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# If sport's the solution then what's the problem? The social significance of sport in the moral governing of 'good' and 'healthy' citizens in Sweden, 1922-1998

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## **Abstract**

All over the westernised world, sport has been promoted as a 'solution' to many of the social 'problems' and challenges that face modern societies. This study draw on Foucault's concept of governmentality to examine the ways in which Swedish Government Official Reports on sport, from 1922 to 1998, define social problems and legitimate governing, and sport as a solution, in the name of benefiting Swedish society. The analysis shows that citizens' 'good' and 'healthy' behaviour and bodies are in focus of problematisation throughout the studied period. In relation to this, sport is seen as an important tool and solution. Parallel with increased critique of sport in contemporary times, a neo-liberal governmentality is embraced which in turn affect how 'problems' and 'solutions' are thought of in individualistic and rational ways.

## **Keywords**

sweden, citizens, healthy, good, governing, 1998, moral, 1922, significance, social, problem, then, solution, sport, if

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**If sport's the solution then what's the problem? The social significance of sport in the moral governing of 'good' and 'healthy' citizens in Sweden, 1922-1998.**

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## **If sport's the solution then what's the problem? The social significance of sport in the moral governing of 'good' and 'healthy' citizens in Sweden, 1922-1998.**

All over the westernised world, sport has been promoted as a 'solution' to many of the social 'problems' and challenges that face modern societies. This study draw on Foucault's concept of governmentality to examine the ways in which Swedish Government Official Reports on sport, from 1922 to 1998, define social problems and legitimate governing, and sport as a solution, in the name of benefiting Swedish society. The analysis show that citizens' 'good' and 'healthy' behaviour and bodies are in focus of problematization throughout the studied period. In relation to this, sport is seen as an important tool and solution. Parallel with increased critique of sport in contemporary times, a neo-liberal governmentality is embraced which in turn affect how 'problems' and 'solutions' are thought of in individualistic and rational ways.

**Keywords:** sport; policy; politics; governmentality; Foucault

### **Introduction**

All over the westernised world, sport has been promoted as a 'solution' to many of the social 'problems' and challenges that face modern societies (Chalip, 2006; Coalter, 2007). In Sweden, voluntary organised sport is often referred to as being one of the most important sites for the fostering of children and young people (SOU 2008:59). Public funding of voluntary organised sport has steadily increased, since the early 1970s and has culminated during the 2000s. The funding of development projects, such as 'The Handshake' (Handslaget) and 'The Sports Lift' (Idrottslyftet) during the 2000s, has for example 'no previous equivalent in Swedish sports' (Prop. 2008/09:126, p.15). The rationale for the funding of voluntary organised sports has been articulated in a series of Swedish Government Official Reports (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU) on sport from 1922 to 2008. Each of these reports makes the case for funding by arguing that sport can address social 'problems' that are

specific topics of concern at the time of their writing and that, in some way, detract from the capacity of the Swedish state to realise its political ideals. This paper draws on Foucault's concept of governmentality to examine the ways in which SOUs define contemporary social problems and legitimate governing, and sport as a solution, in the name of benefiting Swedish society. Governmentality helps us to understand how the governing of various social 'problems' is closely interlinked with systems of thought about the 'problems' themselves and about how 'solutions' should best be designed in order to achieve various ends. The concept of governmentality is thus useful in this study as we seek 'to draw attention to a certain way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to know and govern the wealth, health and happiness of populations' (Dean, 2010; Rose and Miller, 2010, p.272).

It will be argued that voluntary organised sport in Sweden is a key site, in which citizens are constructed, known and governed in particular ways. Further, it will be argued that the SOUs on sport consist of certain ways of thinking about what, why and how to govern citizens in the best way possible. A starting point for the analysis is that 'policies and practices of government, whether of national governments or of other governing bodies, presume to know, with varying degrees of explicitness and using specific forms of knowledge, what constitutes good, virtuous, appropriate, responsible conduct of individuals and collectives' (Dean, 2010, p.19). The SOUs on sport are thus not simply about sport, rather, they are also about the society, the citizens and the future of Sweden.

The fruitfulness of studying Swedish SOUs and other policy documents from a governmentality perspective has previously been demonstrated in several studies focusing on: equality, gender and sport (Larsson, 2001); public health and health promotion (Olsson, 1997), lifelong learning and adult education (Fejes, 2006), the 'mobilization of multi-ethnic suburbs' in democracy, urban and education policy (Dahlstedt, 2008), and popular

movements as 'schools of democracy' (Dahlstedt, 2009). Each of these researchers approaches the analysis by questioning common assumptions about the general 'good' of various government enterprises. For example, Larsson (2001) examines the construction of equality and gender in Swedish sports, and Dahlstedt (2009) interrogates 'ideas about Swedish popular movements as bearers of both democracy and the national project' (p.370). This research has been an inspiration for asking critical questions about how the widely held belief of the social significance of sport is constructed in Swedish government reports.

### **Sport in Sweden**

Competitive sports entered Sweden in the late nineteenth century in competition with the longstanding practice of Swedish Ling gymnastics. Gymnastics focused primarily on drilling and exercising, a disciplinary and regulative form of movement that was based on scientific and physiological principles. Gymnastics were, according to Ljunggren (1999), a solution to particular problems related to modernity and masculinity in nineteenth century Sweden. In contrast to gymnastics, sports and games playing, imported from England, came to be seen as a more liberating and civilising way of movement, embracing values such as freedom, choice, competition and not least enjoyment and solidarity (Kirk, 1998; Ljunggren, 1999). Sport, as a form of warlike masculine battle, also became seen as a more useful way of fostering masculine bodies and behaviours in early twentieth century Sweden (Ljunggren, 1999). Gymnastics and sports struggled over the position of being the main physical activity, until 'competitive sport superseded gymnastics during the 1950s (men) and 1970s (women), respectively' (Larsson, 2011, p.12). One of the main reasons for this was the increasing questioning of the scientific base of Ling gymnastics in Sweden, the UK and elsewhere (Kirk, 1998; Ljunggren, 1999).

The Swedish Sports Confederation (RF) was established in 1903 as the primary institution for voluntary organised sport in Sweden, and is generally referred to as the Swedish sports movement (Idrottsrörelsen). In Sweden, and the other Scandinavian countries, sport is organised by voluntary, member-based and democratically structured sports clubs. There is also a relatively high degree of public funding of sport in these countries (Bergsgard & Norberg, 2010). The relationship, and the low degree of conflict, between Swedish authorities and the sports movement is generally ascribed to ‘a typical feature of Swedish welfare politics’ and the ‘Swedish model’, based on common understanding, collaboration and corporatism, or an ‘implicit contract’ (Norberg, 2011, p.319). The first yearly public grants were given to the sports movement in 1913. From the very first application for funding in 1912, which was approved by Parliament, the sports movement argued for sports usefulness in society (Norberg, 2011). This has also been a common theme in all subsequent SOUs.

### **The social significance of sport: claims and critiques**

Sport sector and public policy initiatives of the past decade demonstrate a widespread assumption that sport can achieve various social objectives that are important to national and international governing bodies. Chalip (2006, p.4) points to ‘five legitimations for sport [that] are popularly espoused internationally: health, salubrious socialization, economic development, community development, and national identity’. These legitimations, or claims, are acknowledged in many countries and not least in the European Union (EU). In the EU White Paper on Sport, sport is described as an important tool to enhance the health of the European citizens, strengthen Europe’s human capital and the Union’s external relations, develop social and civic competences, integrate immigrants, contribute to lifelong learning

and not least prepare young people for an ‘active citizenship’ and help them ‘steer away from delinquency’ (Commission of the European Communities, 2007, p.3-7). With this in mind sport can be understood to be a policy area that is not independent but rather interconnected with political agendas regarding public health, education, social work, economy, citizenship, democracy and civil society, equality and integration, as well as foreign affairs (Chalip, 2006; Commission of the European Communities, 2007).

Claims of the social significance of sport have attracted the attention of sport scholars in a range of countries and with various empirical, theoretical and methodological foci. Writing mainly from the perspective of sociology of sport the common theme in this research is sport’s increasing use in policies and programmes as a solution to social issues. Coalter (2007) in the UK, and Walseth (2008) and Seippel (2006) in Norway, for example, point to the increasing use of the concept of social capital in sport policy and programmes where social capital is related to sport’s perceived ability to contribute to social inclusion and regeneration, voluntarism, active citizenship, democracy, community well-being, social trust and political interest, inter-cultural knowledge and social networks. At the same time it is argued by these authors that the correlation between sport and various social benefits is complex and not to be taken for granted. One critique, posed by scholars such as Coalter (2007) and Green (2007) in the UK, and Shehu and Mokgwathi (2007) in Botswana, of the positive social benefits and claims stated in sport policy is the way they are associated with neo-liberal arts of government and the creation of ‘active citizens’. That is, it is argued that wider social and cultural aspects of ‘problems’ are ignored, and instead, sport is ascribed the capacity to develop desired attributes of individualism, accountability and personal responsibility as ‘solutions’.

Sport scholars that make use of Foucauldian and poststructural approaches demonstrate how sport policies, programmes and practices are historically and culturally specific and discursively constructed, often based on stereotypical and taken for granted ideas about various 'problems' that sport is assumed to 'solve' (Shehu & Mokgwathi, 2007; Svender, Larsson & Redelius, 2012). This kind of research particularly acknowledges that ideas about policy objectives and 'good' public outcomes are social, cultural and historical products in themselves, which limit as well as make possible what can be thought of and how, and consequently how interventions will be designed. Shehu and Mokgwathi (2007) show for example how policy discourse in Botswana construct sport, recreation, lifestyle and citizenship based on Western values of neo-liberal development where sport is seen as the main modernizing force for solving problems in developing countries. Their study contributes to an understanding of how policy discourse conflates mass participation, 'sport for all', and recreational activities with competitive forms of (elite) sport, tied to a modern (and western) sport system. Particularly, discourses of recreation 'justifies sport as a natural necessity, as a fact which public policy and citizens must embrace, rather than as a situation partially created by the policy itself' (Shehu & Mokgwathi, 2007, p.200).

Using the concept of governmentality, Svender, Larsson and Redelius (2012), show how interventions, or projects like 'The Handshake' in Sweden, 'postulate knowledge of the target group, [construct] certain notions of girls; what they are like, their preferences, competences and needs' (p.467) and consequently that they are in need of various forms of interventions. Particularly, the authors argue that 'The Handshake initiative can be discussed as part of governmentality. It is an institutional initiative with special aims and targets in order to make the outcome more regular and predictable - an indirect exercise of control' (p.467). The notion of governmentality is thus particularly fruitful for the study of

institutions, policy and programmes and the way they produce certain forms of knowledge and truth, and how they *govern* populations, and social and cultural practices, like sport (Green, 2007; Svender et al., 2012).

### **Governmentality**

This study builds on the work of Green (2007) and Svender et al (2012) by adopting a Foucauldian concept of governmentality, to analyse Swedish Government Official Reports on sport (Dean, 2010; Foucault, 1991; Rose & Miller, 2010). Foucault defines governing as conduct of conduct: the directing, guiding or shaping of human behaviour, of others and ourselves (Gordon, 1991; Dean, 2010). Governing attempts to shape who and what we are and what we should be. The problematics of governing then concern power and how to govern in the best way possible, with the governing of populations as the final end. This form of power operates not through force but through guidance and through various forms of ‘autonomous’ individuals’, collectives’ and institutions’ capacity for self-control (Foucault, 1991). Seeing governmentality as a form of bio-politics acknowledges that politics is concerned with the administration of life, particularly at the level of populations. It is a politics that is ‘concerned with optimizing the health, welfare and life of populations, and with issues such as ‘the family, with housing, living and working conditions, with what we call “lifestyle”, with public health issues, patterns of migration, levels of economic growth and the standards of living’ (Dean, 2010, p.118-119). With this in mind, sport can be seen to be part of Swedish politics and its broader concern with ‘the administration of life’ and with the optimizing of the Swedish society and its citizens. To think about sport as a means by which citizens and populations may be governed can help us understand why sport is seen to contribute to society in such a profound way and why sport is legitimized for public funding.

From a governmentality perspective governing is seen as a *problematizing activity*. Governing problematizes certain aspects of the individual, the population and society that are perceived to be in need of governing. It is towards problematizations, a central aspect of Foucault's (2001) work that we now turn in setting up the analytical framework that is applied in this study. For Foucault (2001, p.171) it was important 'to analyse the process "problematization" – which means: how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a *problem*'. The problematization is seen as an 'answer' to a concrete situation that needs to be handled in order to secure and optimize society. However, Foucault stresses that 'a given problematization is not an effect or consequence of a historical context or situation, but is an answer given by definite individuals' (p.171-172). By this he means that a given situation doesn't provide a particular answer in itself, rather the answer is dependent on a variety of truths, knowledges and expertise specific for that time. The answers given in the SOUs to various situations or problems can thus be said to reflect how social, cultural and historical conditions render certain knowledges and truths *possible* at the time of writing. The ideals and the problematizing activity of governing circulate around the problems and failings it seeks to rectify and cure (Rose & Miller, 2010). Thus, how a problem is being problematized, and thought of, will contribute to how solutions, or interventions of various kinds, are formulated.

In forming an analytical framework that is useful for this study we have tried to draw together the different components that are suggested for an analytics of government. These points of analytical focus draw on governmentality and how governing 'is particularly related to various authorities, the production of particular forms of truth and knowledge about *what* to govern, *how*, and with *what ends* (Gordon, 1991, p.7, *italics added*). First of all, on the level of *problematization* one must identify the problem (that needs to be governed and solved) of a

certain time, in a certain place, in a certain material form (e.g. a text) (Dean, 2010). It means to identify *what* it is that should be governed; what the actual problem is that needs to be solved. The problem in turn is related to particular systems of thoughts, forms of knowledge and to expertise and authority (Dean, 2010; Rose & Miller, 2010). Looking at policy texts, such as the SOUs on sport, can identify what and how problems of governing are defined. Second, governing aims for something, it concerns certain motivations and *ends* that are sought, or *teleologies and incitements* (Dean, 2010; McCuaig, 2008). Governing is a utopian activity and presupposes a better world and better way of doing things or way of living (Dean, 2010). It aims, for example, towards an ideal society, a healthy population, a social democratic state, or other kinds of ends that are sought. Governing, and thus the SOUs, says something about the undesirable and desirable features of populations and society, and these are thus a focus of analysis. Third, various forms of *tools and technologies* are required if governing is to achieve its ends, or seek to realize its values (Dean, 2010). Governing is practical, strategic and technical in the sense that it says something about *how* to govern, though ‘authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions’ through specific practices and programmes of governing (Rose & Miller, 2010, p.273). These ambitions interlink systems of thought with systems of action. In this particular study it means to ask in what way sport is available as a tool and how governing is motivated, in order to achieve various ends and to ‘solve’ ‘problems’ in society. To summarize, the following toolbox of Foucauldian concepts makes up the analytical framework that is used in this study:

*Problematizations:* What should be governed? What are the problems to be solved? How are problems thought of; according to what systems of thought, forms of knowledge, expertise and authority?

*Teleology and incitements:* Why govern? What are the aims, ideals or ends sought? What are the undesirable and desirable features of populations and society?

*Tools and technologies:* How should governing be practiced? What tools are available to solve the problem?

The analytical framework proposed above was used to analyse four Swedish Government Official Reports (SOU) on voluntary organised sport. The SOUs are final reports of government committees or commissions of inquiry and can be seen as green papers: proposals for future decisions. If the commission's proposal is accepted by the government the government proceeds with a proposition to the parliament. The committee's terms of reference (kommittédirektiv) define the scope and direction of its inquiry.

Throughout the years there have been five commissions on voluntary organised sport (generally referred to as the Commission on Sport, Idrottsutredningen) that have resulted in SOUs. These are: SOU 1922:08 *State support for the fostering of sport (Statsunderstöd för idrottens främjande)* which was the first SOU on sport in Sweden; SOU 1957:41 *Sport and society (Idrotten och samhället)*; SOU 1969:29 *Sport for all (Idrott åt alla)*; SOU 1998:76 *Sport and exercise for life (Idrott och motion för livet)*; SOU 2008:59 *Association fostering and competition fostering (Föreningsfostran och tävlingsfostran)*. In this paper the first four reports, from 1922 to 1998, were analysed. The fifth and most recent report, SOU 2008:59, was initially analysed but has not been included in this paper. This decision was taken due to the major change in the character of the commissioning of the report, from a committee to a single individual, a Professor in Sociology of Sport. SOU 2008:59 will nevertheless be drawn upon in the final section of this paper to allow a comment on future developments in Swedish sport policy.

## **Governing ‘good’ and ‘healthy’ citizens**

Two themes that recur in each of the SOUs is the importance given to citizens’ ‘good’ and ‘healthy’ behaviour and bodies. In relation to this, sport is seen as an important tool and solution. However, both the ‘problems’ of behavior and bodies, the desirable features of populations and society, and the ‘solutions’ offered shift in varying ways over time. A third theme which gains momentum over time is the problematization of Sweden’s international standing, particularly in relation to ‘poor elite performances’. The analysis is organized in a chronological order, starting with the 1920s, and follows the structure of the analytical framework. Each report is generally referred to as SOU 1922, SOU 1957, and so on. Each section begins with an introduction to the SOU, situating it within earlier research, the time of its writing, and in relation to the Commission.

### ***The 1920s – The problems of industrialisation, bodies and character***

In the late 1800s and early 1900s Sweden developed from an agricultural society to an industrialised society. This transition meant better standards of living, increased societal investments and economic growth, but also social ‘problems’ that the state needed to deal with (e.g. diseases, poverty, child labour, work related accidents, the emergence of strikes and trade unions). As is the case with other countries, Sweden was affected by World War I and the 1920s international depression, which required the state to focus its politics on economic and social interventions (Norberg, 2004).

Sport had little support in the Swedish Parliament in the early 1900s, with tensions between those members who supported sport (the city bourgeoisie) and those who critiqued sport (from rural areas) (Norberg, 2004). However, the 1912 success of the Olympic Games in Stockholm increased the interest in, and the positive view on sport. From 1913 the sports

movement was given permanent and yearly public grants. The social significance of sport became officially manifested and the sports movement flourished. However, a crisis for sport became apparent in 1921, when the internationally famous boxer Georges Carpentier arrived at Stockholm Central Station. The government was concerned about the public enthusiasm that arose at this event - an expression of sport that did not meet State purposes. This led to reduced public grants and the formation of the first Commission on Sport, to provide proposals for future public funding of sport (Norberg, 2004).

While the Commission's report, SOU 1922:08 'State support for the fostering of sport', is positively disposed towards sport and the contributions it could make to Swedish society, it also acknowledges the crisis in sport and the financial situation in the country. The Commission consisted of five male experts (sakkunniga) who had discussions with sport representatives and the Swedish medical society (Svenska Läkaresällskapet) throughout its inquiry. The SOU is about 120 pages long and covers topics including: the sports movement's organization and economy; sport fields and sport leaders; the experts' and the medical doctors' view on sport; sport and gymnastics; sport for fostering; reasons for state support.

*Problematization:* As has been the case for all the SOUs examined for this paper, the rationale for sport's importance is based on the argument that sports can address contemporary problems which in SOU 1922 are associated with changes in society attributed to industrialisation. Particularly, industrialisation is blamed for the 'weakening and degeneration' of the population's health and bodies, caused by an increasingly sedentary way of life and the damaging effects of repetitive indoor work (p.46). Drawing on the expertise of medical doctors and the authority of the Swedish medical society, problems of the body, 'the organism', and diseases, 'particularly tuberculosis', are identified as of concern (p.47). In

addition, a theme that recurs in future SOUs is also highlighted, that is, the problem of character and the bad behavior of young people, especially their pursuit of ‘bad amusements’ and engagement in ‘damaging influences’, such as drinking alcohol. The categories of people who are specifically targeted for recuperation in the report include working-class males, ‘people from the countryside’ and people from ‘less affluent social classes of society’ (p.19).

*Teleologies and incitements:* The preparation of specific categories of people for productive citizenship is a key aim in SOU 1922. These are citizens who should serve the needs of the nation and contribute to a productive work force and the future efficiency of the country. This means developing and strengthening (certain) young people’s bodies, and fostering valuable character traits that ‘every pedagogue should wish to find and nurture’, such as courage, determination and quick perception, self-control and persistence, a sense of justice and helpfulness, collaboration for a common objective, a sense of responsibility and leadership skills (p.48). The enhancement of ‘the health and vitality of large groups of young people, and thus of the people as a whole’ is of importance at this time (p.48). The ideal society and the needs of the nation are connected to ideas about nationalism, military preparedness, strength, character building and good behaviour, masculinity, sobriety and reduction of social differences.

*Tools and technologies:* Sport is promoted as the ideal tool to strengthen and foster young people’s bodies and character, and thereby sport is said to have an ‘invaluable significance for public health’ as well as it is ‘a moral factor of significance’ (p.46-47). While sport is advocated as inclusive and liberating for all social categories, the sport participant in the report is assumed to be male. To be beneficial for society sport needs to be undertaken in a certain way. Tensions between gymnastics and sports are evident in SOU 1922, with the

argument that 'sport has its specific tasks and gymnastics has its', and that sport should be seen as a complement to gymnastics rather than being its 'enemy'. In relation to this, sport is described as being 'closer to the most original of all free body exercises; play, and [that it] preferably takes place outdoors', while gymnastics on the other hand is seen to 'promote, above all, harmonious body development, coherence and discipline' (p.48).

While the competitive aspects of sport are described as addressing a 'natural' desire to compete (p.50), there are also tensions evident around elitism and the competitive nature of sport. While successful athletes are regarded as increasing 'the interest in sport', there is a concern that if competition and professionalism become too important, the sports movement's main (societal) objectives will be lost (p.50). These societal objectives are to make 'its practitioners physically and mentally better equipped to fulfil their tasks in society', and not to facilitate individuals to 'acquire fame and money'. Support of the professional athlete is therefore not desirable, who after his short career, is seen as a 'less capable member of society' (p.50).

Concerns are expressed in the report that certain sports, such as soccer, will prosper because they are 'more economically viable' and that only those who are physically skilled will be included. Sport, it is argued, needs to be organised so that the majority of the population can participate. To overcome weaknesses and harmful tendencies, which are inherent in 'the nature of the free sports movement', and related to elitism, unpleasant behaviour and 'coarseness in speech', the Swedish medical society is drawn upon to make the argument for rational training and surveillance of sport activities and participants. Particularly, in relation to this, the expansion of sports fields is of central concern at this time since it can 'facilitate the direction and control of sport practices' (p.62-63), and be a way 'to exercise immediate disciplining and controlling' influence on the participants (p.65). Ideally,

it is argued, sport should be mandatory and incorporated within public education since this would be an even more effective way to ‘influence’ and ‘develop [young peoples’] character’ (p.52). Overall, the public funding of sport is said to be an important part of the state’s work for citizens’ health and fostering, and a way to govern sport, citizens and society, in a valuable direction.

### ***The 1950s and 60s – The problems of the welfare state, health, leisure and young people***

Between the 1920s and the next Commissions’ reports in the 1950s and 60s, Sweden developed into a social democratic welfare state. The post World War II decades were times of public sector expansion and social democratic reforms with promises of a better society and better standards of living, reduced working hours, and better health for the whole population (Norberg, 2004; Olsson, 1997). This was also a time when ideas about an equal and rights based society were gaining prominence. The period from the 1950s through to the 1960s, has been described as the golden age of the ‘Swedish model’, and voluntary based popular movements flourished (Dahlstedt, 2009). It was at this time seen as ‘natural’ to publicly fund popular movements, such as the sports movement (SOU 1969). During this period three Commissions on Sport were appointed with the mission to account for the state’s financial support for the sports movement.

The first Commission of this time, appointed in 1955, consisted of five male experts (sakkunniga) who made study trips and had consultations with sport representatives during the inquiry. The final report, SOU 1957:41 ‘Sport and society’, is about 220 pages long and covers topics including: contemporary support to sport and outdoor activities (friluftsliv); general views on the social significance of sport; organisational and financial structures of state

support; the sports movements organisation; medical consultation and research; and municipalities and sport. In this SOU there are suggestions for increased financial support to the sports movement but at the same time organisational changes that would strengthen the State's ability to control the grants. These organisational changes were met with intense protests from the sports movement, and the Commission's proposal did *not* go forward to the Parliament. This prompted the appointment of another Commission on Sport in 1957, which did not complete its work. It was not until 1965 that a new Commission was appointed again. This Commission's report SOU 1969:29 'Sport for all', is often referred to as a milestone in Swedish sport politics since it resulted in a significantly increased financial support to the sports movement, and a proposition that was accepted by a large majority in the Parliament (Norberg, 2004). The SOU 1969 Commission consisted of seven male experts (sakkunniga) with close relations to the sports movement, led by state secretary Karl Frithiofson, who also became the head of RF, 1969-1989. The report is about 250 pages long and includes topics such as: society and sport; the sports movement's organisational structure; contemporary state support to sport; sport in other countries; future financial structures; sport for the handicapped; sport research; leadership training; facilities; the Olympic committee; and a five year plan for sport.

*Problematization:* Despite, or perhaps because of, Sweden's increasingly better living conditions for the majority of people, the problematization of the citizens' health is a key feature of this period. The authority of medical knowledge is evident in the use of calculations and statistics and with references to the relationships between chronic diseases (particularly cardiovascular disease) and 'new' lifestyles and a sedentary work life. Related to this problematization is expanding health care costs, and a declining economy in Sweden (SOU

1969). The categories of people of particular concern in SOU 1957 are still ‘people from the countryside’ and people from ‘less affluent social classes of society’ (p.11), but the focus has sharpened to concern young people in general. In SOU 1969, there is also an expansion of categories at risk to include women, the handicapped and middle aged adults and older people.

In addition to problems of health, legislation that reduced working hours created an increased amount of ‘free’ time for leisure. The SOUs associate this free time with the risk that citizens would engage in non-purposeful amusements, like drinking alcohol. Young people are particularly targeted as being at risk, and it is argued that: ‘in the coming years, unusually large groups of young people, during a time when parental authority seems to have lost some of its grip on the youth, and this by movements, and concentration in large cities, often have their roots cut, with the risks they run in terms of lifestyle’ (SOU 1957, p.18).

*Teleologies and incitements:* Similar to the 1920s report, the aims, ideals and ends sought in the 1957 and 1969 SOUs concern the advantages of having a healthy and well-behaved population. However, at this time, we see social democratic values come to the fore with an emphasis on collective and social responsibility and civic engagement. Whereas in the 1920s individuals were mainly seen as in service of society, and their activities were for the social good, in these later SOUs, citizenship is about both responsibility to society and being the recipient of social goods. In terms of health, the ideal society is built on prevention and by citizens who are actively engaged, and take social responsibility for the tackling of lifestyle diseases and increasing health care costs. In terms of leisure time and young people, the ideal society is built on meaningful and productive activities, and citizens, particularly young people, who behave in appropriate ways. The language is positive and encouraging, assuming

that individuals are capable of making good choices for themselves, given the right opportunities.

*Tools and technologies:* In these SOUs sport is valued as a means of ‘preventive health care’ and a cost effective solution to the problems of increasing health care costs, new lifestyles and the rising ‘illness frequency’ in society (SOU 1969, p.36). Sport can also contribute to a productive use of leisure time, especially for young people and it would be ‘hard to imagine any activity that has nearly as great potential to bring together different categories of the population, in the city, on the countryside, and regardless of social status’ (SOU 1957, p.18). The theme of inclusivity has developed from supporting a few groups in special ‘need’ in the 1920s, to a notion that sport is for the masses, ‘for people of all ages and of both sexes’, and thereby ‘a popular movement in its full meaning’ (SOU 1969, p.21, 34; SOU 1957).

However, if sport is to be a good tool, and available to all as in ‘sport for all’, it is argued that it must widen its approach and activities, take many different forms and be practiced in many different locations (SOU 1969). Sport is also described as having different purposes for different groups. For example, for the handicapped, middle aged and older people sport is mainly seen as a *physical activity*, and an alternative to a sedentary daily life, to health care, physiotherapy or rehabilitation. For young people on the other hand, who are seen to be ‘naturally’ active, sport is mainly seen as a *social and fostering activity* that ‘eases young people’s adaptation in society’ (SOU 1969, p.37).

As was the case for SOU 1922, the role of competition and elite sport are discussed in these later SOUs. Elite sport and particularly successful elite athletes are now viewed as a positive feature, as effective propaganda for mass participation in sport (SOU 1969), and as contributing to the good image of Sweden when participating in international championships

(SOU 1957). Amateur sport, for exercise and as a mass activity, is however still the focus of public funding.

In these SOUs it is society and the state, that should provide, through sufficient funds, facilities, different options, opportunities and ‘good general conditions for sport of all kinds’, for the individual and the whole population so that they *can* be ‘responsible’, and be ‘free to choose’ for themselves (SOU 1957; SOU 1969, p.36, 168). Through this governing principle, it is argued that ‘the increased leisure time [can be] utilized in the best way possible’ and that it then becomes ‘everyone’s own private affair to determine how leisure time is used’ (SOU 1969, p.36). The direct, disciplining and controlling governing evident in the 1920s can be said to have given way to a more self-directed type of governing, a kind of responsible solidarity where all citizens should voluntary contribute to the best of society. Governing is practiced so that citizens, particularly young people, feel encouraged to make the right/good choices for themselves. As it is stated in SOU 1969, it is ‘*the possibilities* to utilize the individual’s essential possibilities and abilities that should be the main driving force of society’s youth and recreation policy’ (p.41). In particularly SOU 1969, it is argued that the sports movement, as an autonomous, democratic and voluntary based popular movement should be free to develop on its own terms *without* rigorous monitoring and evaluation of how the funds are used. There is trust in how the sports movement use the public grants.

### ***The 1990s – The problems of individuals’ lifestyle choices and poor elite performances***

Almost thirty years after ‘Sport for all’, the next Commission on Sport was appointed in 1996, and its final report ‘Sport and exercise for life’ was completed in 1998 (SOU 1998:76). As Olsson (1997) and others have pointed out, the late 1980s and the 1990s in Sweden were

marked by a financial crisis, with pressures on the so-called 'Swedish model', and with economic rationalist policies and language in focus. This is evident in SOU 1998, where it is acknowledged that new administrative and political processes in Sweden demand savings measures and efficient allocation of grants, as well as governing by objectives and results. In contrast to the 1950s and the 1960s a key component in the Commission's work of the 1990s is to propose a model for monitoring and evaluation in relation to objectives. The objectives that were decided upon in the Parliament in 1970 (based on SOU 1969) are in the 1990s looked upon as 'vague and general' and not connected to purposeful results, performances and effects (SOU 1998, p.197). All of this, it is said, prompts a Commission on Sport who can propose a new direction for the public funding of sport.

During the 1980s sport research gained a more solid ground in Sweden, exemplified by the establishment of a number of professorships, and the Swedish National Centre for Research in Sports. The 1990s Commission is more comprehensive than earlier years and consists of representatives from all political parties in the Parliament, the sports movement, and associations for the promotion of outdoor life. Separate evaluations conducted by external researchers are also drawn upon, and appear as supplementary reports. Additionally, study tours and hearings were conducted covering themes of importance for the Commission: sport and democracy; sport's economic significance; and sport and integration. SOU 1998:76 is about 240 pages long and structured around topics such as: historical objectives of state support; surveys of citizens' exercise habits; the sports movement's organisation and financing; the sports movement as a creator of values; doping; talent and elite sports investments; suggestions for new objectives, follow-up and evaluation.

*Problematization:* Sedentary lives and physical inactivity among the population continues in

this SOU as a main concern. The problematization in SOU 1998 particularly concerns individuals' exercise habits and lifestyle choices, their (over)weight and body size (Body Mass Index is seen as a key measure of the population's general health status), exercise, diet and drinking habits, and tobacco and alcohol habits. Information about this is collected from larger surveys and statistics and based on the authority of medical science and The Swedish National Institute of Public Health (Folkhälsoinstitutet). Adults, children and young people are targeted as at risk, as are specific groups such as women, people with low household incomes, immigrants, older people and those who suffer from disability and illnesses. Other problems that are mentioned at this time are doping, and 'violence, racism, drugs, and vandalism among young people' as well as 'gender discrimination and segregation' (p.136).

The decline in 'Sweden's prominent position in international championships' (p.13) is also acknowledged as a problem in this SOU. This problematization centres on the 'fundamental' changes in 'the international world of sport' (p.158); with increased sporting standards and competition, professionalization and commercialisation, the increase of participating countries and athletes in international championships, and the intensive media and sponsor attention given to these events. As a nation with former success in winning medals in championships, it is feared that Sweden will no longer have the ability to keep up with other nations, which will consequently affect Sweden's position internationally.

*Teleologies and incitements:* In comparison to earlier years, the analysis of SOU 1998 indicates a shift from social democratic values of social solidarity and social responsibility, to neo-liberal ideas about a vital and responsible civil society, an entrepreneurial sports movement that engages in social work, and individual citizens that can govern and take responsibility for themselves and their lives. A key aim at this time is that all citizens of all

ages should have a ‘permanent *interest* in physical activity in order to achieve good public health’ (p.42, *italics added*), and be able to ‘exercise influence over and take *responsibility* for their sporting activities’ (p.12, *italics added*). The ideal society, as it is described in SOU 1998, is a society preferably based on good ethics and health, equality and social integration, democracy and voluntary engagement, and efficiency. The ideal is also that Sweden should be a nation that performs well in international championships, has a strong international position, and a good reputation as an export nation and as a tourist destination.

*Tools and technologies:* Sport, exercise and physical activity in general, combined with good eating and drinking habits, and individual responsibility, is seen as the essential solution to sedentary lifestyles and overweight. In SOU 1998 there is a distinction being made between performance-based competitive sport (tävlingsidrott), and health-, mass-, and exercise based sport (motionsidrott). While this latter form of exercise should be associated with ‘enjoyment and well-being’ (p.18), it should be performed at sufficient intensity to be a good tool: ‘the higher the level it is on the exercise, the lower BMI and the lower amount of overweight [people]’ (p.82).

Sport is also seen as a tool to achieve various aims and ideals that are related to the social development of children and young people, and for integration and communion between groups of people that experience exclusion. For this purpose, sport is not so much referred to as a physical activity, but as a social activity, that can facilitate cooperation, create feelings of belonging and increase individuals’ self-esteem. At the same time though, drawing on the expertise of sport scholars, sport is described as potentially creating negative pressure and stress. Therefore, for children, it is argued that play and friendship, on children’s terms, are considered and prioritised over competition.

However, it is not the actual (sporting) activities that attract the most attention in SOU 1998 but rather sport's institutional form as a popular movement. By being member-based, voluntary and democratically organised, the sports movement is for example said to contribute to 'citizens general democratic schooling' (p. 64), and to provide society with certain 'values' and outcomes that are unique and different from those provided by commercial or public organisations. Even if the sports movement 'indisputably' belongs to 'the voluntary sector', it is acknowledged, with concern, that its unique values might be lost 'if parts of the sports movement cease to belong to the voluntary sector' (p.143), due to increased professionalization and commercialisation.

Even though it is stated that 'sport for all', i.e. mass exercise activities, are prioritised areas for public funding, the focus in the report is not so much on how to solve public health problems (since this is mainly seen as an individual responsibility), as it is on how to solve the problem of poor elite performances internationally. The solution to this, proposed in this SOU, is to increase the funding of elite sport and make 'a major investment in the development of young sporting talents' (p.14). This is supported by claims that elite sport is now a natural part of modern societies and that there is broad political and societal 'acceptance' for the funding of elite sports (p.13). Compared to the 1920s when professional athletes were looked upon with suspicion, in SOU 1998 it is argued that elite athletes must have good institutional conditions to be able to invest in an elite career, as well as being able 'to resume a normal life in society when their sports career is over' (p.157).

In contrast to earlier SOUs the emphasis in SOU 1998 is on the development of a model for monitoring and evaluation based on objectives and results. This appears to be contradictory when at the same time it stresses that it is important that the *autonomy* of voluntary organisations is protected from 'state powers' (p.130). This can be seen as typical

of a neo-liberal approach to governing at a distance. In SOU 1998 governing focuses on free and autonomous ‘actors’ – the individual and the sports movement – who are assumed to be able to govern themselves, make their own (good and responsible) decisions and choices, and be active entrepreneurs in society.

## **Conclusions**

In this article, we have focused on the ways social problems and solutions are defined, and how governing is legitimated, by studying Swedish Government Official Reports on sport. By applying the Foucauldian notion of governmentality we have been able to show how citizens are being constructed, known and governed in order to benefit Swedish society. Sport is in different ways presented as a good solution to achieve various ideals in society. The analysis shows that the problematizations of citizens’ ‘good’ and ‘healthy’ behaviour and bodies have been recurring themes throughout the major part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, there are both similarities and differences in how this has been thought of. A consistent similarity is the way experts have been used to legitimate the arguments being posed, and the authority ascribed to discourses of public health. The main difference over time in the SOUs has been in how the desirable citizen, the desirable society, and sport’s role in achieving these ends, have been defined. The most noticeable difference is the shift from a more state centred approach to governing in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to a more collectivistic approach in the mid part of the century, to a more individualistic approach at the end of the century. In the 1920s for example, citizens were mainly seen as in service of the needs of the nation, and governing was thought of in more direct ways - to make citizens fulfil their duties. Sport therefore, needed to be controlled and directed, and ideally mandatory in public schools, to be an effective tool of the State. Competition was seen as a natural part of sport; however

professionalised sport, which draws citizens away from their civic duties, was not so desirable. This view changed in the 1950s and the 1960s, where citizens, and sport, were included in a social welfare approach. At this time, both citizens and the State were seen as having dual responsibilities, based on collective solidarity, to achieve the ideal society. Neither citizens, nor sport, were supposed to be directly controlled, but rather indirectly governed, through opportunities and possibilities to voluntarily participate in sport and to make self-fulfilling 'good choices' for themselves. Competition and professionalised sport was at this time seen as something positive in order to attract people's interest. In the 1990s the shift is to neo-liberal governmentality. Even though there are similarities with earlier times and the same governing principles are present, governing has now become more individualistic. Citizens are being constructed, known and governed as free, rational and self-regulating individuals, who can and should make their own decisions and strive for a better health, life and for a better society. Or as Rose and Miller (2010, p.298) put it: 'for neo-liberalism the political subject is less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body, than an individual whose citizenship is active'. Neo-liberal governing does not primarily operate through 'society' but through the regulated choices of individual citizens. The sports movement is in this governing enterprise seen as an autonomous, responsible and entrepreneurial social institution where social problems can and should be solved. Professionalised elite sport is now seen as a 'natural' part of modern societies and a necessity for a country like Sweden, in a globalized world. This development is clearly not limited to Sweden. Green (2006) identify for example that sport policy in the UK have a similar twofold focus on 'active citizens' and social investment strategies, and elite sport performance and development. And, as discussed earlier, Coalter (2007) in the UK, and Shehu and Mokgwati (2007) in Botswana acknowledge neo-liberal approaches to governing,

and sport as a 'solution' to various social 'problems'.

To conclude this article, we want to comment briefly on the most recent SOU on sport in 2008. This report is more complex and nuanced than former SOUs and consists of several references to critical sport researchers in Sweden. It is clear that sport, and the social significance of sport, is an object of problematization in itself, in this report. However, even though critical perspectives on sport are clearly present, we can note that sport is still seen as worthy of significant public support. Prioritised areas of discussion in SOU 2008 are: sport as an arena for fostering and socialisation; public health; social inclusion and equal opportunities to participate in sport; the introduction of a 'child perspective' in line with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child; to strengthen sport's international competitiveness; and the development of a new model for monitoring and evaluation of the grants given to the sports movement. We can see that discourses of individualism continue in this report, with an emphasis on individual responsibility, everyone's individual right to health, right to participate in sport, and every child's right to be regarded as an 'independent individual' (p.353). We can also see that discourses of elite sport development, and discourses of economic rationality, efficiency and results comes to fore in this report. The consequences of this development are yet to be explored, but a reasonable suggestion is that it contributes to the shaping of subjectivities, governing strategies, and institutional activities in Sweden, in particular ways.

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