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Title: Managing Progression – Örebro Sports County’s Efforts to Reduce Gender Gap and Increase Gender Equality

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Abstract:
Introduction
An overall ambition with the gender equality objectives of Swedish sports is that gender mainstreaming should permeate every decision, in all activities, and at every level of the sports movement. Despite the fact that modern sports, to a large extent, have privileged (some) men and (some) masculinities, increasing female participation has, since the 1970s, also characterized Swedish modern sports. However, in the county of Örebro, male participation in associative sports, among 7- to 25-year-olds, is approximately 67 per cent according to LOK-statistics (Lokalt aktivitetsstöd – Local Activity Support). This unequal representation has initiated a work of that includes structural as well as individual factors.

Aim and Theoretical Frames
This paper presents an ongoing gender equality project enacting a double-focus on, firstly, recruiting and empowering women/girls in sports and secondly, making visible privileges for men and masculinities in sports and educating participative clubs (i.e. coaches, leaders and board members) in issues concerning gender, norms and masculine domination.

Theoretically the project is inspired from critical perspectives on gender, men and masculinities and the hegemonic masculinity thesis (HMT).

Method
Methodologically this project draws on mixed governing methods which explores the dilemma of implementing a policy in a self-autonomous, voluntary culture. More precisely, participating clubs has applied for economical backing (from Idrottslyftet) for one-year, financing gender equality projects aiming to, on one hand, empower or recruit a disadvantaged social group or, on the other hand, to raise awareness of the existing norms in club’s culture (e.g. masculinity or heterosexual norms). The clubs’ specific projects vary greatly depending on sport genre, number of members/volunteers in the club and other conditions regarding work efforts and access to sport facilities etcetera. Diverse cooperation with local governments in the county of Örebro has also been employed involving financial support and other “structural” target areas. Since knowledge of gender equality and gender awareness is vital for a change management, the participating clubs must partake in educational meetings and, at the end of the year, also give a presentation for all participative clubs at joint forum about their project and its concrete results. Beside these strategical efforts, interviews and observations have also been utilized.

Findings
Changing a rigid structure, such as sports, is a challenge and must, as a suggestion, involve several institutions as well as motivated agents. One central finding is the importance of raising awareness about budgets, facilities and investments from a gender perspective. In some cases, these kind of questions have not been raised before. In other words, the motivation among politicians and club members vary, which causes a reproductive potential of the gender gap. In the work, we have also found different techniques for reproducing men’s power advantage through, for example, the planning and placing of training sessions, the non-encouragement for girls to become “professional” athletes but also how women, themselves, support structures that discriminate themselves.

Discussion
Tentatively, the discussion focuses on dilemmas and the complexities of measuring and managing sports’ gender equality. Several issues for discussion return throughout the project, such as: what should be measured and how and why? Identifying such essential factors leads to the issue of how to manage a change of these factors. What institutions should be involved? What demands could, on one hand, be placed on a local club (with a right of self-determination) and, on the other hand, the governing sports bodies (that should implement government policies)?