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David Ekholm

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# Research on Sport as a Means of Crime Prevention in a Swedish Welfare Context

## A Literature Review

**David Ekholm**

Linköping University, Sweden  
<david.ekholm@liu.se>

### Abstract

This article reviews Swedish research literature on sport as a means to realize social objectives related to crime prevention, contextualized by international literature on the subject. The article examines how Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention can be understood in light of international research regarding research questions, theoretical approaches, and content. Utilizing content analysis with inductive category development, the article describes current Swedish and international research, identifies certain characteristics in Swedish research, as well as underlying assumptions. Besides a thorough description acknowledging discrepancies between scientific knowledge in literature and a common sense notion in society about sport as a means of crime prevention, the article highlights five results. First, Swedish research shows great similarities with international research regarding content. Second, previous research is greatly concerned with empirically driven approaches. Third, Swedish research is nonexplicit in terms of crime prevention as a social objective and considers social objectives a potential effect of, rather than a premise for, sport practices. Fourth, Swedish research is focused on primary and secondary prevention. Fifth, there is general lack of Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention. In conclusion, the article considers future possible directions in research with respect to characteristics in the traditionally upheld Swedish welfare state regime.

*Key words:* crime reduction, social problem, social work, sport, welfare, youth, leisure, deviancy

## Introduction

In modern history, sport has been consistently linked to the notion that it can contribute to positive social and societal development (Hvenmark, 2012; Patriksson, 1973). This idea draws on assumptions that sport is suitable for promoting moral socialization, that “sport’s assumed essential goodness and purity is passed on to those who partake in it” (Coakley, 2011: 306). In recent years, this has been expressed and demonstrated in programs and practices that view sport as a means to achieve various socially desirable goals or to prevent harm of various kinds (Coalter, 2007b; Nichols, 2007). Crime, for instance, is conceptualized as a social problem, and one general goal the welfare state ascribes to itself is helping to address social problems through active intervention (Luhmann, 1990). Hence, crime prevention is a concern for the welfare state, and as a result, programs that consider sport as a means of crime prevention have emerged in society (Coalter, 2007b; Nichols, 2007). In Sweden, social benefits from sport have recently been placed on the public agenda (Hvenmark, 2012; Peterson, 2008). While there is more discussion about sport as a means to achieve social objectives and as a method in social work in the US and the UK, the idea is not new in a Swedish context (Holmberg & Liljegren, 1993; Kolfjord, 2008; Östnäs, 1990, 1991, 2005).

Sport activists, professionals, politicians and policy-makers express faith in sport as a means of crime prevention. It can be considered a common sense notion that is widespread in society (Coakley, 2011). This can be inferred through claims about how sport activities prevent and reduce crime in terms of (1) *community development*, which includes ideas about social bonding between different groups in society (Caruso, 2011; Coalter, 2005; Coalter, 2007a; Crabbe, 2000; Lawson, 2005; Smith & Waddington, 2004; Waring & Mason, 2010); (2) *social mobility*, which includes the idea that competitive success in sport can lead the way from poor to better living conditions (Coakley, 2002; Hartmann, 2012; Riess, 1980; Spaaij, 2009); (3) *diversion*, which includes physical diversion from criminal settings and diversion from idleness – “the devil makes work for idle hands” (Coalter, 2005: 26); and (4) *pro-social development*, which emphasizes personal development, life-skills, character-building (discipline and responsibility), health awareness, cooperation, self-esteem and self-confidence (Bailey, 2005; Caruso, 2011; Coakley, 2002; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). Furthermore, this common sense notion guides the organization of sport as a means of crime prevention in public policy

(Brettschneider, 2001; Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2005; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Hartmann, 2012; Houlihan, 1997; Kolffjord, 2008; Nichols, 2007; Waring & Mason, 2010).

While the common sense notion of sport is in some ways influenced by research (scientific knowledge as opposed to common sense notions), extensive research takes a critical view of this. Although in this research area, even a kind of common sense notion is trying to assert itself, this article does not deal with the common sense understanding but explores the scientific discourse on sport for prevention conveyed in research literature. Nor does the article deal explicitly with scientific knowledge articulating sport rather as a generator of crime (c.f. Eitzen, 2012; Messner, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1994; Young, 2002). Such discourse is, however, treated as an aspect of critical perspectives on notions and knowledge asserting sport as a means of prevention.

### *Problem and objective*

This article presents a thorough literature review of research on sport as a means of crime prevention, focusing on Swedish research while also considering international research, which provides a context. The article examines the following question: *How can Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention be understood in light of international research?* To answer this, the examination targets *what* research questions and content are observed in research as well as *how* they are observed.

In order to observe and understand perspectives in Swedish research, international research is used as a contextualizing background. However, this study does not undertake a systematic comparison of Swedish research with international research. Since many context-specific aspects vary significantly, that would not be a fruitful approach. Four aspects are apparent: (1) different sport practices; (2) different organizational settings for sport practices; (3) different welfare regimes; and (4) possibly as a consequence, different objectives in research as mentioned, both in terms of (a) research problems and (b) study objects. An additional problem preventing a comparative approach is that international research is more fragmented with respect to contexts and research approaches.

The main body of knowledge on sport as a means of crime prevention is comprised of international (predominantly US and UK) research. This research needs to be taken into consideration in order to understand characteristics of Swedish research. A study aimed at understanding

Swedish research on sport as a solution to social problems with relevance to crime without considering the international body of knowledge about the field would be equally irrelevant. On an abstract level, international research on sport as a means of crime prevention indicates certain characteristics that constitute a necessary context enabling an understanding of the Swedish research. Among these are (1) types of research questions, (2) themes in research and aspects of sport considered in research, (3) the constitution of sport practices studied, and (4) varieties of crime prevention approaches.

### *Disposition*

The article introduces a descriptive approach, thus targeting *what* research questions and content are being considered in research. It further introduces an analytical approach, targeting *how* research considers sport as a means of crime prevention (moreover focusing on blind spots, i.e. what is left outside the scope of observation, and underlying assumptions). The article is organized into six separate sections. In the first, a common sense notion of sport as a means of crime prevention is introduced. This section also presents the main problem of the article and its further objective. The second section presents the literature reviewed as well as a qualitative content analysis approach, featuring inductive category development. The third section presents the main features in the international body of research. The fourth section presents Swedish research on sport as a means of social objectives related to crime prevention. In this section, the descriptive focus of the article is central, since it treats *what* research questions and *what* content are identified in Swedish research. The fifth section presents analytical findings while focusing on *how* sport as a means of social objectives is observed in Swedish research. This section acknowledges recurring themes from the international context, with its emphasis on empirically driven research, focus on effects of sport practices, and focus on primary and secondary prevention, as well as the general paucity of Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention. This is discussed with respect to characteristics of the traditional Swedish welfare state model. The concluding sixth section summarizes the article and offers a brief reflection on future directions in research.

## Method

Three aspects emerge as being central to a literature review: (1) demarcation of the literature covered, (2) utilization of an analytical method guided by research questions, and (3) presentation of a summarized content and findings (Aveyard, 2010). The first two aspects are considered in this section while the third, which also includes a synthesized (Cooper, 1998) approach to *what* is being researched and *how* it is being researched, is treated throughout the article.

### *Literature reviewed and methods of search and selection*

Various publications comprise the literature reviewed. They include dissertations, scientific articles, popular articles, reports, book chapters and books. The methods for selecting the literature were: (1) database searches, (2) manual searches of Swedish publications and publication series identified, and (3) a systematic review of references in published research. First, databases covering a broad range of publications in the social sciences, including Scopus, the Social Science Citation Index, Sociological Abstracts, Eric and Libris, were used. This review thus excludes databases related to the health and medical sciences. For the international journal databases, the following keywords were used in various combinations: (a) *sport*, *athlet\** and “*physical activity*”; (b) “*social problem\**”, *crim\**, *delinquen\** and *devian\**, constituting searches such as *sport AND “social problem\*” AND crim\** or *athlet\* AND devian\**. Furthermore the keywords (c) “*social work*”, (d) *leisure*, and (e) “*sport program\**” were used in combinations with the fore mentioned keywords. For the Swedish database Libris, the keyword (f) *idrottsociologi* [sociology of sport] was used.

Second, concerning Swedish research literature, a number of publications and publication series underwent a manual search process:

- *Swedish Journal of Sport Research* (formerly *SVEBI Yearbook/Aktuell beteendevetenskaplig idrottsforskning*.1990 to 2012);
- *Scandinavian Sport Studies Forum* (2010 to 2012);
- *Svensk idrottsforskning* (1998 to 2012);
- *idrottsforum.org* (website, 2003 to 2012);
- *Riksidrottsförbundet FoU*, reports (2002 to 2012); and

- *Riksidrottsförbundet FoU*, Handslaget and Idrottslyftet series, reports (2007 to 2012).

Search results using the first two selection methods were then reviewed. Titles and abstracts were considered and selected for a literature review based on two criteria, if they deal with research on sport in relation to crime, deviance or delinquency, or sport as a method of crime prevention or related social objectives in social work.

Third, the literature selected was then subject to a systematic review of references following the same selection criteria. Searches in databases (the first method of selection) identified a total of some 25 works of research. Manual searches in Swedish publications and publication series (the second method of selection) added another approximately 15 works of research. The literature selected using the first two selection methods underwent a systematic review of references (the third method of selection), and through this review some 35 works of research were added. The Swedish literature was gathered mainly using the second and third method. Selection using these methods was less rigorous for the Swedish literature to ensure collection of any kind of Swedish research. As the review process of identified references proceeded, it was found that selected material referred to publications previously identified to a satisfactory degree.

The research literature reviewed constituting the international contextualization covers a broad spectrum of methodological approaches. These include project evaluations (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Heaward, Ryan, & Suckling, 2008), smaller qualitative studies (Smith & Waddington, 2004), aggregated quantitative studies (Hastad, Segrave, Pangrazi, & Petersen, 1984), literature reviews (Donnelly, 1981), meta-theoretical studies (Frey & Eitzen, 1991), and theory generative research projects (Nichols, 2007). Swedish literature is dominated by project evaluations (Carlson, 2007; Kolfjord, 2007) and dissertations (Brännberg, 1998; B. Larsson, 2008; Schelin, 1985). Further, literature from various disciplines such as sociology, sport studies, social work, pedagogy and education, criminology, history and political science is covered. Swedish literature has an emphasis on sociology (Schelin, 1985; Trondman, 2005b), pedagogy and education (Wagnsson, 2009) and social work (Brännberg, 1998; Kolfjord, 2008; Östnäs, 1990).

The literature reviewed covers research on various sport practices from rehabilitation programs to voluntary organizational practices. However,

the common denominator is that all literature covers research on practices in some regard linked to, and expressing, notions of sport as a means of crime prevention.

### *Method of analysis*

The reviewing process follows the inductive approach. The method of analysis is a qualitative, conventional content analysis aimed at inductive category development (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis was executed in four steps:

1. Reading of literature: the literature identified was read thoroughly and important aspects regarding aims, theoretical setting and results were noted in a systematized schedule. This schedule then constituted the material that laid the foundation for further categorizations;
2. Systematization of literature: the literature was systematized in terms of two analytical questions: *What* are the key results observed in the research? and *How* are the research questions formulated?;
3. Categorization of literature: the systematized material produced from the questions above showed certain patterns regarding their content and research questions from which categories could be developed;
4. On an abstracted and thematic level, characteristics in the Swedish research then emerged through a contextualized reading of international literature.

## Background and Context: International Research on Sport as a Means of Crime Prevention

Research in an international context, predominantly in the US and UK, is structured around three distinct research questions:

1. Does sport prevent or reduce crime or criminal behavior?;
2. How can sport contribute to positive development regarding crime prevention?; and



### 3. How can sport be organized in order to be successful with respect to crime prevention?

Research here also features a critical view of sport's potential as a means of crime prevention.

#### 1. *Does sport prevent or reduce crime or criminal behavior?*

The literature reviewed indicates that there is a lack of evidence regarding relations between sport and criminal behavior and that there is nothing essential in sport that makes it suitable for crime prevention (Brettschneider, 2001; Coakley, 2002; Coalter, 2005; Crabbe, 2007; Danish, 2002; Nichols, 1997). Sport practices are difficult to evaluate because of weak theorization (Nichols, 1997; Smith & Waddington, 2004) and because the possible relation is considered mediated (Bailey, 2005; Coalter, 2005; Coalter, 2007b; Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Nichols, 2004; Nichols & Crow, 2004; Smith & Waddington, 2004). Many studies emphasize a lack of support for causal relations regarding sport and crime prevention (Brettschneider, 2001; Coakley, 2011; Crabbe, 2007; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Sabo, & Farrell, 2006; Smith & Waddington, 2004), while others point to lower levels of deviancy and criminality among sport participants (Caruso, 2011; Donnelly, Darnell, Wells, & Coakley, 2007; Hastad et al., 1984; Segrave & Hastad, 1984). Furthermore, the research reviewed suggests that power sports can lead to anti-social involvement (Endresen & Olweus, 2005).

#### 2. *How can sport contribute to positive development regarding crime prevention?*

When sport is highlighted as a potential means for crime prevention in the literature reviewed, six aspects clearly emerge.

*Social capital.* The literature reviewed emphasizes how sport, considered a venue where people meet, can promote the development of social capital (Harvey, Lévesque, & Donnelly, 2007; Lawson, 2005). This is manifested in two aspects. *Community development* includes social relations in the community based on trust and reciprocity (Crabbe, 2007) and a contribution to collective identities that facilitate active citizenship, which contributes to the establishment of social networks in civil society (Coalter, 2005). *Development of personal relations* includes relations

with peers from other social contexts (Nichols, 2007), between youths and staff in social projects (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Heaward et al., 2008), between youths and coaches (Crabbe, 2007; Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta, & Seefeldt, 2002; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Hartmann, 2003; Richardson Jr., 2012), between parents and adults (Ewing et al., 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) and positive role models (Nichols, 1997; Nichols, 2004; Nichols, 2007; Richardson Jr., 2012).

*Hook.* The literature emphasizes sport as inspiring young people to take part and continue in social projects. Sport is described as a way to reach young people from inaccessible environments (Hartmann, 2003; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Nichols, 2007).

*Diversion.* The literature highlights two aspects here. *Physical diversion* includes how no one can carry out criminal acts outside the sport setting while at the same time performing sport activities (Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Nichols, 2004; Nichols, 2007). *Diverting of attention* includes sport being fun, exciting and entertaining (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Coalter, 2005; Heaward et al., 2008; Nichols, 1997; Nichols, 2004; Nichols & Crow, 2004; Nichols, 2007; Sugden & Yiannakis, 1982) and offering structure, frameworks and occupation (Nichols, 2004) in life which diverts attention from criminality.

*Deterrence.* The literature stresses that the presence of supervising adults, coaches, police (Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Robins, 1990) or staff (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Heaward et al., 2008) in a sport setting deters acts of criminality (Nichols, 2007).

*Empowerment.* The literature emphasizes two aspects of empowerment. *Empowerment for individual activity and responsibility* includes empowering the individual's abilities through education to become socially mobile in pre-existing society (Hartmann, 2003), encouraging individual autonomy in handling social problems (Lawson, 2005), and focusing on active citizenship (Coalter, 2005; Coalter, 2007b; Lawson, 2005). *Empowerment for societal change* includes empowering the individual's abilities through education to stimulate emancipation from injustices, marginalization and reproduction of social problems in an unfair society (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011).

*Pro-social development.* The literature stresses three aspects here. *Self-conception* includes the individual's potential improved self-confidence and self-control (success in performance being a prerequisite) (Coalter, 2005; Ewing et al., 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Heaward et al., 2008; Nichols, 1997; Nichols, 2004) as well as reduced impulsivity and

risk-taking (Coalter, 2005). *Life-skills* includes the transfer of skills, such as communicative and cognitive skills, aggression control, problem solving and feed-back, acquired in sport and transferred to other spheres of social life (Danish, 2002; Williams, Streat, & Bengoechea, 2002). *Physical health improving mental health* (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Lawson, 2005; Nichols, 1997; Nichols, 2004; Ewing et al., 2002) includes the development of a healthy lifestyle for rehabilitation from a criminal lifestyle (Segrave & Hastad, 1984; Williams et al., 2002).

### 3. *How can sport be organized in order to be successful with respect to crime prevention?*

The literature reviewed acknowledges three predominant aspects of how sport should be organized to prevent crime.

*Non-sport components* recognize how sport needs to involve, for example, educative components in combination with sport, since there are no intrinsic values in sport regarding crime prevention (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011).

*Non-competitive logics* include how competition needs to be deemphasized (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Coalter, 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Sugden & Yiannakis, 1982) and should instead urge social relations (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Cameron & MacDougall, 2000; Nichols, 2007; Sugden & Yiannakis, 1982), downplay formal rules and limitations (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Nichols, 2007; Sugden & Yiannakis, 1982), be carried out individually or in smaller groups, where participants experience independence and participation (Andrews & Andrews, 2003; Coalter, 2005; Nichols, 2007), and emphasize internal motivation and individualized standards of success (Nichols, 2007; Sugden & Yiannakis, 1982).

*Goal orientation and rationality* reflects how sport practice should have a systematic, rational approach to its goals, for example, offering settings in which youths can reflect upon and understand their behavior (Nichols, 2007). In this respect, they should acknowledge the importance of policy-makers and sport organizations (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

*Critical perspectives in considering sport as a means of crime prevention*

The literature also features critical perspectives, recognizing rather negative aspects of sport regarding its potential for crime prevention. Six aspects are discernible.

*Obscuring structural explanations to social problems.* Since it has been argued that sport does not reduce poverty or unemployment, which is considered structural bases of criminality, a belief that sport prevents social problems instead obscures structural explanations (Kelly, 2011), ascribes responsabilization (Kelly, 2013) and furthermore legitimizes structures that reproduce criminality (Coakley, 2002; Coalter, 2005; Hartmann, 2003; Pitter & Andrews, 1997).

*Sport is not a social service.* The literature underlines how sport organizations are mainly interested in sport – not in crime prevention – and that there is an overstated belief in sport clubs' concerns in embracing socially excluded youth (Coalter, 2007a).

*Selection and stratification.* The literature stresses that it is predominantly youth from economically and socially privileged backgrounds that are attracted to sport practices (Coalter, 2007a; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Nichols, 2004), which calls into question the potential outreach of sport (Coalter, 2007a). Practices targeting black youth from disadvantaged areas emphasize control and discipline while activities targeting white youth from wealthy areas emphasize prosperity and social mobility, and furthermore most likely produce exclusive bonding rather than inclusive bridging (Coakley, 2011). These aspects have been described as being expressions of social control, normalization and re-socialization related to hierarchical relations and subordination (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011).

*Competition and subordination.* The literature indicates that values of competition are predominant (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) and exclude other possible ideals (Lawson, 2005; Skille, 2011). Conventional sports often also reflect social environments in which vulnerable youth have already experienced failure (Sugden & Yiannakis, 1982; Andrews & Andrews, 2003).

*Legitimizing violence.* The literature suggests that sport ritualizes violence and confrontation (Crabbe, 2007) and ritualizes violence in the sport setting (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Eitzen, 2012; Messner, 1990; Young, 2002). This is described as replicating experiences of the excitement from drug use or criminality, and sport is therefore questioned as a suitable means to deal with such problems (Crabbe, 2000).

*Sport generating crime.* Several examples of how sport is generating crime are presented in literature: besides violence on the field of sport activities, *violence and aggression outside of sport practices* relate to the appropriation of violent skills used in other social settings (Eitzen, 2012; Endresen & Olweus, 2005; Messner & Sabo, 1994); *sexual violence and rape among athletes* indicates higher level of such crimes than among other individuals (Messner & Sabo, 1994); *cheating, immorality* (Eitzen, 2012; Preston & Szymanski, 2003) and *rule-breaking* (Sefiha, 2013) deals with how sport often implicitly evokes violation of rules in the sport setting; *doping and performance enhancing drugs* is a consequence of competition and the emphasis on winning (Eitzen, 2012; Preston & Szymanski, 2003).

Violence and crime in sports are heavily linked to ideals of masculinity (Fraser-Thomas et al, 2005; Eitzen, 2012; Messner, 1990; Messner & Sabo, 1994; Young, 2002) and considered an effect from competitiveness and a full-scale emphasis on winning (Eitzen, 2012). Furthermore, research also considers crime generated from sport concerning spectators or in relation to organizing sport events, such as for instance hooliganism and crowd-violence (Armstrong, 1998), match-fixing and illegal gambling (Preston & Szymanski, 2003) and also corruption (Eitzen, 2012).

## Swedish Research Literature: An Exposition

Most notably, Swedish research literature does not explicitly cover crime prevention to any great extent, but rather focuses on the social benefits that may be more or less directly related to crime prevention. Research is structured around three distinct research questions:

1. Does sport have an effect on social objectives (that may be related to crime prevention)?;
2. How can sport have an effect on social objectives (that may be related to crime prevention)?; and
3. How can sport be organized to have an effect on social objectives (that may be related to crime prevention)?

Swedish research also features a critical view of sport as a potential means of achieving desirable social objectives.

1. *Does sport have an effect on social objectives (that may be related to crime prevention)?*

Swedish research suggests that there are potential positive effects from sport regarding crime prevention. Carlson (2007) draws the conclusion that crime rates decreased as a result of active integration and leadership programs with sport in a local community. Kolfjord (2007) highlights sport's potential in promoting pro-social development while evaluating a social integration project targeting negative attitudes to crime. "Hela-malmö" was an evaluated project conducted under the state-financed *Handslaget* program and managed by a local basketball club in collaboration with local schools. The project was designed as a social integration project founded on three cornerstones, exercise, integration and negative attitudes to crime. One of the aims of the project worth highlighting is that the activity "should provide children with the right attitudes to bullying, drug abuse and other criminality" (Kolfjord 2007:14). Kolfjord identifies the project as entailing general prevention and being directed at diversion and pro-social development. Using Nichols' criterion (Nichols, 2007), Kolfjord notes that the activities are organized in such a way that conditions are good for promoting a negative attitude to crime. However, Kolfjord recognizes that sport initiatives cannot solve structural problems, such as racism or unemployment that underlie criminality. Özdemir and Stattin (2012) further conclude from a quantitative study in psychology on behavioral development on youths over a three-year period that participation in sport can act as a risk-protection factor since youths active in sport are involved in criminality less frequently than other youths. This is supported by Wagnsson (2009) in a longitudinal survey study on school children, who maintains that youths who are active in sport perform pro-social actions more often and anti-social actions less often than comparable youths. Brännberg (1987) and Östnäs (1990) examine a rehabilitation and re-socialization project involving sport diving practices for former drug abusers, concluding that sport can achieve social objectives such as rehabilitation from a deviant behavior and setting. Östnäs (2005) adds further examples of the potential of sport in these regards.

Statistical data on sport and the use of alcohol point in different directions. Trondman (2005b), based on a survey study, and Wagnsson (2009) suggest that youths who are active in sport use less alcohol than youths who are not active. On the other hand, other data show how youths who are active in sport use alcohol more often (Wagnsson, 2009), with refer-

ence to study by Stark and Romelsjö from 2003) and in greater amounts (Trondman, 2005a).

2. *How can sport have an effect on social objectives (that may be related to crime prevention)?*

Swedish research identifies various potential positive effects from sport activities regarding social and societal development, although there is some criticism of viewing sport as a suitable means of crime prevention. Four aspects of the potential contribution of sport are essentially highlighted in this research.

*Integration and community development.* Here, the central issue is how sport is considered as a venue where people meet each other. This is given special emphasis for people with foreign backgrounds. In this regard, sport organizations can be viewed as a community developer which, as a result of committed civil engagement beyond sport practices, could lead to lower crime rates (Carlson, 2007). Additionally, it is claimed that sport practices can offer a supporting social network for youths who lack support from home or school (Kolfjord, 2005). Sport can act as a venue where people from different environments meet and develop friendships (Kolfjord, 2008). Apart from being regarded as a venue for relations between people from different environments, which is clear in an ethnographic study of lower-league football teams (Fundberg, 1996), sport can also be regarded as a venue for strengthening bonds *within* a certain environment, leading to stronger identification with the athlete's own group in contrast to the other group (Peterson, 2000). Concurrently, this could be perceived as segregating *between* different environments (Fundberg, 1996; Peterson, 2000).

*Diversion.* Two aspects of diversion are expressed in the Swedish research. First, direct diversion is exemplified in boxing: young people cannot be involved in sport practices at the boxing club and at the same time also be involved in criminality or deviancy outside the sport setting (Gustafsson, 1998). This view is also supported by claims from coaches in a boxing club who describe how young people with social problems are embraced by the sporting practice (Börjesson & von Essen, 2007; Hellspong, 1982). Second, the diversion of attention could also be exemplified in boxing: the sport activity draws attention away from criminal or deviant settings. Taking the example of a boxing club in a socially vulnerable district, participation in sport stimulated various other interests

such as voluntary work and leadership in sport organizations. In that boxing club, the sport practices were combined with a café (Gustafsson, 1998). In claims from sport coaches, it was expressed how boxing can offer a goal in life for youths with social problems and keep them on the right track (Börjesson & von Essen, 2007; Hellspång, 1982). Furthermore, it is claimed (in a bachelor's degree thesis) that sport could serve as a substitute for the quest for excitement in crime, while also contributing positive skills and values (Olsson, 1996).

*Pro-social development.* Self-control, self-confidence, concentration, cooperation (Kilborn Arvéus, 2009) and developed social, cognitive and moral skills are described as positive effects of sport participation (Wagnsson, 2009). Wagnsson (2009) notes that youths in sport with leaders who initiate reflections about moral issues tend to perform more pro-social actions and fewer anti-social actions than others. Social and psychological benefits of sport participation are also intertwined with physical health in the development of a healthy identity (Östnäs, 1990). Carlson (2007), following an integration and leadership program, further claims that active leadership could be derived from deviant and criminal youth through sport. Carlson (2007) notes how their leadership traits could be focused in a different setting. He considers the idea of using leadership traits in youths with criminal experience in a sport setting as both “simple and ingenious” (Sw. “enkel och genial”; Carlson, 2007: 32).

*Re-socialization.* Boxing is highlighted in the literature as a sport with a certain social mission (Hellspång, 1982). Hellspång (1982) notes that boxing clubs reach out to socially deviant youth, cooperating with penitentiaries and reformatory institutions, and that boxing can provide youths with a meaningful occupation instead of criminal activities. In this aspect, boxing can contribute to re-socialization. Östnäs (1990) also argues (based on experience, documentation and evaluated examples) for sport as a means of rehabilitation through socialization processes with respect to drug abuse, and further highlights the potential for closer cooperation between social services and sport practices.



3. *How can sport be organized to have an effect on social objectives (that may be related to crime prevention)?*

Two aspects of sport are central in targeting social objectives. First, sport for social development should be organized to include a task-oriented pedagogy (Wagnsson, 2009). Second, Kolfjord (2007) stresses non-violence and education promoting a negative view of crime along with an emphasis on participants' strengths and success rather than shortcomings and promotion of social relations in this regard.

*A critical view of sport as a means of social objectives related to crime prevention*

The Swedish research also features a critical view of sport's potential in contributing to positive social values or societal development with relevance for crime prevention. Six aspects are presented here.

*Stratification and exclusion.* Research shows how girls from foreign backgrounds (Nilsson, 1998; Statistiska centralbyrån, 2010) and parents of children from foreign backgrounds (Norberg, 2002) are underrepresented in sport practices. Additionally, youths (for reasons related to their gender, physical impairments or ethnicity) who might want to participate, but with a non-competitive interest, and do not identify their sporting practices with "sport's internal core logic" (Sw. "Idrottens interna kärnlogik"; Trondman, 2011) are excluded from sports. Furthermore, different groups in society, depending on their education, economic situation and cultural background, are active in sport in different ways (Engström, 1999; B. Larsson, 2008; Schelin, 1985; Wagnsson, 2009). This is described as problematic, considering that sport practices offer a venue for inclusive bridging, where people from different social environments can integrate.

Different sports also foster different values and skills which reproduce social stratification. For instance, golf fosters traditional middle-class values, such as individual responsibility, while football (soccer) fosters traditional working-class values, such as collective responsibility and subordination (Karp, 2000; Karp & Stenling, 2011). Social stratification can also be expressed by notions of the body as a goal (health ideals) or as a means (the body is an instrument for performance) in sport practices, with these notions representing disparate social values (Engström, 1999; B. Larsson, 2008; Schelin, 1985; Wagnsson, 2009).

*Ideals of normality.* In sport, dominant ideals of masculinity, Swedish ethnicity (Fundberg, 2003) and heterosexuality (Andreasson, 2005; Fundberg, 2003; Gilenstam, Karp, & Henriksson-Larsén, 2008; H. Larsson, 2001) are promoted. In an ethnographic study of a boys' football team, Fundberg (2003) acknowledges how normality is constituted by degrading descriptions of females, immigrants and homosexuals as deviants. It is also pointed out how men and women are separated and women subordinated in sport (Norberg & Ljunglöf, 2003; Olofsson, 1989; Redelius, 2002).

*Sport and alcohol.* Research suggests that alcohol has a central role in social relations in sport practices and in socialization processes (Andersson, 2002; Brännberg, 1998).

*Sport is not a social service.* Voluntary leaders in sport often give the reason for their engagement as social leadership, and thus view practicing sport as a social activity (Börjesson & von Essen, 2007; Hertting, 2007; Redelius, 2002). Nonetheless, leaders are generally skeptical to the idea that sport can be a solution to more serious social problems, although sport is open and welcoming to youths who are vulnerable to social problems (Börjesson & von Essen, 2007). Leaders describe potential benefits derived from participation in sport, but this should not be perceived as a general or prominent objective. Sport is also described as a free zone from social problems, but that does not mean sport solves these problems – as is expressed in interviews with youth sport leaders (Börjesson & von Essen, 2007). Furthermore, organizational aspects concerning resources, ambition and culture in sport organizations often prohibit sport practices from acting as tools in sport and welfare policy (Fahlén & Aggestål, 2011).

*Limited transferability.* Wagnsson (2009) describes the belief in social fostering through sport as often being exaggerated. He notes that sport considered a social system is relatively autonomous of wider society as a social system. Values and skills obtained in sports are not easily transferred from one relatively autonomous system to the other. Thus values adopted and skills acquired in sports are not automatically transferred to wider society. They are also not necessarily needed in wider society.

*Competition as a dominant logic.* Competition is described as the dominant logic of sport (Trondman, 2011), with ideology focusing individualism (Wagnsson, 2009). The drive of one individual to defeat the other leads to practices that target ranking and selection (Trondman, 2011). In the Swedish research, Trondman's (2011) distinction between "sport's

normative space” (Sw. “idrottens normativa rum”), with an emphasis on participation and the right to participate on one’s own terms, and “sport’s internal core logic”, with an emphasis on competition and rankings, is central. The subordination of “sport’s normative space” and the emphasis on competition prohibit the development of sport practices with ideals characterized by social values and societal fostering (Brännberg, 1998; Hertting, 2007; Kolfjord, 2007; Redelius, 2002), and further lead to the exclusion of sporting practices that are oriented toward participation on one’s own terms in favor of sport practices that are oriented toward performance, results, selection and rankings (Trondman, 2011).

## Analysis and Discussion

On the basis of the literature reviewed and presented in the article, five key results emerge. The results of the analysis, presented below, focus on the Swedish literature seen in light of the contextualizing international research. In this section the article shifts from the descriptive emphasis in the presentation on *what* is being researched to an analytical emphasis on *how* it is being researched.

### *A general remark: Discrepancies between the common sense notion of sport and research results*

Claims associated with the common sense notion of sport (presented in the introduction) often display themes that are similar in content to those in the research presented. Obviously, discourses in research (scientific knowledge) and in wider society (the common sense notion) influence each other and are intertwined. However, whereas the common sense notion seems to have strong faith in sport and its potential in contributing to societal development, research generally lacks clear evidence of sport as a means of crime prevention. While there is research, which emphasizes how sport can contribute in various ways to development and crime prevention in society, it also exhibits a powerful critical perspective. Scientific knowledge seems to have a more nuanced conception of sport that raises a number of questions, whereas the common sense notion of sport as a means of crime prevention has a one-sided emphasis. How this common sense notion of sport and research findings are related and intertwined has yet to be examined.

*Recurring themes in Swedish literature,  
from an international context*

Considering the international context, it is obvious that Swedish research is similar in terms of content and research questions. Although Swedish research suggests a perhaps more confident posture with respect to sport's potential for crime prevention, observations (in the literature reviewed) seem to indicate a fairly cohesive image of sport as means of crime prevention, while considering different contexts. It is clear that the Swedish research literature concerns basically the same topics and arguments expressed in corresponding international literature.

1. The literature displays a lack of evidence for the relation between sport and crime prevention.
2. The literature stressing the potential benefits of sport concerns *integration and community development, diversion, pro-social development* and *re-socialization* – all these themes recur in different forms in the contextualizing international literature. Critical perspectives on sport as a means of crime prevention – such as *stratification and exclusion, ideals of normality, sport and alcohol, sport is not a social service, limited transferability* and *competition as a dominant logic* – are all highlighted in various ways in the contextualizing international research literature. Together, these perspectives on potential benefits and critical perspectives comprise a heterogeneous collection highlighting a somewhat contradictory outlook: “on the one hand, but on the other hand”.
3. Strategies for sport to work towards social objectives – such as a *task-oriented pedagogy* emphasizing *non-violence, education highlighting the negative aspects of crime, emphasis on participants' strengths and success rather than shortcomings* and *promotion of social relations* – also highlight themes that occur in the contextualizing international research literature.

*Empirically driven emphasis in previous research*

The research presented is predominantly empirically driven. The literature reviewed is often theoretically homogeneous, and theory rarely articulated. This applies to both Swedish and international research. Research is mainly interested in descriptive questions, such as whether sport works in the intended direction, what exactly in sport works and

how should sport be organized in order to get it to work. This empirically driven approach is clearly predominant, its only competition being a more theoretically driven social constructionist approach in research derived from more critical views. Research from a social constructionist perspective has examined how it is possible to understand the role of sport in society, how sport can be understood as a means of societal development in terms of ideology or welfare production, and what it means in terms of conceptions of society and the individual to consider sport as a means of societal goals. This could indicate a fourth type of alternative research approach (thus distinguished from the three research questions presented which emphasize empirically driven research) with a more theoretically driven social constructionist interest in sport in society. However, this interest is subordinate in the literature reviewed to the predominant empirically driven approach.

*Swedish research questions: non-explicit focus on crime prevention and social objectives as an effect*

In contrast to the results that emphasize similarities across contexts, reconstructed research questions show a disparity in the Swedish literature regarding two aspects. First, Swedish literature on sport as a means of social objectives related to crime prevention is characterized by a non-explicit focus on crime prevention. While the international literature has a more explicit focus on crime prevention, Swedish research covers a broader perspective on social development and benefits to society. There is a slender body of Swedish literature with an explicit focus on sport as a crime prevention method; instead crime prevention is treated as one among other implicit benefits of sport practices. Second, the Swedish literature on sport as a means of achieving social objectives related to crime prevention treats the social objectives as an effect of sport rather than as premise for the practice of sport. The international literature covers programs and practices with crime prevention being the explicit objective, where social objectives are considered the premise for the sport practice, while the Swedish literature covers sport practices where benefits to society related to crime prevention are considered a potential effect.

Coalter (2007b) has observed sport practices with the distinction between *Sport Plus* and *Plus Sport*. He argues that developmental sport practices can be described as *Sport Plus*, which means that “traditional sport development objectives of increased participation and the development

of sporting skills are emphasized” (Coalter, 2007b:71) and that further “the presumed instrumental role of sport is emphasized, with sport being used to address a number of broader social issues” (Coalter, 2007b:71). Thus, these are practices targeting sport with potentially beneficial effects. By contrast, the concept *Plus Sport* means practices “in which social, educational and health programmes are given primacy; and sport, especially its ability to bring together a large number of young people, is part of a much broader and more complex set of processes” (Coalter, 2007b: 71). Thus, these are practices with social objectives as their premise, using sport as a tool.

The Swedish literature, in contrast to the international literature, disregards this distinction. This can be understood by way two different scenarios: Swedish research is occupied by *Sport Plus* and is scarcely interested in studying *Plus Sport*, or, Swedish research is blind to this distinction (perhaps since social benefits are so well integrated in the notion of Swedish sport that this distinction does not become meaningful). Accordingly, the Swedish research covers – for good reasons – primarily voluntary sport clubs (and thus potential societal and social effects). Offering organized sports for reasons of crime prevention is barely researched at all (perhaps this is not as common as the dominant form in Swedish society, organized voluntary conventional sport).

### *Focus on primary and secondary levels of crime prevention*

Crime prevention practices can be described on three levels. These three levels target risk reduction and promote protection from risk. Primary prevention has a general objective relative to society. On this level, prevention targets conditions in the social environment without focusing on any pre-identified group of individuals. Secondary prevention takes a selective approach to identified groups of individuals in certain risk environments. Tertiary prevention takes an indicative approach that targets identified violators and thus targets recidivate criminality (Brantingham & Faust, 1976; Nichols, 2007).

The international literature emphasizing social benefits as a premise for sport practice more often – implicitly or explicitly – stresses the secondary and tertiary objectives of crime prevention. The Swedish literature, which more frequently emphasizes social benefits as an effect of voluntary sport practices, in contrast stresses primary prevention. However, the programs and practices of integration as a means of crime pre-

vention covered in the Swedish literature can be understood as having a secondary objective since this clearly focuses on identified groups or social environments at risk. Nevertheless, Swedish research – unlike international research – does not cover practices characterized by tertiary crime prevention. Furthermore, there is a general lack of references in the literature to theories of crime, and this is especially valid with respect to Swedish literature.

### *A general lack of Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention*

As was noted earlier, there is limited Swedish literature on sport as a means of crime prevention. This is a general and obvious observation, but nevertheless central. Although crime prevention is a concern in Swedish literature on sport practices, it is seldom the main objective. Furthermore, the Swedish literature reviewed here exhibits a clear focus on empirically driven research to an even greater extent than corresponding international literature. Research approaches concerning the indicated fourth research question (which takes a more social constructionist perspective) on the role of sport in ideology and welfare are conspicuous by their absence.

### *A discussion of specific characteristics in Swedish research – and Swedish welfare*

The Swedish welfare state promotes values such as universal social rights and solidarity, general welfare and social insurance systems, and active economic redistribution (Esping-Andersen, 1990). It is characterized by social engineering ideals of state intervention to govern people in their everyday life – “putting life in order” (Sw. “att lägga livet tillrätta”; Hirdman, 2000). These characteristics are reflected in the findings on Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention. The results indicate an emphasis in Swedish sport research on universalism and general outreach in crime prevention via broader social objectives and targeting crime via primary prevention. One conclusion could be that Swedish research is non-explicit on crime prevention, but rather considers crime prevention a result of broader social objectives and perhaps benefits to society in general. Besides, Swedish research is largely occupied with voluntary sport clubs rather than programs directed at pre-identified

groups of individuals or recidivate criminality. Social objectives emerge as an effect rather than as a premise for the sport practices observed in research. These are explicit features in the research and can reasonably be mirrored in how sport practices for social objectives are actually organized in society. Here universalism and general outreach on social issues are highlighted. This would suggest a living heritage from the social-democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). However, this social-democratic orientation is constantly under pressure from more liberal (and even conservative) notions of the welfare state (c.f. Bergh, 2009; Trägårdh, 2007, 2010), which poses a renegotiated view of the Swedish welfare state. It would be reasonable to consider research on sport as a means of realizing social objectives in Sweden as mirrored by the actual organization of such practices. In addition, both the research on and actual organization of practices could be molded by the traditionally upheld (and renegotiated) social-democratic welfare state regime. In view of this, further research questions concerning the Swedish organization of sport in the Swedish welfare state tradition can be unveiled: How is sport used to foster individuals in the Swedish welfare agenda today? How are changes in the Swedish welfare state mirrored in sport practices today? What ideological and political discourses related to welfare policy underlie the idea of sport as a means of social objectives?

## Conclusion

This article has examined how Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention can be understood, in light of international research on the subject, in terms of research questions and content, with a focus on identifying specific characteristics. First, the article has provided a thorough, descriptive presentation of Swedish literature, with international literature as a contextualizing background. Second, these descriptions have enabled an analytical examination focusing on specific characteristics in Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention. Beside the description of research covered in the Swedish and international literature, the article has highlighted five major results beyond the general remark that there is a clear discrepancy between what literature identifies as a common sense notion of sport as a means of crime prevention and the research results covered in the literature.



1. Although research questions show a disparity with respect to their context of articulation, the research content in Swedish literature is similar to the content in the international literature on sport as a means of crime prevention. This result is a descriptive proceeding and responds to *what* is being researched. Accordingly, these results are inherent in the research literature covered, and this article has shed light on their content and research questions.
2. Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention, like the research in an international context, is structured around three types of descriptive questions with an empirically driven approach. This indicates a predominantly empirically driven approach that takes precedence over alternative theoretically driven social constructionist approaches concerned with constructions of meaning and knowledge regarding sport as a means of crime prevention in the research covered.
3. Swedish research covered in the literature often observes social objectives such as non-explicit crime prevention as well as the potential effect of sport practices. This is in contrast to the international research, which exhibits a more explicit focus on crime prevention and its use as a premise for the practice of sport. Moreover, Swedish research disregards the distinction between *Sport Plus* and *Plus Sport*.

The concluding results below are in response to *how* research observes sport as a means of crime prevention. They disclose the implicit assumptions and characteristics of the descriptions. Hence, these conclusions are an analytical result that goes beyond the descriptions in the literature reviewed.

4. The international research literature emphasizing crime prevention as a premise for the practice of sport targets secondary and tertiary prevention, while the Swedish research covered in the literature review emphasizing social benefits as an effect has a more general target of primary prevention and in a few cases secondary prevention (thus lacking a focus on tertiary prevention). This concluding result is intertwined with the result on premise or effect. However, this is not primarily an analytical construction, but rather a circumstance reflected in the practices covered in the reviewed literature.

5. There is a general lack of Swedish research on sport as a means of crime prevention.

This last concluding result is a general and obvious observation that underlies and contextualizes both aspects of the aim of this investigation and the corresponding results. This observation is also necessary to determine further directions in research.

Finally, the article initiates some remarks regarding future directions in research. Three potential aspects emerge in this reflection.

Since, as this article indicates, there is a discrepancy between a common sense notion of sport as a means of crime prevention and research results (scientific knowledge) on the subject, further research is a legitimate task.

Sport practices based on the premise of crime prevention or societal benefits need to be addressed in Swedish research. Accordingly, such research would need to acknowledge a distinction between *Sport Plus* and *Plus Sport*, and thus focus on the latter.

Research on sport as a means of crime prevention could, as a complement to more empirically driven research, be further approached from a social constructionist perspective, focusing on the construction of meaning, knowledge and the significance of sport in terms of ideology and welfare. Such an approach could further problematize and critically observe the underlying assumptions, distinctions, ideologies and research positions that constitute the conceptions and knowledge surrounding sport as a means of crime prevention.

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