

# The emergence of a national sport event policy in Denmark

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the development of the sport event policy in the case of Denmark, a small, Western country with no mega sport event hosting experience. Based on an analysis of archival documents, media coverage and interviews with representatives of sport federations, municipalities, and the organisations carrying out the event policy, the paper traces the start of the policy to 1994 when the Danish sport confederation (DIF) founded Idrætsfonden Danmark (The Sports Foundation Denmark) supported by among others the Danish ministry of culture. Drawing on the sociology of translation, the paper shows how the policy slowly managed to showcase (‘problematise’) events as suitable investments for both sport organisations, municipalities and the state. The interest of the state showed in particular as the Ministry of culture increased its funding temporarily in 2007 and permanently in 2014. Finally, the paper shows how this development and national recognition is reflected in the policy’s impact on the stakeholders, which changes from an initial one-way form of financial support and advice related to a specific event to a freer form, a “triangle” in which all corners (the policy, the sport federations, and the municipalities) share the responsibility for developing Denmark as a host of international sport events.

**Keywords:** Danish, Denmark, Sport Event Denmark, stakeholders, strategy, history, sociology of translation, sport events

## Introduction

Over the last couple of decades, hosting international sport events has become subject to national or regional policies all over the world. For events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup for men, such use of events has led to global discussions,<sup>1</sup> whereas the interest in smaller events has not caused the same public attention nor attracted the same interest from researchers. Research has however shown that many European countries as well as, for instance, Canada, and cities have adopted formal sport event host policies.<sup>2</sup> Even places with no formal policies might unconsciously regard hosting events as a sort of “tradition” and thus as informal strategies.<sup>3</sup> In 2016, event researchers Jean-Loup Chappelet and Kwang Hong Lee summed up the aim of these new policies as the “successful bidding and hosting for sport events” by for example coordinating the “actions of related stakeholders, such as governments at different levels, sport organisations, commercial sponsors, volunteer groups, local communities and event owners”.<sup>4</sup>

In my reading Chappelet and Lee’s summary suggests that event hosting policies boost not just the sheer number of events but also the ‘quality’ of the events, e.g., with regard to the required involvement of the stakeholders and potentially a shift away from the temporary dimension otherwise intimately connected to events in favour of events as a staple.

If my reading is correct, policies are in it for the long run, and therefore research on event policies needs a long view as well. However, research on sport event policies has so far often rarely taken this long view, with the case of Canada as a notable exception. There, studies have shown a tradition for hosting events which the Canadian historian Cora McCloy traces

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1 Arnold, ‘Putin’s Olympics. The Sochi Games and the Evolution of Twenty-First Century Russia’; Khodr, ‘Exploring the Driving Factors behind the Event Strategy in Qatar’; Palmer, ‘Beijing’s Games’.

2 Black, ‘Managing the Mega-Event “Habit”’; Jensen, ‘Exploiting the Spectacular. A Study o Danish and Norwegian Event Stakeholders’ Interest in International Sport Events 2010-2020.’; Lechner and Solberg, ‘The Competition for Government Funding of Major Sports Events’; Leopkey, Mutter, and Parent, ‘Barriers and Facilitators When Hosting Sporting Events’; Leopkey and Ellis, ‘Sport Event Hosting Capacity as Event Legacy’; McCloy, ‘Canada Hosts the World’; Pinson, ‘From the Olympic Dream to a down to Earth Approach’; Stopper, Gnädinger, and Kempf, ‘The Gain of Playing Host. A Comparison of National Policies for Hosting Major Sporting Events’.

3 Darcy et al., ‘When the Carnival Is Over’, 1; Schnitzer, Schlemmer, and Kristiansen, ‘Youth Multi-Sport Events in Austria’.2000

4 Chappelet and Lee, ‘The Emerging Concept of Sport-Event-Hosting Strategy’, 3; cf. Antchak, ‘Portfolio of Major Events in Auckland’, 282.

back to at least the 1960s, perhaps even the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Since then tradition and formal policies operating on local and national levels have mutually reinforced the efforts for hosting further events and made Canada a “serial user” of international sport events,<sup>6</sup> a trend which more recently also has been marked by “global trends” and focus on events.<sup>7</sup>

While McCloy’s research shows the potentially long history of event policies, it is similar to previous research in the finding that bids for mega sport events like the Olympic Games often have played pivotal roles in the development of event policies.<sup>8</sup> While these findings are important for understanding how a sport event policy can emerge, most countries will never host nor even aspire to host an edition of the Olympic Games or events of a similar size. In these cases, sport event policies thus must have emerged for other reasons than those suggested by existing research.

The present study of the Danish case, as a contrast, analyses the emergence of an event policy in a small Nordic country and how it has developed independently from hosting any mega events.<sup>9</sup> Formulated as a question, this paper asks: *how has the Danish sport event policy developed and impacted the Danish event stakeholders on a local and national level?*

In its method, the present study is inspired by the diachronic view applied in McCloy’s analysis.<sup>10</sup> Although this perspective necessarily will make it a study of a single case, its details show the twists and turns that often accompany complicated decision-making processes and call for renewed reflections on events and the policies behind them.<sup>11</sup>

5 McCloy, ‘Canada Hosts the World’.

6 Black, ‘Managing the Mega-Event “Habit”’; Leopkey and Ellis, ‘Sport Event Hosting Capacity as Event Legacy’.

7 Leopkey, Mutter, and Parent, ‘Barriers and Facilitators When Hosting Sporting Events’, 131.

8 McCloy, ‘Canada Hosts the World’, 1156–62; Jensen, ‘Exploiting the Spectacular. A Study of Danish and Norwegian Event Stakeholders’ Interest in International Sport Events 2010–2020.’, chap. 6.4.2.

9 The Danish policy has previous only been briefly mentioned in Emery, ‘The Bidders’ and Promoters’ Perspectives’ and analysed in parts in the author’s Ph.D.-thesis, on the present paper draws.

10 McCloy, ‘Canada Hosts the World’.

11 Cohen, March, and Olsen, ‘A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice’.

## Theory

The study's theoretical framework is inspired by the theory or "sociology" of translation developed by the French sociologists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour. In the following, I show how this framework accommodates the study's diachronic perspective and focus on a particular entity (the event policy) in an environment marked by several stakeholders.

The point of the theory is to explain how one or a group of initial actors translate "other actors' wills into a single will for which they [the initial actors] speak" in four steps.<sup>12</sup> The present study analyses in a similar way how the Danish event policy has developed and thereby potentially also impacted other event stakeholder by getting them to adhere to, or rather share, the will of the policy.

The first step in the translation is 'problematization'. Here the actor defines a problem, including who is relevant for solving it, how to solve it, and for whom the solution would be relevant. The original example depicted how a group of researchers (the initial actors) would define a problem so that their planned research project became indispensable for the problem's solution.<sup>13</sup> As they defined the problem, the researchers for instance embedded their proposal in a bigger scheme to increase the general interest in the problem. In the present study, a parallel question would be how the policy frames hosting (more) events as a solution to a problem and for whom this solution is relevant.

In the next step, 'interessement', the initial actors convince potential allies of the solution's relevance and, in order to stabilise the interest of these potential allies, "build devices that can be placed between them [those to be convinced] and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise."<sup>14</sup>

Once the recipients are convinced (and isolated), the initial actors are free to "enrol" and eventually "mobilise" the recipients in the third and fourth steps of the process. Enrolment means that the interested stakeholders begin to act in ways that support the efforts of the initial actors and might be followed by a "mobilisation". A successful mobilisation enables the initial stakeholders to amass new stakeholders with whom they in unison and with greater authority can disseminate their view further.

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12 Callon and Latour, 'Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So', 278; Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation'.

13 Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation'.

14 Callon, 208.

Eventually, a successful translation shows a way by which a group of stakeholders forms a power relation and stabilises as a field. However, “translation is a process before it is a result.”<sup>15</sup> A step can fail, stakeholders can turn into dissidents, and the translation process may never conclude.

## Methods

Given the limited existing research, the paper is an exploratory, historical study based on the single case of the Danish sport event policy. The case is located in a specific time and space and focuses on a limited set of relations, namely those developed around the sport event policy between it and the main stakeholders of international sport events in Denmark (the national sport federations, the sport confederation (DIF) and the municipalities).<sup>16</sup> This is a limited scope, but what a single case might lack in scope, its empirical data and its analysis deliver in depth and thus aid further perspectives and studies.<sup>17</sup>

The study’s data consists of archival documents and interviews with representatives from the aforementioned stakeholders. For the analysis of the early history of the policy from 1994 until 2007, i.e., the period in which the policy was handled by Idrætsfonden Danmark (Sport Foundation Denmark), the study draws on archived editions of the foundation’s homepage, press coverage, and an interview with a then-member of the foundation’s board. It has not been possible to locate any documents from the foundation itself at the Danish national archives. For the latter part of the analysis, from 2008, when the mainly publicly funded organisation Sport Event Denmark (SEDK) replaced the foundation, until 2023, the documentation is much better. Firstly, due to the involvement of the Danish Ministry of Culture, documents linked to parliamentary debates, political agreements regulating SEDK, and its economy are all available. In addition to the ministerial documents, the study also draws on documents from the most active Danish event-municipalities (Copenhagen and Herning) and SEDK itself. Finally, the recentness of the period also allowed for interviews.

In total, the analysis of the later period is based on 21 interviews with representatives from national Danish sport organisations, local public au-

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<sup>15</sup> Callon, 224.

<sup>16</sup> Yin, *Case Study*.

<sup>17</sup> Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterView*, 45–47; Flyvbjerg, ‘Fem Misforståelser Om Casestudiet’.

thorities, and tourist trade associations. The sample for the interviews was based on the involvement of their organisations’ engagement in international sport events in Denmark in the period 2010–2019.<sup>18</sup> The criteria for an event to be included was that the sample should ensure that various parts of the country would be represented, include different sports, and that the events’ organisers had been supported by the sport event policy.

**Table 1** *Number of interview informants sorted according to sector.*

| <b>Sport and sport events</b>                       | <i>Number of interviews</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| SEDK                                                | 1                           |
| NGBs and DIF                                        | 5                           |
| <b>Public organisations and lobby organisations</b> |                             |
| Municipalities                                      | 6                           |
| Counties                                            | 5                           |
| Tourist representatives (local and national)        | 4                           |

For the study I did not interview any representatives from the Danish national public authorities such as the Ministry of Culture. Although the ministry is formally responsible for the policy, preliminary talks with a civil servant made it clear that the ministry was not involved in the everyday handling of the policy due to the arm’s length principle, making an interview irrelevant.

The interviews were laid out as semi-structured. This gave me the opportunity to pose follow-up questions and ensured that the interviews had a common base. The questions aimed at providing descriptive answers in line with the theoretical framework’s focus on the actors’ actions.<sup>19</sup> I conducted all the interviews in the spring of 2018, and all except one took place face-to-face. Typically, I would meet the informants at their workplaces at their request. While this location often ensured coherence between the topic and geographical position, a workplace is not necessarily a place for confidentiality. However, the interview would always take place in a room with just the two of us. I presume, therefore, that the informants spoke freely despite the work location.

For the analysis of the data material, I first transcribed the interviews, thereby making them a text similar to the study’s other sources. Then,

<sup>18</sup> The events were the IAAF World Halfmarathon Championship, 2014 (Copenhagen), the IHF World Handball Championships in 2015 (women) (Herning, Næstved, Kolding and Frederikshavn) and 2019 (men) (Copenhagen and Herning) and the IHF Ice Hockey World Championship, 2018 (Copenhagen and Herning).

<sup>19</sup> Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterView*, 46, 185–86.

I familiarised myself with the material by reading it and singling out all parts describing the relation between the informants' organisations and the event policy for further scrutiny. In the final step of the analysis, I sorted the relevant parts of the source material according to the theoretical framework in an abductive process.<sup>20</sup>

The paper's analysis comes in four parts. The first covers the operations of Sport Foundation Denmark from its foundation in 1994 until the Danish government set new ambitions for the policy in 2006. The new level of ambitions led among other things to the foundation of Sport Event Denmark in 2008 and made the years 2006–2011 a period in which the policy enjoyed high political attention and access to considerable financial resources. The high times ended as a new government took over in 2011, that questioned the aims of SEDK signalling needs for reform. This period of uncertainty reached a conclusion in 2014 as a reformed SEDK was made a beneficiary of the state's betting monopoly. Thereby the Danish event policy has found a lasting and currently still relevant format, whose relation to and influence on the Danish sport event stakeholders the paper analyses in its fourth part. The paper concludes with a summary and discussion of the paper's main findings and potential implications for future research.

## The first formal sport event policy (1994–2006)

The first formal initiative to increase the number of international sport events in Denmark was launched in March 1994 when the Danish sport confederation (DIF), the Danish Tourism Council (a trade association), and the Danish Ministries for Culture and Business & Trade established Idrætsfonden Danmark (Sport Foundation Denmark).<sup>21</sup>

The idea originated from leading figures in the sport confederation, who according to a later board member, were envious of Sweden and Norway, which had recently hosted more and much larger sport events than Denmark. For example, Sweden had just hosted the men's Euro in 1992 and would host the World Athletic Championship in 1995, while Norway had just hosted the Winter Olympics in 1994, in addition to several other international winter sport events. Denmark and the Danish sport movement were lagging behind.

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<sup>20</sup> Ryen, *Det kvalitative intervjuet*, 146–47.

<sup>21</sup> 'Ny Fond i Dansk Idræt'.

In line with the theory of translation, the sport confederation however had to present a more general problem in order to win over supporters. Their first target was the tourist council, which the sport confederation was able to convince of the potential benefits the tourism sector were to gain. As a result, the tourism sector and the sport organisations each allocated one million DKK<sup>22</sup> for a foundation for supporting international sport events in Denmark.

Together, DIF and the tourism organisation could then persuade the Ministry of Communication and Tourism to provide an additional one million DKK, and secured a one-time allocation of three million DKK from the Ministry of Culture.<sup>23</sup> The new foundation's purpose was simply "to attract more large international sport events and sport-related congresses to Denmark."<sup>24</sup> As a reflection of the many stakeholders, events were intended to enhance Denmark's brand, increase tourism, promote sport participation, deliver sport experiences, and create jobs.

The foundation sought to achieve these event goals in two ways. Firstly, it offered financial and practical support to sport organisations during the bidding process and when staging events.<sup>25</sup> Here the foundation was rather successful as it quickly gained the support of sport federations. Already in 1995, it supported around 30 projects with a total of 2.5 million DKK.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, the foundation aimed to increase interest in events among relevant public stakeholders, especially the municipalities, by emphasising the economic benefits of events.<sup>27</sup> The foundations for instance mentioned economic outcomes in the media and published reports on the economic value of the sports events. These reports were primarily directed at municipalities, and there is no indication in the source material that the foundation made a similarly concerted efforts to convince national sport federations to host more events. Their interest seems to have been given.

Eventually, the foundation also managed to convince at least some municipalities of the relevance of sport events and in 2004 organise them in the so-called Sport Event Alliance Denmark (SEAD). SEAD allowed for an exchange of experience and, just as important, a regulation of the compe-

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22 1 € equals appx 7,14 DKK.

23 'Ny Fond i Dansk Idræt'.

24 Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Introduktion', 13 February 1998.

25 Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Støtteordninger'.

26 'Udvidet Støtte Til Stævner'.

27 Brandt, 'Idræt Med Lutter Vindere'; Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Internationale Sports Events i Danmark 2005. Hvad Er de Værd?'; Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Internationale Sports Events i Danmark 2006. Hvad Er de Værd?'; Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Den Røde Tråd i Effektanalyserne 1-19. 1998 - 2005'.



tition for events among its members avoiding public controversies, which has occurred in for instance Norway previously.<sup>28</sup> An event official from a municipality described how:

They [the SEAD members] know we [the official's municipality] don't do dance events, those belong to Aarhus. We don't do sailing, those go to Kerteminde and Aarhus, etc. In a way, we all have this subtle understanding... we shouldn't do curling, that belongs to someone else. You try not to cannibalise on each other and to join forces when you need cities to partner.

Overall, the foundation's strategy, supporting smaller sport organisations financially while problematising events in a way that legitimised the events as investments in the eyes of public stakeholders, proved successful. Organisers of more prominent events however noted that their events would have been hosted regardless of the foundation's support.<sup>29</sup> While the problematisation had worked, the policy's limited resources prevented the foundation from being a necessity for event hosts which also hindered a widespread 'interessement' or shared interest – at least in the short run.

## Increased ambitions (2006-2011)

In the long run, the foundation however managed to convince even bigger stakeholders of the potential of sport events as the foundation – after 12 years of modest operation – eventually was recognised nationally when the Minister of Economy and Trade in 2006 acknowledged the foundation's contribution to the “strengthening of Denmark as a place of continuous innovation and development in its cultural production.”<sup>30</sup> Importantly, the recognition came with an increased public financial support, which now amounted to 5 million DKK annually.<sup>31</sup> Other partners increased their support too and the foundation now had a budget of around 10 million DKK, a tripling of its budget, which had not increased since its foundation in 1994.<sup>32</sup>

28 cf. Solberg et al., 'Sykkel-VM 2017: Fra Folkefest Til Økonomisk Bakrus'; Lechner and Solberg, 'The Competition for Government Funding of Major Sports Events'.

29 'Garanti Ikke Afgørende'.

30 Bendtsen, 'R 8: Redegørelse Om Dansk Turisme.', 3411.

31 Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Flere Penge Til Idrætsfonden Danmarks Arbejde'; Bendtsen, 'R 8: Redegørelse Om Dansk Turisme.', 3411.

32 Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Flere Penge Til Idrætsfonden Danmarks Arbejde'.

With the increased support came new ambitions and eventually even more public money. Importantly, these money did not come from the sport organisations or from inside the foundation. Instead, the policy had not only managed to create interest but also enrol and make new stakeholders operate in favour of the policy. The most significant example of this came in 2007 as the Ministry of Culture presented a refurbished event policy as part of nothing less than “a resolute [*offensiv*] global branding strategy for Denmark (...)”, with the aim of making Denmark one of the best countries to live and work.<sup>33</sup> Sport events were seen as particularly important since they could achieve everything from improved integration, public health to global image building.<sup>34</sup> The refurbished policy took effect in 2008 as Sport Event Denmark (SEDK) replaced Idrætsfonden Danmark. In its purpose and personnel, however, SEDK differed little from its predecessor. SEDK should (and shall) for one attract international sport events, which – on a national level – should generate “experiences, happiness, pride (...) [and] raise the participation in sport”. In addition, the events should have an international perspective and attract tourists, brand Denmark, and develop trading relations.<sup>35</sup> The new organisation’s unchanged aim stood in stark contrast to the changes in its budget. In 2007, the government again increased its budget for events from 10 million DKK to an annual budget of 45 million DKK, of which 35 million were an extraordinary allocation paid for mainly by the Danish government and available from 2008-2011.<sup>36</sup>

The mobilisation of the ministry led to a snowball effect as further supporters for the event policy came by as the ministry for instance allocated funds for developing new sport and event facilities to increase the chance of success for the new organisation. The projected facilities included, among other things, a multi-arena in Copenhagen as a supplement to the one planned in Herning, Jutland.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the ministry supported Danish elite athletes and made an agreement with the Danish

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33 Kulturministeriet, ‘Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark’, 3; Regeringen, *Fremgang, fornyelse og tryghed*, 6.

34 Kulturministeriet, ‘Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark’, 4.

35 SEDK, ‘Om Os’; Kulturministeriet, ‘Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark’, 4.

36 Kulturministeriet, ‘Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark’, 20; Kulturministeriet, Idrættens Analyseinstitut, and KPMG, *Udredning Af Idrættens Økonomi Og Struktur: Analyse*, 23.

37 Tøttrup, ‘Medalje-Jagt: Flere Penge Til Sportshaller’.

Sport Confederation that it would seek to increase the number of Danish board members in international sport federations.<sup>38</sup>

The enrolment and mobilisation of new stakeholders proved to be a success for Danish sport policy. In 2011, an evaluation of the policy carried out by SEDK found that the number of events had increased as had their turnover and the number of participants. It also concluded that Sport Event Denmark had been crucial to this development based on interviews with sport organisations and municipalities.<sup>39</sup> The report however also showed that the return on public investments had dramatically decreased from 4.35 in 2005 to 1.4 in 2010.<sup>40</sup> The success had its limits.

The successful mobilisation also had consequences for the sport confederation, DIF, which had had the initial idea. For example, the evaluation was carried out by Ministry of Culture, not by the sporting establishment, but more important was the sport organisations' loss of members on the board. Whereas these organisations had appointed a majority of four out the seven board members at Idrætsfonden,<sup>41</sup> the board of SEDK had eight members, of which the sports' organisations would appoint only three. Instead, it was now the government that would appoint four, and the eighth member would be the chair of the Elite facility group, the newly founded public institution responsible for funding elite sport facilities.<sup>42</sup>

## Professionalisation (2011-2014)

Under the increased influence of the politicians, the event policy in the following years moved away from the initial idea that Denmark should be able to host big international events, as a new centre-left government around 2011 on the one hand bought in on the idea that international sport events had a positive impact on the economy, national cohesion and international recognition.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, in line with the evaluation, the new government decided that SEDK should apply a popular/sport-for-all

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38 Kulturministeriet, 'Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark', 20.

39 Deloitte, 'Store Idrætsbegivenheder: Evaluering Af Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark', 12–13.

40 Deloitte, 45.

41 Idrætsfonden Danmark, 'Introduktion', 29 September 2000.

42 Kulturministeriet, 'Sport Event Danmark - Kommissorium'.

43 Regeringen, *Et Danmark Der Står Sammen. Regeringsgrundlag*, 70.

perspective in considering which events to support in the future, in order to increase public profits and legitimise the policy.<sup>44</sup>

Whereas the new perspective was accepted both by the sport organisations and in parliament, the accompanying budget cuts, from 45 to 20 million DKK, were not.<sup>45</sup> The reaction from sports federations and politicians in the opposition in parliament was swift underlining the successful mobilisation which the policy had managed in the previous years. Several representatives from these organisations argued in favour of an increased budget in media and other outlets,<sup>46</sup> praising SEDK's professionalism and their efforts to coordinate the work on international events in Denmark. But they did also emphasise the sport-for-all events as a good new step that could be developed further, and the need for a sustainable financial model.<sup>47</sup>

The government's reaction came in 2014, when it proposed a more "professional" policy for sport events, which seemed to understand professionalisation as the process of becoming more associated with a profession such as event organising rather than just an instance supporting sport events.<sup>48</sup> Although the professionalisation did not include a much-increased budget, SEDK did benefit financially as it in the future would receive a share of the surplus of the Danish national lottery. While it locked its budget at around 25 million DKK it also exempted SEDK from annual national budget negotiations.<sup>49</sup> Also, as a beneficiary of the lottery surplus, SEDK became member of an exclusive club, along the national Danish sport confederations and NGOs recognised for their work for health, youth and the "common good" in general, a status which SEDK now also would share.<sup>50</sup> The new financial model not only secured a budget for the Danish event policy but also underlined the theoretical point that translations are processes. In this case, the policy had now moved from being controlled by sports to the control of the state before ending up in an almost apolitical sphere.

44 Finansministeriet, *Aftale Om Finansloven for 2012*, 51; cf. Deloitte, 'Store Idrætsbegivenheder: Evaluering Af Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark', 22; Brock, 'Store Idrætsbegivenheder Skal Inddrage Almindelige Danskere'.

45 Finansministeriet, *Aftale Om Finansloven for 2012*, 51.

46 Henriksen, 'Idrætten Skal Markedsføre Danmark'; 'Tale: Samråd i Folketingets Kulturvalg Om Sport Event Denmark'; 'Spørgsmål Nr. S1842'.

47 Kulturministeriet, Idrættens Analyseinstitut, and KPMG, *Udredning Af Idrættens Økonomi Og Struktur: Analyse*, 215.

48 'Sport Event Denmark på finansloven'; Kulturministeriet, Idrættens Analyseinstitut, and KPMG, *Udredning Af Idrættens Økonomi Og Struktur: Analyse*.

49 Kulturministeriet, Lov om udlodning af overskud og udbytte fra lotteri; Kulturministeriet, 'Politisk Stemmeaftale Om Ændring Af Udlodningsmodellen Mellem Regeringen, Socialdemokratiet, Dansk Folkeparti, Radikale Venstre Og Socialistisk Folkeparti'.

50 Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 'Om udlodningsmidler'.

Its apolitical status was further underlined as the government reduced SEDK's board from eight to six members, of which the Ministry for Culture would appoint four and DIF the other two. Importantly, the government also prohibited DIF from appointing anyone from their own board and did not appoint any national politicians themselves fitting well with the aim: to increase SEDK's professionalism.<sup>51</sup> The result has been that as of May 2024 no board member had a professional relation to the sports movement or national politics but instead were local politicians, civil servants, or representatives of business or tourist interests.<sup>52</sup> DIF criticised the decision but to no avail. SEDK itself did not comment on the changes, only making it clear that it wanted to keep its autonomy regarding its strategy.<sup>53</sup>

The Danish event policy was now able to enrol and mobilise sufficient supporters so that it could operate principally independently of both sport organisations and the state. The support for the policy was especially based on the stakeholders' perception of SEDK's experience as well as its efforts to construct an international event brand for Denmark. The following section shows how SEDK and its partners focused on this in the years that followed.

## Stability and a new problem (2014-)

In 2014, SEDK reached a plateau. 2024, the regulations regarding its board and budget are unchanged, and although SEDK then as now must report on its aims to the Ministry of Culture annually, a SEDK employee described these aims as “meter-long rubber bands,” leaving it very much up to SEDK to form its operations. Its plea for strategic autonomy in 2014 was apparently heard. The only threat SEDK recognised in its strategy for 2019-2022 was the (slightly) increased number of private initiatives that circumvented SEDK's event system and went directly to the politicians for support.<sup>54</sup>

An informant from SEDK in 2018 underlined the policy's stability by concluding that the Danish stakeholders had become very good at the “hard-core parts of an event” regarding access to infrastructure, competencies in planning and capacity for problem-solving. As mentioned, the development of new infrastructure had been part of the plans around 2011

51 Jøved, ‘L 23 Forslag til lov om ændring af lov om udlodning af overskud fra lotteri samt heste- og hundevæddemål og lov om fremme af dopingfri idræt.’

52 SEDK, ‘Bestyrelse’.

53 Kulturudvalget, ‘L 23 Bilag 1 (Høring)’, 31-32, 58.

54 SEDK, ‘Strategi 2019-2022’, 2.

and these had by 2017 resulted in the inauguration of Royal Arena in Copenhagen, as a supplement to 'Boxen' in Herning which had opened in 2010, but only began to host international sport events regularly around 2016.<sup>55</sup>

The stability is further underlined by the growing interest in the aforementioned SEAD and SEDK's establishment of so-called *Erfa-grupper* [Experience groups] for sport federations with a steady interest in events.<sup>56</sup> At the group meetings the federations can exchange of experience between NGBs (National Governing Body), not least between those new to events and the more experienced.

At the same time, the financial and advisory support offered by the policy remained a prerequisite for this stability and spread of expertise. The policy as carried out by SEDK could not stop supporting sport federations and municipalities in attracting and staging international sport events. This continued support underlines the process perspective in the theory of translation and not least its implied risk of relapse. The Danish event policy should still, for instance with regard to the sport federations, mitigate their risks. An official from DIF, for instance, described how SEDK would try "to keep pressing and try to get that or these municipalities involved, to commit themselves a bit more than originally planned" if a NGB were to reject the conditions for public support,<sup>57</sup> support which already usually put the burden on the municipality. An official from SEDK explained the model, which "you have always had in Denmark", as follows:

As a rule of thumb, SEDK and the host city split the costs 50-50 (...), and in campaign mode [the bidding phase], we go higher. There, we take 75% of the campaign costs, and the remaining 25% we get from the host city. What we actually do with this model is to exempt the national governing body completely. For some governing bodies, [spending] a couple of hundred thousand DKK on a campaign, which they might lose, could lead to the manager being criticised at the next general assembly (...).

Just like in the 1990s SEDK also continued highlighting economic event outcomes to maintain the interest from public authorities.<sup>58</sup> Although an

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55 Royal Arena, 'Om Royal Arena'; Jyske Bank Boxen, 'Jyske Bank Boxen 10 År: Pressekit'.

56 SEDK, 'Handlingsplan 2018'.

57 This bias in favour of the sport organizations is indirectly supported by the ministerial report from 2014. Although both municipalities and federations were satisfied with SEDK, the federations were particularly satisfied, cf. Kulturministeriet, Idrættens Analyseinstitut, and KPMG, *Udredning Af Idrættens Økonomi Og Struktur: Analyse*.

58 SEDK, 'VM i ishockey'; SEDK, 'VM-håndboldfans skabte turisme for en kvart milliard kroner'; Geelmuyden Kiese, 'Evalueret Grand Départ. Copenhagen Denmark'.

informant from SEDK emphasised that “some of our partner cities do not look too much at that” (the economic outcome), many did, and the economic outcome was still considered a broadly appealing and politically important argument.<sup>59</sup>

## The event triangle

Another very concrete sign of the stability was that the cooperation between the sport federations, the public authorities, and SEDK around 2013 became known as “the event triangle”. Although the term originated with SEDK,<sup>60</sup> it became a household term for every group of stakeholders involved in international sport events in Denmark. For example, an event official from a local tourist office described how municipalities, sports organisations, and SEDK would come together and create “what we call the event triangle...that is the triangle that makes things connect.” And not only things but also people. A civil servant from a county involved in hosting the Ice Hockey World Championship in 2018 explained how he liked it and said, “I think our politicians do too...when looking at it, you stand together in some way.”

Importantly, the acceptance of “the event triangle” as a template for how international events are organised in Denmark also signalled an equality among the three corners of the triangle. In other words, the professionalisation of the Danish event policy was no longer imposed from, e.g., the sport’s organisations or the state on the rest of the members, as had been the case in the past. Instead, the stakeholders now shared the responsibility for the proper organisation of international sport events in Denmark. This equality is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that an informant from SEDK was unable to tell where the ideas for events would usually start. “It might have been so earlier, that we were more isolated and one contacted the other. Now we talk about something happening... ‘And then how about...?’ It’s like an ongoing dialogue.” Interestingly SEDK did not only experience such cascades with the most experienced federations. Another SEDK informant explained how they since 2009, had been following a strategy with the Danish Canoe/Kayak federation aiming at still larger events. And “(...) [p]ersonally, I’m not sure whether it is conscious or not,

59 cf. Jensen, ‘Exploiting the Spectacular. A Study of Danish and Norwegian Event Stakeholders’ Interest in International Sport Events 2010-2020.’, 221.

60 Sport Event Denmark, ‘2013 Bliver et Stort EM-År’; Kulturministeriet, Idrættens Analyseinstitut, and KPMG, *Udredning Af Idrættens Økonomi Og Struktur: Analyse*, 215.



but it is like that anyway, in these strategic processes, that there is nothing like a stop for events.”

In line with the translation theory, the Danish event sector stabilised as a field in which stakeholders are mutually mobilising in order to solve the problem (organising international events in Denmark). However, also in line with the theory's emphasis on the process, the combination of the missing “stop”, the event triangle and the stability indicate a continued interest in sport events but said little about the direction of the interest and for instance how to move beyond the “hard-core” parts of the events. In the following section, which concludes my analysis, I argue that the policy as carried out by SEDK in this period also took up exactly this new question or – to frame it in the theoretical framework – problem for the policy, i.e., how should audiences and participants experience international sport events in a ‘Danish’ way?

### *The ‘Danish’ event*

The idea of the “Danish” event originated with the foundation of SEDK in 2007 but only around 2014 did it become more widespread and a part of the policy's mobilising efforts among the stakeholders.<sup>61</sup> In its foundation, the ‘Danish’ way of hosting goes beyond solid know-how for SEDK as it adds focus on spectators’ and participants’ experience of the event. A ‘Danish’ event should, as a SEDK informant put it, “be delightful, entertaining – without it being a circus.” Circus, in this case, would mean reducing the sport event to simple entertainment detached from the sporting activity. Another SEDK informant used a picture of a cycling event in the interview room as an example. In that particular event, SEDK had focused on making the route accessible: “it is about getting the route so that people can stand like that [packed, close by, cheering when watching the cyclists]. That is entertaining in my opinion, but it is not a circus. They are there to see the races.”

Eventually, the policy attempted to enrol the federation and the host municipality as supporters of the ‘Danish’ way by emphasising the need for them to add “‘something new’[sic]” to the events that they host. An innovative event should not only increase local interest, but also improve the Danish standing in the global competition for future sport events by refining the events and handing them back to the owners in an improved

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61 Deloitte, ‘Store Idrætsbegivenheder: Evaluering Af Handlingsplan for at Trække Store Idrætsbegivenheder Til Danmark’, 16–17.



state. At the time of the study, a perceived lack of public support in some host countries had allowed SEDK to brand Denmark as a supplier of genuine public support for sport events. An informant from SEDK, for instance, told how,

we [SEDK and their Danish partners] do not do as they do with [cycling] races in China and such. There you have a long distance, some fences, and only then some runners or riders or something and then a couple of people. It just is not that interesting because you cannot come close. Here [in Denmark], you can come close and experience the event.

A SEDK employee explained further that these observations were relevant for all events, not just cycling:

We like to talk a lot with the national governing bodies and the municipalities about this [what SEDK expect of them]. Surely, this isn't just tournaments. A sports tournament is where somebody comes, times the athletes, and goes home again. There is a lot going on around the tournament, and that's what makes the difference.

Importantly, the stakeholders did not just have these talks around specific events. They were also debated in the SEAD among the municipalities and the sport federations in the "Erfa-Grupper". An official from a Danish NGB for instance recounted how:

that [increasing the professionalism and demands for how the NGBs' approach events] is what Sport Event Denmark has to do. They are the ones pushing it, but the international federations do that too. They challenge us all the time by demanding more and more. They want it to flash [sic], no doubt about that really.

As hinted at in the last quote, the efforts to develop a 'Danish' event on a national level is intimately linked with the competition for events on the international level. And whereas the stakeholders in the 'event triangle' were equal on a national level, it seems that SEDK's pressure for the 'Danish' event has made SEDK a form of representative of the international demands in Denmark. Conversely, this would most likely also make SEDK the Danish representative on the international level, indicating another process of translation for future research to analyse.

## Conclusion

The present paper has shown how the development the Danish sport event policy since 1994 has been intricately intertwined with the policy's impact, as its development was marked by a significant shift from sport's movement to the state as the policy's central stakeholder before the policy eventually dispersed among the stakeholders and became an objective of shared responsibility.

To be more specific the study has shown how the first Danish sport event policy originally emanated from leading figures in DIF, the Danish sport confederation, with the support from various ministries and the Danish tourist association in 1994. The policy took the shape of the foundation Idrætsfonden Danmark (Sport Foundation Denmark) with an annual budget of around 3 million DKK and a significant influence from DIF, which would appoint the majority of the board.

The policy as carried out by the foundation lived a rather quiet life until 2006-2007 when the government decided to increase its support for the policy significantly. The new money increased the ambitions of the policy, which would now be the responsibility of Sport Event Denmark (SEDK), a new, mainly publicly funded organisation that replaced the foundation. The influx of money also initiated a shift in control from DIF to the government and the Ministry of culture, who eventually would appoint the majority of the board. The government's interest and influence showed again in 2011 when a new government cut the budget significantly and proposed new directions for which sort of event, SEDK should attract.

This period of governmental control lasted until 2014 when the government changed how SEDK was funded. Instead of getting its money from the national budget, SEDK would from now on receive a share from the surplus of the national lottery. Thereby SEDK would no longer risk losing its funding in the annual party-political negotiations over the national budget, and instead acquire a position quasi-independent from both the sport organisations and the state.

This development of the current quasi-independence of the Danish sport event policy is however not just a matter of political negotiations. In line with the sociology of translation, the paper's theoretical framework, the paper also shows how this development is intricately linked to the impact it has had on the Danish event stakeholders on a local and national level.

As suggested by the theory, the policy initially focused on showcasing (or ‘problematise’ in the wording of the theory of translation) international sport events as a solution for the stakeholders needed to host the events. The paper shows how the foundation’s practical and limited financial support generally managed to convince the sport organisations whereas the foundation had to provide more substantial arguments in order to create the required interest, or ‘interessement’ in the words of sociology of translation, among the municipalities, on whose financial support the events depended.

On the other hand, the paper also shows how the problematisation in time did lead to a significant mobilisation which for instance showed with the protests when the policy’s budgets were cut in 2011. The political decision to make the policy a beneficiary of the national lottery’s surplus and exempt it from annual budget negotiations in 2014 only underlined its status further. The most important sign of mobilisation in this 105 recent period however shows in the policy’s impact on the sport organisations and host municipalities due to its ‘enrolment’ of sport organisations and the municipalities into the so-called ‘event triangle’, which made the continued attraction and organisation of international sport events in Denmark a shared responsibility. Reaching the step of ‘mobilisation’ in the sociology of translation, the stakeholders would now mutually ‘mobilise’ each other to keep up the interest in international sport events. This mobilisation followed a process of professionalisation through which the board was made more independent from the sport organisations. This allowed the policy to focus its interest on events as such and due to the ‘event triangle’, require the same of its partners in line with the theory’s idea of *interessement*, as an action designed to make the partners to focus on the problem in question, sport events.

However, a translation remains an ongoing process. In at least two ways, this is also the case in the present study. Firstly, the paper shows how the policy still has a central position when it comes to shaping the ‘Danish’ event, i.e. how spectators and participants should perceive an event in Denmark, and secondly, the foundation for the triangle and the interest in events is still dependent on the continued support and advice provided by SEDK as it has been the case since the policy started in 1994.

With regard to previous research, the paper confirms the important role policies can play in coordinating event stakeholders as suggested by Chapelet and Lee (2016) but adds that a policy also can improve the coherence between the stakeholders. Thanks to its diachronic perspective, the study

also confirms that the continued staging of events can lead to organisational learning, as has been proven to be the case in Canada. However, the study also shows that it is possible to learn in a much more direct way, namely through specific event organisations, than through staging several events, and that it is possible to learn by staging events much smaller than the Olympics if time allows for it. This in turn is a finding with practical implications too.

In the future, it would be relevant to add an international perspective and analyse, for instance, how event owners react to the increased number of event policies. How far can an organisation like Sport Event Denmark go in promoting the ‘Danish’ event image before it diverges too much from what the event owner would regard as proper event hosting? Recently, representatives from the Nordic sport federations have been very vocal in debates over good governance and human rights in the international sport field, and a path for future research could be to investigate this crossover between sport event policy and international sport politics further.<sup>62</sup> As the study also underlines the relevance of paying attention to the “national and local cultural peculiarities” surrounding sport event support schemes, similar studies on national sport events policies in other parts of the world would be relevant too, in order to qualify future policy development.<sup>63</sup>

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62 DIF, ‘Et modsvar til Qatar og Saudi Arabiens sportsoffensiv’; Riksidrottsförbundet, DIF, and NIF, ‘Nej till ryskt och belarusiskt deltagande’.

63 Leopkey, Mutter, and Parent, ‘Barriers and Facilitators When Hosting Sporting Events’, 131.

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