

## Summary

### *Football Fitness – the implementation of a new football culture*

Society is changing, as are Danish exercise habits and the factors influencing them. Firstly, it seems that more and more people are playing self-organised sport. And secondly, Danish sports organisations are being squeezed for financial resources for voluntary sport, while there is clearly a growing political desire to incorporate it in public social and health services.

Football Fitness (FF), which is the focus of this thesis, can be seen as a reaction to these changes, with Danish participation in association activities having stagnated (Laub, 2013:96) or being in decline (Bak et al., 2012; European Commission, 2014), depending on which source is deemed reliable, and with the government increasingly incorporating sport in health-promoting and other services. In this light, FF can be viewed as a strategic political manoeuvre by the Danish Football Association (DBU), one of whose goals is to create a framework allowing organised football to take the initiative in making its mark, legitimising itself and changing. In a press release from December 2012, the DBU writes:

#### **“Football as fitness”**

***“The provision of the football as fitness concept – small pitches, more ball touches, alternative times of the day and week, flexible enrolment and modern forms of payment – should attract a new target group of adult men and women to the country’s 1,600 plus football clubs.”***

*“Football is the world’s healthiest form of exercise.”*

*“And the fitness culture has impacted on many active people’s expectations and requirements for flexibility in the way that sport is played. (...) The two factors are now being combined (...) in “football fitness”. The DBU and the Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) are joining together in this three-year project, which aims to develop and offer football as fitness for men and women primarily over the age of 25 in a way that is brand new from a sporting and organisational perspective, and in so doing create the platform for a brand new group of members in the country’s football clubs.”*

FF was developed and designed by the DBU with a view to being operationalised by the DBU’s local associations (LA) and then realised in the 1,600 or so voluntary football clubs. This implementational division of responsibilities – with the DBU as the central implementing actor, the

LAs as the regional implementing actor and the voluntary football clubs as the local implementing actor – provides a springboard for the thesis’s problem formulation:

### **How is Football Fitness being implemented and what are the roles of the institutions involved?**

The thesis analyses FF and its implementation in relative detail and seeks to solve the problem formulation with the aid of the following three working questions, which also form the basis for the structure of the thesis:

*1) What is Football Fitness?*

*2) How is Football Fitness being implemented and what are the implementation results?*

*3) Specifically, how is Football Fitness being implemented in local football clubs?*

Working question 1 is answered by analysing how FF differs from traditional recreational football and professional football in order to subsequently analyse why and how FF is a path-breaking concept (Sydow et al., 2005). Working question 2 is answered by analysing FF’s implementation strategy (Winter & Nielsen, 2010; May, 2012) in order to subsequently analyse organisational and interorganisational implementation behaviour (O’Toole & Montjoy, 1984; Winter & Nielsen, 2010; O’Toole, 2012), the job characteristics and task specifics of the consultants (Winter & Nielsen, 2010; Meyer & Nielsen, 2012), and the job characteristics and task specifics connected with managing the consultants (Winter & Nielsen, 2010). Finally, there is a relatively descriptive analysis of the implementation results (Winter & Nielsen, 2010). Working question 3 is answered by analysing the extent to which the nature of the association’s institutional pillars (Scott, 2014) impacts the local clubs’ translation (Campbell, 2004) of FF.

The thesis, which comprises 11 chapters, builds on qualitative methods and aspects of implementation theory and new institutionalism. In places, it refers to the results of a pilot study (Krustrup & Ottesen, 2014) and two questionnaire surveys, the results of which results are presented in Bennike et al. (2014a) and Bennike et al. (2014b) respectively.

**Chapter 1** sets out and develops the context. It begins with a text leading up to the thesis’s problem formulation, then expounds the relevance of the thesis. The thesis illuminates a current phenomenon in a form that is required in peer-reviewed research (e.g. Skille, 2008; O’Gorman, 2011). There is relatively limited research in the field, most of it relating to the implementing work that is carried

out, or could be carried out, in sports associations and the implementing cooperation between sports organisations and sports associations. Further to this, this study is unique in that it also looks at an implementing cooperation between a national and a regional sports organisation, namely the DBU and the LAs, identifying that this cooperation faces particularly crucial implementational challenges.

**Chapters 2, 3 and 4** present the theoretical and methodological basis and scientific theory considerations. The thesis is based on empirical evidence gathered in two phases, designated as the implementation study and the case study. In some respects, these designations are misleading inasmuch as all the empirical evidence, not just that gathered in the implementation study, relates to the implementation of FF.

**Chapter 5** analyses FF from a theoretical perspective. The starting point is the theory of path dependence and path-breaking concepts (Sydow et al., 2005). The analysis shows that FF breaks with recreational football and creates a new path. The break is not clean, as FF is organised in associations and under the regulatory organisational conditions to which they are subject. The sole organisational difference between FF and recreational football is that FF is offered at a smaller fee. By contrast, there are major differences in the factors relating to the content of the game, partly because FF does not have a tournament structure.

**Chapter 6** analyses the implementation strategy (Winter & Nielsen, 2010; May, 2012), which impacts on the implementation process and the implementation results. It is important to “map” the implementation strategy in order to understand the challenges of the implementation process. The chapter expounds on implementational ‘goals’, ‘responsibilities’ and ‘methods’. The DBU sets out objectives and purposes that are both quantitatively and qualitatively oriented. The implementational responsibility follows a structure that also applies for the structure of voluntary sport in Denmark, where it is the local sports associations that organise activities. This is also the case for the implementation of FF, where the local clubs are tasked with realising the initiative. The DBU designs FF, the LAs operationalise FF and the voluntary football clubs realise FF. This gives a hierarchical structure in which three institutions are involved in the implementing work, each with its own implementation system (central, regional and local) in a sequential dependent relationship. In the cooperation between the three systems, a range of implementation methods are used. These can be divided into ‘rules’, ‘information’, ‘financial management tools’ and ‘service deliveries’.

**Chapter 7** analyses the implementation process (O'Toole & Montjoy, 1984; Winter & Nielsen, 2010; O'Toole, 2012; Meyer & Nielsen, 2012 ), which is relevant for the implementation results and ongoing revision of the content of the formulation phase, which is generally based on a causal theory that is not valid, as is also the case with the implementation of FF. In the implementation process, interorganisational implementation behaviour occurs because three implementation systems are involved. This behaviour is governed by factors that, as well as relating to 'content', 'goals', 'responsibilities' and 'methods', also relate to autonomy and differences between the systems in respect of 'logic' and 'interest'. It is also the case that each system is reliant on different cash streams. These factors, which present challenges to implementation, should be seen in conjunction with the form of cooperation between the implementation systems (namely DBU-LA and LA-club). The form of cooperation can be categorised as either 'authority', 'common interest' or 'exchange', which are not mutually exclusive. In the relationship between DBU and LA, all three forms of cooperation are limited, whereas 'common interest' and 'exchange' are found in the clubs organising FF. However, the use of these forms of cooperation seems to be linked to the relationship between the DBU and the club, which is problematic for a sequential implementation structure.

In the implementation process, the consultants assume an important role as the implementing actor in the regional system, which interfaces with the local system. The role of consultant is characterised by the same factors that Lipsky (1980) cites for the role of 'field workers', where the development consultants express inner conflicts arising from the working conditions associated with implementation. These are not found in FF consultants, partly due to the different conditions of employment. In relation to managing the consultants, which is the responsibility of the FF administrators and the FF project leader, the main tool deployed is change of attitude, which is characterised as a 'targeted management tool'. This job is not easy, however, due to the prevailing organisational structure, where the FF project leader does not communicate directly with the development consultants and the FF administrators say that, from the outset, they were not clear about the aims of FF.

**Chapter 8** analyses the implementation results (Winter & Nielsen, 2010) as implementation performance and implementation effects respectively. The goals that the DBU has set are only linked to implementation effects, which means the evaluation of implementation performance takes a discussive form. Disregarding any symbolic importance of the high quantitative objectives, the

conclusion is that the objectives have not been fulfilled. This is not the case with the primary objectives, which, to a greater or lesser extent, have been fulfilled. With reference to Bennike et al. (2014a), the chapter also looks at implementation results that, from a quantitative perspective, concern characteristic factors relating to the FF team and FF clubs as well as the FF clubs' use of the FF starter pack.

**Chapter 9** looks closely at four clubs' translation (Campbell, 2004) of FF based on each club's institutional elements and actor-specific factors (Scott, 2014). The chapter concludes with a cross-case synthesis that comparatively illuminates the translation of FF taking place in the local clubs based on their use of the FF starter pack and five questions on the translation. The case study shows that institutional pillars play an important role in the implementation of FF and that it would be a mistake to conclude that the FF starter pack does the same. However, it emerges that the more FF differs from the form of football that the club normally organises, the more important the starter pack has been. This is overwhelmingly the case in clubs organising FF for women. It is also in those clubs that the actor-specific factors are most important and where the FF contact has most responsibilities. Common to all four cases is that the FF contact is closely associated with the club, making this an important relationship and implying that where the club organises FF and has done so for a long period, the implementation is relatively successful.

**Chapter 10** discusses selected findings relating to the knowledge that already exists. Mostly the discussion will deal with the role of the involved institutions cf. the problem formulation. The discussion will also focus on the quality of the thesis based on eight validation strategies (Creswell, 2007).

**Chapter 11** contains the conclusion of the thesis, which summarises the learnings presented. The study shows that firstly FF is a break from the recreational football that football clubs normally organise. Secondly the implementation of FF presents a number of challenges, partly due to the initiative, the implementation strategy and the differences in logic and interest between the respective implementation systems. And thirdly the study concludes, that the content of the clubs' institutional pillars is decisive for the form of the FF-organisation and the FF-team interaction. Not two FF-clubs have the same organisational form, due to the unique translation process, and the relatively unbounded initiative.