

Associationalism strikes back!

Approximately 150 years ago sociological thinking related to the idea of associative democracy loomed large in countries such as Britain, France, Germany, and Denmark. Denmark was not in front when it came to big 'theorists' of associative democracy but it was probably among the leading countries when it came to the development of associational structures and associative democracy. From the late 1860s, as a reaction to the defeat to the Prussians, a strong wave of voluntary associations emerged and many of these lay the foundation of the Danish welfare state. Since it developed into a top-down social democratic welfare state based upon universalistic rights financed by the tax payer. In recent years the social democratic welfare state has run into problems. The Left as well as the Right claim it is clientelistic, bureaucratic, produce free riders, non-democratic and impossible to control financially. The criticism and the fact that the welfare state now exists in a completely new geo-political and geo-economic situation have pushed the Danish welfare state into a transformation process. Several politicians, parties, and many different organizations brings voluntary association into the debate and many argue that associationalism is the answer to the problems. We see how Denmark is revitalizing old ideas about associative democracy but also new ideas have arrived (Hirst, 1994; Cohen and Rogers). Similar to the late 19th century Denmark has become the experimentarium of associational practice. The paper finishes with some reflections on these ongoing processes. Will it be the savior of the welfare state?

The Future Welfare State and the Future Organization of Sport (Idræt)?

This paper discusses the relationship between the character of the welfare state and the existence and organization of sport (idræt) in Denmark. In particular, the paper will look into the current transformation of the welfare state including the role of privatized welfare services and welfare services based upon voluntary work and how it will affect the organization of sport/idræt. An organization of sport based the voluntary associations will be challenged because several voluntary associations will turn into more professionalized welfare organizations which might have unintended consequences e.g. more ad hoc loosely organized associations within sport will emerge. The traditional voluntary association – the core principle of organization of Danish sport – will decrease. Maybe even an allocation of resources to sport activities will be earmarked associations, which provide welfare services. This, again, will be an attack on the 'Danish model'.

In other words, a future welfare state in which health becomes even more important due to the astronomic costs of the health sector the sport organization/voluntary association will be under pressure to provide health as a welfare service. More and more financial support will be dependent on the ability to deliver and to provide results – results in relation to improvement in health. Also this will have many implications which will be discussed in the paper.