

## **Football in Denmark –tradition and new tendencies**

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### **Prologue**

It is five o'clock in the afternoon on a Tuesday in early September, and the football pitches around the local sports centre on the outskirts of town are full of activity. There is a clear hierarchical system. The youngest players, almost equally divided between boys and girls, are playing on the smaller pitches close to the sports centre, whereas the older children, almost exclusively boys, are playing on the pitches furthest away. Parents - some standing alone, some in groups - are watching the youngest players being trained. Almost unnoticed, new teams arrive at the pitches as the afternoon turns into evening. By seven o'clock the smaller pitches near the sports centre are all empty, except for three boys playing by themselves, but now the pitches furthest away are full of activity, with the distinction that now it is only men who are playing.

On another day in September in a nearby city a dozen teenagers and young men are playing football on an asphalt pitch surrounded by a fence and boarding. The pitch is situated in a public area beside a basketball court and skateboard track, on the outskirts of a recreational park. As afternoon turns into evening, some of the players who have been there for several hours get replaced by newcomers, giving a kind of constancy to the play, though the two teams at the end of the activity will be almost completely different from the ones that started. As they leave the area, the players agree to meet again on some future occasion for a game of either football or basketball. Telephone numbers and addresses are exchanged.

What has been described here are two typical scenes of football in Denmark. The first one describes the everyday rhythm of sporting clubs in smaller towns as well as in the bigger cities. It has been like this for decades, with Tuesdays and Thursdays typically the days for training throughout a season that runs from April to September, the main period for playing outdoor football. The second scene is more strictly urban, with all the variety this entails: football being played on grass in the park, or on pitches made of inflatable rubber, or on asphalt pitches enclosed by fencing and boards. Though the basic pattern has gone on for years, this article argues that in the future there may be a number of changes in the way in which football is practised in Denmark that reflect wider changes in society and, in particular, the new flexicurity<sup>1</sup> system on the labour market. Let us look at this in more detail.

## **Configurations, patterns and futurology**

The trends just mentioned suggest that football is entering a stage of development or change. We may be slowly moving away from a pyramid-based paradigm towards a multitude of different paradigms. Such a hypothesis, however, can only be confirmed on a theoretical and empirical basis. Eichberg's configurational analysis, which relates back to the thoughts of Ruth Benedict, Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault, offers a methodology for sketching the interdependent connections by which movement on the one hand, and society on the other hand, create and influence each other. By analysing configurations, we can investigate any event as part of a specific pattern, avoiding the dangers of over-generalization inherent in any all-embracing paradigm of civilization or modernity. The configurational method has already been applied in this way to a cultural analysis of the National Gathering of Popular Sports in Denmark, the DGI *Landsstævne*, which was held on the island of Bornholm in the year 2002.<sup>2</sup> Questions were asked in a new way, with the traditional research question "why" being edged aside by the more interesting question "how".

Staying with "why" for a moment, we may ask why football is entering into a stage of change or development right now. One answer, especially favoured by sociologists in recent years, would be that we are now leaving modern industrial society behind and moving into a late-modern society.<sup>3</sup> While theories of this sort seem to give a plausible explanation of recent problems and tendencies in society, they tend to overestimate the importance of individualization, thus ignoring the way that -as Norbert Elias has pointed out - development is determined by chains of interdependency between individuals, groups of people and society. In other words, neither the individual nor the governing social structures acting on their own are sufficient to explain change. A better paradigm of change seems to be provided by futurology. The Danish futurologist Hoppe points out a three-step historical paradigm, based on the ways in which progress in technology causes changes in people's mentality.<sup>4</sup> Step one refers to the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the industrial mode of production slowly obtained hegemony over the agricultural mode, changing society materially and mentally. Step two lasts from the end of the 1960s up to the 1980s, and consists, on the one hand, of changes in the educational system in favour of more equal opportunities for everyone, and on the other hand of a greater rationalization of everyday life according to the American model of "time is money". Step three, from 1994 to 2001, brings in the digital and technological revolution, revolutionizing the ways in which people communicate and interact, and the rapid changes in people's perception of time and space that follow from this.

If this periodization is indeed accurate, we find ourselves at a the starting point of what can be called a new configuration, which means that, once more, we have to rethink our respective positions in society, as our forefathers had to do in response to earlier societal changes. Our focus should be not only on individual components of society such as family life, leisure time and the labour market, but on how these forces interact, and on the different possibilities this offers (or the limitations it imposes) in terms of how people act in a flexible world.

### **Football and time: traditional and modern measurements**

In a society characterized by in-depth changes, the division, budgeting and use of time become extremely significant. In Denmark the agricultural mode of production has traditionally been of great importance. In terms of jobs, it was not until the 1950s that agriculture was overtaken by the industrial mode of production, and its importance for the economy of the country is still great.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1990s we have seen another radical change: industrial production patterns are rapidly disappearing, and society is now characterized by a demand for flexibility and service.<sup>6</sup>

These societal changes deeply influence our conceptions of time. We could start by looking at this on the macro level. Whereas life in agrarian society was characterized by cyclical and repetitive modes of production, often associated with external elements like rain, sun and wind, life in industrial society was marked on the contrary by notions of progress and linear evolution. Large industrial and bureaucratic institutions aimed for, or tended towards, homogeneity. In recent years, however, more heterogeneous patterns have become discernible: fixed working hours are being replaced by flexible and shifting working patterns, lifelong affiliation with one employer tends to be replaced by shorter periods of employment, and a single standardized education intended to last a lifetime is slowly being replaced by education throughout life so that at any time the workforce is able to handle new tasks.<sup>7</sup>

These three configurational periods, which in broad terms could be called the industrial, the educational, and the technological, have had a deep impact on the ways in which societal patterns at the micro level are constructed. For example, as far as working hours are concerned, many local authority offices and most shops nowadays have longer and more flexible opening times than they did just a few years ago, making it in some ways easier for the individual employee to plan his or her daily life, although we need to add that more variety in this field also brings in its own complications.

In this perspective a widely documented statistic is interesting, informing us that the percentage of the population attending some form of physical activity, either as onlooker or participant, has risen from a mere 15 % in 1964 to 62 % in 2004.<sup>8</sup> But, looking at this statistic with the currently more flexible labour market in mind, it is surely not just coincidental that the ratio between people attending organised sports on the one hand, and, on the other hand, people who attend neither organised sports nor commercial sports centres, nor engage in any other form of physical activity, has declined over the same period from 4:1 to 1:1. We are not surprised to find that organized football, as a representative activity in sports clubs that demands two weekly training sessions and a match every weekend, had its heyday between the sixties and the nineties, in other words at a time when the majority of people worked to fixed schedules, and there was a clear-cut distinction between work and leisure.<sup>9</sup> In fact, during the past fifteen years the number of people taking part in organised football has scarcely grown at all, and the proportional balance between very young players and everyone else is slowly but constantly shifting in favour of the very young age group.

### **Football and place: Different kinds of pitches**

As suggested above, society has changed a great deal from the 1930s, when many people in Denmark were still self-sufficient and production was profoundly locally-based, to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with its centralisation of production and long-distance distribution of goods. These changes, taken in conjunction with the heavy urbanisation that followed the years of agricultural mechanization and industrialization (especially in the decade between 1950 and 1960),<sup>10</sup> have contributed to shaping a society in which centre and periphery, city and countryside, are more noticeable. At the same time, the recreational landscape, both in city and countryside, has become more specialized, leaving little space for sports like football when they are practised outside the organisational level.<sup>11</sup>

Two observations follow from this. In the first place, competitive soccer, with its demands for hegemonic-specific surroundings and standardization of space, seems to have better options than other forms of football. At least this will be true in areas where leisure activities continue to be catered for by town planning or by local regional development.

But secondly, we can discern another trend: it seems that the main sports associations, DGI and DIF, in conjunction with the local community, have in recent years decided to give as many people as possible the opportunity to participate in football. The reasons for this trend are various, though concerns about public health are often near the top of the list. In general it can be said that whereas

the projects set up by local communities are built to last, the projects initiated by the associations are more temporary. This can be best understood in the light of their different aims. Local communities direct their efforts towards giving young people living in heavily urbanised and socio-economic weaker areas of the bigger cities the same chances as their peers in better-off parts of the city. The aim is to keep these youngsters off the streets - to help them become physically active without necessarily attending a sports club. You could say that this is essentially a preventive project, rather than a project undertaken in order to raise interest in football in itself. For their part, the associations tend to use their established football pitches both to recruit new members to their clubs, and to heighten their profile vis-à-vis the public. This may have to do with the fact that the associations have to show in some way that they are being socially responsible, since to a certain degree they are financed out of public funds.

An interesting example of these trends can be found in the activities of DGI in Aarhus. Here we have additional pay-and-play activity instituted by an association that normally works through club membership. This development, and others like it that are currently in the planning stage, testify to a greater diversity in general. This does not mean that the football pitches as we know them, with their established international norms, will disappear. But it does mean branching out, on the one hand preserving traditional modern mainstream football, played in an institutionalized space, and on the other hand encouraging different kinds of semi- or self-organized football, played by local rules in local places. With its provisional framework and lack of “traditional” normalized fields, the second of these options may come to share some of the characteristics of the pre-modern carnival-type festivity.<sup>12</sup>

### **Football and energy: Atmosphere, stress and laughter**

As has already been remarked, the spaces round the playing of football have changed during the last century. But what about the energy of football - has this changed too? Energy is here understood in the light of the original Greek meaning of the word *energeia*, signifying ability to act. We apply this to different configurations of human activity, specifically here to atmosphere, stress and laughter.

When football came into Denmark<sup>13</sup> it was as a sport for the upper classes. This is evidenced by the fact that many of the clubs – mainly those from the big cities – which took up football as an activity, already went in for the traditionally bourgeois sport of cricket as part of their programme.<sup>14</sup> In its early days Danish football was connected to the values of the upper classes: those who played it were supposed to be relaxed in their emotions and in control of their behaviour. Blue collar workers

were excluded from the sport since it was considered that their behaviour was too coarse. The social control of feelings and the restriction on rough behaviour, described in a broader context by (among others) Elias in his thoughts about the civilizing process,<sup>15</sup> was also very much part of Danish society. Values mainly taken from the upper classes tended to become part of a common educational project, although this did co-exist with ideas about free education and “education for life”, associated with the ideas of the Danish free thinker Grundtvig. Naturally these trends did not simply begin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; they had already been going on for a long time. But the process grew along with the infrastructure of railways and roads that made it easier to travel round the country. By these means the different social groupings that constituted the country at this time - the mainly urban upper classes, the farmers and the smallholders from the countryside – entered an educational system where common values were instilled.<sup>16</sup> To the extent that the working class adopted these values, it became more difficult to exclude them from participation in the new sports. A case in point concerns the traditional blue collar club FREM Copenhagen in the 1950s, whose coach insisted that the clothes, hair and general appearance of the players were “up to snuff” before a match against local rivals from KB, which represented the Copenhagen upper classes.<sup>17</sup> This, and many similar cases, should be seen in the light of a process whereby football’s rules and restrictions were becoming constantly more formalized, making the game more homogenous and therefore more predictable and serious too.

Looking at stress as it is understood in a medical context, a paradox seems to emerge. Football seems to have moved away from its original carnival-like configuration and the atmosphere of festivity connected with it (manifested both during the game and afterwards), towards configurations of tension, connected to the demand for getting the best results. To put it another way: in earlier times football was associated with expectations of a break in everyday routine - it was a holiday activity - whereas soccer nowadays, although theoretically sharing the same recreational aim of relaxation and avoiding tension, actually induces stress through its emphasis on training and the demands of a thoroughly organised schedule. The idea of football - or sport in general - as a stress-reducing activity in a complicated and hectic everyday life thereby seems to disappear. And if something is hectic, laughter will disappear too.

This does not mean simply that laughter was always an inherent element in pre-modern football, but absent in the modern game: to say this would be merely a romanticization of the facts. It does mean however that heavy institutionalization and a plethora of regulations leave fewer opportunities for the creative, unforeseeable and funny elements in football to emerge. This could be one of the

reasons why football as it is practised in today's organisations does not attract the same number of adults as it did years ago. There is a discrepancy between the values that are present in the field of sport - seriousness, attention to competition and a fairly regimented atmosphere - and the many and shifting values that are present in contemporary society.

In this respect, people who meet on an irregular basis to play football in the park or similar locations are bringing back into the game some of the elements of early football such as laughter and friendship, not only sharing this camaraderie with their own teams, but extending it to the opposition as well. Here, the physical and the psychological body meet happily in a counter-stress atmosphere.

### **Football and interpersonal relationships**

Interpersonal relationships come into play when people meet, both in groups and as individuals, either as strangers or as friends. In traditional folk football (where for example two villages are playing against each other in an open landscape) as well as in the early stages of organized football as it was played in the big cities, it was usual for the game to be played between people from homogenous socio-economic backgrounds. Thus in the rural areas, the majority were peasants or peasant-farmers, while in the big cities football was a game between people from the upper classes. In traditional country football as well as in the early city football the players from both teams came from the same geographical area. When we look at football understood as a bodily activity, a big difference between the two settings emerges. Whereas playing in the former circumstances was often rough, due to the absence of commonly agreed and institutionalized rules, the latter game was, from the beginning, characterized by codes of fair play and equality. And we know that, whereas the former ended up as a historic relict, the latter in due course became the model for the type of soccer that is played today.

This has inevitably led to an era of sport in which the distinction between "us and them", my team and my opponents, has become sharper. Elite players from a team in the local club find themselves playing against teams from another part of town, or from a far-away town or even from another country altogether. And so it is with the lower levels too. Everything now becomes hierarchical, geographically as well as at performance level. Opponents in most cases are now strangers, meeting each other on average twice a year in home and away games. In addition, the teams we play against are not of our choosing, but forced upon us by the system of league tables - a development that leads from inclusion towards exclusion, from close relations towards distant relations.

Yet to conclude that football has developed from a game revolving round different socio-economic groups towards a game where people “just by chance” attend a certain club would be false as well. Historically it used to be possible to choose between two clubs in every town, one connected to the upper classes and another that was more working class. Indeed, especially in the bigger cities, there was often a third club, representing minor tradesmen. In this respect one could say that a club was chosen on behalf of one’s own, and also the club’s, “habitus”, to use Bourdieu’s terminology.

In the new forms of popular football, for instance those practised on asphalt pitches in the cities, or in town parks or DGI centres, people are engaged in (re-)shaping some of the traditional values of closeness. These kinds of games make it possible for the participants to play with and against their friends, their families and colleagues, thereby breaking down if not banishing the traditional hierarchy of club football. Such activities are “inclusive” rather than “exclusive”. To sum up: modern club football is selective, tending towards homogeneity in such matters as sex, age and the numbers of participants, whereas the new forms of popular football are in principle open to all.<sup>18</sup>

Naturally I am not claiming that the latter is a better or truer way of practising football. It is simply a different approach, fulfilling certain requirements that are not fulfilled in traditional modern football: for example, the ability to choose time, place, energy and who you are playing with - freedoms which it could be said are fundamental to modern life.

### **Football and competition: Results**

Ask anyone playing football - boys in the schoolyard, teenagers taking part in a tournament match in the local club or seniors in the park “playing just for fun and old time’s sake”- and they will normally know the current score in the game. But it is not the result as such that is significant for these different forms of football, but the relationship between results on the one hand and the process on the other hand.

In traditional folk football where local people met for a game, as well as in the upper class version of the sport organized between, say, the local club and officers from a (normally English) visiting naval ship, the result was only of minor importance, and not dwelled upon. The game was performed as an event, something that had a value in itself. It was the process that counted. In modern times, however, things have changed, and results nowadays, in the world of institutionalized sport, are used to categorize and rank both players and teams. Results have changed from being a minor consideration to becoming the point of the exercise, permanently fixed

in tables. “Who won today?” spills over into further considerations, for example the overall result of the season: “Who are the current champions?”

This debate about results may also be seen in the light of the contrast between play and work. There is a configurational tension between play on the one hand, where process is the dominating factor, and “sport-work” on the other, where product dominates process.<sup>19</sup> An interesting question arises, concerning how the production of results is handled on an organizational and institutional level, and whether there are differences in this respect between the main associations.

### **Football and institutions: Competing organisations or Scandinavian consensus?**

Football in Denmark, at an organisational level, has different frameworks and settings, and to understand these a brief description of early Danish sports history may be helpful.

The first Danish club, Kjøbenhavns Boldklub, was established in Copenhagen in 1876 by people from the upper classes, and shortly after this clubs were set up in other cities too. In 1889, DBU, The Danish Football Association, was established,<sup>20</sup> affiliating itself in the same year to the newly established DIF, the Danish Sports Federation that today includes the Danish Olympic Committee. Since then, despite a sometimes tumultuous relationship, DBU and DIF have together constituted the basis of organised Danish football.<sup>21</sup>

Still, DBU is not the sole organizer of football in Denmark, since the game also became part of the programme of DAI, the Danish Workers’ Sports Union, founded in 1929. Shortly thereafter, in the mid-thirties, and after some discussion, football was taken up by another organisation, the DGI, as a “popular sport”, placed alongside traditional gymnastics, which was – and still is – the core activity of this body. Later still, DFIF, the Danish Federation of Company Sports, made football part of its programme too. When we note that DAI, another independent association, joined DIF in 1943, this organisational multiplicity may begin to look a little confusing to the outsider. Yet what is really remarkable about football in Denmark is that approximately ninety percent of the Danish clubs (and thus ninety percent of active players) are members of both the major organisations, DIF and DGI. Both clubs and players are thus on the one hand members of an organisation (DIF) that has connections to the Olympic sports paradigm, and on the other hand belong to an organisation (DGI) that operates under a sport-for-all paradigm. What we see here, in short, is a classic example of the Scandinavian spirit of consensus.

The story can be told in a configurational way, too, using the trialecical<sup>22</sup> approach in our attempt to understand the complex institutional situation of football in Denmark. Early Danish soccer, as

played by the upper classes in the big cities, represents sport in its prototype, with a pyramidal structure and a focus on competition along with reproducibility of results. In the inter-war period DAI, representing the other part of the sports movement (the blue collar workers) attempted to challenge DIF using as its referents a hygienic and social democratic paradigm, focusing on equality and public health. As previously shown, however, DAI soon joined DIF, indicating a common consensus about sport, and thereby papering over the existing differences in political ideology. In due course DFIF comes into the picture and it, too, in its ideology, hovers between a view of football as a competitive sport and a view in which it is primarily a hygienic and democratising tool. As far as the DIF and the DGI are concerned, there is no real competition between the two big organisations. Both have, in some way or another, adapted the hierarchical sports system since they are both (though in different ways) engaged in championship football.

We could say that they are doing almost the same thing, even though both organisations state that they have their own special methods. Whereas DIF/DBU talk about “equality, joy and fair play” and the possibility of “everyone becoming a complete person”, DGI for their part talk about putting “the person – not the result – at the centre” and the importance of “playing to win, but not at any cost”.<sup>23</sup> How these expressions relate to values in football such as education and fun is the next question.

### **Football, values and ideas: Education and fun**

Since bodily movement is closely connected to society, and society is characterized by certain values shared by the majority, bodily movement is also a question of values. In the Danish context this can be linked to a distinction, and an ongoing debate,<sup>24</sup> about whether sport should be exercised for the sake of society, or as something valuable in itself. This is indeed an ideological debate. In attempting to analyse these distinctions we should take the Trialectical approach as our starting point. Although this approach, by definition, operates on a three-pattern grid, defined in this context as performance sport, fitness sport and popular sport, two opposing positions may be discerned when trying to estimate whether something is done because it has a value in itself. The first position concerns the performance and fitness sports, with their focus on education for sport and by sport, respectively. In the case of football, this is connected on the one hand to the hierarchical system, with its focus on results and the selection of the best players and teams, and on the other to the health-oriented system, with its focus on integration. The second position, by contrast, refers to football as a popular sport, focusing on education through activity. Now although all three

pedagogical positions, performance and fitness on the one hand and football as a popular sport on the other hand, may not seem at first glance to be very opposed to each other, there are in fact clear differences. Whereas football in the first two cases is played for the sake of something bigger or outside itself (either by way of a preparation for performance, with a social orientation towards the liberal market, or else for the sake of better health, thereby doing something for the community and the state) football in the last case is different. In this instance, football is practised as something valuable in itself in civil society, making irrelevant the various characteristics of competition, efficiency, discipline and health mentioned above, and focusing instead on the opposite: play, fantasy, creativity and fun.<sup>25</sup> Naturally this does not mean that there are *no* elements of fun and play in performance and fitness sports (and no competition or considerations of health in popular football) but it does mean that certain characteristics stand out more distinctly in some types of sport than in others.

## **Conclusion**

So far a brief story of Danish football has been attempted, describing new patterns of time and location. The examples that have been chosen aim to show that football, as body culture, must be understood in connection with societal changes. Yet what do we learn by analysing these tendencies?

First of all football, even though widely homogenous on a global level, is still practiced in particular ways in different countries, following differing co-ordinates of time, place and organisation. This is important to remember when, in political discussions about sport, the case of soccer is used to describe the essentials of European sports culture.<sup>26</sup> Such writing reduces football to a different concept: “soccer”, that is, a hierarchical and competitive sport. This soccer paradigm does not recognise the diversity and pluralism of football as it exists today and as it has always existed. Football is a multiplicity of configurations, including not just elite and professional soccer, but also a game of the people, “grassroots football”.

Secondly, the sports clubs face a challenge. Instead of being anxious about people “voting with their feet” (i.e. dropping out of organized soccer), they should take this decline of support seriously as a kind of silent critique. If they wish to retain their pre-eminent position in the Danish sports landscape, they have to begin to think seriously about developing new opportunities, for youngsters as well as adults, that will give them good reason for joining the game of football in the future. Otherwise there is a risk that football practised by adults will slowly fade away, while football

practised by youngsters becomes restricted to those few who are good enough to participate at the top level, in the full glare of the media.

If this division is to be countered, the associations need to begin to think in untraditional ways, recognising that the fascinating game of football is once more moving towards diversification, corresponding thereby to the social habitus of different kinds of people in our society.

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<sup>1</sup> Flexicurity is a hybrid word made up from flexibility and security.

<sup>2</sup> Eichberg (2006).

<sup>3</sup> By “we” I mean people living in industrialized countries in Europe, North America and the Far East.

<sup>4</sup> Hoppe (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Mørch (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Sennett (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Jensen (2001).

<sup>8</sup> Bille (2005).

<sup>9</sup> Jensen (2001).

<sup>10</sup> Mørch (1996).

<sup>11</sup> Bale (2004).

<sup>12</sup> Eichberg (2006).

<sup>13</sup> Jørgensen (1997).

<sup>14</sup> Toft (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Elias (1978-82).

<sup>16</sup> Mørch (1996).

<sup>17</sup> From the archives of Danmarks Radio.

<sup>18</sup> Though it is a topic to debate, too, as quoted by Dovborn & Trondman (2007).

<sup>19</sup> Møller (2001).

<sup>20</sup> Toft (1993).

<sup>21</sup> Jørgensen (1997).

<sup>22</sup> Bøje (1994).

<sup>23</sup> The citations are taken from the websites of DBU and DGI, and are presented in my translation.

<sup>24</sup> Møller (2003).

<sup>25</sup> Sterchele (2005).

<sup>26</sup> Arnaut (2006).