

Isomorphic forces and professional soccer standardizations: instruments of governance for municipal investments?

Abstract

This article aims to explain why Danish municipalities usually choose to comply with stadium requirements from the Danish Soccer Association (DBU) even though, in most cases, they do not have the supporter base that could fill the renovated or new stadiums to their capacities. Using institutional theory as a theoretical framework, the article shows that coercive forms of isomorphism are part of the homogenization process leading to the municipalities' compliance. It also suggests that mimetic forms of isomorphism are present in the sense that municipalities believe that if they comply with these requirements they will strengthen the conditions of their local clubs. In turn, they have encouraged other municipalities to follow suit. In sum, the analysis shows that the central form of governance through standardizations together with isomorphic forces have contributed to a uniformity among the municipalities.

Keywords: isomorphism, standards, organizational fields, municipalities, professional soccer

Introduction

Public authorities often use substantial public funds to build stadiums in accordance with requirements established by international and national sport governing bodies (SGBs). The stadiums may be intended for major sporting events (Alm, Solberg, Storm, & Jakobsen, 2016; Preuss, Solberg, & Alm, 2014; Solberg, Lechner, & Alm, 2017; Street, Frawley, & Cobourn, 2014) or smaller local elite sport clubs (Alm, 2014, 2016; Andersson, 2016; Wøllekær, 2009). These public investments have become a highly debated subject (Alm, 2016; Bennett, 2012; Lerulf, 2010; SKL, 2014; Watts, 2014), and the operating costs of the facilities have also come into the spotlight, as stadium requirements applying to major international events such as the FIFA World Cup and the

Olympic Games rarely correspond to local needs. Many facilities stand empty after the events, leaving taxpayers to defray the overcapacity costs (Alm et al., 2016; Molloy & Chetty, 2015; Preuss et al., 2014; Solberg et al., 2017).

Public investments and overcapacity, as a consequence of stadium requirements of elite sport, are a problem in Denmark, particularly with regard to professional soccer clubs¹ whose home games usually take place on municipality-owned arenas. The Danish Soccer Association's (DBU's) demand for a stadium capacity of at least 10,000 spectators for first-tier clubs (DBU, 2015b) is far greater than the average local fan base of many of these clubs (Alm, 2014). In spite of this, Danish municipalities have largely implemented and financed the DBU's stadium requirements. From 2000-2014, Danish municipalities invested 1.06 billion Danish kroner in municipally owned arenas (Alm, 2014) in addition to offering subsidized rents to professional clubs (Bang, Alm, & Storm, 2014). In times of increasing demands for cost-efficiency and savings in the public sector, it is essential to understand why municipalities comply with DBU's requirements, particularly when it is often a misuse of public resources. This is the aim of this article, which asks: What are the driving forces behind these municipal investments? What could explain why municipalities choose to comply, despite not necessarily needing to enhance their facilities? An institutional theory perspective supported by a comprehensive questionnaire – which has been addressed to all Danish municipalities – forms the framework for this study.

The article is introduced by a brief overview of previous research on municipalities and stadium requirements. This is followed by a presentation of the theoretical background, method and empirical data. The data is then analysed within the theoretical framework and the results as well as suggestions for further research are presented in the discussion and conclusion.

¹ In this article, a professional soccer club is one playing in either the first or the second tier of the men's league in Denmark.

The presence of standardizations in sport

Stadium requirements from SGBs are nothing new. There have been demands for standardized facilities ever since the establishment of modern sport in Scandinavia in the late 19th century (Moen, 1992; Rafoss & Breivik, 2012; Yttergren, 1996). The SGBs formulated these requirements and oversaw they were being complied with (Rafoss & Breivik, 2012). This is still the case. The standardizations have had a great impact on municipal facility policies (Goksøyr, 1996; Rafoss & Troelsen, 2010; Tangen, 1997, 2004; Wøllekær, 2009), particularly in Denmark (Rafoss & Troelsen, 2010). However, even though municipalities have taken great responsibility for financing and implementing the stadium requirements, their role in continuing the trend of building and renovating sports stadiums has been generally overlooked, especially in Danish research. Previous research on the Scandinavian context has largely focused on the consequences of sport standardizations for sport as such and on the actors who have been favoured or compromised by municipal facility policies. Others have concentrated on the types of facilities municipalities have chosen to finance. These studies have elucidated municipal facility priorities in relation to organized and spontaneous sport (Bergsgard, Nødland, & Seippel, 2009; Goksøyr, 1996), as well as between different sports (Nenseth, 2009; Nenseth, Schmidt, & Skogheim, 2006; Sjöblom, 2006), women's and men's sports, and within specific sports. They have focused on the differences in priorities between elite and grassroots sports (Rafoss & Tangen, 2009), as well as between various elite teams (Wøllekær, 2009). However, no in-depth examination from the municipal perspective has been conducted.

Theoretical framework

Sporting bodies' successful attempts, both on an international and national level, to formulate advanced facility demands and pass on these costs to public bodies indicates the exercise of power. The institutional concept of *standards* (Brunsson, 2005a; Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005; Brunsson,

Rasche, & Seidl, 2012; Gustafsson, 2016) can help to understand how this works on the basis of formulated rules. The empirical data collected for this study indicate that a large number of municipalities experience pressure to comply with the stadium requirements of professional soccer. The material further shows signs of uniformity, in that there is almost no deviation from one municipality to another, in the sense that they have all chosen to comply with the demands. This is why we have chosen to use the concepts of *isomorphism* and *organizational fields* as the article's core theoretical approach.

Stadium requirements: Standards or directives?

From the perspective of Danish soccer clubs, the DBU stadium requirements should be considered as directives, as they constitute rules the clubs have to comply with in order to gain a license to play in the first or second Danish tier. Failing to comply with the requirements may lead to relegation to a lower division, according to DBU's licensing criteria (DBU, 2015a, 2015b). A standard is a rule for how an actor should act and can be issued on many different levels: from international bodies like the EU and the UN to private organizations like the International Football Association (FIFA) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005). The aim is to make actors act uniformly in a certain situation (Brunsson, 2005b). As there are no explicit sanctions tied to standards (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005), it is up to each standard-issuing organization to convince the adopter of their relevance (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). One example is the EU's CE Marking, which requires the manufacturer of a product to obey a number of rules if they wish to sell their product within the EU (European Commission, 2016). Although EU's requirements are in principal voluntary, manufacturers are obliged to follow the rules to gain access to the European market. The same situation can apply to Danish municipalities: formally, they can choose whether they comply with the DBU stadium requirements or not. It is only if they have ambitions to be promoted to the top tiers that they must obey the rules.

Against this background, the question is how it can be theoretically understood why Danish municipalities have chosen to finance and implement the stadium requirements of professional soccer to such a large extent, even though the standards are voluntary and DBU formally lacks the power to impose sanctions against them?

Organizational fields

One way of explaining the way municipalities respond to what they are being asked to do is to use the institutional concepts of *organizational fields* and *isomorphism*. Organizational fields are defined as:

(...) those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148)

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organizational fields can only be adequately defined through empirical studies. Besides lacking clear objective existence, they are founded on the notion that for some specific reasons certain organizations belong together – or carry out their activities within the same sector or area. Some organizations can even belong to more than one organizational field (Olsson, 2005). The organizational field in question here includes those involved in producing, utilizing and regulating professional soccer in Denmark. More concretely, DBU and Divisionsforeningen (“the Association of Elite Soccer Clubs in Denmark”)² are the primary organizations as they organize and regulate Danish professional soccer and have interests in the development and expansion of Danish soccer in general. The field also includes soccer clubs in the

² Divisionsforeningen represents all soccer clubs in the three highest men’s divisions. Its goal is to establish an effective framework for developing and operating the international competitive power of association football and for taking active responsibility for safeguarding club interests in Danish soccer in general (Divisionsforeningen, n.d.)

first and second tiers, as well as municipalities owning arenas where the professional clubs play their home games.

Isomorphic forces

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) claim that organizational fields are arranged according to specific principles. Usually the organizations in the organizational field in question adapts to certain institutionalized norms, implicit (or explicit) rules and expectations. This theoretical assumption can be used to understand the development process initiated by the licence requirements of DBU.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) are of the opinion that so-called homogenization processes are in line with three institutional isomorphic (driving) forces: *coercive*, *mimetic* and *normative* isomorphism.

Coercive isomorphism is the typical result of formal and informal pressure based on a relatively strict hierarchical power relation between an awarding authority and one or more receiving organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Coercive isomorphism may be linked to what Brunsson and Jacobsson (2005) call directives, where the adopter need to comply with specific formal rules in order to avoid sanctions. This in turn leads to a homogenization process where the organizations in a specific field tend to act in similar ways and in line with the intentions of their authorities.

Coercive isomorphism may also be the result of external pressure affecting the whole organizational field. It can also build on cultural expectations in the environment in which the organizations are active (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which is similar to standards that are not coercive per se but are still used by actors as a form of governance (Brunsson, 2015).

Uncertainty among organizations in an organization field is another powerful driving force contributing to isomorphism in the form of imitation – *mimetic* isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In fields characterized by a high degree of competition, organizations have to continuously search for new solutions to handle competitiveness. Therefore, they are more prone to adapting to what they consider as convenient or in line with community expectations than to solutions that

could be in their best interests (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). They may also imitate organizations working in the same field that they consider as being successful.

Normative isomorphism involves professional adaptation and development that runs in parallel with the evolution of the organizational field. It entails the build-up of a professional identity among its organizations by establishing a joint awareness of what the field's professional norms and values are (Storm, 2013).

In practice, these three isomorphic driving forces overlap. However, from an analytical point of view, coercive isomorphism primarily affects organizational fields externally by creating a structural framework for homogenization or standardization processes. The other two forms of isomorphism are internal and can explain the prevalence of particular structures and roles in the organizational field (Frumkin & Galaskiewicz, 2004).

In this study, the three forms of isomorphism are applied to understand why municipalities finance and implement professional soccer's stadium requirements in spite of the voluntary character of these demands, DBU's formal lack of sanctions against municipalities, and the discrepancy between the demands and local needs.

Method and materials

The study is based on a questionnaire and on in-person interviews. The questionnaire was addressed to all 98 municipalities in Denmark and included questions on four themes: 1) the stadium requirements of SGBs and clubs, 2) the content and relevance of the stadium requirements, 3) the financing of arenas for elite sport, and 4) political support for elite sport. The questionnaire comprised a total of 16 questions with alternative answers based on a six-grade scale. Although addressed to municipal chief executives, it was usually answered by subordinate officials in the municipal sport administration. A little over half, 55 percent, of the Danish municipalities answered

the questionnaire. There are two reasons why the questionnaire was not addressed to politicians. First, a large number of policy studies have highlighted the great influence of administration employees on actual policies (Ibsen, 2007). Second, one of the primary missions of (municipal) administration is to prepare and implement the decisions of politicians (Ibsen, 2007; Lundquist, 1992). This means that in many cases the administration has a greater insight into single cases than politicians do.

As this study is limited to municipalities, which have soccer clubs in the first or second tier of the Danish men's league, the only ones included are those owning a stadium where professional soccer clubs play their home games. This amounted to a total of 19 municipalities, of which 15 responded. The relatively high response rate gives a good overview of approaches and actions regarding municipal investments in Danish professional soccer.

The study also comprises six interviews, which were conducted in the autumn of 2013 in Denmark. Four of these involved officials who worked in municipalities with professional soccer clubs who played their home games in a municipally owned stadium and/or hosted the U21 Male European Soccer Championship in 2011. The timing of the championship event meant that the municipalities not only had to consider the DBU's stadium requirements, but also the Union of European Football Associations' (UEFA), when making or influencing decisions about upgrading facilities. Two of the selected municipalities were in 2011 engaged in a municipal stadium process, which made them particularly interesting with regard to the aim and issues of the study. Finally, interviews were also conducted with two representatives of DBU and one from Divisionsforeningen. All of the interviews were semi-structured (Christiansen, 2011; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Kvale, 2007), containing questions linked to the previous questionnaire, in order to delve deeper into the background of the requirements, the clubs' involvement in developing them, DBU and Divisionsforeningen's relation to the municipalities, as well as the effects of the requirements. All

of the interviews took place by phone or at the workplace of each organization. To avoid misunderstandings, the respondents were invited to comment on and adjust the quotations selected for the analysis below. The quotations were chosen to illustrate essential features of the relationships between and within the organizations in the specific organizational field.

Understanding the actions of Danish municipalities in relation to isomorphic forces and standards

Coercive isomorphism

Stadium requirements have been a prominent feature of the DBU's club licencing system for the first and second tiers of its men's soccer league since 2004 (DBU, 2003). The current requirements concern the arenas' capacities, including standing room and numbers of seats, pitch heating, designated areas for VIPs and media, and so on. The higher the tier, the greater the demands, i.e. there are a total of 75 requirements for first-tier arenas and 59 for the second tier. DBU requires, for example, that a first-tier stadium should accommodate a crowd of 10,000, including 3,000 individual seats. The corresponding demand for the second tier is 4,000, 300 of which should be individual seats (DBU, 2013).

From a local club's perspective, the DBU stadium requirements are directives: if they are not followed, there is a risk of relegation in the league's system (DBU, 2015a, 2015b). For the municipalities, however, the DBU's demands are to be considered voluntary standards because they do not carry the same direct consequences. This was illustrated in the interviews by a representative of Divisionsforeningen who stated that, on the one hand, the stadium requirements have to be met in order to play in the first or second tier whereas, on the other hand, it is up to the municipality to choose whether it wishes to have a club at a certain level or not (Interview Divisionsforeningen, 2013).

Despite the voluntary element, municipalities generally choose to make great investments in stadiums for local professional clubs, which means that over a billion Danish kroner of public funding has been allocated to professional soccer arenas since 2007 (Alm, 2014). In the questionnaire, eleven of the 15 municipalities that responded emphasized that they had made investments to meet the DBU or UEFA's stadium requirements. However, a representative of Divisionsforeningen added that no club had so far been forcefully relegated because its stadium did not meet to the DBU's stadium requirements (Interview Divisionsforeningen, 2013). The soccer organizations have thus persuaded municipalities to comply with and, to a large extent, pay for stadium upgrades even though neither the FA nor Divisionsforeningen have formal coercive power to make them do so. This is an illustration of coercive isomorphism insofar as municipalities believe they do not have a choice, as an official from a municipality with a club in the tier suggests:

(...) so it's self-evident that there are some of the demands made by DBU that we don't agree with but, on the other hand, we don't have many other alternatives than following them, so to speak. Otherwise, we may run the risk that they will not give the club a licence, and then they will play in another municipality, something we (that is, the municipality) are in no way interested in. (Interview Municipality 2, 2013)

This quotation also illustrates that, in its role of regulating Danish soccer, DBU exercises some power over the Danish municipalities. *"As with monopolistic markets, standardization sometimes concentrates power but dilutes responsibility,"* as Brunsson (2005a, p. 28) puts it. Elite soccer is a monopolistic market in that FIFA only gives one organization per country the right to organize soccer (Meier & García, 2015). This prevents municipalities from choosing between different issuers of professional soccer and/or stadium requirements. As professional soccer is not only a monopolistic market, but also involves standardization, this gives rise to coercive isomorphism,

which contributes to implementing municipal investments in professional soccer, even though the demands are not always favourable to the municipalities.

It is also possible to analyse municipal actions as a result of coercive isomorphism based on cultural expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Both DBU and the clubs seem to take it for granted that it is the adopters of the standards, i.e., the municipalities, that have to pay for and comply with the soccer stadium requirements – the reason being that they have historically been willing to build facilities that meet the requirements and requests of sport in general (Wøllekær, 2007). Thirteen of the municipalities taking part in the study's questionnaire considered investments in arenas for professional sport more or less a municipal duty. This finding is surprising because funding facilities for professional soccer is an optional public commitment in contrast to, for example, healthcare or the provisions of schools, which are mandatory tasks to Danish municipalities. However, this does not mean the municipalities are not critical of the situation, as 13 of the 15 municipalities answered that the Danish SGBs should contribute financially if they wish to make formal stadium requirements. Some made statements such as: “(...) *DBU makes high demands and contributes very little despite their thick wallets*” and: “*It is of crucial importance that those who make standards also take part in financing them*”.

There is a clear discrepancy between the DBU's stadium requirements and actual attendance rates (Alm, 2014). Many clubs fill, on average, about half of the capacity required by DBU for the first and second tier. In spite of this, the municipalities' awareness of the difference between demands and actual needs is strikingly low, with nine of the 15 municipalities claiming that the capacity requirements are reasonable. Others objected, however, saying that it is unrealistic to demand a capacity for 10,000 people outside the four biggest cities in Denmark. This criticism is nothing new to DBU:

(...) All said and done, we know of course that the audience capacity is a problem for many, and this is probably the issue that has faced the most criticism. (Interview DBU, 2013)

As illustrated by what both DBU and the municipalities emphasize, standardizations are directed towards general categories and not to specific actors (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2005). Hence, standardizations are not usually adapted to separate actors within an organizational field. DBU pinpoints that their stadium requirements are set by overarching goals within the organization (Interview DBU, 2013) and not by the current reality in individual municipalities. In DBU, as well as in a few municipalities, there is an awareness of the problem with standardizations not always being in line with real demands. Still, the actions of both parties indicate that the municipalities give higher priority to the expectations and goals of DBU than efficiency and rationality in regard to their own contexts. This implies that standards are an efficient instrument of governance, which can sometimes exercise more power than directives do (Brunsson, 2015). It further shows that needs in other public policy areas are not necessarily taken into account when it comes to investments in facilities for professional soccer.

There is an assumption among both municipalities and soccer representatives that professional soccer and its facilities should add value to their communities. The dependence of municipalities on elite sport is expressed both in the questionnaire and in the interviews. No less than eleven of the 15 municipality representatives state that elite sport, to a higher or lesser degree, benefits their municipality, which makes it a political priority to maintain high-standard facilities. One representative of a municipality with a club in the first tier mentioned in their interview that:

(...) of course it means something to have a club that in one way or another represents the municipality and brands both the municipality and the region (...). (Interview, Municipality 1, 2013)

The interest or belief in the power of sport to create growth is also evident among the soccer organizations. Divisionsforeningen argues that tangible benefits, such as an increase in jobs and tax revenues, can be the outcome of having a professional soccer club in the municipality (Interview Divisionsforeningen, 2013). In addition, DBU claims that a stadium fulfilling its requirements will generate money for its owner and/or the club (DBU, 2014). In other words, there is a shared opinion among the actors in this organizational field that professional soccer is of use to society. This is also in line with Wøllekær (2007), who states that municipalities and organized sport have used the same arguments for legitimizing public financial involvement in sport. The financial argumentation is, however, not supported by current research. On the contrary, there are studies showing that municipalities with professional soccer experience neither increasing in-migration nor growth (Storm, Thomsen, & Jakobsen, 2016; Värja, 2016). In addition, economic arguments for growth are connected with culture and sport policies (Bille & Lorenzen, 2008). The notion of economic growth is also in line with what Montin and Hedlund (2009) describe as creating a discourse with the purpose of wielding power by viewing the world from a specific point of view. Taken together, this may be a contributory factor when municipalities choose to invest public funding in stadiums for professional soccer.

Mimetic isomorphism

The belief in professional soccer as a means for increased in-migration and economic growth is not merely a form of coercive isomorphism but also one of mimetic isomorphism. In organizational fields, successful organizations often function as models for others to imitate. This is especially evident in organizational fields characterized by high competitiveness. Translated into this study, it could be said that municipalities tend to imitate other municipalities rather than deploy solutions which would, in fact, have been preferable (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). When municipalities experience a pressure for efficiency and savings, competition to attract new inhabitants arises and,

as a consequence, so do new tax revenues. Thus, a stadium for professional soccer may become a means to cope with this pressure.

However, even in this context there is resistance within the organizational field. A representative of one municipality, which at the time of the interview had a team in the first tier, emphasizes that the market of experience economy in Denmark is not big enough to enable all municipalities with a stadium fulfilling the demands for the first tier to use the capacity by, for example, arranging events profitably (Interview Municipality 2, 2013). The same respondent adds that it may be problematic if the local club is relegated from the first tier, as the municipality is dependent on having the local club play in the first tier to be able to make a profit corresponding to the investment made in conforming to the DBU stadium requirements. The club has to stay in the first-tier league for the investment to be defensible (Interview Municipality 2, 2013).

In Denmark, professional soccer has never been a lucrative business. Although turnovers increased after the Danish amateur rules were abolished in 1978, the clubs' financial problems have generally exceeded their successes (Sperling, Nordskilde, & Bergander, 2010). Potential profits has not been realized, but all financial income has instead been used in the effort to achieve sport results (Storm, 2013). This is a development which also characterizes European soccer in general (Dietl, Franck, & Lang, 2008; Hervik, Ohr, & Solum, 2000; Whitney, 1993). The problem with the "ruinous competition structure" of soccer is that the pressure to improve the framework of the actual product is high. It is not only professional soccer that is subject to pressure, but there are naturally other business lines that are under the same pressure to come up with innovative solutions and developments. Still, among soccer clubs this pressure seems to have become radicalized (Storm, 2013). Small ranking differences may be crucial to club incomes. This makes long-term planning in clubs problematic (Szymanski & Zimbalist, 2006). For clubs to achieve the best chances of success – financially as well as on the sports field – it is necessary to continuously optimize their internal

and external relations. A situation marked by high competition and insecurity sparks isomorphic processes where the soccer clubs mimetically imitate one another in looking for solutions to the specific problems faced in their line of business (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

One solution is to strengthen the external framework – the stadiums (Storm, 2013), if they are considered to play a great role in optimizing the framework of club activities. In order to enhance spectators' experiences, optimize television broadcasts or strengthen hospitality relationships with sponsors, extending an arena or building a new one provides the answer to the question of how to achieve success in the organizational field. The stadium requirements become a solution to a club's problems in line with Brunsson and Jacobsson's (2005) argument that those who issue standards try to define "their" solution as the only one to overcoming a specific problem. The mimetic element in the process consists of watching the (positive) attributes of one club and turning them into a requirement for the others, and in effect homogenizing the organizational field as a whole. In this process, requirements and requests for improved conditions are forwarded to the municipalities in question in the form of standards. Thirteen of the 15 municipalities that responded to the questionnaire consider themselves as having experienced pressure from local professional clubs to make investments in arenas in line with the DBU requirements. Thus, municipalities turn into co-actors in the mutual competition between clubs as an effect of mimetic isomorphism.

Normative isomorphism

Normative isomorphism, the third driving force that is part of this article's theoretical framework, does not emerge as clearly as the two other forces. Indirectly, normative isomorphism develops via the club licence system developed by DBU for participation in the first and the second tier. In addition to the stadium requirements, DBU makes administrative and management demands on the clubs. For a licence to be granted to a club, there has to be, for example, a club manager, people

responsible for the finances and for the media, a security manager, as well as arena managers (DBU, 2015b).

It could be argued that the starting point for this is an expression of coercive isomorphism emanating from the regulatory national authority of the organizational field. However, the adaptation of the field, in the form of increasing organizational professionalization driven by the requirements, contributes to establishing a joint awareness of what constitutes the core and primary purpose of the field. This includes institutionalizing the organizational field's central perception of what is needed to make the organizations in the field successful, which in turn adds force to the centrally established demands, such as the stadium requirements. Overarchingly, the normative force thus has a self-reinforcing effect on the homogenization process that Danish stadium building has undergone.

Conclusion, perspectives and future research

The aim of the article was to understand, from an institutional perspective, why municipalities in Denmark make large investments in public stadiums in compliance with the DBU's stadium requirements. The analysis shows that the centralized governance created through standardization and isomorphic (driving) forces have contributed to their compliance with the demands with uniformity as the outcome.

The primary result demonstrates that coercive forms of isomorphism are involved in the homogenization process. Claiming that there is a need for specific stadium requirements to make Danish clubs more powerful in both national and international competition, soccer organizations and clubs have been highly successful in realizing their requirements and requests. This in turn has contributed to making municipalities allocate public funding for professional soccer stadiums. In this way, soccer organizations with no formal power over municipalities have managed to have their standardizations implemented without making any financial contribution of their own.

Municipalities have felt obliged to comply with the DBU's stadium requirements because of the lack of alternatives to not following them. The obvious consequences to the club's standing override any other scenarios. As a result, the optional standards for the municipalities have turned into mandatory directives and a coercive isomorphism is thereby a significant factor.

There is also evidence of mimetic forms of isomorphism. Uncertainty among organizations in an organizational field is a powerful driving force contributing to isomorphism in the form of imitation. One effect of the competitive situation in the organizational field in this case is that the clubs keep watching one another and searching for solutions to their basically insecure situation of fierce competitive pressure in sport. In interaction with perceptions of the importance played by clubs in the experience economy municipalities and clubs have found a common ground. When one municipality strengthens the situation of its club, other municipalities seem to have been inspired to follow suit. This is the expression of mimetic forms of isomorphism, and correlates with the rationale behind standards: when more and more actors choose to follow a specific standard in a certain way, the greater the uniformity will be in the organizational field in question.

However, the analysis also shows that municipalities have resisted the new requirements. Both the questionnaire and the interviews reveal that representatives from Danish municipalities are dissatisfied with the development and would like to see more co-financing of the facilities.

Although some municipalities and clubs consider the DBU's stadium requirements disproportionate, at the same time they succumb to their perceived power. It is a complicated task to pinpoint why soccer organizations and clubs exert such power as the process manifests. At a time characterized by high demands on the public sector to streamline and reduce costs, DBU, Divisionsforeningen and the clubs have, remarkably, succeeded in getting municipalities to pay for investments that they do not really need. According to Brunsson and Jacobsson (2005), the soccer

organizations have thereby succeeded in convincing the municipalities that the standards are beneficial to the end-users.

Another remarkable finding is that municipalities obviously consider investments in arenas for elite sport as a municipal task, despite professional soccer clubs having a high turnover compared to many other elite sports clubs. In addition, the majority of the clubs are operated as private joint-stock companies rather than non-profit organizations. A further peculiarity is that municipalities have chosen to comply with the standards without much debate, which suggests that they view the provision of arenas for local elite sport as an accepted municipal task.

It should be pointed out that there is great support for soccer at a local level in Denmark. As mentioned above, sport exercises great influence on decisions concerning facilities. Since having a first tier club within the municipality is highly regarded by many people, municipalities are willing to comply with the stadium requirements to keep them there. It also indicates that standards are a central form of governance and that those who issue them can, without making any financial contribution of their own, persuade other actors to agree to them.

Taking an institutional approach to the field of public administration is not new. However, through the institutional concept of standards and isomorphism, the stadium requirements, as well as their issuer (DBU) and the adopter (municipalities), give an increased understanding of how institutional regulation works. Moreover, this study adds to the body of knowledge on how to interpret the actions of municipalities in relation to demands from a private organization within a monopolistic market where the issuer has no formal power over the adopter. Further research should identify which actors have an impact on standardization and what possibilities public authorities have to exercise influence. This applies both on international and national levels. In addition, continued research should determine the economic consequences of requirements in other political areas. Will there be reductions and streamlining within other fields against the background of specific

standards? What other municipal ventures will be deprioritized? Or are no reprioritizations made?

These are issues that could be the subject of future research.

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