

“Violence towards sports archives – a Danish perspective”

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Physical deterioration (damp, fire, temperature changes and chemical effects of various kinds) is not the only kind of violence to which sports archives are vulnerable. In Denmark, over the last 150 years, they have also been subjected to mentality-related, cultural and political violence – in that order. It is this kind of violence towards sports archives that forms the subject of this paper.

What are sports archives?

Which historical sources can tell us about sport? What is a sports archive? And are there differences in the relative importance of the various sources? The more one thinks about these questions, the more difficult it becomes to provide unequivocal answers. Is it more important to preserve an account of a football match than an invitation to a sports club party? Are Michael Laudrup's football boots worth more to posterity than a Real Madrid fan's scarf? And is the correspondence of a sports ministry more important than the membership lists of a local sports club? All of these are relevant questions to which it is important to find answers, as there are neither enough finances nor enough resources to preserve everything. This is a fundamental condition of all archiving work. The archives are not independent of the researchers, who themselves are not independent of their society and the zeitgeist of their times. It is both naive and false to believe that it is possible to establish an independent and objective definition of sport, and consequently, of sports archives.

It is the prerogative of every age to ask its own questions of history. Without these varying questions, historical research would stagnate and lose its renewability and dynamism. However, these shifts in issues make it difficult for the historical archives and their archivists to foresee what the society of the future will find interesting and important to learn about the past. Not everything can or should be saved, so the decisive question is to determine which sources possess preservation value. It is only when a given age seeks answers to particular historical questions – usually in response to contemporary issues – that the historical sources come into existence, so to speak. We cannot, in other words, always foresee what the historians of the future will choose to define as historical sources. The one thing we can be sure of is that future historians will accuse us of having exercised violence towards the historical sources.

When is violence exercised towards sports archives?

Violence towards sports archives can in my opinion be described as any kind of diminution in the heritage left behind by sport and all the activities associated with it. By heritage I mean any kind of information passed on to us in the form of written sources, film, pictures, audio recordings or objects. But, in contrast to what some researchers imagine, sources are not objective and neutral items which merely need to be found and written about. Historical sources do not come into existence as such until historians turn their attention to them. As I mentioned before, this attention is determined by contemporary ideas and thinking, which means that the sports archives are in the final analysis also defined by the mentality of the times. One could say that sources which are not “recognised” by this mentality fails to be preserved. Each country or culture has its own understanding of what sport is, and thereby its

own definition of sports archives. As a consequence, each country practises its own form of violence towards sports archives, depending on its mentality, culture and politics.

Despite the fact that the Danish state and local authorities have provided ever greater financial support over the last 150 years to sport in Denmark, this support has not been linked to specific conditions. Historically, sports organisations have enjoyed a great degree of autonomy in relation to the public authorities. The explanation for this is to be found in the prevailing Danish mentality towards sport, which was formed in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. In this collective mentality – which would require too much space to deal with here – the view arose that the social relationships created through sport were indisputably positive and correct, and that such relationships were permeated by the same positive values which were ascribed to relationships in the family and among friends.¹ The sports club was a haven which functioned as an extension of the intimate social sphere, and it could be argued that sports associations were seen as a kind of extended family.

Sport thereby acquired enormous positive connotations throughout Danish society as a symbol of the good things in life. Furthermore, this symbolic value became associated with the best qualities of the local community. Sport and the community became practically synonymous. For ordinary people, politicians and the state, sport (like the family) was seen as an oasis which should be free of interference from official regulations or restrictive demands.

As we will see, this positive view of sport in the mentality of society has had serious consequences for the preservation of sports archives in Denmark.

Sports archives in Denmark

Danish archives can be roughly divided into two overall sectors: state archives and non-state archives. The state archives consist of the National Archives, four provincial archives and two specialised archives. The non-state archives consist partly of municipal archives and partly of voluntarily-run archives (local historical archives, specialised archives and the like.)

In general, the sporting organisations in Denmark have been regarded as the main historical actors in the area of sports. Since the Danish Public Records Act and its associated deposit requirement encompasses only publicly created sources, systematic collection has been undertaken only in state-subsidised areas of sport. The archives of the sports associations belong, however, to the voluntary sector, in which the state makes a virtue of not interfering, which means that the vast majority of sports archives are not covered by the Public Records Act. The major national sports organisations, such as the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) and the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations (DGI) – which besides receiving annual state grants in excess of one billion kroner also represent most sporting activities in Denmark – are not covered by the Public Records Act, and thus, the preservation of their archives has been left up to private initiative. Unfortunately, these two organisations have been unable to agree on the systematic joint collection of the historical sources.

Sport in the state archives

The state archiving service, in accord with the state's and the politicians' view of sport, has not been very active in the preservation of historical sources from the sporting world.

The Danish state has mainly been involved in sport within the area of education. Prior to 1985, when the first Sports Act – which was concerned with elite athletics – was adopted by the Danish Parliament, the only sports covered by legislation were school sports. As a result, only records dealing with school sports were covered by the Public Records Act and thereby subjected to systematic collection and registration.

Indirectly, the state has provided various kinds of economic support to the major voluntary sports organisations. Prior to the 1948 Pools and Lottery Act, the state provided a

small amount of support to these organisations, and after 1948, this support has gradually increased and become more regulated in parallel with the growth in revenues from the national lottery and pools.ⁱⁱ The 1968 Leisure Act and the Adult Education Act of 1990 both provided support for training and instruction by local sports associations.ⁱⁱⁱ Today, almost 85 percent of the total public financial support for leisure-time sporting activities comes from the municipalities.

The possibility has existed for the major sporting organisations to supply their records to the state archives, but there has been no initiative from the state in this area. As a result, only certain parts of DIF's archives and parts of the archives of the Shooting Movement are preserved in the National Archives. Moreover, only such records as minute books and accounts have been collected; all other aspects of the sports movement, such as its social relationships, activities, etc., are absent from such sources. This thus represents a highly selective and traditional source collection.

Sport in the non-state archives

The vast majority of sporting activities take place in non-public auspices, i.e. through voluntary associations and organisations, in private, informal form, or in commercial contexts. As implied earlier, this has meant that the collection, registration and preservation of sports archives relating to this area has been left exclusively to private initiatives.

Where can sports archives be found? Sports archives may be found in many places, and unfortunately they are often divided up and distributed among various institutions. At best, a large proportion of the archive material may be found at the respective sports associations. The precise amount is unknown, as it may be feared that the physical conditions of storage are poor.

Over the last sixty years, as a reaction to the collection policy of the state archives, around 400 local historical archives have been established. Many of these archives began as sports association archives, kept on a voluntary basis by citizens with an interest in history. Today, many of these archives are kept by the municipalities, in the best cases with a single permanently employed archivist.

In 1976, following a Swedish model, a nationwide collection of association archives was initiated in co-operation with the local historical archives. Many association archives were thereby collected and registered, but unfortunately, only a tiny fraction of these was collected from sports associations. An attempt in 1990 to get the state to finance a collection project exclusively for sports archives was rejected, and today, these archives are still under-represented in the local historical archives.

An example from Copenhagen and the municipality of Ballerup may serve as an illustration. A century ago, as the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen led the way in the sports movement, just as its municipal authorities were a model in the provision of sports facilities. Ballerup municipality, on the other hand, was then a small village outside Copenhagen with a nascent but small sports movement. Now, 100 years later, these roles have been switched in relation to the preservation of sport archives. While many sports archives are collected and registered in Ballerup Municipality's local historical archives, Copenhagen lags hopelessly behind. Despite its venerable and municipally-financed city archives, practically no sports archives are collected or preserved in Copenhagen at all. We thus find ourselves in the situation that the nation's capital and largest city, the very cradle of the Danish sports movement, cannot document its own sporting history. The reason for this lack is that the sports associations were private voluntary organisations with which the public authorities did not wish to interfere, much less dictate what they should do with their records. This did not spring from any lack of interest in the welfare of sport, but on the contrary, from a desire to avoid destroying this special haven for comradeship and local community spirit through

official interference. In fact, Copenhagen went as far as to transfer the running and management of municipally-financed sports facilities to the sports associations via a specially-established institution, Copenhagen Sports Stadium.

Historically, the sports associations have increasingly co-operated with the municipal authorities in the building of sports facilities and the leasing of premises, and through the provision of municipal grants for sports associations. In many cases, a clear commonality of interest has existed between the leaders of the sports associations and the municipal politicians and civil servants. Local sports policy arose through this interplay between the public authorities and the voluntary sports associations. Although negotiations between sports organisation leaders and the municipal authorities usually took place in an informal context, and consequently were not written down, traces of these relationships may be found in such sources as the minutes of parish council and local authority meetings, the minute books of sports committees, leisure committees, leisure board committees, school commissions (for school sports) and the construction records of the municipal technical administrations (sports facilities). Unfortunately, these sources mainly consist of resolution minutes and cannot, therefore, document the underlying political debate.

Besides the archives of organised sports, many other historical sources have been created which will not be dealt with here. However, the archives of individuals formerly involved in sport could be mentioned, along with the archives of the mass media, the entire record of sports journalism, etc.

The Vartov Archives

Since as long ago as the 1860s, and in parallel with the sports practised by the sports associations, the popular enlightenment movements associated with the Danish folk high schools and free schools have encompassed a very active and important sports movement.

The folk high school and free school movement arose partly as a reaction against the state schools department, which was dominated by rote learning and examinations. The folk high schools, the first of which was founded in 1848, and the free schools may be considered a reaction and a protest against the state schools. In the folk high schools, young people of the peasant classes acquired an opportunity to study philosophical, theological, political and cultural subjects in an open form of learning that was free of compulsion and examinations. In 1884, the "Swedish gymnastics" of P. H. Ling (1776-1839) were presented at Vallekilde Folk High School. This became the starting signal for an athletics and sports movement within the popular movements which was rooted in the folk high schools and the free schools, and which remains significant in Denmark today. Besides the sports and gymnastics that take place in the ordinary folk high schools, there are still many actual sports schools, such as Ollerup Gymnastikhøjskole (Ollerup Gymnastics High School), Gerlev Idrætshøjskole (Gerlev Athletics High School) and Snoghøj Gymnastikhøjskole (Snoghøj Gymnastics High School). The sport that arose from these schools was very ideologically marked and characterised by the idea that the practice of sport was not an end in itself, but rather a means to cultural and personal development. Accordingly, this branch of sport was opposed to competitiveness and record-hunting.

The archives deriving from this important part of Danish history also failed to fall under the care of the state, as the folk high schools lay outside the state schools department and were therefore not covered by the Danish Public Records Act. However, the popular organisations themselves took the initiative to save the sources to the history of the popular movements, in which sport played such a significant part. The first step in this was the establishment of *Biblioteket for det folkelige Arbejde* (Library of the Work of the Popular Movements) as an independent institution in 1985. Supporting this institution were *Den frie Lærerskole* (The Free Teacher Training College), *Foreningen for Folkehøjskoler i Danmark* (the Association

of Danish Folk High Schools in Denmark), *Foreningen af frie Ungdoms- og Efterskoler* (The Association of Free Continuation Schools), and the then *Danske Gymnastik- og Idrætsforeninger* (Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations). The establishment of the library was preceded by comprehensive committee work dating back to 1981. The task of the library, which was included in the annual state budget for 1988 and placed under the Danish Ministry of Culture, was to collect and preserve printed materials on the popular movements, and thereby help to stimulate research into the movements' history and the renewal of the popular tradition. In 1992, Nornesalen was founded through a merger of the library and *Forskningscenter for folkelig Livsoplysning* (The Popular Education Research Centre), and was housed at the Free Teacher Training College in Ollerup. In 1994, *Foreningen af grundtvigske Valg- og Frimenigheder* (The Association of Grundtvigian Voluntary and Free Congregations) was absorbed into the board of Nornesalen, which thereafter consisted of twelve members.

In 2000, a debate on the physical location of the institution led to a division of the board, and in September 2000, this division caused the Danish Ministry of Culture to revoke Nornesalen's annual grant, as there was concern that the institution's popular base was being eroded by the division in its board. The archives and library in Ollerup continued under a new name: *Arkivet og Biblioteket for det Folkelige Arbejde* (Archives and Library of the Work of the Popular Movements).

Subsequently, the Research Institute for Sport, Culture and Civil Society (IFO) was subsidised in 2002 by the Danish Ministry of Culture to create historical archives covering the popular movements: the Vartov Archives. In 2003 the Danish Ministry of Culture revoked its basic grant for the IFO, but consented, however, to provide a five-year grant to allow the continued operation of the archives. Currently, an attempt is being made to continue the Vartov Archives with the help of limited funds from the sports organisations involved.

What began as the first stirrings of a sense of responsibility on the part of the state towards the archives of sport in the popular movements has thus ended in disappointment.

What can be done?

Sports archives in Denmark have been poorly treated in relation to large parts of the country's other cultural heritage. This is a paradox when you consider that sport and the activities which have been – and still are – associated with it have been surrounded by enormous goodwill on the part of the Danish authorities. No politician has ever spoken in derogatory terms of the work carried out by the sports associations; indeed, politicians have been practically queuing up to praise the importance of sport, particularly for children and young people. This goodwill also finds concrete expression in the form of the large public grants that annually accrue, directly or indirectly, to Danish sports organisations and sports associations – to which, we should note, no conditions are attached. Sport is allowed to govern itself. But this is also the source of the whole unfortunate state of affairs regarding the archives, because such unconditional support means that the keeping of records is left up to private initiative. In this context, it is even more unfortunate that the two leading sporting organisations in Denmark, DGI and DIF, refuse for ideological reasons to collaborate on this important aspect of cultural history. In conclusion, one could say that comprehensive violence has been practised for years in Denmark towards a very large and important group of archives, namely those covering the entire involvement of civil society in sporting history. Very important source material which could have thrown light on the role of sport in the development of the welfare state, attitudes towards health and leisure, the history of the local community, the relationship between sport and key political actors, gender roles, forms of social activity, etc., has already been lost – and it looks likely that more will be lost in the future.

But what can be done? First and foremost, it is important that researchers, archives and museums communicate to the public and the politicians the considerable role that sport has played in the development of the modern welfare state. We cannot understand modern society unless we also understand the role of sport, and for this purpose, historians need records. This requires that historians and other researchers are able to use the archives that exist, and that there is a short professional distance between the historians and the archives. If we are to continue to collect and preserve the sports archives, it is necessary for the work to be research-based, so that whatever the current collection strategy, it will be based on all the new questions that researchers ask of sports history. As mentioned earlier, neither archives nor researchers can be independent of their times, which is why a broad policy of collection must be central to any collection strategy, in order to ensure that as many different aspects of sport as possible are represented in the collections.

ⁱ Morten Mortensen: *Idræt som kommunal velfærd. Mentalitet, velfærd og idrætspolitik i København, Ballerup og Skive 1870-1970*. PhD dissertation. 2004. 489 pages, illustrated.

ⁱⁱ The Pools and Lottery Act was adopted in 1948 by the Danish Parliament, and entered into force the following year. In accordance with a detailed distribution scheme, the sporting organisations were thereafter provided with a so-called disposable amount from the lottery profits, the use of which was not subject to any specific conditions or control. In advance of the adoption of the legislation, there had been heated public debate on whether it was appropriate for sport to be supported by gambling.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Leisure Act, which was adopted in 1968, followed a major review of the Youth Education Act of 1960. Three working parties prepared drafts for the so-called Leisure Act, which was the first time that youth and sports associations had been taken into consideration by legislation. The Leisure Act heralded the introduction of a broader definition of culture, focusing on leisure interests and individual desires. The Leisure Committee, one of the working parties, recommended that meeting places be created for children, young people and adults outside of the home environment, in so-called leisure communities which would be capable of competing with commercial leisure amenities. To this end, private individuals, via the creation of "special-interest groups", would be able to apply to the public authorities for support for instructors, premises and materials for "activities of an interest-related character". See also Bjarne Ibsen's description of the Leisure Act, in *Trangbæk, Else (ed.): Dansk idrætsliv. Velfærd og fritid 1940-1996*. 1996, p. 111-130. The Adult Education Act was a revision of the Leisure Act, which had been viewed by sports associations as unnecessarily bureaucratic.

Bibliography

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