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## **ELITE ICE HOCKEY – A PLEASURE ONLY IN MAJOR CITIES? A COMPARISON OF SWEDISH AND FINNISH ELITE ICE HOCKEY CLUBS GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION 2015/2016**

### **Background/problem/issue**

One feature that characterizes National Hockey League (NHL) is that NHL-owners run NHL-clubs in geographical cities/regions that have the best conditions for marketing NHL. Professionalization and commercialization of NHL has also huge impact on global elite ice hockey's development and commercialization (Kidd and Macfarlane, 1972). NHL influences (i.e. Americanization of sport) have also reached Swedish and Finnish elite ice hockey (Backman, 2012). Even though Sweden and Finland are countries with strong historical ties and a similar tradition of organizing sport (i.e. amateurism and promotion and relegation) representatives of elite ice hockey has chosen different paths (Backman, 2012). Swedish sport and elite ice hockey is organized according to the European Model of Sport with the Swedish Ice Hockey Federation as governing body for all Swedish ice hockey. In Finland the elite ice hockey representatives has chosen to implement several significant feature of the NHL (i.e. American Model of Sport). For example one from the Finnish Ice Hockey Federation autonomous SM-liiga, that runs the elite league, and a closed league, with no promotion or relegation (Backman, 2012). The main problem and research task question is hereby to analyze if this organizational difference has affected the geographical structure where Swedish and Finnish elite ice hockey clubs was located geographically in relation to the size of population 2015/2016 season.

### **Theory**

Americanization. The term Americanization means of tradition that American influence and culture is received/imported/forced to a country (Alm, 2002). Americanization has mainly been used in three different meanings. According to the first meaning the concept of Americanization is seen as a center and periphery relationship between the US and the world. As the world's most powerful state, the US, through its economic and political strength have exported their culture to other countries (Alm, 2002). In a hockey perspective this is related to the NHL's hegemonic position. In a second sense, a joint development of modernization is ongoing in the US and Europe. The third meaning refers Americanization to international intermediation of values, ideas and images and symbols with a clear American origin. The provision of these American impulses can be discussed in terms of center/periphery relations between the US and the world. The American impulses are not included in the same shape in the recipient countries; these have been adapted to the conditions in the recipient country. In this case, it is not about America's domination but about what each recipient country chosen to receive (Alm, 2002). In a hockey perspective, the third meaning is related to the impulses from the NHL as the representatives of the Swedish and Finnish ice hockey implemented and implements in each country's elite ice hockey.

## Method

Comparative study based on document analysis. My documents consist of public statistics from Statistics Sweden and Finnish Population Register Center, media publications, research about NHL, Swedish and Finnish ice hockey and the American and European Model of Sport.

## Result

In the Swedish elite league (SHL) six of a total of fourteen clubs were from the ten largest municipalities in terms of population. Five clubs were from municipalities located 11-30. Other clubs were from smaller municipalities. One club came from the municipality that did not belong to the fifty largest in terms of population. In Swedish ice hockey there are exceptions from the principle that cities or regions with biggest ice hockey interest have clubs in the elite league (Östman, 1996). Hereto several large Swedish cities don't have elite league ice hockey, for example Norrköping, Uppsala and Umeå. This development can be explained by Swedish elite ice hockey's structure, i.e. sporting logic with promotion and relegation, and close connection to the European Model of Sport.

In the Finnish elite ice hockey league (SM-liiga) ten of the fifteen clubs was geographically located in the ten most populous municipalities. Five clubs were from municipalities located 11-30 in terms of population. I should be noted that the biggest Finnish elite ice hockey club in economic terms, Jokerit HC from Helsinki, plays since 2014/2015 in the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL). According to historian Jani Mesikämmen Finnish elite ice hockey began to be concentrated in the larger cities in connection with the ice hockey sport's emergence (Mesikämmen, 2001).

Finnish elite ice hockey is by these facts closer to the NHL's geographical structure (i.e. American Model of Sport) than Swedish elite ice hockey. A feature of the Swedish ice hockey (and the European Model of Sport) is that small clubs in small cities/regions can advance to the elite league (SHL).

## References

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