

Paid work in voluntary sport clubs: An oxymoron with transformative potential?

Date: Wednesday, 25th of February, 2026 Time: 10.00 – 11.30

Location: Oransjesalen, Nord University, Levanger.

ABOUT THE LECTURE:

In this lecture, I will present analyses from an ongoing interview study concerned with the conditions for, characteristics of, and potential transformative consequences of employed 'background' workers in Swedish voluntary grassroots sport clubs. Contrary to existing knowledge on 'off field' sport staff, the project applies an organisational sociology lens to address paid work as a basic yet neglected form of professionalisation. The lecture will attempt to tease out the distinctiveness of paid work in otherwise volunteer contexts, ultimately suggesting that paid professionals occupy a paradoxical position as employees primarily governed by a democracy/volunteering logic. The lecture will furthermore propose that it is ironically precisely because paid staff understand their work through this lens that their everyday 'muddling through' harbours potential for 'downwards' professionalisation effects vis-à-vis member/volunteer roles.

ABOUT CECILIA STENLING:

Cecilia Stenling holds a PhD in Education. She currently works as an Associate Professor at the Department of Education, Umeå University (SWE) where she is the coordinator of the research group CRESPO – Critical Research on Sport Policy, Management and Organisation. She is also a visiting lecturer at the Department for Sport and Physical Education, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (NOR). Her research and teaching focus is the policy, governing and organising of voluntary sport. She is particularly focused on key processes of change such as professionalization and governmentalization, and the ways in which they align or are in tension with longstanding ideals, structures, and practices of voluntary organised sport. Her past projects deal with these issues at all organisational levels of federative sport systems and in relation to, for example, board nomination processes, sport policy advocacy, policy implementation, and the emergence and organisational footprint of sport integrity instruments. She is currently pursuing work concerned with professionalisation in its most basic form: paid work.



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