

4.2 Sport, enthusiasm, and industrial development in remote rural places?

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This chapter has its origin in the “Gargia Conference 2011” during which I gave a lecture on “Sports and image building in Finnmark”. The purpose was to try to show how sport in smaller towns may have a positive impact in the community. This chapter is also done in collaboration with the industry.

My background

We all have different backgrounds, but my background is probably unique. I grew up in a place without roads, and where the boat was the main transport. In my home, everything was what we today might call a private business. Revenues came from a combination of fishing, farming, hunting, carpentry, and other small tasks. It is also worth mentioning that I have Sami origin, both in terms of language and culture. I have all my years in school been living away from home, boarding in private accommodation as a tenant. I have teaching experience at the primary and secondary school level and at college. I am an Assistant Professor in sport and physical education. In addition, I worked for 10 years as project manager for various projects. I also have an active career as a player, coach, judge, and manager in volleyball. This chapter is based on the experience I have with volleyball through a period from 1973 to 1993.

Alta – Teacher training at Finnmark University College, and Alta Sport Association

I came to Alta as a student at the then Teacher Training College. Here students came together from all over the country and some were also interested in volleyball. Volleyball quickly became the main activity in the student club. In these early years all five teams were in the league in Finnmark. The 1970s was a politically active time in the student community, and this also affected the operation of the student club. It was reflected in the fact that anyone who wanted to play was allowed to play in league matches and participation was not necessarily based on



training attendance or skill. For some of us who wanted to invest more in volleyball, this was not a form of organization that developed performance. This meant that some players who wanted to focus more on the sport got together and formed a subset of Alta IF. Sports that were in focus in Alta IF then, as now, included football, handball, and skiing. Those who initially played on the team, were people who moved here. In addition to the volleyball team that did well in the men`s league, it was also invested in having a wide range of teams so that the group had many active players and a nice tone among them. Afterwards, I think Alta IF`s volleyball team has been very important for visitors to Alta, through education, employment, or military service. This was an arena where they met their visitors with an interest in sports. Many who showed up were athletes from other sports who had a desire to train in an inclusive environment.

Karasjok – IL Nordlys

In my student period in Alta, I chose Karasjok as the place for my first job as a teacher. This was done because the site had a good volleyball environment. But in 1979, the place had very poor training conditions. As a coach and player I had to make the best of the situation, and we developed a fast game and more specialization of individual players. In the period before the sports hall was opened in Karasjok in 1981, we played our home matches in Lakselv, which is 75 km from Karasjok. When the hall was opened in Karasjok, it showed that the volleyball interest in the population was big. In the most there were about 500 people in the hall watching our matches, and the other matches were also well attended. IL Nordlys was the best volleyball team in Finnmark, both among men and women, over many seasons. In the 1981/82 season, IL Nordlys won the Division 2 championship for men in Northern Norway, and played the qualification to the top division, but lost 15-13 in the final set. Karasjok is located only 18 km from the Finnish border, and this was an advantage because we had players from Finland and had both good practice and new ideas from there.

Businesses in Karasjok have rarely been based on sales outside the municipal boundaries, except the knife forge and sales related to tourism. Industry sponsored the volleyball team, and the team paid this support back with ads in the program, advertising sails on walls, advertisements on jerseys, and by getting positive reviews in the newspapers in northern Norway. In addition, visiting teams used something of what in the village could offer when they



came for games and tournaments. It is difficult to measure, but it seems that success in sports brings pride among the residents, something which also can create optimism and perhaps greater performance in their work.

Båtsfjord - BK Sats 72, Sats 72 Båtsfjord, Båtsfjord sportsklubb

Båtsfjord wanted to focus on volleyball, and I was asked to come there and be a playing coach. Since most volleyball players in Karasjok in the men team were moving from the place and could pretty much only play the matches, it was impossible to maintain a good level. I did not really want to move to Båtsfjord, but at the time it had rather a lot of good players and the place is really just 70 miles from my home. So in the autumn of 1986 I moved to Båtsfjord and stayed there for five years. What was special about Båtsfjord, was that the private sector was clearly visible as many had their work in the fisheries and fishing industry. In addition, the export value of the fishing industry was quite high, even in this period there was a reduction fisheries.

This meant that the economic conditions were better for each player, with less time going to voluntary work and there was no need for user fees for traveling. I was also coach of the women's team that eventually played in all-Norwegian 1 Division. For the men's team, things went even better with games in the 1991 European Cup. During this period, Båtsfjord's four clubs merged into one, with the purpose to make the place name more well-known, and to coordinate resources better and professionalize the administration by hiring a daily manager. This merger also supported the business community in the municipality. Since there was also a decline in the fisheries, as the volleyball team began to achieve good results it was our accomplishments on the volleyball court that helped as a way of maintaining optimism on the site. This was reinforced by the municipality and the private sector which provided good conditions for that sport to develop, including when new players were bought.

Theory based on my experiences in sport

In closing, I look at some features of which are based on my experience over a 20 year active period as a player, coach, referee, instructor, and administrator (including three years chairman of Finnmark volleyball circuit). Figure 1 shows that the awareness level of sports performance



under the international level decreases in relation to site size. This means that an equal sporting achievement will be more noticed in the villages than in larger places. This is because sports performances in bigger places struggle with many other achievements for attention, which is less in smaller towns.

Figure 1. Awareness Level for sports performance in relation to size on site

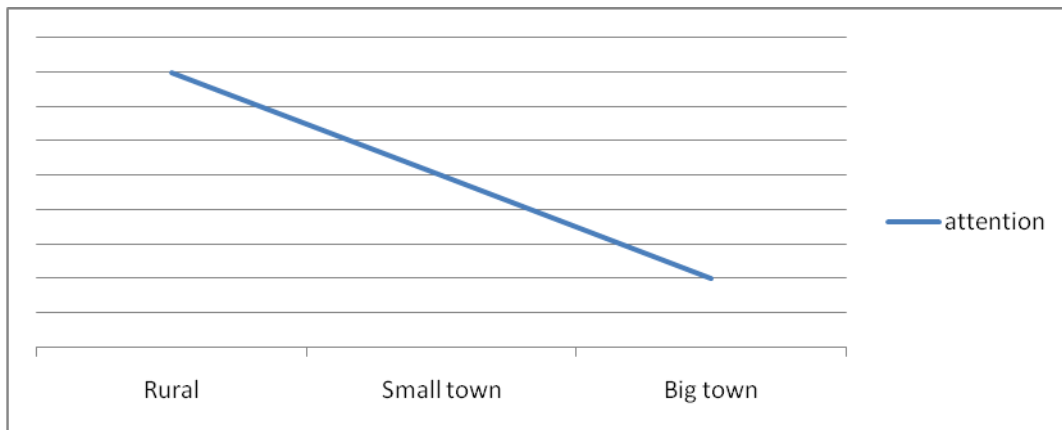


Figure 2 shows that sports performance over at a certain level (Norwegian Championships, etc.) will in smaller towns be remembered longer than in larger sites. This is because the larger places have more wins, and the expectation of large areas is also larger because such performance will be repeated more frequently. In addition, it is not expected that the smaller sites will be able to obtain peaks, it is especially true in team sports. If a smaller place can do it, it is almost seen as “unnatural.”



Figure 2. Value of sports performance among the population in terms of perspective, related to size on site.

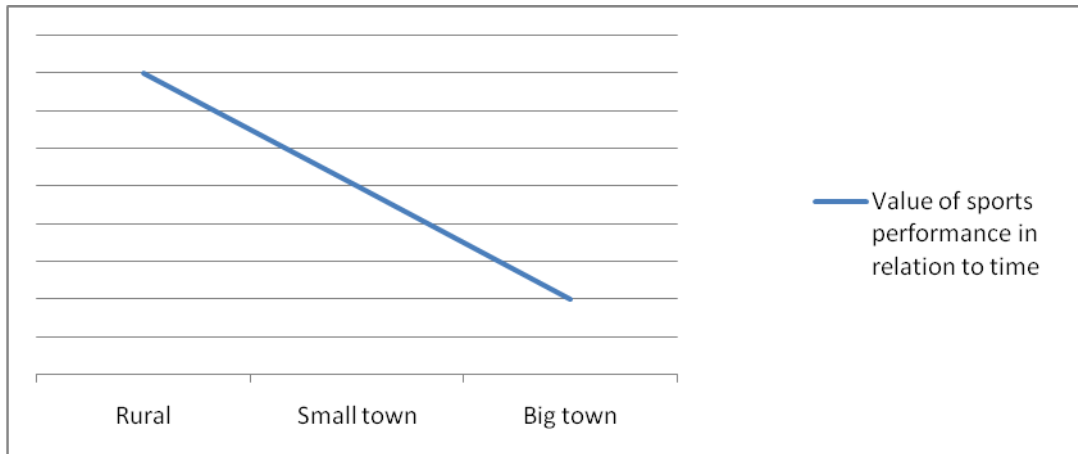


Table 1 indicates that it is easier to achieve athletic success in bigger places than in smaller towns. In larger sites, there is basically more talent and larger places in Norway also have higher institutes for education, which provides access to talent (often coming from small towns for that education). Having good “neighbors” makes it easier for athletes to compete as they have short travel distances, meaning less time and fewer expenses on travelling. When it comes to access to money and sponsorships, this will not only be dependent on site size but also on local businesses and the level of sports activity. In this area, the club's ability to market will also have a major impact on access to funds or other benefits. My contention is that the smaller the place is, the greater is the local enthusiasm and the greater the percentage of the population who are engaged around the team or as spectators. This also applies when it comes to media attention.



Table 1. Positive and negative aspects of sport in smaller towns compared to major cities.

	Smaller places	Larger cities
Population, access to talent	-	+
Opportunities for education	-	+
Attention from the media	+	-
Travelling, spending and access to the competition	-	+
Access to sports facilities	-/+	-/+
Local enthusiasm	+	-
Access to money, sponsorship	-?	+?

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