

“Decidedly frosty”

Conflict and cooperation in the management of Swedish elite football matches

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Football is a major attraction in Sweden with over two million people attending games in the highest division – Allsvenskan – in 2018. Organising these games requires collaboration between the main stakeholders: the police, the clubs and the supporters. The success of such relationships is largely dependent on respectful collaboration between all parties to secure safe management of crowds at football. All stakeholders have invested significantly in their ability to build legitimacy through communication and collaboration with other stakeholders, and recent research conducted between 2014 and 2017 in Sweden suggested that to a large extent Sweden is at the forefront when it comes to good practice in the collaboration between the main stakeholders. However, during the 2019 season there has been a steadily growing sense of mistrust between stakeholders, which has impacted significantly upon the working relationship between them. This article will analyse those developments in order to illuminate the intergroup dynamics at play in the football environment. Based on an analysis of the developments, a series of recommendations will be made with the main aim of improving the relationship between the stakeholders.

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Introduction

Football is a major part of life in Sweden. Over two million people attended games in the highest division – Allsvenskan – in 2018 (Svensk Elitfotboll, 2018). The atmosphere surrounding the games has been described as one of the most positive and central parts of the events (SOU, 2013). Sweden has many well-organized official supporter clubs (SOU, 2012). Planning and attending football matches is for the majority of the people involved something they do on a regular basis. The police, club personnel, as well as external safety and security staff all have their routines and standard procedures. The same goes for the supporters. Home supporters gather in their regular pubs. Even away supporters tend to have their ‘usual place’ and routines. Most of this is well-managed. A key feature of this management has been the commitment to dialogue and cooperation between the main stakeholders: the police, the clubs and the supporters.

There has been a variety of research conducted around football in Sweden, from studies of football supporters specifically (e.g. Radmann, 2012, 2015, 2016), to research examining the role of dialogue between clubs and their supporters (Junghagen, 2018; Madsen, Khan, Williams, & Havelund, 2019; Stott, Khan, Madsen, & Havelund, 2018), not to mention the broad spectrum of work on the policing of supporters (Green, 2006, 2009; Stott, Havelund, & Williams, 2019). Sweden is not alone in viewing football as an important area for academic research (e.g. Adang & Brown, 2008; Havelund, Joern, & Rasmussen, 2015; Hoggett & Stott, 2010; Spaaij, 2007a, 2007b; Stott, Hoggett, & Pearson, 2011), problems with crowd management at football are a worldwide phenomenon (Fuller & Junaedi, 2018; Knijnik, 2018; McManus, 2013; Pilz, 1996).

A common conclusion found across this research is that the relationships between the clubs, the supporters and the police are fundamentally important for the reduction of conflicts and the safe management of crowds at football. The success of such relationships is largely dependent on respectful collaboration between all parties, which then leads to a strong sense of perceived legitimacy between stakeholders (Brechtbühl, Dimech, Schmidt, & Seiler, 2017; Havelund, Lauritsen, Joern, & Rasmussen, 2016; Schumacher Dimech, Brechtbühl, & Seiler, 2016; Stott, Pearson, & West, 2019).

Recent research conducted between 2014 and 2017 in Sweden suggests that to a large extent Sweden is at the forefront when it comes to good practice in the collaboration between the main stakeholders (Stott et al., 2019; Stott et al., 2018). However, during the 2019 season there has been a stead-

ily growing sense of mistrust between stakeholders, which has impacted significantly upon the working relationship between them. This article will analyse those developments in order to illuminate the intergroup dynamics at play in the football environment. The developments will be described through the use of document analysis (Rapley, 2018) of official reports, proposals and protocols combined with public statements from the parties involved. The current analysis was concluded mid-October 2019 at which point the writing of this article was completed.

The article will begin with a short discussion about legitimacy, as this concept forms the theoretical basis for the paper. The paper will then provide a short description of the main stakeholders and outline the dominant working relationships between them prior to the arising conflict. This will be followed by an analysis of recent developments and how they have affected the collaboration between the stakeholders. On the basis of our analysis, a series of recommendations will be made with the main aim of improving the relationship between the stakeholders. Finally, the implications of our research for the theoretical understanding of the management of football matches in general will be explored.

On (il)legitimacy

Legitimacy is found where there is a positive recognition by citizens of a public authority’s moral right to exercise power (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2013). Effective order maintenance depends on compliance and cooperation on the part of the general public, yet compliance by members of the public can never be taken for granted (Fagan & Tyler, 2004). Data from the European Social Survey illustrates that trust in police can vary profoundly between countries and can also change over time within that same country.¹ However, when the general public is compliant the necessity for deterrence and coercive means is minimised, resulting in societies that function effectively, ethically and legally (Bradford, Jackson, & Hough, 2014). This is not to say that deterrence doesn’t work effectively in the short term but “the unfortunate long term consequence of undermining the intrinsic motivations that also encourage law abiding behaviour, with the result that people’s behaviour must be increasingly motivated by costly deterrence mechanisms if constant levels of compliance are to be maintained.” (Fagan & Tyler, 2004,

¹ European Social Survey: <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org> (last accessed 17 October 2019)

p. 4). Besides, deterrence effects are typically costly to maintain, since they require a significant investment of societal resources to create and maintain the credible risk of punishment (Fagan & Tyler, 2004; Tyler, 2001). Adherence to commands by the police by the public may depend on two factors: the individual citizen's fear of punishment for not following police orders, and the citizens' internalised values that require them to accept and comply with police commands. The first is described as an instrumental perspective, in which people shape their behaviour based on judgments about the personal gains and losses resulting from different kinds of behaviour (Tyler, 2006). In contrast to this instrumental perspective is a more normative perspective, in which people judge what is regarded as just and/or morally right (Fagan & Tyler, 2004; Tyler, 2006). People are compliant to the extent that they perceive the police as legitimate, making compliance a matter of legitimacy. Bradford, Jackson and Hough provide the following description of police legitimacy:

The police can be considered to be legitimate when individuals perceive that police officers act in morally valid ways, when individuals believe that the police abide by the rules and procedures intended to govern their behaviour, and when individuals voluntarily offer their consent to police activity (2014, p. 553).

When people feel that an authority is legitimate, they allow that authority to determine what behaviours will be acceptable in a given situation or set of circumstances (Tyler, 2004). From a normative perspective, people are more concerned about whether they are treated fairly rather than the actual outcome on a personal level. The normative view includes the expectation that police behaviour should be fair, honest, polite and without bias, while taking care to respect all citizens' rights (Tyler, 2006).

The concept of legitimacy is core to the Elaborated Social Identity Model (ESIM) that has been applied to football contexts on numerous occasions (Stott, Adang, Livingstone, & Schreiber, 2007; Stott, Livingstone, & Hoggett, 2008; Stott & Reicher, 1998; Stott, West, & Radburn, 2016). In the model, collective behaviour in crowds is understood as an outcome of a shared contextually derived 'social identity'. While individual participants may see themselves as acting legitimately, by for example singing, gathering in large groups, or drinking alcohol, the same actions may be seen by the police as a sign of impending trouble and therefore illegitimate. In such circumstances, the police often have the power (i.e. law on their side,

equipment, and the human resources) to impose their view upon the situation. By doing so they then change the social context for crowd participants. This shifting social context can lead to changes in the social identity of the group being policed, which can then affect the group processes, escalating the intergroup tensions and leading to conflict between the police and the policed. In other words, when crowd participants start to perceive police and police actions as illegitimate, conflict with the police may be seen not only as legitimate by the crowd, but also as possible due to their large numbers (Stott et al., 2019).

Stakeholder collaboration in the management of Swedish football matches

All sports in Sweden are mainly organised through the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF), an umbrella organisation created in 1903 with the task of supporting all member federations logistically, politically or financially. The largest of those federations is football with around 1 million members (around 1/3 of the total number of members of the RF). Football is organised by the Swedish Football Association (SvFF), while clubs in the top two divisions are also organised in a branch organisation, Swedish Elite Football (SEF). This is similar to the structure of English football, whereby football is organized by The Football Association while the clubs in the top league have their own branch organisation in the Premier League. All SEF clubs have designated safety and security officers. They take the main responsibility for the event from the club’s perspective and work in close collaboration with the local authorities and the police. In addition to this, for the majority of matches the police will stipulate that the clubs hire security guards licenced by the Police Authority. The clubs also employ Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs) who play an integral role in managing the arrangements on match days involving other stakeholders like the police (Madsen et al., 2019). The creation of the SLO role was a UEFA initiative aimed at ensuring the flow of dialogue between clubs, supporters, and other stakeholders (UEFA, 2011, 2012). Supporters in Sweden have gradually become more organised and today more than 40 official club affiliated supporter groups are organised through The Swedish Supporters Union (SFSU), while many other unofficial groups also make up the supporter scene.

The police might not be regarded as part of the Swedish ‘football family’ as the other stakeholders are, but they are a vital partner when it comes to the

management of matches. The fact that many people gather in one designated place puts pressure on infrastructure and the demand for police presence alone. In addition to the purely logistical needs of a crowd, the Swedish supporter scene has many distinct sub-groups, some of which self-define as ultras or hooligans, that create different needs (Radmann, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016). In order to cope with this, the police have developed special units of police officers to support their main tactical intervention (Delta Units) for medium to high risk matches. The first of these special units has the task of working closely with supporters in order to build relations with individuals and groups at the core of the supporters' subculture. In the largest police regions this is done by a small group of police officers who attend both home and away matches and thus play an advisory role to the hosting police region when the team they follow play away matches around the country. These police units have different names and uniforms and their roles are not completely the same in all regions. In some regions their *modus operandi* is primarily dialogue based while other regions tend to combine dialogue with more repressive means and prosecution (Stott et al., 2019). The second special unit is called Delta 80, named after their radio call sign. These units were developed from 2015 and onwards. Their role is to facilitate all supporters. They have a special role in welcoming and accompanying away supporters during their visit to a city. Both of these types of special units, especially the units that have dialogue as their primary tool, have been praised by supporters and clubs (Almgren, Lundberg, Williams, & Havelund, 2018; Madsen et al., 2019; SOU, 2013; Stott et al., 2018). The units are integrated parts of the Special Police Tactics (SPT) concept which is framed around the protection of citizen's rights through a set of working methods called the *conflict reducing principles* (Adang, 2012).² These principles serve the dual purpose of enabling the police to manage crowds in a manner that de-escalates any potential problems, while also promoting perceptions of police legitimacy in the general public.

It is also important to mention the Legal Affairs Department as they play a key role in granting the organisers the permission to host an event. The police are often classified as an independent institution somehow detached from the governmental and political systems. However, it should be noted

2 In summary, the conflict reducing principles are: *Knowledge* about the nature of the identities and cultures of those within the crowd. *Facilitation* of those behaviours and intentions judged as lawful (e.g. peaceful assembly, expression, etc.). *Communication* is achieved with crowd participants and maintained throughout an event in order to ensure channels of communication. Finally, if use of force is necessary, it should be based upon *Differentiation* and not targeted against crowds indiscriminately.

that on the subject of resource deployment and how those resources are prioritised, the police are answerable to politicians, as well as the Government Offices of Sweden such as the Prime Minister’s Office, the government ministries and the Office for Administrative Affairs (e.g. Regeringskansliet, 2013; Statskontoret, 2015). Besides this, the Government Offices of Sweden have also initiated investigations that have influenced policy within the police (SOU, 2012, 2013).

Both the ‘football family’ and the police have invested significantly in and thus enhanced their ability to build legitimacy through communication and collaboration with other stakeholders. This has not been without results. In 2014 SEF and SFSU made an agreement that henceforth the SFSU should be recognised as a formal interlocutor for the supporter community. Part of that agreement included a set of shared goals aimed principally at developing a welcoming, safe and secure atmosphere for all attending football events (SFSU, 2014). These exact goals formed the basis for a national strategy agreement for the period 2014–2017 made between the Swedish police (represented by the Swedish Police Authority, Swedish Prosecution Authority and the three largest police regions in Sweden), Swedish football (represented by SvFF and SEF) and representatives from the Swedish Ice Hockey Association and Swedish Bandy Association (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2014). SvFF, SEF, SFSU and the Police are all partners of ENABLE Sweden which is an organisation led by the authors of this paper. The aim of the organisation is to create a platform for sustainable collaboration and mutual understanding between football’s main stakeholders. In order to achieve this aim, the project has concentrated on the development and dissemination of theoretical and practical knowledge intended to support all partners in developing collaborative working methods. Over the last four years the project has hosted more than 20 events in which police officers, club representatives, supporters and representatives of other smaller stakeholders have all worked together with the aim of identifying good practice and sharing experiences.

Analysis

The Government Offices of Sweden have debated the challenge of reducing costs for policing football several times. Possible options have ranged from the reduction of the number of police officers deployed to events, to requesting that the clubs take direct financial responsibility and pay for police

presence (Regeringskansliet, 2013). Between 2011 and December 2013 the police tried the latter initiative and invoiced the clubs for police operations. However, this procedure was highly criticised by the clubs and resulted in what the Swedish Agency for Public Management called a “decidedly frosty” climate for cooperation between the Police and the clubs (Statskontoret, 2015).³ On 1 January 2014 the law that made the reimbursement system possible was abolished. However, the police and the Government Offices of Sweden have continued to pursue options for reducing police resources. In 2015, The Swedish Agency for Public Management published the report *The contested fee. Organisers’ obligation to reimburse police security costs*. The report recognised that both police and football clubs experienced vastly improved cooperation after the abolishment of the law, but at the same time the report stated that police costs had not been reduced. Therefore, the report points towards issuing conditions as a more practical approach: “The focus on stricter conditions is not directly related to the compensation issue, but according to the Police, this is what it takes to get sports organisers to take on the responsibility that is required” (Statskontoret, 2015, p. 56, our translation). What is meant by “not directly related” is unclear but the formulation indicates that there is a connection and that the connection is motivated by a need to reduce police costs. The report mentions that two police departments, one of them being the Legal Affairs Department, were working on a “condition strategy” where the issuing of permits was highlighted as a *suitable tool* for the police (Statskontoret, 2015, p. 56).

Condition strategy: Action steps and Condition stairs

Police as well as clubs have their routines and standard procedures. Before every match the organising club must file an application to the police’s Legal Affairs Department for permission to host a match. In this application the club describe the nature of the event and how they will prepare for the event, including safety and security procedures, number of staff, reduction

3 Swedish Agency for Public Management is tasked to provide the Government and Ministries with relevant, specific and useful documentation for reassessment and rationalisation decisions. The term “decidedly frosty” is used in the official English summary of the report: *The contested fee. Organisers’ obligation to reimburse police security costs* (2015:27) <http://www.statskontoret.se/In-English/publications/2015---summaries-of-publications/the-contested-fee.-organisers-obligation-to-reimburse-police-security-costs-201527/> (accessed 17 October 2019).

of stadium capacity etc. Through permits, the police have ample opportunity to impose conditions as the Legal Affairs Department can either approve the application or add extra conditions such as the need for extra staff, additional fencing, or more open gates etc. As a final solution the Legal Affairs Department, on behalf of the Police Authority, can actually prohibit the event from taking place. Until recently this has not been seen as a realistic scenario as the collaboration between stakeholders has mainly been characterised by pragmatism and mutual understanding (Stott et al., 2019). In 2016, the Legal Affairs Department introduced two tools as part of the condition strategy referred to as “Action steps” and “Condition Stairs”. These tools were first outlined in the police protocol named *Guidelines for conditions in connection with public events in the form of sporting events* (Polisen, 2016). The idea behind *action steps* is that if an incident occurs, actions need to be put into place in order to avoid the incident being repeated in the future. This can be formulated as new requirements laid on top of the previous requirements – the *condition stairs* – set by the police to the organisers.

The police protocol states that solutions and new requirements should be targeted towards the specific context and be discussed with the organisers (Polisen, 2016). The protocol underlines the importance of proportionality and the use of the least intrusive measure possible in the circumstance. The measures used have been anything from adding fences, recruiting more security staff and intensifying visitation areas, to reducing stadium capacity. The tools were used independently in different police districts during 2017 and 2018 and were to a large extent perceived as legitimate measures by the organisers. However, during the beginning of the 2019 season conflicts arose between police, clubs and supporters as the police appeared to be coordinating the *condition stairs* nationally. This assertion was validated when the police published a supplement to the protocol from May 2019 enforcing the original protocol from 2016 (Polisen, 2019). The 2019 protocol advocates national coordination and links specific offences (e.g. the use of pyrotechnics) to a specific added condition (lowering of stadium capacity) unless less repressive measures can be identified. The supplement was viewed by clubs and supporters as collective punishment and an unnecessary escalation of the use of repressive measures as part of the *condition stairs* (Svensk Fotboll, 2019).

The suggested measures were regarded as disproportionate and perceived to be detached from the incidents which they are intended to control. One example of these protocols is the banning of overhead flags that are common in Swedish supporter culture, based on an assumption that the flags are often

used as cover for the masking which takes place before the use of pyrotechnics. Reduction of stadium capacity has also been used, which has created a strong sense of illegitimacy among clubs, supporters, SEF and SvFF, and thus affected the collaboration negatively. Reactions from supporters have been banners with protest against police, chants unifying rival supporters against the police and massive critique on social media. Social media has also been used by club security staff to complain about the conditions imposed by police.

Making individuals responsible for whole events

Part of the rationale behind the *condition strategy* mentioned by the Swedish Agency for Public Management in the report *The contested fee. Organisers' obligation to reimburse police security costs* is to make the “sports organisers (...) take on the responsibility that is required” (Statskontoret, 2015, p. 56, our translation). During 2019, this resulted in a situation where the head of security from top league club Kalmar FF was reported by the police for an incident that had happened during a match around five months earlier, in November 2018. According to the club it received an 18-page updated version of the conditions for the match less than two days before the match.⁴ However, for the previous match the conditions document had been no more than three pages. The subsequent reporting represented a radical shift away from the previously positive working relationship between the clubs and police. As club security staff from all clubs work closely together, it did not take long for the incident to become a highly debated and polarising topic between police and clubs across the country.

4 KFF:s säkerhetsansvarige anmäld av polisen – fem månader efter AIK:s guldmatch: ”Blixt från klar himmel”. <https://www.fotbollskanalen.se/allsvenskan/kffs-sakerhetsansvarige-anmald-av-polisen--fem-manader-efter-aiks-guldmatch-/> (Last assessed 17 October 2019)

Expanding the area for which the organisers are responsible

It has been commonly understood and accepted among the stakeholders that while the clubs have the main responsibility for safety and security on the stadium footprint, the police are responsible for order in the public spaces where supporters gather before and after matches. In reality it is much more complex.

On matchdays the police will usually deploy a high-ranking police officer to the stadium to work together with the clubs’ security managers. This secures a mutual understanding of risk and close coordination in situations where police presence inside the stadium is required. The police will often have specially educated officers with thorough knowledge about supporters working inside the stadium (Stott et al., 2019). The situation outside the stadium is also handled in collaboration as clubs often take an active part in negotiating the logistical arrangements for the meeting places and transportation routes that their supporters will use for both home and away matches. Much of this work is done by the club’s SLOs, who often have opportunities to reach supporter groups that would be hard to reach by the police (Madsen et al., 2019; Stott et al., 2018). These working relations seem beneficial for both clubs and police as risk and unforeseen situations can be minimised with planning and a steady flow of information between the stakeholders.

During 2019, the police in Stockholm tried a variation of the *condition strategy* which they called a “restitution of responsibility”. The aim has been to make the clubs take more responsibility for the supporters in public places like city centres. The rationale seems to be that these supporters are guests of the club, therefore it should be the club who is tasked with hosting supporters at meeting places throughout the city and not just on the stadium footprint. This has sparked a heated debate between Stockholm Police and the three big football clubs in the city (AIK, Djurgården IF and Hammarby IF) that has contributed to the escalating mistrust between the stakeholders.

Police agreement with Swedish Sports Confederation

One of the major issues of concern with regards to the *condition strategy* has to do with the negotiation and collaboration between the stakeholders – or the lack of it. Rather than negotiating a continuation of the national strategy agreement which was in effect between 2014 and 2017 (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2014), the police have entered into an agreement with the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF). The RF is, as earlier mentioned, an umbrella organisation with the task of supporting its member federations. It is clear from the reaction of the ‘football family’ that they are highly critical towards parts of the agreement and that they do not feel that they were adequately consulted during the process. This critique has been made of both the police and the RF. Public statements made by SEF and SvFF have expressed a strong sense of illegitimacy regarding the agreement and pointed out that it would be difficult for the agreement to be implemented without revisions. Going from a period between 2014 and 2017 where SEF, SvFF and the police had a shared agreement, to a situation in which an agreement has been made between the Police and the RF appears to be a major drawback and has contributed to a declining working environment between the stakeholders.

Final remarks

The situation in Swedish football has gone from one in which the working collaboration between stakeholders was judged as being in the forefront when it comes to good practice, to one in which the mistrust between the stakeholders is undoing most of the previous good work. As this study suggests, the primary problem stems from the imposition of the *condition strategy* and thus in the first place the Legal Affairs Department.⁵ Secondary issues have also arisen following the agreement between all the relevant stakeholders being replaced by an agreement made solely between the police and the Swedish Sports Confederation. Neither the Legal Affairs Department nor the Swedish Sports Confederation play an active role in the face-to-face interaction between the stakeholders on matchday. Collabo-

5 It is not within the scope of this article to analyse to what extent the Legal Affairs Department is being regulated or is influenced by the Government Offices of Sweden and/or the Swedish Agency for Public Management, who also have shown interest in lowering police costs.

ration between clubs and the police has been affected negatively, with supporters, clubs and SEF openly criticising conditions imposed by the police. Supporters show their perception of police illegitimacy during tifo displays, with banners inside the stadium and in their general interactions with police. The mistrust affects everybody who works with the management of safety and security questions in Swedish football. In that sense the developments appear counterproductive and detrimental to the previously shared goals of making football a welcoming, safe and secure element in Swedish society. It is also in sharp contrast to the core of the Special Police Tactics with its *conflict reducing principles* that aim to de-escalate conflict and promote perceptions of legitimacy. What can be observed are displays of civil disobedience due to the police use of collective punishment and the resulting perceptions of illegitimacy. This can lead to situations where the police will be more reliant on costly deterrence mechanisms (Fagan & Tyler, 2004). This result is counterproductive to the ultimate aim of reducing football related policing costs.

The changes to the working relationship between the stakeholders on the operational level thus illustrates how developments on a policy level in the legal system can influence the intergroup relations. This aspect has not previously been highlighted in articles where ESIM has been applied to football contexts (Stott et al., 2007; Stott et al., 2008; Stott & Reicher, 1998; Stott et al., 2016). However, the analysis in this article does not contradict ESIM. Rather, it adds to the existing body of research by pinpointing the effect that developments on a policy level can have upon the intergroup dynamics. The policy level is an extended part of the context in which the interaction between the stakeholders takes place. The recent developments in Swedish football illustrate how changes in legal policy can undermine the major investments in dialogue and stakeholder engagement made by police, clubs and supporters in recent years. This issue has raised concerns among politicians which has resulted in a proposal put forward by the member of parliament Gustav Fridolin and colleagues in September 2019 (Fridolin, Hult, & Tovatt, 2019). The proposal asks for a decision made by parliament to initiate an investigation into police work, including their application of conditions at sport events.

Building relations between the stakeholders has been a long and vulnerable process. The developments described in this article have done massive harm in a short space of time. To re-establish a perception of legitimacy, trust and working relations, it is recommended that the stakeholders recognise the importance of collaboration built on mutual respect. A first step could be to

sign a national agreement between the relevant stakeholders working in the football context. The previous national strategy between 2014 and 2017 was signed by the Swedish Police (represented by the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Prosecution Authority and the three largest police regions in Sweden) and Swedish football (represented by SvFF and SEF) (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2014). This agreement was replaced by the agreement between the Police Authority and the Swedish Sports Confederation. The Police has thus made an agreement with an institution with no operational responsibility and power, instead of negotiating a new agreement with the relevant stakeholders. It is also clear from the analysis that the police is a complex organisation; initiatives taken and investments made by those at the operational level in terms of trust building collaboration through dialogue, are easily undermined by changes initiated by those at the policy level, namely the Legal Affairs Department. Therefore, a second recommendation would be to pause and reconsider the *condition strategy*. As this analysis has demonstrated, the condition strategy has contributed to a rather chilly climate for cooperation. A reconsideration of the strategy that allows for input from all stakeholders would enable a thaw in relations. As was shown during the period of the National Strategy of 2014-2017, Swedish football does not have to be “decidedly frosty”.

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