

## DOES ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE FOSTER UNINTENDED RESULTS?

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### **Context**

Is the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies in sport important, and why might it matter? Women's attempts to gain greater participation in sport governance have met with varying success. Historically, women have been largely excluded from participating in formal sports institutions. If we use Bracchi's (1999) 'What's the problem?' approach to examining policy problems, the follow-up question would be: 'Who has to give up power in order for the women to get in?' My hypothesis is that it is the less powerful men – more specifically men from a working class background and with less education - who have lost out.

This question is currently being researched among volunteers in the executive boards of federations, district associations, the umbrella organization, the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC). This 2004 study compares results with those of an investigation in 1974, before any equality measures had been introduced into the Charter of sport. Both Norwegian society at large and sports organizations have developed over that period of 30 years. In Norway the acceptance of equality in everyday life provides an essential context for understanding the phenomenon in sport. In this regard, it is important to note that in Norway there has been a Gender Equality Act since 1978. In 1981 a gender quota was enacted, whereby at least two members of each gender must be elected to committees of more than four people. In 1988 the law was changed to ensure a minimum of 40% representation of each gender in appointing boards, councils and executive committees by public authorities. Most political parties promptly adapted to this legislation. The quota regulations raised awareness of gender issues in Norwegian society. Since 1986 Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Prime Minister, with a cabinet consisting of 40% women, has supported this commitment to gender equity from the top. In sport, an attempt to introduce the quota failed the first time it was tried in 1980, but succeeded in 1987; later there were amendments in 1990, 1996 and 1999. Furthermore, positive actions and gender mainstreaming have been used as tools for attaining equity. While the policy target was gender equity, additional outcomes were not anticipated.

### **Methods**

In 1974 a postal questionnaire was sent to all executive board members (N=599) in the non-governmental umbrella organization, the Norwegian Confederation of Sports (NCS), all 39 sport federations (though only 10 were open to women for competition) the 19 district associations, and the Norwegian Olympic Committee (NOC) with a response rate of 71% (Skirstad 1982). Thirty years later, the boards of the same organisations received a webmail questionnaire with many of the same questions. The sports federations now numbered 55, district sport associations the same, and the boards of the NCS and the NOC had merged in 1996 to become the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC). N was 623 and the response 61%.

Bracchi's (1999:4) approach identifies "a space to consider competing constructions of issues addressed in the policy process, and the ways in which these constructions leave other issues untouched." Its goal is to keep analysis open to other possibilities. Formal equality within the structure of an organization is recognised as a necessary, but not a sufficient precondition for equality.

### **Results**

When interpreting the two surveys, the *Statistics Yearbook* was used to find comparative national data on income, education and occupation, so respondents could be assigned to a social class. While gender issues in sport have been analysed frequently, the interrelationship between gender and class appears not to have been. The hypothesis is that an unintended result of introducing a gender quota system has been to change significantly the class structure of the boards to become more socially exclusive.

The female percentage of executive boards in 1974 was 11.1%. The NOC was the only board with no female representatives (then neither did the IOC before 1981, when two were co-opted). By 2004, had

more that trebled, till women accounted for 36.9% of the equivalent boards, while the female membership of these organisations had increased from 27 % to almost 40 %. However, the leading position (the presidency) was held by only one woman at district level in 1974, and in 2004 there were just four women presidents in the federations and two in the districts, a minimal increase from 0.5% to just 1.6%.

In 1974, 45.9 % of board members had only lower level education (high school exam or less), and by 2004 this figure had decreased to 23 % (cf. for the national population the figures were 93.3% and 76.3 % respectively, *Statistical Yearbook 2004*). Thus while in 1974 the level of education of the sport board members was higher than in the population, this difference had widened considerably over 30 years. If we use educational level as one indicator, then the data suggest that the boards, besides significantly increasing the number of women members, also have become increasingly middle class as they lost their working class members. Judged by education, the board members were three times more likely to belong to the upper and middle classes than the general population. Data on income are more difficult to compare, since the 1974 study used personal income before tax in 1973, while that in 2004 inquired about household income (because it was part of a Nordic comparison using this measure). Interviews will be used to gather more information about respondents' economic situation.

Taking education as a broad indicator of social class, it seems that board members were three times more likely to come from the upper and middle as from the lower social classes. A recent Swedish investigation showed that the larger the family resources, the higher the chances that the youth will belong to a sport club (Elofsson, 2003). This was more important for the girls than the boys. A greater social inequality in girls' sport participation than boys' seems to explain the upward class trend by letting the women into the decision-making fora in sport.

### **Discussion/Implications**

The organizational changes have been associated with an increase in the number of women in the executive boards in sport, but they have not led to many women occupying the most powerful positions on boards, such as president. This may be due to the fact that these women have joined the boards at the expense of less powerful (because less well educated and working class) men, who lost out in the fight for positions when the change occurred in the charter. There is some evidence to suggest that these changes, which were designed to change the gender balance, also appear to have been associated with changes in the social class composition of the executive boards, with a significant move towards greater exclusivity on a social class basis. If this has indeed been the case – and this will be the subject of more detailed investigation in this project – then it may be argued that these changes have been associated with two interrelated processes, one of which has made the executive committees more representative on the basis of gender, but less representative and more socially exclusive on the basis of social class. These changes in the class basis, in the direction of greater class inequality, appear to have been an unintended and unforeseen outcome of policies designed to achieve greater gender equality.

### **References**

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