

'CLEANING UP' CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING: DRUG SCANDALS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL SKI FEDERATION

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INTRODUCTION

Change is a central aspect of contemporary sports organizations (Slack & Hinings, 1992). Since the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was established in 1999 sport federations worldwide have been subject to strong global pressures towards a unified fight against doping. This paper focuses on how the International Ski Federation (FIS) has adopted the WADA policy. A doping scandal in cross-country skiing during the Nordic Ski World Championship in Lahti 2001 was the point of departure for FIS. In the next few years FIS went through a complex process of change both at internal and at interorganizational levels. This paper combines the theoretical approaches of figurational sociology and neo-institutionalism to examine these processes.

METHODS

The analysis uses a combination of methods: (i) qualitative interviews (8) and informal conversations (5) with key figures in WADA and FIS; (ii) documentary analysis of working papers and reports; and (iii) monitoring of media coverage of the process.

RESULTS

During the Nordic Ski World Championship in Lahti 2001 six cross-country skiers from the host Finland tested positive for drug use. The scandal also unmasked doping as a serious problem within cross-country skiing.

Changes within FIS took place in different ways. Externally, close cooperation with WADA was established. A cooperative agreement was signed and anti-doping programmes were carried out. WADA was responsible for out-of-competition testing and organized meetings with all the federations which were doing blood testing. More effective testing was based on the WADA Code, which came into force in January 2004. FIS was one of the first international federations to implement the athletes' whereabouts system which led to more effective testing. Prior to this, some athletes had just 'disappeared'. Now they were easier to monitor for doping control officers.

Internal changes were comprehensive. The leadership (president and secretary general) restructured and put more resources into anti-doping work. One internal challenge was to change the Medical Commission's role. The Commission had been very enthusiastic in their work but until the scandal had experienced resistance from the leadership. Then these members were disregarded and an external anti-doping expert was appointed. It has been suggested that there were too many dual roles by the members in the Commission (they were also team doctors during the championships, member of national teams etc).

DISCUSSION

After the doping scandal in 2001, the FIS came under great pressure from WADA, some national federations, mass media and sponsors to clean up cross-country skiing. The following analysis focuses on networks, or figurations, power, change, control and resistance and interdependencies, central to the work of both figurational sociology and neo-institutionalism.

The work of Norbert Elias has been used in organizational studies only to a limited extent but he brings together all these elements in one 'take' (Newton & Smith, 2002). The figurational approach also has an

openness that allows it to be combined with other theoretical approaches (Smith, 2001). One such theory is neo-institutionalism which has been widely used within organizational studies (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996) and in the study of sport organizations (Slack & Hinings, 1992; Slack, 1997).

The neo-institutionalist concept of isomorphism is central to understanding change within the FIS. The organization was subject to coercive isomorphism arising from both formal and informal pressures exerted by other organizations on which FIS was dependent (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The figurational concept of game models (Elias, 1978) supplements and develops the understanding of these processes of change. FIS had resisted such pressure before but this was impossible when new actors arrived the field.

After the first phase FIS was subject to both mimetic and normative processes. *Mimetic isomorphism* results when environmental uncertainty drives organizations to mimic the action of peers that are perceived to be legitimate or successful. Di Maggio and Powell (1991) argue ambiguous goals are a relevant factor when organizations, as FIS, model themselves on other organizations. WADA had the know-how and was both legitimate and successful with a strong standing within the Olympic movement.

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