

WHERE NOW, DEMOCRACY?

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INTRODUCTION

This paper depicts the picture of the period previous to the election in the General Assembly of Sports, the highest decision-making forum in sports in Norway in light of stakeholder theory (Freeman 1983, Frooman 1999, Mitchell et al 1997, Näsi 1995). This assembly is normally organized every fourth year. This election will be special because of the incidents prior to the election since the president was forced to resign. This resembles the situation before the extraordinary election in 2004 when both the president and the general secretary of the umbrella organization, Norwegian Olympic Committee and the Confederation of Sports (NOC) resigned because of an economic deficit of 4.4 million Euros. The president elected in May 2004 had as his main task to restore the economy and install new legitimacy for the sport organization. He managed to downsize the NOC, and got the economy straight. But just as the election campaign started, he was caught in a situation of mistrust. He had promised money to a district sport association without approval from his board, therefore he back-dated an e-mail which led to his departure. The board forced him to resign due to lack of trust. In order to help sport and not have a scandal the board claimed he resigned because of health reasons. This was a secret for three weeks before details about his departure were further known. The purpose of the study is to analyze how the different presidential candidates of NOC manage to balance the majority of the stakeholders' interest.

METHODS

The different stakeholders and their influence are studied in the period running-up before the General Assembly by analysis of the media-pictures in the newspapers and the TV as well as the documents sent out to the organizational units before the General Assembly. The comments from the hearings are also collected and studied. The results from the Sport-leader investigation done in the end of 2004, where many of the persons to be presented at the general assembly were included are used.

RESULTS

The last months before the General assembly have been rather confusing and chaotic. According to the rules of the organization the electoral committee shall present the list of candidates to the board one month before the election. The electoral committee, which has members elected from the districts as well as the federations, presented their proposal at the time when all thought the previous president retired because of health reasons. The majority wanted a female president, who was a present member in the board. An unusual situation started when a member of the electoral committee was disloyal to the electoral committee and started to persuade the former president to stand for a new period after the recommendations of the committee were made public. Later the same person was the spokesperson of the big federations in the media and was searching for new candidates. Then the order of democracy was broken, and the power play started.

Three main groups of internal stakeholders have entered the scene: the big federations, the small federations and the district sport associations. The goals for the elections are different for the different stakeholders. Some of the problems are due to a long-lasting conflict between competitive sport and sport for all. The goal for the small federations that are represented with just one delegate at the general assembly is to survive. Of course they will support any candidate that will ensure that they still have their power/separate existence in the organization. There are proposals that the small federations can be replaced by mergers of the smaller ones. The biggest federations only try to find candidates that will pursue their interest which are different from the smaller federations and the districts. They do not want much interference, but they would like to get more of

the gambling money as well as the government money for facilities. The district associations are also in danger of disappearing, especially to lose their power in politics. The federations seem to want to change the law so they are the only ones that can decide on the 'activity money' that the money used for activities. The election will take place May 13th 2007.

The election campaign so far resembles American politics, where the opponents try to dig up as much dirt as possible. One candidate has been described as psychologically unstable and not fit to lead such a complex organization.

The biggest sponsor the Minister of Culture, is concerned how this in the future can influence sport and people's opinion of the biggest voluntary organization. If other sponsors have the same thought then NOC has a problem.

DISCUSSION

It is perhaps time to diagnose the health of the democratic system in Norwegian sport as was done in society at large with the Norwegian study of Power and Democracy. People engaged at the grass root level in sport clubs has written letters to the umbrella organization, the NOC, and ask if the people fighting for the presidency represent anyone, and in case who. Representative democracy must ensure that the opinion of the members of the organization is heard and that no legitimacy gap exists. The members should be given reasons to be involved in sport politics. The time seems to be ripe to put emphasis on the politics of sport rather than to be occupied with the different stakeholders' power play.

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