

Ten years after establishment of WADA: A study of interconnected processes in anti-doping policy

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Aim of paper and research questions

Since the 1990s anti-doping activity has gone through comprehensive changes. Until then just a few units, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), some major international federations (IFs) and a small number of governments were involved. The scandal during the 1998 Tour de France has been described as a watershed (Houlihan, 2002) because it showed that (i) doping was out of control in a number of sports, (ii) the sport movement was not able to clean up its own house, and (iii) governments in the Western world decided actively to intervene.

To meet the increasing criticism, IOC organised the World Conference on Doping in Sport in February 1999. One of the outcomes of the conference was the decision to establish an independent anti-doping organisation, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), with the Olympic movement and governments as stakeholders.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the interconnected processes in anti-doping policy that have been the consequences of the 1999 establishment of WADA. Figurational sociology will be utilised in the analysis. Norbert Elias introduces the concept of figuration as a way of overcoming the individual–society dichotomy (Elias, 1978; 1994). Sociology should be concerned with viewing the social world as open pluralities of interdependent people ‘bonded together in dynamic constellations’ (Murphy, Sheard & Waddington, 2000: 92).

Research design and data analysis

The paper is part of a four year PhD-study on anti-doping with an organisational approach on four levels (Hanstad, 2009). The key sources of information were in-depth interviews (n=25), document analysis and analysis of media text, and a survey on Norwegian athletes who were required to submit whereabouts information to the national anti-doping organisation.

Results

The numbers of units in the fight against doping have increased considerably from 1999 to 2009. The increasing involvement by public authorities is one of the factors that have resulted in what some have argued is a more effective fight against doping. Governments have, in addition to their WADA involvement, transformed a common policy into the UNESCO Convention which provides a legal framework in which all governments can address the use of drugs. Governments’ financial contribution to WADA constitutes 50 percent of its funding, and governments take part in decision-making by the Foundation Board. Nevertheless, it is timely to ask whether representatives from public authorities have the expertise that is needed, or whether they operate as hostages by the sports movement. Representatives of public bodies “come and go”. Most politicians or bureaucrats are elected for limited periods of time, and most countries have their representative in the Foundation Board for 1-3 years. This gives the representatives

from the sports movement much more stable positions an advantage because they have the knowledge and experience their governmental colleagues are missing.

WADA is recognised as a much more credible key-actor in anti-doping than the IOC, which had been the frontrunner in the fight against doping until 1998. A standardised framework of rules and regulation has increased the harmonisation between different nations and different sports, even full harmonisation is lacking. There are still many NOCs, anti-doping organisations (ADOs) and IFs which are not compliant with the WADC.

A core goal in anti-doping activity is to protect the athletes' right to participate in doping-free sport and thus promote health, fairness and equality – or what is called “the spirit of sport”. But some of the tools in the expanding anti-doping regime have been perceived as having negative effects for “clean” athletes. The whereabouts system seems to have resulted in outcomes that may not were planned by the WADA. The system makes it compulsory for elite level athletes to report their whereabouts, and be available for testing, for one hour every day. The system has been under strong criticism after an updated version of the whereabouts system came into force on 1 January 2009.

Discussion and conclusion

Firstly, as in most social processes and policy developments, power relations are of key significance. Since 1999, public authorities and WADA clearly have established a power platform with other sport organisations in a new and less powerful position. This has led to intensifying anti-doping work.

Secondly, planned social processes almost always have unplanned outcomes. Or, more precisely, although social and political life unfolds based on certain regularities and is therefore to some extent predictable, unplanned events frequently occur that may have a crucial impact on the intended outcome. One recent example from the anti-doping campaign is may be the introduction of the whereabouts system, a system that met more resistance than WADA had foreseen.

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