

## Stuck in structure – how young leaders perceived the institutional frames at the youth Olympic Games in Innsbruck 2012

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### Aim

The aim of this paper is to create understanding about the institutional influence on young leadership at sport events. It thus adds a contribution to the study of young leadership at major sport events. Based on the theoretical framework developed by Skille, Bodemar and Hanstad (2012) the institutional framework of youth leadership at Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Innsbruck 2012 is analyzed. No previous studies have addressed this topic.

### Theoretical background

Within the neo-institutional theory the concept of translation provides a framework for analyzing institutional change in organizations. New ideas are combined with existing institutional practices and translated into new practices to varying degrees (Campbell, 2004). YOG is a new concept and the organizing committee consisted of young people with experiences from the event industry. This could result in greater pressure to introduce new institutional solutions to the field. In this context, it's interesting to see how YOG leaders solve tasks within an organization as IOC with strong institutional frames.

### Methodology, research design and data analyses

At YOG 2012, observation for 8 days resulted in 12 pages of field notes. Six leaders between 24 and 34 years old (average age 29 years) were interviewed. In addition, five interviews with youth volunteer leaders' experiences with leadership were conducted. These results will be analyzed and added as a contribution to the institutional perception of the young leaders.

All interviews were conducted during the event and lasted between 31 and 67 minutes. The interviews were thematically coded, broadly into three topics: leader's general background, experiences with the leadership and institutional frame. The citations coded as institutional frames will be presented here.

### Results, discussion and conclusions

Preliminary analysis indicates a series of tensions between the institutional frames given by IOC and the leaders perceptions of appropriate measures.

For the majority of the leaders (5 out of 6), cooperation directly with IOC was a new experience. All the leaders had earlier experiences with event organizing and had to learn how to work in the new institutional frame where they perceived that it was difficult to implement changes. Where I came from before starting at YOG, we had a quite small organization. When we wanted to change [...] something, we could just do it. We didn't have to ask 100 different parts. I started here and I thought, it's the same. Then I learned it's not. We cannot just decide something, and just do it like that. First we have to discuss it with the International Federations, with the IOC, with everybody. We just try to accept that and live with that. We have no choice (Innsbruck interview 4).

The young leaders refers to examples where ideas went in totally different direction (Innsbruck interview 3), but the respondents also describe the cooperation with IOC as good. The leaders felt that IOC appreciated what they had done within a small organizing committee (Innsbruck interview 3).

The results indicate that there exists a tension between IOC and the young leaders' ways to solve tasks in the IOC given frames. There were mentioned examples where the cooperation became accentuated, and where the young leaders experienced difficulties to argue and to implement tasks in the direction they wanted. Despite this there were ideas translated and interpreted in the YOG, which also resulted in a new practice on solutions that had not been intended and implemented in an IOC-events before. At the same time the young leaders report that structure in IOC limited the possibilities.

They [IOC] did youth games, but at least we were not allowed to post there video which they have done in their own web site because of the rights. They want to do youth games, but they cannot because of the strong regulations and all structures. So I think they really have to fight also in the IOC to change. We think they have really good ideas, but they are "stuck" in the structure. (Innsbruck interview 3).

The results of this study indicate that the institutional frame limits the capabilities for the young leaders to implement a youth event in the current IOC structure. The power structure designate IOC as the heaviest ruler, but the young leaders have had an impact due to they are the ones who best knows the youth culture. To utilize the potential of the young leadership it may be necessary for the IOC to dissociate themselves from some of the structures that have its origin in the Olympic Games. Due to that rule changes take time, this should be a priority for IOC and future organizers.

### Reference List

- Campbell, J. L. (2004). *Institutional change and globalization*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Skille, E., Bodemar, A., & Hanstad, D.V. (2012). *Between institutionalization and authenticity - a theoretical framework for the analysis of young leadership at sport events*.