

Doing Legitimacy: Legitimation Processes Of Sport Organizations

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Aim

The Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sport's (NIF) main argument for hosting the 2016 Lillehammer Youth Olympic Games (Lillehammer 2016) was the alleged positive demonstration effect, the promise that the event would increase the active engagement of youth in Norwegian organized sports in terms of participation, young leadership, and young coaches, and play an important role in NIF's youth sport policy (YSP). The aim of this research is to analyze how different actors shape and influence Norwegian YSP in connection to Lillehammer 2016 as legitimation process of NIF. This aim was met through the examination of the entire policy process, from formulation via implementation and perception of the policy target group to the policy outcome

Theory

Theoretically, the paper is based on the neo-institutional concepts of legitimacy, isomorphism and (institutional) change (Campbell, 2004; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, Meyer & Rowan, 1977) as well as implementation literature (Lipsky, 198; Marsh & Smith, 2000). Changes in policies, professions, and programs can lead organizations to incorporate practices and procedures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The incorporation of these procedures helps the organization to increase and/or maintain legitimacy and survival. Using the YSP as main argument for the Lillehammer 2016 bid can be understood as incorporated procedure in order to for NIF to secure legitimacy. In addition, there is a need to scrutinize policy processes in the context of the fact that the process is organized and influenced by intra- and inter-organizational values, norms, and relationships, as well as power structures and practices and also by the creation and impact of policy networks (Marsh & Smith, 2000). By combining implementation literature and neo-institutional theory) structures and practices, which enable as well as constrain actions that are subject to change were analyzed.

Methods

The study is based on qualitative inquiry comprising 33 interviews with actors central to policy process in connection with Lillehammer 2016. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the bid committee (n = 8) who were involved in the policy formulation, as well as with representatives of NIF (n = 4), the organizing committee (n = 4) and the County of Oppland (n = 1) who were involved in the implementation of the policy. As well, participants (n = 16) of a young leaders program, which was organized in connection with Lillehammer 2016, were interviewed. The study is complemented by document analysis and observations which were conducted before, during, and after the event. In the analysis the tactics by Miles and Huberman (1994) were followed identifying common patterns in the data in two steps: first via inductively coding, which corresponds to a descriptive and open observation of data, followed by second, a theoretical analysis under the framework presented above.

Results, discussion and conclusions

The study confirms that a sport event is often convenient for the legitimation of sport politicians' needs, while actually not fitting into the policy already ongoing. The key conclusion from this dissertation is that the legitimation process of NIF could be found in all stages of the policy process where different actors and organizations within the NIF system were actively *doing* legitimacy. This is exemplified by the language used for the Lillehammer 2016 bid in documents, meetings, and by the bid committee which was based on taken-for-granted understandings of the YSP, and it was worked out purposefully to provide assurance of the alleged necessity of Lillehammer 2016 as a solution to the existing — and long-lasting — challenges of Norwegian youth sport. In that respect, the YSP has become a self-imposed norm and a convenient symbolic strategy and assumed solution to NIF's dropout problem. Lillehammer 2016 was not a solution to the dropout problem — rather the opposite — but the dropout problem was a convenient argument to justify the Lillehammer 2016 bid. Lack of implementation strategy, and conflicts of interests of involved actors created tension between the policymaker within NIF, the implementing agents as well as the policy target group, and challenged successful implementation. NIF can document that they created projects involving young people, however, none of the projects were created by strategically using Lillehammer 2016 to develop youth sport; they are more a series of projects initiated by the few implementing agents which were communicated as legitimate actions. In the study, I discussed if it was more important for NIF to convince and satisfy the public about their 'successful outcome' of the YSP, i. e. an actual increase of young people

engaged in organized sport. Based on the empirical findings, this study provides a theoretical model for understanding the relation between sport policy process and legitimation processes of sport organizations.

References

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