Policy making in sport: the Norwegian case

Bernard Enjolras@samfunnsforskning.no
Ragnhild.H.Waldahl@samfunnsforskning.no
Institute for Social Research (Oslo) &
Norwegian School of Sport Sciences (Oslo)

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Introduction

In Norway policy making has been traditionally understood within a neo-corporatist framework. Following Rokkan (1987) two channels of influence – the numerical-democratic and the corporatist – have been distinguished in order to explain policy making processes in Norway and more generally in Scandinavian countries. Neo-corporatist institutional arrangements operate “the linkage between state and society through privileged participation of organized interests in policy, and through mutually supportive arrangements between the machinery of government on the one hand and large, centralized interest organizations on the other” (Streeck, 1991). Policy-making in such a context involves a privileged cooperation between a representative organization in the policy field and the machinery of government. Previous researches on policy-making in sport have used a neo-corporatist analytical framework in order to investigate policy-making processes (Goksøyr, 1992 and 1996). These researches have an historical focus and study the relationships between the state and the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC) during the period 1945-1990. They show a pattern of cooperation and of mutual dependency between the NOC and the state.

In Norway, sport has been traditionally organized on a voluntary basis. In fact, only voluntary organizations can be members of the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports. With 29 percent of all organizations and 26 percent of members, sport organizations form the largest sector within Norwegian voluntary organizations. In total, there are about 7000 sport organizations, based either on a single sport or multi-sport. All local sports clubs are federated at the regional level. Sport organizations are also federated at the national level according to discipline. There are 19 regional (or county) federations, and 56 national federations. Regional and national federations are represented under the umbrella organization, The Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NOC). This body enjoys a relatively high level of autonomy concerning both the regulation of organized sport and in allocating finance to organization within the sports sector. The regulations are determined internally and adopted by the sports council. Financing is largely in the form of state grants which are administrated by NOC without government intervention.
However, in most European countries, neo-corporatist institutional arrangements have recently experienced transformations from a system of integration of “representative” interest organizations towards a system of “competitive pluralism” where interest associations no longer have a monopoly of interest representation and have to compete with a wide variety of players of different and uncertain statuses (Streek, 1991). Within the field of Norwegian sport policy signs of increasing pluralism have become evident during the 1990s (Rommetvedt, 2002). In addition in previous studies the role played by the parliamentary channel in the policy-making process has not been studied, which may have led to overestimating the neo-corporatist character of the policy-making process.

The main question this article deals with is to determine whether policy-making within the sport field still happens within a corporatist framework or whether this is been replaced by other forms of institutional arrangements. The empirical material, on which this article is based on, consists of two case-studies of governmental sport policies implemented in 1999 and 2002. The following section gives a short presentation of the main theoretical approaches that are relevant for analyzing policy-making in Norwegian sport. The second section presents the methods of data collection while the third section presents the empirical material. Section four discusses the findings and concludes.

1. Theoretical background

Theoretical approaches of policy-making are numerous and diversified (Parsons, 1995, Birkland, 2001, Hill, 1997) and the aim here is not to survey the literature, but to give a short presentation of the major features of the main relevant approaches against which the Norwegian empirical findings will be discussed. Three approaches are particularly relevant for our purpose:

The first approach is the neo-corporatist developed during the 1970s by Schmitter. Following Schmitter (1979:13) neo-corporatism may be defined as:

a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated, categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports
Policy-making within a neo-corporatist setting will therefore be expected to involve, according to this definition, a limited number of actors. Among the actors the state will act in a unitary way i.e. the administrative machinery, the government and the parliament are expected to have the same viewpoint on policy matters. The (undifferentiated) state will have a privileged and asymmetrical relationship to an interest organization enjoying a monopolistic position as representative organization within the policy field.

The second approach is the *policy community* one. This approach may be understood as a type (Rhodes, 1997) of policy network (Jordan, 1990). The notion of policy network varies according to the authors considered (Jordan, 1990; Rhodes, 1990; Jordan & Schubert, 1992). A common feature is however the emphasis on the contextuality of policy-making and on the interplay between a plurality of state and non-state actors. For Löffler (2003:170): “Policy network consist of a variety of actors who all have their own goals and strategies but who are also dependent on each other to achieve the desired public policy outcomes”. Smith (1993:67) argues in the same direction emphasizing the role of state actors:

> The notion of policy networks is a way of coming to terms with the traditionally stark state/civil society dichotomy. … State actors are also actors in civil society; they live in society and have constant contact with groups which represent societal interests. Therefore the interests of state actors develop along with the interests of the group actors and the degree of autonomy that exists depends on the nature of policy networks.

In contrast to the neo-corporatist approach, policy network theories will not consider the state as a unified actor, but insist on the diversity and fragmentation of state actors. Within policy networks actors are inter-dependent due to resource dependencies (Jordan, 1990). The relationship between state actors and non-state actors will be characterized as symmetrical within a policy network, as a result of the fragmentation and diversity of state actors and of the mutual dependencies between actors. Power and information will be relatively equally distributed between actors leading them to seek compromises in the process of making policies.

Policy communities are a kind of policy network involving a limited number of actors (ministries, politicians, interest groups) and presenting four central features (Rhodes, 1997): the actors have frequent contacts, they have shared values and political conceptions, they share ideologies and political preferences, and are mutually dependent in terms of resources. These features contribute to the balance of power within the network:
Thus, the basic interaction is one involving bargaining between members with resources. There is a balance of power, not necessarily one in which all members equally benefit but one in which all members see themselves as in a positive-sum game. The structures of the participating groups are hierarchical so leaders can guarantee compliant members (Rhodes, 1997:44).

The last approach is that in terms of clientela relationship. This approach, developed by LaPalombara (1964), emphasizes the nature of the relationships between given public agencies and interest groups in the process of making policy decisions. LaPalombara (1964:262) defines a clientela relationship as follow:

The clientela relationship exists when an interest group, for whatever reasons, succeeds in becoming, in the eyes of a given administrative agency, the natural expression and representative of a given social sector which, in turn, constitutes the natural target or reference point for the activity of the administrative agency.

This kind of relationship is established because both sides to the relationship derive advantages from it. The interest organization within such a relationship expresses the interests of the field and defines the framework in which policies are made and implemented. Such a relationship is characterized by mutual dependencies between the partners: the interest organisation is dependent on the public agency for funding whereas the public agency is dependent upon the interest organization for information.

It is possible to sum up and contrast these three theoretical approaches along two dimensions: limited number of actors vs. plurality of actors; symmetrical vs. asymmetrical relationship. Neo-corporatism supposes the allocation of a monopoly of interest representation to an organization and an asymmetrical relationship between the unified state and the organization, whereas the policy community approach emphasizes the plurality of interest representation and the diversification/fragmentation of state actors, as well as the symmetrical (mutually dependent) relationships between actors. The clientela relationship approach is characterized in turn by a symmetrical relationship between a monopolistic interest group and a public agency.

2. Data and method

The data for this article are derived from interviews, analysis of policy documents and participant observation in meetings. The analysis is hermeneutic and involves interpretation of
the content of documents and the meanings expressed in interviews. 13 persons were interviewed during 2004. These persons were central actors in the policy processes studied, either as civil servants with the department of sport policy (Ministry of culture), decision-makers at the NOC and the national federations, or politicians and members of parliament. Key documents used as sources of data include a government White Paper (Stortingsmeldinger), reports by Parliamentary committees, Parliamentary discussions, political parties’ programs for the period 1983-2001, and NOC’s policy documents. Participant observations were made during the general assembly of the NOC in 2003 and 2004, NOC’s leaders meetings and NOC’s committees meetings in 2004.

The data collected are concerned with two policy decisions, each constituting a case-study. The first case is the elaboration and adoption of the White Paper (Stortingsmelding nr 14, 1999-2000) defining the content, goals and objectives of governmental sport policy. This document was adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 1999 and discussed by the Parliament in February 2001. The second case is the modification of the “Law 28. August 1992 nr 103 on money gambling”, which had significant consequences for sport funding. This law regulates the uses of the surpluses from the public owned gambling company (Norsk Tipping). Between 1992 and 2002 the surpluses were distributed equally between sport, culture and research goals. The surpluses were allocated to the responsible ministries outside the state budget and spent on activities related to sport, culture, and research. In 2002, after intense lobbying from the NOC, the Parliament changed the pattern of allocation and decided that the surpluses would be shared by sport and culture, research being from now financed in the state budget. Following this decision public funding to sport increased by about 340 millions NOK.

The cases were chosen in order to allow contrasting results. Yin (1994:46) notes that several cases may be chosen because this method either “(a) predicts similar results (literal replication) or (b) produces contrasted results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)”. The chosen cases cast different light over the ways sport policy is formed. The report from government to Parliament defines the broad governmental strategy, is concerned with the sport field in its entirety, and is initiated by a state actor (the sport administration). In contrast, the modification of the funding formula has an impact on the field’s economic framework, is concerned with allocative objectives and is initiated by a non-state actor (the NOC).
3. **Empirical results**

This section gives a presentation of the two case-studies, the process leading to the adoption of the governmental report to the Parliament on sport policy and the process leading to the changes in funding regulations. Since the analysis aims at characterizing the institutional context in which sport policy-making takes place (neo-corporatism, policy community, *clientela*), the presentation of each case will follow the same pattern beginning with the background for the policy decision, going on to describe the process, the actors involved and the type of relationships between actors.

**Case 1: Governmental report to the Parliament**

**Background**

The elaboration of the governmental report to the Parliament on sport policy (*Stortingsmelding* nr 14 1999-2000) took place in a context marked by the nature of the relationship between the NOC and the Department of Sport Policy, which was part of the Ministry of Culture. The adoption of the previous White Paper (*Stortingsmelding* nr 41 1991-1992) had been characterized by a conflict of interest and power between, on the one side, the Labour Party and the NOC and, on the other side, the Department of Sport Policy (Goksøyr, 1996). The disagreement between the two sides was about the extent to which the NOC (as an independent voluntary organization) should be directed by the state, as well as about who should control the division of the financial support from gambling surpluses. The Department of Sport Policy wished to increase the state control on NOC’s use of public money whereas the NOC did not recognize gambling funds as public money.

The NOC is mainly funded through the allocation of gambling funds. In 1998, 622 millions NOK came from this funding source and were allocated to the Department of Sport Policy who transferred about 300 millions to the NOC. The earlier White Paper to the Parliament in 1992 did not entirely accept the demands of the Department of Sport Policy to direct the NOC. However in 1998 the Auditor General of Norway inspected the NOC and concluded that NOC’s reporting routines in matters of public fund use were not satisfactory (Riksrevisjonen, 1997). With the new governmental report to the Parliament on sport policy the Department of
Sport Policy was aiming to get the support of the Parliament in order to increase its direction over the NOC.

Another important background element is that, in 1998, the Minister of Culture promised to present to Parliament another White Paper in 1999, as compensation for the abolition of government funding from the Department of Sport Policy. Before 1998, the Department of Sport Policy was funded mainly by gambling surpluses (outside the state budget) and received only modest funding from the state budget (9 millions NOK in 1998 which constituted just 1,4 % of the total budget of sport). The Parliament’s vote of the state budget allocated to sport constituted also an occasion to discuss sport policy issues. After the state budget funds were abolished, and given the new funding structure of the Department of Sport Policy (funds coming from gambling surpluses outside the state budget), the main occasions for the Parliament to express itself on sport issues (and for the Department of Sport Policy to get political support) would become the discussions related to the adoption of the White Paper. The production of a new White Paper was therefore initiated as a result of a compromise between the minister and the Parliament.

Process

The report was produced at a short notice. The Department of Sport Policy was compelled by the minister’s promise to deliver a White Paper in 1999. The writing of the report was directed by the chief of the department and was mainly undertaken by two executives of the department. No public hearing was held during the writing period, several informants confirming that the writing was produced by the Department of Sport Policy alone and that only a few limited issues were formally discussed with other actors. Still several informants point out that there were an informal dialog between the Department of Sport Policy and the NOC. Informants from the Department of Sport Policy emphasized that they knew what NOC would accept within different policy areas and therefore how far they could go in stating policy objectives and policy instruments. They also that they have learned from the process related to former White Paper.

The report reaffirms the vision of “sport for all” as central to sport policy. Three important political messages are expressed by the report. First, public funding is reserved to voluntary sport and commercial sport is excluded from public support. Second, a new policy instrument – the local activity fund – is created allowing the department of sport policy to support
directly local initiatives. Third, the principle of an evaluation of NOC’s use of public funds is affirmed.

The report was first discussed by a specialized Parliamentary committee and then discussed in plenary session and adopted. During the plenary discussion a proposition, aiming at modifying the principle for the allocation of gambling funds to culture and sport, was put forwards by the Progress Party. The proposition was rejected but would get a new life in 2002.

**Actors**

Few actors were involved in the process of adopting the governmental report to Parliament. The main actors were the Minister of Culture, the Department of Sport Policy, the Parliament, especially the committee for culture and family affairs, and the NOC. At the department level few persons were involved in shaping the department’s policy orientation without any formal contact to the rest of the field, but with some informal contact with the NOC. During the parliamentary phase the committee proceeded to hearings involving representatives from the NOC and some experts. From the political parties there was relative agreement on the political orientations with the exception of the Progress Party who clearly took the side of the NOC against the department of sport policy.

**Relationships between actors**

The formal contacts between actors during this policy process were limited to the hearings before the parliamentary committee and were limited to few actors. Most of the contacts between actors were informal especially during the writing phase. Three persons appear as central, both because of their role during the process and because of their positions within different networks. The chief of the department during this period, H.B. Skaset, had been previously president of the NOC and had extensive networks within the organization especially at the political level of the organization. The deputy director of the department, P. Glomsaker, seems to have made use of his networks among sport professional leaders. A third person, G. Fossli, had a special position, being at the same time a member of Parliament (for the Socialist Party) and a member of the NOC’s executive committee.

**Summing up**

The process leading to the adoption of the governmental report to parliament may be divided in two phases: administrative and political. The first phase consists in the elaboration and
writing of the report where the Department of Sport Policy was the key actor. This was a closed process with no formal contact with actors in the field, but involving numerous informal contacts. In contrast, the second phase, consisting in the hearing by the parliamentary committee and the adoption by the parliament, involved a plurality of actors and formal contacts between actors. The main actors were the political parties and their elected representatives to the Parliament, the Department of Sport Policy, and the NOC and its representatives.

**Case 2: Changes in funding regulation**

**Background**

*Norsk Tipping*, the publicly owned gambling company, was created in 1948 and has been since the main funding source of sport. The surpluses of this company were from the beginning, allocated to social goals such as research and sport and later on culture. The question of the distribution of funds between the different goals has been, since the creation of the company, a conflict issue for organized sport (Goksøyr, 1992). After 1998 when sport was no longer funded by the state budget, changing the principle of distribution has become the only way for the department of sport policy, and indirectly for the NOC, to increase their resources and the public funds allocated to sport activities. A little change in the principle of distribution has significant consequences on the amounts available to sport finalities. As we have seen a proposal from the Progress Party was put forwards in 1998 in order to transfer the funds allocated to research to the state budget and to increase the share allocated to sport and culture. In 1999 NOC’s general assembly adopted as a priority for action to increase the share allocated to sport from 33% to 50% by transferring the funding of research to the state budget.

**Process**

The process leading to the change of the funding was initiated by the NOC. This was confirmed by the informants both with the NOC and the Parliament. A politician stated: “The NOC has obtained this repartition key change through a good and durable lobbying activity”. In addition to its lobby activities at the national level the NOC engaged in lobbying at the local level during the election campaign in 2001. Before the elections, given the pressure exercised by the NOC on the political parties, the Labour government announced the creation of a committee in order to investigate the extent of public support for sport. The new rightwing coalition government that came out of the elections was not favorable to changing
the principle of funding. The NOC continued its lobby activity with the opposition parties in the Parliament. The government was supported by a minority coalition in the Parliament and was only able to govern because of the divisions between the other parties, and notably the Labour Party on the left side and the Progress Party on the extreme right. In such a political context, the NOC sought to obtain the support of both the Socialist Party and the Progress Party. The main obstacle to this alliance was for the opposition parties to agree on the way research would be funded if the funding pattern were to be changed. Negotiations between the Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and the Progress Party led to an agreement. The funds allocated to research would not be reduced and would be transferred to the state budget. This agreement allowed the Progress Party to put forward a proposal aimed at modifying the funding pattern for the allocation of surpluses from Norsk Tipping. Parliament accepted, against the wishes of the Government, this proposal.

_Actors_

The NOC played a central role in conducting the lobbying activities that led to the modification of the law and increased the public funding for sport. In this case, in addition to the central organization of the NOC, the regional federations were also very active in lobbying parties’ candidates during the elections and members of Parliament after the elections. Among the political parties the Progress Party also played an important role since it supported from the outset the NOC proposal and put forward the proposal before the Parliament. The Labour Party and its leaders also played a decisive role during this process by leading the negotiations which resulted in a compromise between the opposition parties. From the governmental side one has to differentiate between the position of the minister, who was against this proposal, and the position of the Department for Sport Policy who could not officially support the proposal but who saw in it the opportunity for increasing its financial means and therefore influence.

_Relationships between actors_

Few actors, the NOC, the political parties and the Ministry of Culture (and indirectly the Department for Sport Policy) were involved in the process. The relationships between the main actors, the NOC, the political parties, the Department for Sport Policy, were both formal and informal. Most of NOC’s lobbying activity towards the Parliament did not take place within a formal framework, but there were informal contacts between the NOC and the political parties, especially the Socialist Party. Because of the importance and popularity of
sport in Norwegian society, the parties were receptive to the pressures exercised by the NOC. Within the triangle formed by the NOC, the political parties and the ministry, the NOC was able to counterbalance its relative lack of power in relation to the Department of Sport Policy by getting political support within the parliament.

**Summing up**

The process leading to the change in the funding principle and the increase of financial means allocated to sport was the result of the lobbying activity of the NOC. In spite of governmental opposition, the NOC was able to mobilize a majority in Parliament in order to support its policy objectives. Even if it is difficult to get hard evidence on this particular element, it is likely that the NOC got the informal support of the sport administration who would benefit from the success of the action. The change of the funding principle may be therefore be analyzed as a result of a successful alliance and cooperation within the sport policy community.

4. **Discussion and conclusion**

The main question we want to discuss here is to determine to what extent these two case-studies, illustrating recent policy-decisions within sport in Norway, reflect a neo-corporatist framework for policy-making, or whether the institutional framework has gone through a transformation and has to be understood in other terms. Previous literature on sport policy in Norway has characterized policy-making as “a corporatist governance system” (Goksøyr, 1996). If one characterizes a neo-corporatist system as (i) involving a limited number of actors, (ii) an undifferentiated state and (iii) a formal asymmetrical relationship between the (undifferentiated) state and a monopolistic interest organization, the two cases presented here do not meet the criteria for characterizing the institutional framework as neo-corporatist.

The first case, the process related to the governmental report to the Parliament, involves a few actors (mainly the NOC, the Department of Sport Policy and the Parliament) within the formal part of the process, but the state does not appear undifferentiated, even if the different actors within the state (minister, Department of Sport Policy and Parliament) seem to converge. In addition, the informal part of the process involves a greater number of actors involved in informal networks linked together through mutual dependency relations. The relationship between the NOC and the Department of Sport Policy is one of mutual
dependency. The NOC is dependent upon the department in order to get funding while the
department is dependent upon the NOC in order to implement its policy, given the “private
government” character of the NOC for the sport field. But the exchanges between the
different components of the NOC (the regional and national federations and the central
organization) and the department do not occur only through formal channels but also through
informal contacts involving also mutual dependencies between the actors. As a matter of fact,
the type of institutional framework in which the policy-making process described in the first
case takes place is better characterized as a clientela relationship involving a symmetrical
relationship between a monopolistic interest group and a public agency.

The second case, the modification of the funding principle, involves also a limited number of
actors, the NOC, the political parties, the Parliament, the ministry, the department of sport
policy. Here also the state does not appear as undifferentiated and its different components do
not act in a coordinated way. The leading actor here is the NOC, but the obtained change was
made possible by the alliance of several actors. The alliance between opposition parties and
the NOC, but also informally including the sport department, is conclusive. The relationships
between the NOC and the political parties are also characterized by mutual dependencies. On
the one hand, the NOC is dependent upon political support in order to get additional financial
means, but on the other hand, politicians are dependent upon the NOC for increasing their
legitimacy. In the Norwegian context, where sport is part of the national identity (remember
Lillehammer Olympic Games), no politician is willing, either to appear uninterested in sport,
or to deny support to millions of volunteers involved in day to day sport activities. The
lobbying activities carried on by the NOC did not take place (until it became a law proposal)
within a formal setting. The relationships between the NOC and the Parliament are not
institutionalized in the manner one would expect to find in a neo-corporatist framework. The
policy-making institutional framework characterizing this case appears therefore as meeting
the criteria usually applying to policy community - plurality of interest,
diversification/fragmentation of state actors, symmetrical (mutually dependent) relationships
between actors – rather that those applying to neo-corporatism.

These two case-studies seem to indicate that the neo-corporatist model that used to
characterize the sport field from 1946 onwards has been undergoing during the last decade
transformations, even if some neo-corporatist features persist. Two changes may explain this
transformation: the politicizing of sport and the department’s will to govern. The politicizing
of sport is exemplified by the NOC’s new lobbying activity reflecting an increasing self-consciousness about its capacity in influencing political decision due to its deep anchoring within the Norwegian people. It reflects also the increasing importance of sport in politics, both at the national and global levels, leading to an increased interest on behalf of the politicians and the political parties. This politicizing of sport allowed the NOC to seek new alliances and to form an influential policy community in order to realize its interests. This new role of the NOC may be also the result of the department’s attempts to increase its power and control over the NOC. Reacting to the department’s will to govern, the NOC succeeded in rebalancing the relationship with the department by getting political support within the Parliament. The new turn taken by the relationship between the NOC and the Department of Sport Policy, reducing the importance of formal contacts and developing informal contacts with the different components of the NOC (and so doing turning the NOC’s official representative structure), may be also understood as the result of the department’s need to get direct information and influence outside the formal channels. The department’s will to govern, expressed in the White Paper by the need for evaluating NOC’s use of public fund and by the creation of a new policy instrument aimed at supporting local initiatives, led to the development of clientela relationships with key actors within the sport field in order to get autonomy from the NOC. As a result the former neo-corporatist framework, if still structuring the formal relationships between the NOC and the Department of Sport Policy, has become obsolete for understanding the way policy is made within the sport field. The new institutional landscape appears as a two-tier system involving both clientela relationships and policy community features and reflecting the power struggle going on between the two main actors of the field, namely the NOC and the department of sport policy.

The two case-studies presented in this article indicate a transformation of the institutional framework in which sport policy is made in Norway from a neo-corporatist setting to a mixed setting involving clientela relationships and policy community relationships. Further researches are needed in order firstly, to test, by extending the scope of the policy decisions analyzed, the diagnosis made in this article. Those two case-studies obviously do not allow generalization of the findings and need to be complemented by similar studies. Secondly, further researches are needed in order to investigate whether the institutional constellation outlined as a result of the analysis (a mixed setting involving clientela and policy community relationships) is durable and reflects an institutional equilibrium, or whether this institutional
constellation is transitional and likely to evolve towards another type of institutional framework.

References:


Stortingsmelding nr 41 (1991-92) ”Idretten – folkebevegelse og folkeforlystelse”

Stortingsmelding nr 14 (1999-2000) ”Idrettslivet i endring”
