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# **Power and Domination in Sport Policy and Politics –Three Intertwined Levels of Exercising Power**

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# **Power and Domination in Sport Policy and Politics –Three Intertwined**

## **Levels of Exercising Power**

### **Abstract**

In this paper I discuss the fruitfulness of a three-level approach for studying power and domination in sport policy and politics, derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Steven Lukes. This approach provides new insight into the deep structures that form sport policy and politics. Bourdieu's concepts of social field, symbolic capital, and symbolic power are invaluable for examining and revealing important aspects of power in sport policy and politics. To paint a fuller picture of power-relations, I have supplemented the Bourdieusian approach with Lukes' three-dimensional perspective on power. Lukes' third dimension of power resembles Bourdieu's emphasis on how one's perceptions and preferences are shaped to legitimate the existing order of things. I argue further that Lukes' second dimension of power – focusing on situations where decisions in potential conflicts are hindered (i.e., agenda setting) – partly relates to Bourdieu's perspective. However, Bourdieu focuses less on the direct exercising of power in political processes, which resembles the first dimension advocated by Lukes. I argue that it is necessary for this dimension of power to be incorporated into the study of sport policy. Moreover, the three dimensions can be viewed as intertwined levels in an analysis of specific social fields, specifically the sport (policy) field. Norwegian sport policy in general and local facility policy specifically serves as the empirical basis for the current analysis.

Key words: Bourdieu, Lukes, power, policy, sport, Norway

# **Power and Domination in Sport Policy and Politics –Three Intertwined**

## **Levels of Exercising Power**

### **Introduction**

Sport has become a political concern in many western countries (Chalip, Johnson and Stachura 1996, Green and Houlihan 2005, Bergsgard, Houlihan, Mangset, Nødland, Rommetvedt 2007; Nicholson, Hoye and Houlihan 2011). Even in more liberal countries like the United Kingdom and Australia where sport has been traditionally regarded as a private affair, sport has become more of a political issue. In 1996 Chalip, Johnson and Stachura wrote in their introduction to *National Sport Policies. An International Handbook* (1996, p. vii): ‘Nevertheless, as the chapters show, the phenomenon of extensive government involvement in sport is relatively recent, having arisen primarily in the post-World War II era. This may further explain the relative paucity of scholarly work on national sports policies’. In the decades after, studies of sport policy and politics have become more frequent, as seen with the launch of the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* in 2009, and the *Routledge Handbook of Sport Policy* (Henry and Ko 2014). The predominant issue pursued today is how to study sport policy and politics. Some researchers have focused on the network of stakeholders, via the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Houlihan and White 2002, Green and Houlihan 2005), emphasizing policy communities and policy networks (Houlihan 1997), or focusing on governance (Grix 2010, Goodwin and Grix 2011, Thing and Ottesen 2010, Fahlen, Eliasson and Wickman 2015). Others have examined sport policy using neo-institutional theory on organizations (Slack 1997, Kikulis 2002, Augestad, Bergsgard and Hansen 2007, Alm 2016, Alm and Storm 2017), or used path dependency theory (Houlihan and Green 2008). Lastly, some have explored institutional changes, both in the political system and in sport, to study sport policy and politics (Bergsgard and Rommetvedt 2006, Bergsgard *et al.* 2007).

This short review outlines some of the dominant approaches but remains undeniably incomplete. However, it remains apparent that a significant amount of these approaches tends to concentrate on political processes and institutional arrangements, the stability or development in these areas, and on the consequences for policy outcomes. In this paper I will present one approach that takes into consideration not only the political and the institutional processes, but with an emphasis on the comprehensive structured power relations that form sport policy and politics. Here I present a three-level approach for studying power and domination in sport policy and politics, inspired by the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Steven Lukes. This approach brings a fresh perspective to the underlying structures that form sport policy and politics. Bourdieu's concepts of social field, symbolic capital, and symbolic power are highly valuable for examining and revealing important aspects of power in sport policy and politics. In order to achieve a more comprehensive description of power-relations, I have supplemented the Bourdieusian approach with an examination of other dimensions of power. In this instance, Steven Lukes' three-dimensional view on power proves relevant. His third dimension resembles Bourdieu's emphasis on how individuals' perceptions and preferences legitimate the existing order of things. I argue that Lukes' second dimension – focusing on situations in which decisions in potential conflicts are hindered (i.e., agenda setting) – is partly related to Bourdieu's perspective on the discourses in a field (its *nomos*). However, Bourdieu focuses less on the direct exercising of power, for instance, in political processes compared to the one-dimensional view according to Lukes. I argue that the integration of this dimension of power is critical when studying sport policy. Furthermore, these three dimensions are interwoven aspects in the analysis of specific social fields, such as the sport (policy) field (Bergsgard 2005, 2017). Each level of power will have an impact on the other levels, often reinforcing each other to promote a specific outcome.

Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus is used in several studies on sport: studies on sport and social class, on habituation and sport practices, and on sport and social capital (see *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Sport* Giulianotti 2015). However, there is a gap in literature addressing sport policy and politics. For example, in the *Handbook on sport policy* (Henry and Ko 2014) Bourdieu is only mentioned in the introduction to an approach based on Foucault (Piggin 2014) and in relation to a discussion of social capital and sport policy (Skille 2014). In Grix' *Sport Politics. An Introduction* (2006), Bourdieu is not referred to at all.

Thus, introducing Bourdieu in policy studies of sport is rather uncommon. Taking this into account, there are approaches that resemble the three-level approach currently present. Some earlier approaches have focused on how deep structural values constitute important constraints on policy (See i.e. Houlihan and White 2002, Bergsgard *et al.* 2007). In Bergsgard *et al.* (2007, chp. 3) a whole chapter is devoted to underlying structures and policy paradigms, however these concepts act mainly as political and historical context for analyzing sport policy and politics for the four countries involved in the study. They are to a lesser extent included and operationalized in the analyses of concrete policy institutions, processes, and outcomes. In a study of elite sport development, Green and Houlihan (2005, p. 6-7) refers both to critical realism and Lukes' three dimensions of power to provide a more complete picture of sport policy processes. However, it is the theoretical lens of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) that is given priority (an approach that resembles the second level of power in the current three-level approach). For example, in the concluding discussion Green and Houlihan (2005, p.181-189) refers to the usefulness of including an indirect form of power embodied in and mediated by the structure of elite sport development. Nevertheless, I will argue that they place less emphasis on *why* and *how* these structures emerge, and more on what takes place within these structures – the networks, coalitions and power-relations.

Another perspective that possess similarities to the theoretical approach at question, is that presented by Grix as the modified ‘decentered approach’ to governance (Grix 2010, Goodwin and Grix 2011). The decentered approach re-inserts the individual at the center of analysis, and emphasizes the importance of ideas and beliefs for explaining policy and politics. Grix (2010, p 162) modifies this by including ‘institution and structure as useful for explanation in themselves’, and it is accepted that some cases structures may have effect ‘on people’s beliefs and attitudes’. Grix highlights this grey area between ‘critical realism’ and ‘interpretivism’, gravitating towards the latter as ‘hard interpretivism’.

The three-level approach to power, however, leans more towards the critical realism side, i.e. structures, discourses, institutions per se have effects on people’s beliefs, values, and attitudes. This does not imply that agents are required to merely replicate these structures, there is a potential for both generating new structures and redefining existing ones. Steadfast, my approach primarily emphasizes structure and institution, and less on an agent’s generative and recreating practices.

The paper is structured as follows. I start out presenting the theoretical perspective. Then I will, with the Norwegian sport policy in general and the elite sport policy and the facility policy more specifically as the empirical basis, argue for its relevance.<sup>1</sup> I do this by describing the emergence of and the structures in the Norwegian field of sport. I then use the theoretical approach to analyze two distinct and relevant empirical cases, the institutionalization of an elite sport unit in Norway, Olympiatoppen, and the ‘Hall in the north’-project, a large sport facility project. Finally, I sum up the analysis and discuss the implications and relevance that follows my theoretical approach.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of Norwegian sources are mine.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

In 1974, the American sociologist Steven Lukes published *Power: A Radical View* (updated 2005) that identified three dimensions or faces of power. The first dimension emphasizes the direct exercise of power to advance a given outcome in a manifest conflict. The second dimension of power -- also known as agenda setting -- arises in situations where potential conflicting cases are excluded as non-relevant. The third dimension of power focuses on the latent conflicts and cases where there are antagonistic interests between the one executing power and the true interest of the one without power. Some people have the power to prevent others from having grievances 'by perceptions, cognitions, and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely, ordained or beneficial' (Lukes 2005, p. 28). The third dimension involves changing one's perceptions and shaping their preferences; the basis for engaging in such symbolic production that defines the situation is related to the actor's (organization/agent) *symbolic capital*, following Bourdieu (1992, 2000). Symbolic capital is an exchange of the other species of capital (economic, cultural, social) in the daily social game, referred to as the operationalization of capital, or, as Bourdieu points out, the *symbolic effects of capital*. Different types of capital are exchanged and transformed into effective rhetoric. Symbolic capital confers *symbolic power*, 'as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself' (Bourdieu 1992, p.170). Symbolic power is a transformed and transfigured form of power based on economic, cultural, social capital, and thus is unrecognized as power and subsequently seen as legitimate.

Power needs to justify itself, and Weber (1968) emphasizes three ideal types of authority as the basis for legitimation: traditional by norms and existing institutions, charismatic by the gift of grace by the ruler, and legal/rational through laws, rules, and bureaucracy. Weber underlined that the legal authority, in its purest form as bureaucratic power, dominates modern western society. However, an emphasis on its neo-institutional aspects and the symbolic side of the exercising power, directs us to a more differentiated approach than the one that is based solely on the legal authority. We see this clearly in the third dimension of power. With this symbolic and structural power it is difficult to distinguish legitimacy of power from its actual exercise, since what we can call the justification processes primarily entails concealing that it is a matter of power. The exercise of power is taken for granted. For Bourdieu, symbolic power is to shape others' understanding of the situation as given: 'For symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it' (Bourdieu 1992, p.164).

When power relations are stable and enduring based in differences in resources (economic, political, symbolic), they take the form of domination. Weber defines domination as 'the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons... every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance...' (1968, p. 212). With Bourdieu (1992, 2000) we can add: Compliance by misrecognition (symbolic violence), that is a domination-structure based on the symbolic order that are again rooted in the principles of hierarchy in different social fields, principles that determine the validity of cultural, economic, and social capital. This symbolic dominance exists beyond the compelling power and consent by reason, between mechanical coercion and voluntary endorsement, not in the pure awareness, but in habitus' gloomy world of dispositions (Bourdieu 2000, p. 168-172). Consequently, my central argument is that this kind

of dominance is grounded in a deep structural level, forming a basis for assertion of power on the other levels. This argument is inspired by the *critical realist* tradition that emphasizes three ontological levels of reality where in which the deep level of structures, powers and mechanisms can only be interpreted and observed via the actual level – events and state of affairs – and the empirical level – perceptions, impressions, sensations (Bhaskar 1989, Sayer 1992). The structures and powers at the deep level affects the other two levels regardless of whether we recognize them or not, and are thus seen as real in an ontological sense. ‘Whereas the real in this definition refers to the structures and powers of objects, the actual refers to what happens if and when those powers are activated, to what they do and what eventuates when they do...’ (Sayer 1992, p 12). Thus, the third dimension of power, relating to symbolic dominance and located at the deep/real level, transcends the two other dimensions, and can in many cases be more enduring than, for instance, domination based on the distribution of economic resources.

Turning to sport policy and politics, further investigation of government policy regarding the sports field and politics on the sport field is necessary (Bergsgard 2005). Moreover, policy and politics both consist of decisions concerning the distribution of scarce material goods and about creating commonness, meaning, and coherence through political processes and discourses, according to Olsen (1988, p. 40). It is about recognition, accumulated in the form of a symbolic capital of being widely known and respected, which grants one the authority to force through the legitimate view of the social world, in Bourdieu’s words (2000, p. 240-246). Consequently, the political struggle at the sport field is not only a struggle for scarce resources, but perhaps even more about the meaning of the activity, thus creating both identification and the ability to speak on behalf of the field. As we will see, the ability to define one’s needs is a crucial prerequisite for fulfilling said needs. Thus, if such discourses have political outcomes (distribution of resources, regulations, and institutional

arrangement), then one may argue that political and symbolic capital overlap. Here I will identify how the field of sport, due to historical political processes and struggles, forms the basis for concrete decisions in today's political processes by controlling what is and is not taken for granted and consequently transforming different forms of capital into symbolic power. I view sport policy and politics as a struggle for resources, be prioritized in planning, and shaping the preliminary understanding of various sports activities, thereby creating identification and acceptance of the needs of specific sports activities. Again, being able to define one's needs as natural and unchangeable (cf. Lukes' definition of the third dimension of power) is an important prerequisite for the impact in sport policy.

From the previous presentation follows a model for analyzing power and domination in sport policy and politics that includes three separate but intertwined analytical levels: 1) the direct and formal exercising of power in defined political processes, decisions, and negotiations; 2) the institutionalized structure of power/informal power/agenda setting; and 3) the symbolic/discursive power that frames how we understand the social world, that forms a room of discourse, thus structuring the cultural and social relations in each field. The key here is that the three dimensions of power will often cooperate with and reinforce each other (but they can also counteract each other), still they can be analyzed as three separate levels of power execution. There are three areas in which such a three-level approach can increase our understanding of sport policy, and may fill some theoretical gaps. First, to include deep-level structures in dialogue and exchange with the remaining two levels of exercising of power, not only as context, is to imply a more profound understanding of the outcome of political processes. Second, this approach escapes the fallacy of merely providing a descriptive categorization of the actual or by producing a normative political science, by focusing on the mechanisms and processes that lead to and legitimate political institutions. Third, such an

approach includes a diachronic perspective on current political issues. ‘All sociology should be historical, and all history sociological’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 90).

### **Theoretical Informed Analyses of Norwegian Sport Policy and Politics**

The first step in this type of analysis of sport policy and politics is to define the structure of the sport field.

#### ***The Power Structure of the Norwegian Sport Field***

##### *The Emergence of a Norwegian Sport Field*

According to Bourdieu, to understand the field of sports, it is important to see ‘...that the *social definition of sports* is an object of struggle, that the field of sporting practices is the site of struggles where the stake, *inter alia*, is the monopolistic capacity to impose the legitimate definition of sports practice and of the legitimate function of sporting activity –’ (1978, p. 826). In Norway, we can trace these struggles to 19th-century milestones: the dominance of English sports and the rise of the Olympic movement (Olstad 1987/1994). These developments gave way for English sports to assert competing hegemony over the German gymnastics movement, concurrent with the increased organization and institutionalization of modern sports, with series, associations, and sports producers. The (re)establishment of the Olympic Games led to the increased focus on achievement sports, the regime of victory, and records (Tangen 1997). ‘Sportization’ is used as a concept to capture this development of the modern Western sport up until today (Maguire 2007). In Norway, development from the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th century contained a latent and partially evident contrast between two perspectives on sports, that are closely related to, but cannot be reduced to, these international developments (Olstad 1987/1994, Goksøy 1992). One

perspective emphasized the overall value (sport as a mean for other causes) and the other emphasized the intrinsic value of sports (sport as an end in itself). After World War II, the two former national sport confederations representing each of these views on sport, merged into one major confederation that included nearly all organized sport in Norway, namely Norwegian Confederation of Sport (NIF). NIF institutionalized the two views of sport in two organizational pillars: one as a means for other ends and the second as an end in itself, corresponding with the regional confederations and the National Federations<sup>2</sup> respectively (Bergsgard 2005). Further, like in Sweden (see Norberg 2004), achievement sport – i.e. intrinsic values – became the dominant sport practice in the Norwegian sports movement throughout the 20th century; the English sport obtained hegemony.

From the Norwegian government perspective, sport has been seen as means to other ends. In this respect, sport was connected to the welfare state project. This was especially pronounced in the decades following World War II, but then gradually weakened. Since the 1970s, the government has placed more emphasis on the intrinsic value of sports as a leisure activity.<sup>3</sup> A quote from a white paper on sport underlines this: ‘Earlier the health benefits from sport and physical activities were highlighted. As sport gradually became a part of the concept of culture, the intrinsic value has increased its significance when it comes to governmental support. Intrinsic values includes often qualities like experience of joy, mastery and unity’ (White paper no. 14, 1999-2000, p. 13). Slagstad (1998, p. 344) points out that development has shifted from regarding sport as an important aspect of the welfare state project to seeing

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<sup>2</sup> The first, *Idrettskrets*, is based on the counties and thus geographical localisation, while the latter, *Særforbund* organise and have the responsibility for a single sport in all Norway, such as the Norwegian Football Association, Norwegian Basketball Association.

<sup>3</sup> However, health and integration has been important factors in the Governmental politics of sports after 1970, but more as a spin-off from sports activities than as a primary goal.

sport as sectorial policy, from a focus on sports as ‘welfare culture’ to today’s ‘sports culture’. Thus, from the 1960/70s the emphasis on sport’s intrinsic values gained prominence; both within the sports movement and from the government’s perspective, sport emerged as a separate social field in the Bourdieusian sense. The self-oriented achievement sport appeared as the legitimate sport activity, whose representation provides the sports capital that is necessary to define the field.

During this period, specific agents appeared that drew symbolic power and their legitimacy from the field itself. To determine those agents, their structure and limitations, it is important to decide what type of capital is recognized as valuable (Munk and Lind 2004). Acknowledged sports achievements are such a legitimate foundation for capital in the field of sport (Bergsgard 2005). This can both be related to the agent’s embodied sports capital (habitus) and the organization’s institutionalized sports capital. These agents take possession of a sports-specific mentality: a specific way of seeing the world. The basic understanding and categorization of what is the correct sport, of what may or may not be said, and what falls under debate, became internalized both as cognitive structures and bodily manners.

However, we need to add an institutional angle to the current understanding of the sport field. According to a white paper on sport from the Ministry Culture Affairs: ‘It is *common* to equate sport and the activities taking place in the sports organizations... Physical activities mean self-organized sports and exercise activities’ (my emphasis, White paper no. 14, 1999-2000, p. 36). The government draws a line between *sport* that takes place in organizations, consequently within NIF, and *physical activities*. Why is it ‘common’ to equate sport with organized sport within NIF? Is it a natural or obvious equation? NIF’s near-monopoly of organized achievement sport after 1945 has made ‘sport’ and ‘Norwegian sport’ synonymous with NIF. A fellow meaning of the term ‘sport’, singular definite form, refers to one uniform sport and legitimate sport practice. For the leadership of NIF it is important to

sediment this understanding of a uniform and united sports movement, so they can speak on behalf of all sport in Norway, to speak with one tongue. NIF's own slogan from 1971 is thus striking: "There is only one sport!" (Tønnesson 1986, p. 342).

### *The Symbolic Order of the Sport Field*

The symbolic order in the sports field is classified as a social construct: a historical design that is recreated through 'the inscription of social in things and in bodies [...], with the resulting effects of symbolical violence' (Bourdieu 2000, p. 181). The hierarchical principles at the field are materialized in the individual agent's mentality, objectified in the prize cabinet or sports grounds, and institutionalized in the organizations. Terms like 'the sport' and 'Norwegian sport' – representing the legitimate sports activity – reminds us of this symbolic order. The common sense that 'sport is good', expresses the true symbolic order. Related to Bourdieu's (2000, p. 182-188) description of the political field's doxa, that politics is important and only politicians have the skills to engage in politics, in addition to the examination above, the following may appear as the basic *dogma (doxa)* of the field of sport in Norway: *Sport (read: achievement sport) is good and best within NIF*. This is a statement that 'goes without saying because it comes without saying' (Bourdieu 1977, p. 167).

Inside the field of the undisputable, there is also a 'universe of discourse' following Bourdieu (1977, p 168). Yet there remain organizing laws (in sport referred to as the 'laws of gravity', see later) that address the principle of division between true and false, right and wrong, what can be said or not, or what Bourdieu refers to as a field's *nomos*. In the discussion on which sports practices receive most recognition, ascetic sport practice is overwhelmingly regarded as most prestigious (see also Bergsgard 2005, pp. 262-265). To paraphrase the George Orwell novella, *Animal Farm*, 'some sporting practices are more equal

than others.’ Due to its historical status as Norway’s national sport, cross-country skiing acts both as an example and an important criterion for this established definition. The ski-sport milieu has traditionally met any innovation with great skepticism. Football, Norway’s largest sport, remains influenced by the gravity of this definition, despite tensions (Augestad and Bergsgard 2007, pp. 92-97). In addition, if we look at the ongoing debate on the relationship between top-level and grassroots sports, we find that this contradiction does not dispute the field’s doxa, as both positions end with the legitimate basic definition of sport. In fact, it supports the dominance structure and nomos of the field, since the participants in this debate do not comment on or contest the field’s doxa.

Thus defining the game is critical. *Who is in, who is out.* From the above we learned that the achievement-oriented sport is the legitimate practice in the sports field, and representation of achievement sports generates sports capital. In this discussion, we saw that this legitimate sports practice must take place inside the NIF-system. Self-organized sports activities are thus not legitimate sport practice and consequently fall on the outskirts of the sports field -- even if they are often achievement and competition oriented.

### *The Political Implication – the Distribution of Governmental Funding*

Before we delve deeper into two distinct empirical cases, I will briefly present the most important political implication of this symbolic order at the sport field, the distribution of resources. The distribution of gaming funds (from the National Lottery) to sport after WWII has been viewed as an important measure in governmental sport policy and has subsequently defined relations between dominant participants (see Bergsgard 2005; Bergsgard and Rommetvedt 2006). The gaming fund institution has affected the relationship between NIF and its national federations, the governmental specialist ministry in question, as well as the

Norwegian Parliament. It has resulted in increased contact between NIF and the sports bureaucracy within the Ministry of Culture. Simultaneously, NIF's role as gaming fund distributor to the affiliated organizations implied that the national federations were tied more closely to NIF. Outside NIF, no gaming funds were available, as Tønnesson (1986, p. 298) notes in his description of post-war Norwegian sports. Goksøy and his co-authors (1996, p.126) point out that, 'Even if NIF had no lawful monopoly on the gaming funds, they were not very interested in distributing the money outside their domain. If applicants were to receive a share of sport's income from the gaming money, they would have to become a part of the NIF system'. The guidelines for gaming fund distribution relay that a substantial part of the contribution must be allocated to NIF *and* sports facilities. In practical sports politics, the latter has resulted in facilities for traditional achievement sports, therefore sports clubs/national federations affiliated to NIF have acted as the primary beneficiary (Goksøy et.al. 1996, Rafoss and Breivik 2012. Bergsgard et al. 2017). However, there are now signs of minor changes; in 2016 more than one-quarter of the gaming money for facilities went to facilities primarily for self-organized sporting activity.

Still, it is reasonable to state that the gaming money institution and the distribution of funding rely on the symbolic order in the sport field. Without the rhetorical maneuver where *the sport* is held synonymous with NIF, the symbolic capital following the representation of *Norwegian sport* and the ability to define the right sport practices, it is hard to see that NIF and its members should have a near-monopoly on public funding, since most of the population's sporting practices take place outside NIF (Bergsgard 2011).

### ***Exercising of Power: the Cases of Elite Sport Policy and Sport Facility Policies***

In this part, I present two empirical cases from Norwegian sport policy and politics that exemplifies the relevance of my theoretical perspective.

### *The Institutionalization of an Elite Sport Unit in Norway – position and opposition*

Since 1992, Norway has seen almost unprecedented success in elite sports. This success has been attributed to Olympiatoppen, established in 1988 as the central coordinating unit for elite sport development in Norway (Augestad, Bergsgard and Hansen 2006, Augestad and Bergsgard 2007). In 1996, the Norwegian Confederation of Sport (NIF) joined forces with the Norwegian Olympic Committee (NOC) to form the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sport (still NIF). From then on, Olympiatoppen has held the position of the elite sport division within NIF. Four years after the merger, Andreas Hompland, a commentator in one of Norway's leading newspapers, *Dagbladet*, wrote, 'Bjørge Stensbøl, the former bank director, is the leader of elite sport. His formal equal is mass sport leader Per Tøien, former foreign-aid worker. Has anyone ever heard of him?' (Augestad and Bergsgard 2007, p 70). Hompland's rhetorical question exposes the power structure within the Norwegian Confederation of Sport, and with that, the dominant position of Olympiatoppen and its leader. 'The governing of elite sport...has resulted in that one man [Børge Stensbøl] decides everything', complained one representative from a national federation (Bergsgard 2005, p. 127). While the president of NIF in 2000 said, 'Responsibility and authority must go hand in hand. When NIF has put the responsibility for elite sport to Olympiatoppen, then it is natural that the head of elite sport is given influence' (Augestad and Bergsgard 2007, p 82).

The structures within elite sport coincided with the structures in the field of sports to a large extent. The NIF's primary role is that of the principal supplier of gaming funds to the national federations, while Olympiatoppen, the elite sport division of NIF, is the primary supplier of funds to the national federations' elite sport programs. In addition, there are close ties between the central administration of NIF and Olympiatoppen, while Olympiatoppen's independence within the NIF organization has been institutionalized (Hanstad 2002, Augestad

*et.al.* 2006, Augestad and Bergsgard 2007). Olympiatoppen's headquarters is located outside NIF, and just as the quotes above underline, they have been granted great responsibility and authority regarding elite sport. Thus, while Olympiatoppen is independent in some areas, in all, they remain entwined in a symbiotic relationship with the rest of the sport's movement (Augestad *et al* 2006). Further, due to the emphasis on autonomy of sport organizations in Norway, the government has been reluctant to target and govern elite sport other than with broad and general objectives; this is unlike other Western countries such as Australia, Canada and UK.<sup>4</sup>

Within the sub-field of elite sport, the formal division of work rendered national federations responsible for branches of sport between the Olympic Games, while the Norwegian Olympic Committee (NOK) was responsible for Olympic participation. However, over the course of time, more operative responsibility for development of elite sport was assumed by Olympiatoppen, at the expense of the national federations. Olympiatoppen began not only to coordinate this activity, but also to participate in the development of elite sport, i.e. selection of athletes for competitions, appointment of coaches, and development of training regimes.

Olympiatoppen's monopolistic position concerning the use of government funds earmarked for elite sport provided them with a kind of 'credit power' (Augestad *et al* 2006, Augestad and Bergsgard 2007). The financial assistance came with an expectation that the national federation would adapt to Olympiatoppen's working methods and also with a credit-note in future success. Thus, the role as *key supplier* of funds for elite sport for many of the national federations (and athletes) granted Olympiatoppen a voice when addressing the rules,

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<sup>4</sup> C.f. for instance organisations such as the Australian Institute of Sport/Australian Sport Commission, Sport Canada, UK Sport/English Institute for Sport (Oakley and Green 2001, Green and Houlihan 2005, Houlihan and Green 2008).

routines, and institutional arrangement that governed these sports. In addition, the scientification of elite sport involved an increased need for *more information* and for professionals who could operationalize knowledge. In this context, Olympiatoppen functioned as a pool of resources, either in the form of funding to acquire knowledge or experts, or in the form of employees who had the skills to exploit the knowledge.

Olympiatoppen became the key supplier of funding, competence, and legitimacy. Alternatively, in light of my three-level approach to power, Olympiatoppen possessed the direct power to distribute funding to athletes and to national federations. This power was partly based on an acclaimed competence regarding what it takes to be a top-level athlete and an institutionalized understanding of top-level sport. According to a representative from Olympiatoppen, a kind of specific ‘competence’ was possessed that functioned like ‘basic laws of gravity’ in all sports (Augestad and Bergsgard 2007, p. 92). As argued above, this competence can be traced back to the strong cultural position that cross-country skiing holds in Norway, emphasizing asceticism and discipline in modern times combined with the scientific attitude towards top-level sport (see also Bergsgard 2005, p. 262-264). Further, the power over distribution of funds and the power of forcing through the legitimate view of top-level sport, were rooted in Olympiatoppen’s legitimacy to represent Norwegian top-level sport.

The latter and third level of power need to be explained more extensively. Nearly 30 years old, Olympiatoppen remains a young organization. Nevertheless, due to its instant success on the podium, it quickly assumed a position where it could define what top-level sport is and how a top-level athlete should act. In this case, there was an instant exchange of sport capital based on merit at the international stage to a symbolic power that granted them with the authority to impose a legitimate view of a social world, in this case top-level sport. In a 1997 audit report, criticism was aimed at Olympiatoppen. The president of a national

federation called for a more active board: 'How could a board let the boss remain in the chair after such an audit report? A capable board would have sacked him the same day,' he declared to a Norwegian daily newspaper (Augestad and Bergsgard 2007, p 71). Some claimed that this reflected the result from lacking competence in the board: 'Earlier the board of the Olympic Committee was elected by and from the national federations. Now it seems the Sports Board is composed of all sorts. Some of them don't seem to know much about elite sport,' argued one informant from a national federation (Bergsgard 2005, p. 125). However, the lack of criticism may not be due entirely to competence, but the fact that Olympiatoppen was able to impose their views as given via confirming or transforming the vision of top-level sport. The political outcome, visible in the distribution of funding, rules, regulation, and institutional arrangement, is thus dependent on non-visible structures of domination at the subfield of elite sport, due to Olympiatoppen's symbolic capital and symbolic power following Bourdieu.

The concentration of power in the hands of Olympiatoppen gained opposition from the national federations, as they saw their authority to govern elite sport threatened (Augestad and Bergsgard 2007, p. 81-86; Augestad et.al. 2006). Especially the so-called 'five large' National federations (football, handball, ski, athletic, ice hockey) criticized Olympiatoppen's role and position: emphasizing that Olympiatoppen should merely distribute government money to elite sport and not hold an operative role when it comes to running elite sport. Moreover, after the weak results in Winter Olympics in Torino 2006, this debate intensified and an organizational process was launched aimed at discussing the power structure in Norwegian elite sport. However, in spite of some changes, it is fair to claim that Olympiatoppen still holds a dominant position.

*The “Hall in the North” project – a Backdoor to the Front Seat*

Between 1995 and 1998, the Norwegian Football Association (NFF) initiated an ambitious project to build large indoor halls in northern Norway: *the “Hall in the North” project*. Rafoss (2015) explains how the Football Association managed to establish the project despite opposition from other parts of the sport sector and the government. Rafoss concludes:

The “Hall in Nord” project created sustainable coalitions, mobilized resources, fought resistance, created and changed the meaningful content related to the importance of the facilities and thus gained legitimacy for the project. NFF's argument about the public service of the halls was carried out locally, despite the fact that the regional confederations, national federations and bureaucracy had other perceptions about the function of the facility type and general benefit’ (2015, p. 267).

The case shows how the Football Association made an impact at the expense of Norwegian Confederation of Sport (NIF). The premises of organized achievement sport prevailed:

‘Despite the different course and resistance of the NIF pillar, NFF projected and implemented the construction of the halls as planned’ (Rafoss 2015, p. 260). Rafoss notes several collaborative factors, such as coalitions, resources, and legitimacy that led to the project's impact. An important criterion was that NFF created alliances outside the NIF pillar to bring the project to fruition; different networks were crucial for implementing the project locally and to reverse a decision that had been made against the project (Rafoss 2015, p. 260).

In the case of Hall in North, additional financial resources were directed to the project. In one municipality, where most of the residents were against the development of the municipal hall, ‘close and exclusive networks formed by local sportsmen, business actors and members of the development committee, generated financial resources that established a back door to the political decision making process’ (Rafoss 2015, p. 261). Contributing additional financial resources is often a key factor in these processes. This resembles the findings from

another case (Ersland 2008), where the football team gained substantial financial support from a so-called ‘rich uncle’ under the premise that the money was spent on a football hall. This implied that the municipality decided to build a new football hall that was not initially in the municipal plan for facilities. ‘The money from the sponsor had given the sport team political power. It had prompted the municipality to support the sport with more money than they would otherwise have received’ (Ersland 2008, p. 235).

Rafoss' (2015) main argument is that the informal network did not replace the traditional hierarchical model of the sport facility policy (Bergsgard et al 2017), but coincided with it, since one ultimately had to deal with these formal hierarchical processes. However, the fact that one transcended the NIF pillar and the partly responsible government councils, at least initially, set the premises for further processing of the project. The actors were ‘caught’ by previous decisions, although they might have opposed the project at first, that is, as a form of path dependency (see Bergsgard 2017). In addition to mobilizing networks and resources, NFF changed the understanding of these halls, which strengthened their legitimacy (Rafoss 2015): These were halls for other sports and they could also be used as cultural houses. In parentheses, Rafoss' (2015) study highlights that the halls were mainly used for football activity.

*Hall in the North* exemplifies the power relationship inside the sports movement when it comes to facility development policy, where the biggest federation, the Norwegian Football Association, managed to outmaneuver NIF. This was partly due to networks established outside of the formal lines, subsequently affected the process, and partly because additional funds were provided locally, which made it difficult to resist wishes from developers. It is also about NFF's position, which is by far the largest specialized federation responsible for the majority of activity taking place in the facilities. However, perhaps equally important is to define the understanding of the halls as *multi-purpose halls* and *cultural houses* that are

theoretically designed for more than football (although in practice it was dominated by football). To be in the position of defining how to understand a case resembles the second level of power: the institutionalized understanding of what the case in question is and how to discuss it. To define these buildings as multi-purpose halls and cultural houses initiated by NFF but for the greater good (the interests of the whole population), is to set the agenda for what can be discussed and how. The view of the halls not only to represent football, but also other type of sports and culture too, made the Hall in North-project untouchable in many ways (Bergsgard 2017). This symbolic position coincided with informal networks that could promote this view, and extra money to back the case. Thus, in the final political processes the Football milieu's view overruled both local and regional politicians' opposition and the NIF's resistance.

### **The implications and relevance of the theoretical approach**

In the previous sections, I have used the social field analysis according to Bourdieu supplied with Lukes' three-dimensional view on power, to analyze the empirical object of sport policy and politics in Norway. In this final part, I discuss possible implications and the relevance of this approach.

The theoretical approach presented here expands upon traditional political science approaches that focus on the political institutions and the corresponding power embedded within them. These approaches and the associated terminology are primarily descriptive and are not suited to analyze dynamic processes that yield and determine structures and relations among actors in a field and the power that constitutes them. In addition, my approach differs from historical studies of 'big men' and the power tied to them and the institution they represent. Such studies tend to neglect that power is related to more objective structures in the sense that the power relations influence the social conditions regardless of a single actor's

intention. Further, this approach leans on *descriptive sociology* and not normative political science. I have been less interested in the distinction between legitimate forms of power, and more interested in the specific process of legitimating, what Weber (1968) refers to as the need to justify power. This is the ability to force the legitimate understanding of the social world that again constitutes the legitimacy of distinct forms of power.

In addition, the emphasis on field analysis in a Bourdieusian sense calls for attention to *reproduction and transformation*, description and explanation, and history and sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Here I have just sketched out the battles and processes that took place in the emergence of a Norwegian sport field. Still, by combining this analysis with empirical materials on sport policy and politics from the last decades, I have been able to emphasize what constitutes the sport field and the reproduction of the power structures in that field as exemplified by my two sport policy cases.

Combining Bourdieu's field analysis with Lukes' three-dimensional view on power also implies some *epistemological* assessments. Bourdieu's (2000, p. 8) conviction is that the social world would become better known, and the scientific discourse about the social world better understood, if one realized that there are not many objects that it is more difficult to get knowledge about. This implies skepticism toward given categorization of the social world, toward the theoretical practice on this social world, and focusing on making critical analysis of the possible, not just the actual (contingence). Concepts like corporatism and lobbyism are in a way the categorization of the actual, and the state of art in a specific area of politics compared to others. However, they give little direction to analyze how the actual becomes *actual* and not just a possibility. Bourdieu's warning is that 'to endeavor to think the state is to take the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, that is, of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state and hence to misrecognize its most profound truth' (1998, p. 35). My focus has been on the power

resources (capital) that naturally transform into symbolic capital and power in sport policy cases, naturally in the sense that they are taken for granted and thereby not seen as power by the agents in the field. In Norway, this has been a prominent school in political science, especially associated with the historian Jens Arup Seip (1983). For Seip, the source of power is located in the social condition, that is, the power giving institutional arrangements and structures of norms. What is 'of interest in this matter – what makes it understandable – is exactly the different types of "resources" that makes a man a man of power', according to Seip (1983, p. 55). In my case, it is different forms of capital that make an agent possess a position or title in an organization or institution.

One major test of my theoretical approach lies in how innovative and original my production of knowledge has been. To what extent have I produced new knowledge and alternative explanations that have eluded 'traditional' approaches? Combining a *critical theory approach* focusing on the deep-level structures that structure the other *levels or dimensions* of power, implies a possibility to obtain a deeper understanding of actual political processes. The outcome, be it the facilities built, distribution of funding, or rules for top-level athletes, is analyzed not just as a result of the formal arrangement, one person's engagement, or resources in the form of membership numbers and/or money, but understood in relation to the basic structure of the field that promotes one result over another.

One could argue that it makes sense that football receives a large portion of funding for facilities since it is Norway's largest organized sport – more than one-fifth of the active members in NIF are members of NFF. Still, the share of funding for football facilities of all facilities that are primarily for organized achievement sport is somewhat higher. Football facilities have by far the best coverage compared to other large facility types (Rafoss and Breivik 2005). In addition, as we saw in the case of Hall in the North, facilities that are categorized as multi-sport facilities are often *de facto* facilities for football. If we also include

the municipal funding for sport facilities and not just gaming money from the central government, this skewed distribution would most likely be reinforced (Bergsgard, Nødland and Seippel 2009, Bergsgard 2017). Studies from Sweden and Denmark demonstrate the tension between the National Football Associations/local clubs and the municipalities when it comes to stadium development (Alm 2016, Alm and Storm 2017). The requirements from the governing bodies of football were presented as given and non-negotiable (nearly as ‘natural unchangeable’ in light of Lukes’ (2005) definition of the third dimension of power), even if the municipality covered most of the costs for the development of the stadiums. Thus, we need explanations aside from the number of memberships to study football’s success rate regarding facilities; these are found in structures based on cultural and social capital.

Further, if we look at NIFs near-monopoly on public funding allocated to sport, we need to take into account NIFs symbolic capital based on representing *Norwegian sport*. In the midst of this, as the second dimension of power, there are several formal and informal institutional arrangements. These three dimensions can, as shown, also be understood in terms of three levels, where the symbolic capital is a result of deep structures constituting the sport field. These structures then influence both the institutional arrangement and the distribution of gaming money. Moreover, the distribution of money reinforces the domination-structures at the sport field. We find the same but less defined structure in the subfield of elite sport; here the opposition to Olympiatoppen’s position is more profound and outspoken. The point made here is that in order to understand Olympiatoppen’s position, we need to surpass the former head of the department, Stensbøl, who is often considered by many as the main actor and the formal arrangement as such, and investigate how Olympiatoppen’s position coincides with the symbolic order of the sport field. The amount of symbolic capital that stems from representing the top-level sport in Norway and thus defining the right way of being a top-level athlete,

together with formal and informal arrangements, charismatic leaders, and international trends, has formed Olympiatoppen's position.

To summarize, to fully understand *Olympiatoppen's* position in the subfield of elite sport, we need an approach that emphasizes the symbolic and discursive power, the informal and formal institutional arrangement, and the concrete political processes and decisions. The same goes for the outcome of the *Hall in the North Project*, and more generally, the *Gaming Fund Institution's* influence on the relation between the government and NIF, and between NIF centrally and other organizations within the NIF system. Focusing on the three intertwined levels of power implies the possibility of a more thorough and coherent study of sport policy and politics.

The empirical cases presented here are Norwegian. One question is then how my approach could be operationalized beyond the Norwegian context. I argue that the three levels of power, derived from the work of Bourdieu and Lukes, can be identified analytically across different national contexts and that the three dimensions of power influence all political decision on sport to a larger or lesser extent. However, I have also argued that to make use of the three-level approach to power, you need to take into account historical analyses in order to reveal the symbolic order of the sport field (or related fields) – and thus what structures the political processes and decision making. Given this, it is too large a task to present the thorough analysis of an empirical case from another country here, however I welcome such studies in the future.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this paper, I have argued for what I have called a three-level approach for studying sport policy and politics. My approach has been inspired by Bourdieu's theory of social field and

symbolic power in combination with Lukes' three-dimensional view on power. I have argued, using empirical examples of Norwegian sport policy, that such an approach provides a profound understanding of the processes and dynamics that leads to a certain political outcome, be it the distribution of public funding, type of facilities built, or rules and regulations for the elite sport field. The political institutions, political processes, and decision-making depend largely on deep level structures. To make use of such an approach, one needs to possess some historical accounts; the structure of what can be termed the sport field is an important prerequisite to understanding actual political processes. In many cases – for instance evaluating a certain public funding scheme for sport – such an in-depth analysis is not feasible or necessary. However, to arrive at the full picture of a specific political case within sport, the three-level approach to the exercising of power is a relevant tool.

### **Disclosure statement**

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