

## Article

# Facilitating Sustainable Outcomes for the Organization of Youth Sports through Youth Engagement

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study was to explore how a youth sport development programme in connection with a major event may facilitate sustainable outcomes for the organization of youth sports in Norway. The context of the study involved the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports' initiative to increase young people's engagement within Norwegian organized sports. The result of the initiative was the Young Leaders Programme (YLP) in connection with the 2016 Lillehammer Youth Olympic Games. Young people's perceptions of the YLP, as well as how these perceptions relate to its implementation, are evaluated to determine the extent to which the programme may make a difference to sustainable youth engagement in organized sports. Qualitative data were generated through interviews with 16 YLP participants, aged 16–20, and five implementing agents. Applying the framework of processes affecting sustainability, the study shows how certain forms of sustainability can be enhanced while constraining other forms at the same time. The findings highlight that project design and implementation play a more crucial role in creating organizational sustainability than in creating individual sustainability. Furthermore, we were able to reveal that the engagement of young people in sport events as volunteers fosters individual sustainability, of which sport organizations and sporting communities should take advantage by providing arenas where young people can re-engage in sport organizations and thus contribute as change agents to a sustainable organization for youth sports.

**Keywords:** youth sports; sport policy; organizational sustainability; Youth Olympic Games; implementation



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## 1. Introduction

The engagement of young people in organized sport is a concern for national and international sport-governing bodies because youths are seen as vital to the sustainable management of sport organizations. Worldwide, many initiatives have been implemented to increase youth engagement; for example, in terms of sport participation [1,2], elite sport development [3,4], and youths' voices in sport organizations [5]. Hoekman et al. [6] argue that youths who have participated in a programme and become re-engaged in an organization are valuable drivers of organizational success. Such re-engaged youths increase the effectiveness of an organization's management by challenging institutionalized practices and attitudes. In the process, they mobilize people in the organization and manifest new attitudes and practices that enable more sustainable management. Thus, they create change through a bottom-up approach. Sustainable organizing and planning are a key issue in the Norwegian youth sport policy [7].

In this study, we focused on an initiative by the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) concerning its youth sport policy (YSP) aimed at increasing young people's engagement within Norwegian organized sports by recruiting young athletes, leaders, and coaches. Youth sports have been prioritized on paper since 1992, but not much work has been done with the youths to increase their

profiles [8]. Even though NIF formulated the YSP to enable sustainable membership among young people, it never specified the extent of the policy's implementation [9]. Politicians were confident that the 2016 Winter Youth Olympic Games in Lillehammer (hereafter, Lillehammer 2016) would attract more young people to engage in Norwegian organized sport as an argument for more sustainable organization of sport—indeed, a symbolic policy process to legitimize its bid and spending of public money [7]. The assumption that Lillehammer 2016 would attract youths to sport was popular and accepted in Norway.

The only vehicle to fulfil the NIF's policy aims was the Young Leader Programme (YLP), which was based on an already existing programme within the organization. The already established programme involved a series of leadership courses for young people (aged 13–19) over a span of 22 months, with the aim to educate 200 young people who would take on voluntary leadership tasks during Lillehammer NIF anticipated their re-engagement in voluntary leadership positions in sporting teams, clubs, and federations would occur after the event. The YLP was organized in cooperation with NIF's central administration, two of NIF's district sport confederations (DSCs), and the Lillehammer Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee (LYOGOC). The different levels of the sport organization may have complicated policy implementation, and the relationship between the policy formation and implementation was never problematized by NIF or Lillehammer. In this study, we concentrated on the YLP as a policy action to engage young people in Norwegian organized sport. Our research question was as follows: How may a youth sport development programme in connection with a major event facilitate sustainable outcomes for the organization of youth sports in Norway?

The article contributes to the literature in several ways: the recruitment of young leaders into sport organizations is a major concern of national Olympic committees (NOCs) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) [10] and has not been researched to this extent in prior studies. Due to the advanced ages of persons in current NOC and the IOC leadership positions, successful recruitment is highly important. The article contributes to sport organizations' understanding of how sustainable management facilitates and thus enables change in highly institutionalized structures. Because sporting events are used as a strategic vehicle to achieve sustainable social, educational, and economic development goals [11], the study contributes to the academic discussion on the potential effects and legacies on the organizations and countries that host sporting events [12–14]. By undertaking an analysis based on a conceptual framework that combines the literature on sustainability in sport development and sustainable outcomes from sport events with the framework of processes affecting sustainability [15], the study connects the research fields of sport policy, sport development, and event management. In addition, it provides insights into perceptions of young people participating in a sport policy program, and thus it adds to the understanding of the interaction of target groups and the organization implementing sport policy programs.

## 2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Sustainable Organization of Sports

In past decades, researchers pointed to a trend in policies focused on sustainability. The terms “sustainable” and “sustainability” are key in the strategies of sport organizations worldwide [15]. Besides focusing on environmental and social sustainability, sport organizations also focus on organizational sustainability. Organizational sustainability is concerned with allowing an organization sustainable to remain viable, either financially [16] or by maintaining or expanding its managerial activities over time. Research on organizational sustainability primarily focuses on rationales for adopting sustainability strategies and operational practices in support of a certain goal. Sport organizations define such sustainability strategies in their strategic plans, statutes, and policy documents, which are then put into action through programs and interventions. The engagement of central actors connected to the formulation of such sport policies is an important factor within sustainable organization [17]. Young people participating in sport are an example of central

actors involved in the formulation of a youth sport policy. The literature on sustainable organization of sports neglects the engagement of young people as central actors in policies. Existing studies referring to the sustainable organization of sports address financial sustainability [16], sustainable governance models, and policy change [18]. In addition, the sustainable organization of sport in a country is understood through the respective country's success in elite sporting competitions [19] rather than through the success of its youth sport programmes. One major research field referring to sustainable organization of sports through sport programmes is found in sport development research. Sport development researchers have, for example, examined programmes on sustainability through social and human development [20] and programmes in physical education that aim at sustained change of resources [21]. In the sport development research field, Kirk [22] argues that studies exploring the sustainability of young people's participation in sports are lacking. There is also a lack of literature contributing to the understanding of how and why young people's participation in sports is connected to the sustainable organization of sport. An exception is the work of Hoekman et al. [6], who found that previous participants in a sport programme add value to the sustainable management of the organization when returning to the programme as volunteers or staff members at a later stage. The study context was a disadvantaged community setting in Vietnam. Hoekman et al. [6] showed that re-engaged young people acting as local change agents were recognized as key drivers of success in an organization and creators of a "family feel" in the community.

Young people who had participated in the programme contributed valuable local knowledge, social capabilities, and necessary cultural resources that helped the organization respond to local challenges and meet needs of children. In that respect, young people can be seen as change agents [6]. Change agents "can mobilise support and inculcate an attitude of confidence and co-operation among participating community groups and their respective members" [23]. In the context of Lillehammer 2016 and the YLP, it is interesting to see how the latter can bolster young people to become actual change agents who mobilize themselves and other young people (peers or members in sport clubs) to engage in Norwegian sports as athletes, volunteers, and/or coaches. Schulenkorf [23] thus argues that to realize a sustainable form of development, local communities (in this case the young people interested in sports) must receive an increased amount of responsibilities to be engaged in the long run.

## 2.2. Sustainable Development through Sport Events

Sustainable outcomes from sport events have been studied in various facets in the scientific literature under the concepts of event legacy [12,24,25] and event leverage [26,27], as well as contributors to sustainable development of sport organizations [14] and communities [23]. While the sustained outcomes of events are delimited as a legacy, the strategic planning for event outcomes is defined as leverage [28,29]. To sustain and maximize positive event outcomes, programmes connected to the events must be strategically monitored and evaluated during and after the event phase. This includes a systematic evaluation of the management mechanisms and the assessment of social outcomes [28]. The feedback from different event stakeholders is crucial for future policy formulation and management activities [17]. The lack of a sustainable and participatory planning agenda between stakeholders of events can result in problems when aiming to create social benefits for local residents [26] and the successful implementation of sport policy leveraged through events [9].

## 2.3. Framework of Processes Affecting Sustainability

To examine sport development programs, Lindsey [15] proposed a two-dimensional framework of processes affecting sustainability. The first dimension includes the definition of the four forms of sustainability: individual, community, organizational, and institutional.

*Individual sustainability* is understood as the "longer-term changes in individual attitudes, aptitudes and/or behaviour through involvement with the sports development

programme" [15]. It aims at providing individual beneficiaries who can move beyond individual sport participation, such as engaging individuals in sport clubs and/or individual performance in sports. This form of sustainability may also include personal and social development of a single person [15].

*Community sustainability* refers to the "maintenance of changes in the community in which the sports development programme is delivered" [15]. Community can be interpreted geographically, culturally (sporting community), or organizationally (community of agencies). In this case, organizations in the same athletic league or young people interested in a particular sport could be interpreted as a community.

*Organizational sustainability* is defined as the maintenance or expansion of sports development programmes by the organization responsible for their delivery (NIF). Policy documents of organizations state goals for both organizational capacity and viability and reveal intentions of long-term commitment to sustain after the event.

In the study context of Lillehammer 2016, the organization committee of the YOG (LYOGOC) and NIF is the delivery organization for the YLP, whereas NIF is the organization responsible for the programme. Usually, in times outside of Lillehammer 2016, the NIF is responsible for the YLP but the DSCs are the delivery organization. In the Lillehammer 2016 context, the delivery was shared between NIF and the LYOGOC.

*Institutional sustainability* involves the "longer-term changes in policy, practice, economic and environmental conditions in the wider context of the sports development programme" [15]. It refers to the wider institutional and policy context in which programmes are situated. In the present study, the institutional context is the organizational and political environment in which Norwegian organized sport is embedded.

The second dimension of the framework includes the following process issues in addressing sustainability:

- Project design and implementation factors, such as the programme's effectiveness, duration, and available resources.
- Factors within the organizational setting, strength of the delivery program, the extent to which the programmes are integrated into organizational structures, and the presence and capabilities of programme leaders.
- Factors in the broader community environment—political, social, and economic environment of the programme and community participation.

The framework is suitable for shedding light on the YLP because the forms of sustainability it defines encompass the types of long-term change to which the policy formulators and implementing agents (i.e., NIF and LYOGOC) aspired.

Achievement of individual and organizational sustainability could be linked to positive outcomes at the community and institutional levels. While the organizational sustainability in sport programme delivery seems to be dominant, it might trigger individual, community, and institutional sustainability in a longer term [15]. However, the framework does not claim that one form of sustainability needs to be achieved to address another form. Following Lindsey's [15] call for research on how different forms of sustainability correlate positively or negatively and the conditions in which these correlations occur, we apply this framework to shed light on how the Norwegian youth sport policy programme (i.e., the YLP), in connection with Lillehammer 2016, facilitated sustainable outcomes for the organization of youth sports in Norway.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Data Collection

Data were drawn from a larger research project analysing various aspects of the YSP process concerning Lillehammer. Qualitative data were generated in the lead up to Lillehammer 2016 and during the event through interviews, documents, and observations, which were triangulated to increase the trustworthiness of the data [30].

### 3.1.1. Interviews

The 76 young leaders (51 females, 25 males) who took part in a course in January 2016 were invited for interviews. A total of 39 young leaders were from Oppland and Hedmark counties (Lillehammer's surrounding counties, further referred to as inland), and the other 17 Norwegian counties were represented as well. The interviewed participants comprised nine females and seven males, with 12 from inland (aged 16–20). Four young leaders were from other Norwegian counties. Each interviewee was asked to review and sign an agreement form, in which they agreed to be recorded. We outlined confidentiality guidelines and participants' right to withdraw from the study at any point. Interview questions included open questions regarding, for example, the young people's relation to organized sport and the reason for participation in YLP, as well as how they experienced it. In addition, questions emerging from a sustainability perspective were posed to examine young leaders' intention to engage in organized sports in the near and longer future. In addition, we posed questions on how engaging in organized sport could be made more attractive for young people. Interviews were also conducted with the course organizers (further referred to as the implementing agents), who were five employees of NIF and the LYOGOC, and questions were focused on the project design and implementation factors of the YLP. The implementing agents were identified based on an earlier study by Strittmatter and Skille [31] on implementation activities in youth sports and Lillehammer. The selection procedure was based on strategic sampling to best inform the research questions [32].

### 3.1.2. Documents

Two reports about the YLP were used to generate data. One evaluation report of three courses held in 2014 concerned the follow-up course of the earlier courses (October 2015), and there was an evaluation report on the young leaders' experiences during Lillehammer. These reports include information about the young leaders' gender, age, and county of residence. Data also include the young leaders' involvement in organized sport as athletes and coaches and in other functions. In addition, the reports include an evaluation of the course by the participating young leaders: how they perceived the organization, the single programme points, what they found positive and negative about the course, how employees in Norwegian sports organizations followed up on them, and what they wanted the content of future recruitment courses to include. Another important element of the reports is the connection of the young leaders to Lillehammer 2016 before and during the event. The reports reveal whether and why young leaders took part in the organization of Lillehammer 2016, what roles they would have liked to have had, which ones they actually had, and whether they felt prepared for their positions. In addition, we analysed sport-related political documents comprising bidding documents, such as the Lillehammer 2016 candidature files sent to the IOC ( $n = 2$ ), as well as NIF's annual reports from 1991 to 2019 ( $n = 29$ ) and the NIF's policy documents that are adopted every fourth year at the NIF general meeting ( $N = 4$ ). These documents included information about the formulated policy goals and the intention with Lillehammer 2016, as well as the involvement of youths during and after the event.

### 3.1.3. Observations

Field notes (72 pages) were generated through observations of (a) four of the seven courses organized prior to Lillehammer 2016, between April 2014 and January 2016, and (b) the 12 days of the event during February. All three authors conducted observations. During observations at the YLP, we focused on situations in which the implementing agents interacted with the young leaders. Field notes were taken regarding how motivated young leaders were to participate in the courses, how they brought forward ideas, how and whether the implementing agents considered these ideas, and how young leaders were involved in discussions and made progress during the course in terms of gaining knowledge and skills about Norwegian sports, being a leader, and Lillehammer. We recorded how Lillehammer 2016 was brought up as a topic during the courses, how the implementing agents

explained the involvement of the young leaders in the organization and implementation of the event, and the plans to involve young leaders in sports afterwards as a strategy for organizational sustainability.

Our observations during Lillehammer 2016 focused on how the young leaders were involved in the implementation of the event, the roles they had, the tasks for which they were responsible, and how such tasks could be useful for re-engaging youths in other sport contexts after the event.

#### 3.1.4. Data Analysis

The first author transcribed the interviews verbatim and shared them with the co-authors. Open coding [33] was used to identify the key emerging themes. Field notes and documents were coded first and then compared to interview transcripts to assess whether perceptions during observations were similar to those in the interviews. Examples of thematic categories that emerged from the open coding process are expectations of the YLP, sport for fun, the YLP as a socialising platform, learning outcomes, network opportunities, communication, youths as a resource, activation on the club level, Lillehammer 2016 as a source of excitement, and youth engagement in one aspect of sports (i.e., an event) fostering youth engagement in other aspects of sports (i.e., participation). Theoretical coding was followed by identifying categories in light of a framework of processes affecting sustainability [15]. Applying this framework led to identification of YLP's design and processes (i.e., which actions were implemented and by whom). This enabled the emergence of topics that helped us identify which forms of sustainability (individual, community, organizational, or institutional) could or could not be facilitated through the YLP identification. This two-cycle coding [33] helped us reveal how the YLP in connection with Lillehammer 2016 facilitates sustainable outcomes for the organization of youth sports in Norway.

The longitudinal design presents a strength of the study because we could observe and analyse the process and progress of project design and implementation over two years. Data analysis from different sources (interviews, observations, and document studies) helped us to secure triangulation of data [30]. This method secures the study's credibility because information from several sources led to the findings it presents.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

This analysis of the YLP in connection with Lillehammer 2016 through the framework of processes affecting sustainability reveals three main findings. First, the YLP in connection with Lillehammer 2016 enhanced individual sustainability among the young leaders. Second, design and implementation factors of the YLP might constrain the organizational sustainability, but the third finding was that these factors might also strengthen community and institutional sustainability in NIF's organizational environment. In the following, we will first explain these findings in detail. Based on the knowledge from these findings, we discuss how sustainable outcomes for the organization of youth sports in Norway can be facilitated.

### 4.1. Individual Sustainability for Young Leaders

The young leaders generally perceived the YLP positively. In the initial meetings, the young leaders reported being satisfied with the many activities offered, and they reported the weekend as having been much *fun*. The *learning outcome* from initial meetings and the experience gained by *networking*, *communicating*, and *socialising* with other young people interested in sport from all over Norway—though with the majority from inland—were especially perceived as positive. Besides having gained “interesting knowledge about how sports are organized in Norway” (young leader, inland), *communication skills*, and awareness of how to be self-confident (young leaders from north Norway and inland), several perceived the *leadership content* of the courses as useful. Considering the positive feedback in light of the factors of processes for sustainability [15], the young leaders perceived the YLP as beneficial to individual participants because it fostered their personal and social

development. Because these young people are community members, we can argue the YLP triggered a long-term outcome because it helped develop skills of community members.

#### 4.2. Constraint of Organizational Sustainability

The findings indicate that organizational sustainability, understood as the maintenance and expansion of sport policy programs [15], was constrained. The intention to create long-term commitment and sustained youth engagement after the event was not delivered in a thorough project design and implementation. In practice, the policy was not well integrated in the organizational structures of the delivery organizations—that is, NIF and the LYOGOC.

Critiques of the design and implementation arose after the follow-up courses. The young leaders negatively perceived lectures as too many in number and drawn-out. They felt programme points that actively engaged the participants would have been better, as one young leader pinpointed:

In the initial meeting, I also learned about communication skills and conflict solving and so on, and this should have been continued instead of only focusing on presentations about Olympic Games and Youth Olympic Games in general. (young leader, northern Norway)

Our findings show a mismatch in expectations existed between the young leaders and the implementing agents concerning the design and implementation of the YLP. Young leaders from several parts of Norway criticized implementing agents for not communicating enough information regarding how the courses would continue after the meetings. The young leaders did not know what to expect from or how to prepare for the meetings that followed. The lack of communication and information, which many interviewed young people mentioned, was due to a lack of a strategy for the implementation of the course and a missing project design, as employees from NIF and LYOGOC pinpointed, according to an LYOGOC employee we interviewed. Our data show that the implementation challenges did not start during policy implementation but were already present during policy formulation. NIF top management and politicians defined the YSP's goals in connection with the bid process for Lillehammer 2016 without involving other important stakeholders, such as young people. At the end of 2013, two years after Lillehammer was assigned as the host city for the 2016 Olympic Games, representatives of NIF, inland DSCs, and the LYOGOC started planning the YLP to meet the promise that NIF had made regarding improved youth engagement. These implementing agents received a call from NIF's top administration, which said the agents were now responsible for educating 200 young leaders in connection with Lillehammer. According to an NIF employee we interviewed, this was a top-down command with no guidance, strategy, or suggestions for implementation from NIF top management. In the first planning stages, the implementing agents did not plan more than three courses in. According to an NIF employee we interviewed:

In the beginning, we just planned on three initial meetings. We did not know that there would be follow-up courses; they were just organized ad hoc. Had we known that the programme would have been different. But, there was no time to think things completely through; we had to act quickly. (NIF employee)

In 2015, NIF received money for the YLP from a foundation and was able to implement further meetings, but they had not been planned at the beginning (NIF employee). According to NIF employees and a LYOGOC employee we interviewed, implementing agents felt under time and performance pressure to proceed with the YSP implementation, which created a chain of challenges. The missing implementation strategy had two main consequences: (a) a mismatch between the expectations of the young leaders and the agents and (b) conflicts of interest between the implementing organizations. We explain these consequences further in the following.

One of the most common criticisms from the interviewed young leaders was that they never knew what the next step was, what would happen after the course, and what

they would be doing at Lillehammer This lack of communication created a mismatch of expectations on both sides. The young people on the one hand expected to have leadership positions during Lillehammer 2016 and expected to be trained for these jobs through the YLP. The implementing agents did not intend to include such training as part of the course due to a lack of a strategy and no plans from one meeting to the next (NIF employee), as well as a lack of specification about which tasks they should have at the event. The implementing agents stated that they did not have the resources to organize this training (NIF employee):

They (the young leaders) had an expectation level of YLP and Lillehammer 2016 that was completely unrealistic. This is our own fault because we created an incredibly good course programme for them in 2014 [the initial meetings]. I would have loved to have known that YLP would last 20 months in order to use our resources better. I would have liked to have involved the DSCs and national federations much more. We would have taken care of that, and the LYOGOC could have given much more tasks for the young leaders with more details much earlier, so the young leaders would have had time to practice and prepare themselves better for Lillehammer 2016. (NIF employee)

At the same time, the LYOGOC staff assigning tasks for Lillehammer 2016 did not consider the young leaders as suitable for tasks with responsibility because of their young age and lack of experience. While the implementing agents tried to meet the expectations of the young leaders by assigning them leadership roles during Lillehammer 2016, the LYOGOC could not provide such roles for them. This caused a conflict of interest between the implementing agents, whose goal was to educate 200 young leaders for Norwegian sport, and the LYOGOC, who needed people they could rely on in terms of leadership skills and experience. This phenomenon is in line with the common mismatch of expectations in policy-in-practice and policy-on-paper (see also Peric et al. [26]) and illustrated competing interests of both parties concerning the young leaders, who on paper were supposed to be the target group of both NIF and the LYOGOC. The young leaders expressed dissatisfaction with knowing nothing about their tasks until one month ahead of the event. Not only were the young people dissatisfied with the lack of information, their expectations concerning their tasks during Lillehammer 2016 were also not met. The implementing agents made promises of leadership positions to the young leaders (field notes, 19 September 2014), and these young leaders expected leadership roles and training in leadership tasks. The implementing agents used the same rhetoric as policy formulators and realized within the implementation process that the policy formulation and policy implementation were incompatible, as one implementing agent explained:

The rhetoric that was used in the beginning, stressing the “with, by, and for the youth”, was a mistake. We know that this was not happening (...). Of course, Lillehammer 2016 was supposed to include a lot of young people; however, 15–20-years-olds are the wrong age group to give leadership responsibilities. (NIF employee)

The constraint of organizational sustainability led to the missed opportunity for sustained youth engagement towards which the YLP had aimed. We will explain this more in the following section.

#### *4.3. Missed Opportunity for Sustained Youth Engagement*

In the interviews, young leaders from all parts of Norway stated they had looked forward to the Youth Olympic Games, socialising, meeting people from different countries, the competitions, and the side programmes. Being part of an international event was reported as interesting and exciting. However, the fragmented design and implementation process and a missing strategic timeline for implementation of the YSP in connection with Lillehammer 2016 meant that the knowledge young people gained during the initial meetings was forgotten by the time the follow-up meetings occurred (young leader, inland).



Nine months between the first, second, and third meeting was considered too big of a time gap by the young leaders, as well as by the implementing agents. Further, there was confusion about the YLP's actual goal. On the one hand, they were promised leadership positions at Lillehammer 2016, but they did not receive any training for this. The connection between Lillehammer 2016 and the YLP was too abstract. Rather than informing the young leaders about their tasks, the implementing agents spent most of the time explaining the history of the Olympic Games and goal of Lillehammer 2016 (field notes, 10 January 2015, 10 January 2016). The following quote from one young leader from the inland area confirms this observation:

I feel that this programme was too much focused on Lillehammer But this was probably the goal—that we would learn to be a leader there. But maybe also for our own club and for our own sport. But actually more for Lillehammer 2016, I think. (young leader, inland)

Young people were very critical of how Lillehammer 2016 would affect the engagement of young persons in sport organizations. Data revealed that while the event was an exciting experience for the youths, it might not have changed behaviours and attitudes towards sport, as one young leader explained:

Those who already have been engaged are maybe going to engage even more. But for those who are not engaged in sports, it [Lillehammer 2016] is not so helpful. (young leader, inland)

According to our respondents, the engagement of young people who were already involved in organized sport was likely to increase; however, Lillehammer 2016 did not necessarily increase the number of young people engaged. The following quote illustrates this argument:

I think with such initiatives as Lillehammer 2016, where young people from inland actually go and experience something big, young people understand how cool sports in Norway actually are (...) But I am not sure about whether many will take the step to get active themselves. (young leader, inland)

Schulenkorf [23] argued that to realize a sustainable form of development, local communities (in this case, young people in sport) must receive increased responsibilities to be engaged in the long run. However, the implementers did not mean for the target group of the youth sport policy and the YLP to be given such responsibilities, and thus the chance for sustainable development through the YLP in connection with Lillehammer 2016 was weakened.

Some 223 young leaders were educated in the lead-up to Lillehammer 2016, but only 115 volunteered during the event. Only 20 study participants stated that they had leadership tasks during Lillehammer 2016, and during the event, the implementing agents and event organizers did not take input of the young leaders into account. Young leaders in sport need opportunities to network, socialize, and contribute as resourceful persons to feel engaged and thus produce organizational sustainability. Although the YLP offered ways to achieve sustainability for themselves (individual sustainability), they did not believe they were acknowledged as resourceful persons contributing to organizational sustainability.

Analysing the results in light of the conceptual framework, we found that instead of a feeling need to serve the needs and wishes of the young people, leading persons in NIF initiated and implemented the YLP because they needed to show they were working towards the promised outcome that Lillehammer 2016 would have for youth. This finding is similar to the results provided by Fahlén [34], Skille [8], and Stenling [35], who found that instead of increasing the number of people in sports, this policy action rather was reproduced as another venue for those already involved in organized sports. Besides the doubt of increasing engagement, the young leaders also doubted that the number of active participating young persons in sports would increase by staging the event. Even though it missed the opportunity to engage more young people, NIF could reach institutional

sustainability. That is, by staging a youth sport event in conjunction with Lillehammer 2016, NIF could improve its credibility and legitimacy as a youth-serving organization. At the same time, NIF and the LYOGOC fostered institutional sustainability by building the legitimacy of an Olympic event that helped engage young people in organized sport—even though organizational sustainability was not enhanced. Through institutional sustainability, the NIF will be able to secure legitimacy from its stakeholders who see NIF as a youth organization. For example, the Norwegian state sees NIF as legitimate organization that is given the responsibility to implement state youth sport policy and, thus, the government provides funding to NIF.

#### 4.4. How to Facilitate Youth Engagement in Sports for Sustainable Organization of Youth Sports

Although the above findings show young people see themselves as capable of taking on responsibilities and thus are willing to contribute to sports, it would be fruitful for NIF to see young people—and these young leaders—as change agents. In the context of Lillehammer 2016 and the YLP, it is interesting to see how NIF can strengthen the young people to actually become such change agents to mobilize themselves and other young people (peers or members of sport clubs) to engage in Norwegian sports as athletes, volunteers, and/or coaches. In this section, we provide practical suggestions on how NIF can facilitate youth engagement in sports for sustainable organization of youth sports.

During the interviews, many general reflections arose on the nature of what sport organizations (NIF, DSCs, or clubs), instead of the YLP, could do to engage more young people in Norwegian organized sports as volunteers and participants. Data from the interviews with the young leaders revealed three themes that may attract young people engaged in organized sport: (a) more intensive involvement of local clubs, (b) adult facilitators or mentors who encourage and consult young people, and (c) a focus of clubs on social life and fun rather than performance.

##### 4.4.1. Involvement of Clubs

The young leaders suggested the involvement of local clubs would engage more young persons, as the following quote exemplifies:

It would have been good to have such a YLP in the clubs, in a way not directed to Lillehammer 2016 but [towards] a more general course about being a young leader. This would be helpful for new assistant coaches to gain competence. (young leader, western Norway)

The YLP on a club level has several advantages—a young leader from Oppland claimed the knowledge gained in the courses can be applied right away. Another young leader from western Norway said that young people tend to feel more affiliated with their respective clubs rather than big international events such as Lillehammer 2016:

If you are a spectator at Lillehammer 2016 and you would like to contribute, it is difficult to know what you actually can do and whom to contact. But if there is a person in your club who actually asks you to contribute with concrete tasks, then it is much easier to get engaged. This would help to get more young people engaged, I think, better than just organizing an Olympic Games where you don't really know what tasks to do and how. (young leader, inland)

This quote confirms that a complex, one-off event such as Lillehammer 2016 is quite different from day-to-day activities in a local sport club. It is unlikely that a local sport club can prepare persons for future organization-related tasks through the staging of an elite international event. The young leaders support the bottom loci of the YLP implementation, whereby the interests of the policy end users are more likely to be fulfilled than by starting implementation on higher administrative levels. However, the longevity of a programme and the established trust of the club leaders with young people may make a difference in sustained youth engagement in organized sport (see also Hoekman et al. [6]).

#### 4.4.2. Assigning Adult Facilitators/Mentors to Encourage Young People

Data from the interviewees clearly show that the first recommendation to join the YLP came from a third person suggesting and inviting the young person to start. Thus, the communication about course registration was directed from the top down, from the main organization (NIF) to subordinate organizations (DSCs, clubs, national federations) and schools—not directly from the main organization to the target group. Young people may not engage in organized sport, an event, or a programme such as the YLP due to lack of motivation and confidence. Rather, young leaders reported that the first step must come from another person—usually an adult—acting as a facilitator, providing the young people with information and encouraging them to take on tasks:

The clubs have to show that we (the youth) are important, because it does not help if we are not taken seriously. Most important is that we have the feeling that we are recognised and heard, I think. (young leader, northern Norway)

Mentors can help young people to find their way into organized sport. Mentors can, for example, show which voluntary tasks young people can take on in order to socialize with other young people in the sport community, or in order to help the organization with the resources needed to provide sporting activities. Mentors could help to encourage the young leaders participating in the YLP and assist them on their way to re-engaging in organized sports. This in turn made the young leaders to mentors for other young people. Re-engaged youth in sport organizations play an important role in moving an organization forward [6], and in terms of policy goals for youth sport, they engage with other young people in a way that adults cannot. The young leaders were competent, as is apparent in the following quote, and their input was valuable in programme design:

If you want to focus on the youth, you have to make them feel that they are important, that adults listen to their ideas. We can contribute, we are resourceful, and I want adult leaders in the clubs and sport federations to realise that—realise that they can involve us, because we are capable of much. (young leader, inland)

By assigning mentors to young leaders, young leaders will feel that they are being heard and that they are important. Structures within the clubs and teams must be adopted for young people to have the chance to engage. Young leaders greatly appreciate mentor programmes. In these programmes, adults in leadership positions within sports show and explain how young, inexperienced people work, their tasks, and everyday life in Norwegian sport. Such mentor programmes already exist in the DSC of Hedmark. The implementing agents from the inland DSCs ensured a proper follow-up for the young leaders from those counties. They included the young leaders also in the organization of other events, such as world cups, national cups, and social events arranged by the DSC (NIF employee; young leaders, inland):

We know that the DSCs inland are very focused on youths. We wished we could get more DSCs to act that supportive for the young leaders and start initiatives for the youth (LYOGOC employee).

The idea of a mentor programme could be adopted at the club level throughout Norway and would be a street-level strategy whereby it would be easier to engage young people as change agents [6,23] and thus foster sustainability in youth sports organizations on the local level as a bottom-up catalyst.

#### 4.4.3. Enhancing Sports Clubs as Social Platforms

Besides the initiatives of the DSCs and NIF on more regional and national levels, all interviewed young leaders mentioned that an organized sport needs to be a fun, social platform and that too many teams and clubs are focused on performance. As argued by Stenling and Fahlén [36], “sport” has different meanings for different people, and sport policy implementers must be aware of the meaning attributed to the target group in order to meet their needs and expectations. Restructuring on the sport club level is necessary for motivating more young people to be active in teams and to continue engaging as coaches

and athletes. This implies that organizing an international event such as the YOG might not be an appropriate instrument for the sustainability goals that NIF has set for youth sports. The interviewees proposed replacing the drive for performance in Norwegian sports with fun, social aspects to increase youth engagement. Staging an international youth elite sport event is characterized by the need to win [37] and winning seems to be a strategy that does not enhance sustainable youth engagement. Although NIF has held courses for young leaders for many years within DSCs and clubs in Norway, we think it was not an appropriate direction to adopt them on the national level and connect them to a major sport event—Lillehammer. The implementation process was also placed on the insatiable institutional level of the sport-system structures—from an existing local and regional level to a national-level programme with elements of an international-level event. In accordance with suggestions by Lindsey [15], we found that, in the case of the YLP and Lillehammer, promoting a national course with international features in order to foster sustainability on a community and local level was rather ineffective. Rather than lifting it to the national level, an anchoring and elaboration of the programme on the club level would have been better, as requested by the young leaders and sport policy implementation researchers.

## 5. Conclusions

In this study, we tried to answer whether a sport policy programme connected to a major sporting event was able to facilitate sustainable outcomes for the organization of youth sports in Norway. We studied the case of Norwegian youth sport policy and the 2016 Lillehammer Youth Olympic Games.

This study provides several theoretical and practical contributions that widen our knowledge of sustainable organization of sport. Our study contributes to the sustainability literature by showing how the framework of processes affecting sustainability by Lindsey [15] helps us understand how sport policy (or sport development) programs may fail to provide organizational sustainability and to enhance individual and institutional sustainability in sport organizations. The study shows that the lack of such a project design and implementation has a greater effect on organizational sustainability than on individual sustainability. Furthermore, we were able to reveal that the engagement of young people in sport events as volunteers fosters individual sustainability. These findings have practical implications for sport organizations and sporting communities. First, organized sport should provide arenas where young people with volunteer experience can re-engage in sport organizations. As a result, young people will be able to contribute as agents of change in an organizational community and enhance institutional sustainability in organized sports [6,15,23]. Second, for many sport organizations, the youth are the main target group. Therefore, relationships between sport organizations and young people should be nurtured by providing young people with a voice in policy formulation (see also Viollet et al. [17]) and implementation [31] in order to meet the expectations of the youth. This can be realized through inclusion of one or more young spokespersons in the decision-making processes of several political platforms within the NIF, including the general assembly. Third, future YLPs could be organized more effectively by including young alumni leaders in the planning of project designs and implementation plans. Furthermore, we suggest the assignment of more experienced sport leaders as mentors to all young leaders. These mentors would consult with young leaders on how to apply knowledge from the YLP in their own sport organizations.

Despite the contributions mentioned above, this study has some weaknesses that future studies should address. This study was based on a single-case design in a Norwegian context, where youth sport is a clear policy focus. The transferability of the findings to other contexts, such as the implementation of youth sport policy in other countries, is therefore limited. Furthermore, the YLP we studied were limited to the editions that were organized in connection with Lillehammer. We did not directly study YLPs organized on a district level independent of the event. Future research should examine several programmes staged by sport organizations aimed at engaging young people in organized sport or other

contexts. Furthermore, we suggest that future studies focus on how policy makers can consider perceptions of the target groups before choosing the vehicle for implementation. This may enable us to gain more knowledge on how to minimize the gap between the different levels of policy implementation and thus enable a sustainable implementation of policy. With regard to studies on sporting events, the purpose of youth elite sport events as a leveraging platform for sustainable organization of sport needs further consideration in various contexts.

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