

9. Whose voice matters? The role and democratic legitimacy of the representation of civil society in sport in contemporary Nordic governance

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INTRODUCTION

Civil society gives a face to democracy and to the voluntary participation of citizens, both of which are fundamental characteristics of Nordic welfare states. Organizations, as part of civil society, have been significant actors in shaping Nordic societies by collectively bringing forth the people's opinions and aiming for social change (Eichberg & Loland, 2010; Norberg, 1997). From a governance perspective, civil society and its organizations are intertwined with the trust gained from citizens at the grassroots level, as well as with factors related to institutional power and organizational democracy (fin. järjestödemokratia). Civil society organizations also act as a link between the people and the government (Alapuro, 2010; Giulianotti et al., 2019). To be influential societal actors and a driving force, civil society organizations must have shared values between citizens and their formal institutions. Therefore, to what extent the formal organizations of civil society represent the citizens is an important question (Pättilä & Tuurnas, 2019).

However, instead of a monolithic actor, contemporary civil society seems to be a heterogeneous group of organizations with varied goals, roles, and purposes (Brandsen et al., 2017). Even if the traditional roles of building social capital and defending pluralism are still relevant, civil society organizations have two more important roles: service delivery (e.g., in health care, education) and expression (e.g., advocacy, representative; Anheier & Toepler, 2022, pp. 66–67). How civil society is represented, or who represents it, is thus essential. It is a question of whose voice matters and how legitimate civil society organizations are as a stakeholder group in the societal debate. It is also a question of how persuasive and effective as negotiators civil society organizations are, as

representatives of wider actor groups in the collaboration process, which is the basis of Nordic governance (see Ejersbo et al., 2023).

In this chapter, we focus on Nordic civil society in the framework of sport. As Bergsgard and Norberg (2010) have stated, the civil society of sport, including different organizations, has developed in parallel with the Nordic welfare state model. Its foundations are similar to Nordic civil society emphasizing: voluntarism; democracy; the role of grassroots-level organizations, such as sport clubs; and the dual role of the central organizations of sport as negotiators between citizens and the state. Over the years, the state has supported civil society, especially sport organizations, through funding and has recognized the importance of free civic activity, while simultaneously seeing its potential to implement policies and political ideas (Norberg, 1997; Mikkonen et al., 2022).

Sport and sport organizations of civil society also reach large groups of citizens, and they are the largest organized forms of civil society. This is also the case in Finland, whose sports civil society we are examining. Our focus is on the leading representative organization of Finnish sport, the Finnish Olympic Committee (Olympiakomitea, OK), and its role as a policy actor and as the representative of the civil society of sport. The central organizations, such as the OK, have developed a dual role through intimate cooperation with the public sector: on the one hand, they are the collective representative of civil society in the traditional sense (see Ibsen & Seippel, 2010; Pättilä & Tuurnas, 2019); on the other hand, they are 'quasi-authorities' of their countries (Norberg, 1997). Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2001) have stated that this close relationship has made the boundaries between state and civil society blurred. Especially in Finland, civil society organizations have been strongly state-oriented and incorporated into the political and municipal system (Siisiäinen & Blom, 2009).

To shed light on the role and legitimacy of civil society organizations as representatives of the citizens, this chapter builds on the idea that crises bring forth the strengths, as well as the underlying weaknesses, of institutions' policy aims and governance practices. Based on this, our guiding research question is as follows: *Which facets does an ethical crisis bring forth in the role and democratic legitimacy of the central organization of sport to act as the representative of civil society?* We utilize a case study approach and explore the OK's ethical crisis, which went public as a media revelation in March 2022. In the series of events, the most important director in Finnish elite sports had to resign due to inappropriate behaviour towards women. The instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2003) enables us to explore the role and democratic legitimacy of the OK in the context of Nordic governance and thus contribute to the discussions about the role and possibility of the central organizations

of civil societies to continue to shape societies by bringing forth the people's opinions collectively (Eichberg & Loland, 2010).

The main data consist of media archives from three of the main Finnish news outlets (*Ilta-Sanomat*, *Helsingin Sanomat*, Yle News) and comment threads attached to the articles between 23 March 2022 and 23 June 2022. The data are analysed with qualitative content analysis. The aim of the analysis is not to consider the media's role or how the media has framed the case; rather, it is to analyse the content of the news articles in relation to the public's comments and examine what these narratives reveal about the democratic legitimacy and prerequisites of the OK as the main representative of the civil society of sport.

In the next section, the basic features of civil society and the Nordic governance model are introduced and defined. In the third section, we introduce the research setting and methodological choices for this study. The fourth section introduces the empirical findings and, finally, we conclude with a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS LEGITIMACY IN THE NORDIC GOVERNANCE MODEL

The Nordic governance model is based on transparency and openness, and the decision-making processes tend to be characterized by pragmatism and collaboration among various stakeholders, despite the prominent role played by the state in policy formulation. This model hinges on a sturdy collaboration among the state, civil society, and the private sector, facilitated through integrated stakeholder participation in governmental processes (Ejersbo et al., 2023). Thus, civil society organizations, and the civil society of sport as the largest manifestation of it, are important societal actors in the Nordic welfare state model that contextualizes the Nordic countries and their governance (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

In line with the New Public Management-inspired reforms in Finnish state governance, the operating logic of the third sector has also changed and shifted from ideological bases towards professionalism and professionalization, and the ethos of voluntarism, once characterizing Nordic civil society, has decreased since the 1990s (Pätälä & Tuurnas, 2019). Furthermore, the role of third-sector associations as guardians and promoters of the interests of citizens has decreased. The trend has been similar also in sports organizations, in which societal changes, trends, and reforms, such as uncertainty of funding and marketized operating logic, have pulled the sector towards professionalization, centralization, marketization, and servitization (Ibsen & Seippel, 2010; Mikkonen et al., 2022). This contradicts the collective value of democracy traditionally cherished in civil society organizations (Lehtonen & Mäkinen, 2020).

However, citizen participation is also central within the contemporary governance context. The contemporary context creates challenging demands for civil society, as simultaneously civil society is increasingly expected to take care of the well-being of citizens (Pätilä & Tuurnas, 2019), while at the same time Nordic societies would need a civil society that is based on active citizenship, voluntarism, and community (see Brandsen et al., 2017). In the case of sport, if the position of the institutional leader organization of the civil society of sport, as the representative in negotiations with the state, is not based on active citizenship and democratic principles, the collaboration and meaning of civil society in Nordic governance may diminish, as citizens are not adequately represented.

Tackling complex issues of contemporary societies requires ideas and expertise beyond civil servants, which underscores the meaning of collaboration and utilization of stakeholder networks. Moreover, if different stakeholders are provided with possibilities to participate in decision-making, it is easier for the government to argue for the legitimacy of the decisions. For instance, if citizens are provided the opportunity to participate in decision-making, it is easier for the citizens to support them (Mäkinen, 2016). Organizations may have more power to negotiate with the public sector compared to individual citizens. Therefore, the role of civil society organizations also remains important in a contemporary governance model that is based on networks and cooperation (see Pätilä & Tuurnas, 2019).

Democratic principles form the base of the Nordic governance model. Since the 1980s, governmental institutions have opened up their decision-making processes and included different stakeholders in these processes through various means (Pätilä & Tuurnas, 2019). The concept of legitimacy is closely related to democracy. Besides legality, legitimacy is often perceived to emerge through (representative) democracy (Jäntti et al., 2017). Therefore, part of the legitimacy is already constructed before decisions are made, as the views of citizens are considered in legitimate decision-making through representative democracy.

In addition, those who are chosen for power positions and how and according to which merits they are chosen affect the legitimacy, as well as the structures and processes within which the decision-making occurs. From this point of view, legitimacy is connected to authorization and, as Weber (1978) or Dahl (1971) have stated, may also be defined as popular acceptance or recognition of the authority of the existing system of rule or a political regime. Another perspective on legitimacy is to consider how a regime/government has succeeded in relation to its aims and goals. If a government is perceived to do the right things and produce solutions to the challenges defined for it, the legitimacy of the government increases (Jäntti et al., 2017, pp. 37–39).

DATA AND METHODS

The chapter utilizes an instrumental, qualitative case study approach (Stake, 2003), as it allows for exploring the role and democratic legitimacy of the leading organization (the OK) of the civil society of sport in its context. The case is a single case study illustrating the role and democratic legitimacy of leading organizations as representatives of civil society actors. The selection of the case (OK's ethical crisis) builds on the idea that crises bring forth the strengths as well as the underlying weaknesses of institutions' policy aims, democracy, and governance practices. Next, the case, data, and analysis methods are briefly introduced.

Case Organization and Description

The Finnish Olympic Committee (OK; founded 1907) is the central organization of Finnish sport. Until 2016, the focus of the OK was on elite sports and especially on Olympic sports. In 2017, the OK became the sole central organization for Finnish sports, thus leading all aspects of organized sport (apart from para sport, which is under the Finnish Paralympic Committee), including sport for all, children and youth sport, as well as competitive and elite sport. The OK's new organizational status is based on several reforms of the sport system in the 2010s, with the aim being to reduce overlapping organizational structures as well as governance costs of governance (Lehtonen et al., 2021). As a result, three national central sport organizations were abolished, and the OK became the sole central organization for sport with the aforementioned new tasks. The organization's annual budget is approximately 10 million euros, of which about two-thirds are general grants received from the state. The number of employees is 60.

Recently (in 2021), the OK renewed its strategy and included a new broader perspective to its purpose besides organized sports: to increase overall physical activity and to decrease the sedentary behaviour of all citizens (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2021; Mikkonen et al., 2022). The new role is also acknowledged in the performance target document, an official document, in which the Ministry of Education and Culture, as the state representative, grants authority and representation of the state in certain tasks to the OK, and the OK describes its tasks in different domains of sport policy (active lifestyle, club and member services, and elite sports; Finnish Olympic Committee, 2022). The document can also be seen as a symbolic authorization that confirms and legitimizes the organization's double role as the main institutional representative of both organized and unorganized sports in Finland (cf. Norberg, 1997) and as a 'collective voice for the Finnish sport and physical activity in

society', as the OK describes itself (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2022). The performance target document further describes that the OK is to develop the conditions for sport and physical activity, take strategic responsibility for the sport and physical activity community, and build cooperation between different actors to implement strategic choices.

The ethical crisis

On 23 March 2022, Yle (the national news broadcaster in Finland) reported that the director of the OK's elite sports unit had behaved inappropriately in the fall of 2021 and received a warning. The OK's board was not informed about the warning. The president, together with the CEO, elected the director of the unit for an extended term despite the warning. The position was not publicly advertised. The director's performance in achieving sporting success and general development was considered significant. The OK's board also agreed with this during the selection phase. A few days after Yle's report, it turned out that the reported inappropriate behaviour had also included physical abuse. Neither the president nor the board stated that they would resign. Five days after the first piece of news went public, the director announced his resignation.

On 6 April, one of the member associations brought up the convening of an extra members' meeting, which requires a proposal from a total of ten member associations. Almost at the same time, the OK announced the selection of a new CEO. Even before the first news appeared, it was known that the CEO would change.

On 14 April, the news reported that 14 member associations had proposed an additional members' meeting to discuss the case and legitimacy of the ways the OK and its leaders handled the case. The additional meeting was held in connection with the spring meeting at the end of May. Before that, a general discussion event at the beginning of May was organized. The member associations disagreed on how the external investigation should be carried out and who would do it. The original idea was that the OK's board would order it themselves.

The consultant's report (the external investigation) published at the end of May shows that the principles of good governance were not followed in the practices of the OK's board. At the members' meeting, a vote of confidence in the presidency was taken. The majority opinion was that the presidency has confidence (72 yes, 22 no, 7 empty). After that, the news reported the selection process for the new elite sports director.

Data and Procedures

The data consist of news media archives and comment threads by the readers attached to the news articles between 23 March 2022 and 23 June 2022. As

Figure 9.1 shows, media attention and discussions subsided over time, especially after the guiding member vote of confidence in the president on 1 June. Therefore, the data-gathering period was finished at the end of June.

We have utilized two types of data to get a holistic image of the phenomenon. The data set includes news articles and comment threads connected to the articles from three major Finnish news outlets, two of which are privately owned: *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS); *Ilta-Sanomat* (IS); and the state-owned Yle. Altogether, the three outlets produced 196 articles (76 HS; 85 IS; 35 Yle) and 389 pages of comments (195 IS [anonymous comments possible]; 194 HS [commenters must provide their name]; Yle articles did not have the option to comment). The news articles were scraped using the search words: Olympiakomitea (Olympic committee); Jan Vapaavuori (the president); and Mika Lehtimäki (the former director of elite sport; the director).

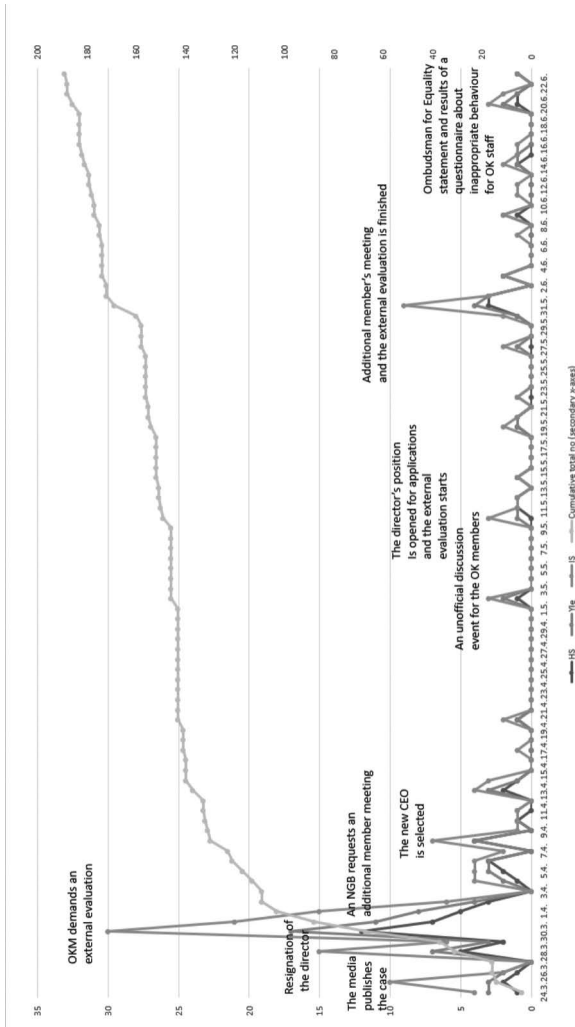
In the analysis, the comment threads are seen to represent the citizen debate, whereas the data produced by media houses describe the process and represent a more traditional debate, which has a meaningful role in shaping people's opinions and often brings forth the statements of institutions. The aim of the analysis was not to study the media, such as its role or its framings of the crisis; rather, the media data were used as rich data, illustrating the content and process of the crisis as well as the public debate and argumentation involving the OK and its leaders, as well as the citizens. The data were analysed with qualitative content analysis (White & Marsh, 2006; Krippendorf, 2018). Both researchers engaged in careful reading and coded the data separately with an inductive approach. Throughout the analysis, we discussed our codes, insights, and findings, and the similarities and/or differences between our thoughts and analyses. Throughout the analysis, our insights were rather parallel, and we had identified similar themes, ideas, and contradictions. However, through discussion, we were able to identify some taken-for-granted ideas and thoughts from each other's analyses. We believe that this process increased the reliability of our results. Ultimately, the analysis resulted in three main themes that arose from the careful reading and coding of data.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The analysis resulted in three main themes that illustrate the state and role of civil society organizations in contemporary Nordic governance: politicization; merits vs. democracy; and forced democracy.

Politicization

Politicization of the sport sector, its leaders, and decision-making, was visible throughout the case. When comparing the discussions in print media and



Source: Authors' own illustration, Data sources: *Ilta-Sanomat*, *Helsingin Sanomat*; Yle.

Figure 9.1 Number of news articles by the media houses and the main events of the case

in the comment threads, the approaches are slightly different, as in the print media, criticism connected to politics was slightly more subtle. However, in both data sets, the theme was dominant. On the individual level, the politicization manifested especially in the link often made in the comment threads between the president and his assumed state presidency game:

[The president] showed by his actions that he is not presidential [refers to state presidency], so Kokoomus will not have to think about it [selecting him as their candidate].

Another manifestation of politicization was the emphasis on party politics, especially in the comment threads, where party politics were included in the discussions early on. The president's and a vice-president's background in one party (Kokoomus; liberal-conservative/moderate bourgeois party) as well as the other vice-presidents' bond to the same party was especially underscored:

The most interesting thing, in my opinion, is that the OK is almost completely under the control of one party, Kokoomus.

When talking about Finnish sports, politics cannot be left out. All major sports organizations are controlled by Kokoomus. This makes it impossible to make changes, because the seats are divided by a small political constituency.

These findings highlight the notion that citizens still associate party politics with Finnish sport. On the one hand, this may partly be explained by the political polarization of Finnish society after the civil war in 1918. This polarization lasted for a relatively long time in the sport sector, until the 1990s (Mikkonen et al., 2022). Relatedly, also highlighting the historical path dependency is the notion of the corporatist nature that characterized Finnish governance and especially sport governance until the 1990s (Lehtonen, 2017, pp. 45–50). The sport organizations were interest groups of certain political parties and naturally explicitly related to those (e.g., SVUL promoting the political right, Työväen Urheiluliitto the political left). In Finland, as in many other countries, the popularization of the dogmas of New Public Management and later New Public Governance tamed the corporatist notions. However, the findings support Mäkinen et al. (2019) by highlighting that sport and sport organizations are still perceived to be intact with the political system and reminding us of the prior corporatist system.

Merits vs. Democracy

The data showed how the leaders of the OK based their decision-making on merits rather than democratic values. One example of this kind of behaviour

manifested itself early on in the process. When the case was revealed by the media, the leaders of the OK justified the director's re-election because of his '*undeniable merits*', which outweighed the inappropriate behaviour when deciding on the re-election. The CEO stated in the media that the Olympic Committee considered an open application but '[the director's] displays from four years weighed heavily in the balance cup'. However, in the comment threads, the public heavily criticized this kind of weighing:

[T]he strange thing is that the person's merits have been brought up at the same time [as his inappropriate behaviour]. As if there were a scale with merit on one plate and harassment on the other, and the merit could then cancel out the harassment. Nobody's work performance should be evaluated in connection with harassment. The way someone has performed in their work is not related to the matter [harassment] in any way and should not affect the evaluation of the act [harassment].

Another example of the heavy emphasis on the meritocratic principle in the case was the president's discourse. He argued for his and the leaders' decisions mainly based on official titles and merits and highlighted the legality of their actions and decisions:

No more can be demanded than the law allows

I, myself, am a lawyer. Nevertheless, I have consulted lawyers familiar with these matters [inappropriate behaviour at work], who have told me directly that there is no basis on which this could have been made public. The employer does not have the right to disclose this type of matter to the public.

The public comments also highlighted that being legal is not enough. Ethics should also be considered in decision-making:

[The president] states that he, too, has been forgiven for crimes he committed when he was young, and [the director] hasn't even been accused of a crime. [The president] doesn't seem to understand that moral and ethical norms can be above legal norms. Simply not having committed a crime is not enough to receive a 'clean slate'.

Based on the data, there seems to be a contradiction between the leaders' and the public's perceptions of the values based on which decisions should be made. There may be many reasons for this contradiction. It may be that the leaders of the OK had misinterpreted the weight people give to ethical conduct when contrasted to merit. On the other hand, the leaders may have known people's opinions but decided, nevertheless, to act differently, or the values of the leaders and the institution differ from those of the people. Regardless of the reason, this contradiction may negatively impact people's perceptions of the legitimacy of the OK to lead the civil society of sport, because the output of the

decision-makers does not meet the expectations set by the principles of good governance in sport (European Commission, 2013) or by the public (Jäntti et al., 2017, pp. 37–39).

Forced Democracy

The case brought forth nuances that can be understood as examples of forced democracy. First, the democratic processes (voting, discussion event, public debate) did not take place until the media had brought the case into the public domain. The media attention, and following debates, thus ‘forced’ the OK to engage with and implement their own democratic and ethical principles, even if it had not been in the leaders’ initial interest:

Big disappointment [the case and how it was secretly handled]. The good thing is that now [it] became public. Long live journalism.

Second, the case included instances that fight against the democratic principles of third-sector organizations (leaders selected in a small circle, lack of transparency, lying; see Jäntti et al., 2017) and principles of good governance in sport (European Commission, 2013):

Was anyone surprised that the old boys club tried to save their friend? Considering [the president’s] record as the mayor of Helsinki, where he invalidated the work of female deputy mayors and tried to override democratic practices, the current situation is nothing new. Some kind of broader change of leadership is worth considering.

The situation does not look promising for [the president] because such clear lies have been revealed.

The public comments also highlighted the OK’s nature as a publicly funded organization, which, therefore, has a fundamental responsibility to act ‘properly’:

The point is that the employment contract was on a break. [...] The matter [the warning and inappropriate behaviour] was kept secret, and it was certainly thought that it would not become public. And [the director] continues. Transparent handling of the matter requires that it is made public and then a decision is made about extension. Not through a secretive ‘you-scratch-my-back-I-scratch-yours’ principle. Publicly funded organizations must act with particular openness and not sweep things under the rug.

These democratic principles from third-sector organizations, however, were not thoroughly considered by the leaders of the OK during the process. Rather, based on the news data, it seems that the aim of the OK leaders was to clear the air fast and move on. This is illustrated when the president announced, ‘I

will not resign' early on in the case and when the case was silenced after the member vote at the end of May 2022.

The aspect of forced democracy is further underscored when the OK's present position is considered. In the latest OK strategy, as well as in the performance target document between the state and the OK, the position of the OK is defined to lead all aspects of Finnish sport, and physical activity is defined (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2022). However, when discussing the position of the OK as the leader of Finnish sport and physical activity, it is good to note that the citizens, as such, cannot vote or otherwise have a direct impact on the decisions about those chosen as board members or as the president. The board members are selected by voting between the representatives of the member organizations of the OK. The lack of possibilities for citizens to impact their representatives in sports policy may decrease the legitimacy of the OK to act as the representative of all sport and physical activity (see Jäntti et al., 2017).

Relatedly, according to the media data, 'only a few member organizations took the floor' in the discussion meeting for the member organizations, arranged at the beginning of May 2022. This behaviour, as shown above, contradicts the public's opinion, which was much more critical, based on the comment threads. One of the representatives of a member organization commented that '[i]t is a very long-standing phenomenon in Finnish and international sports life that decisions are made somewhere other than in the places where they should be made', pointing towards the lack of discussion in the meeting. The different groups the OK should lead and represent may have different values and perspectives, while only some groups have the possibility to impact institutional decision-making. In other words, it is questionable whether the OK is a legitimized leader for all aspects of sport and physical activity and through which procedures legitimacy is earned.

THE DIMINISHING ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY OF SPORT IN NORDIC GOVERNANCE

In this final section, the findings of this chapter are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and the prospects of the OK as the representative of the civil society of sport in Nordic governance.

Whereas traditionally the role of civil society and its organizations has been to represent the people and bring forth their voice in society, the findings of this chapter strengthen the conclusion that the role of civil society organizations as representatives of the citizens has decreased (e.g., Pätälä & Tuurnas, 2019; Ruuskanen et al., 2020; Lehtonen, 2017). The institutional leader organization of sport's civil society has drifted further away from the people and the democratic principles of civil society, in the spirit of New Public Management towards a 'domain business' and individualistic market logic, in which merit

outplays democratic principles. In addition, personal interests may be influencing more than the common benefits of sport (cf. Minikin, 2015). Therefore, it is relevant to question whether the OK remains an unpolitical civil sector organization or if it is more like a quasi-authority with a political twist.

This trend seems to conflict with the collective values that a civil society needs to be democratic (cf. Wollebæk et al., 2010). The top-down approach and the disappearance of the ‘democratic movement’ in Finnish sport that this case further illustrates are not new or sudden. Rather, similar notions have been previously identified in the series of structural reforms (Lehtonen & Mäkinen, 2020; Lehtonen, 2017). Although managerialism and market-oriented management practices have become part of civil society, and the operating logics of them seem to have shifted towards a service deliverer (Anheier & Toepler, 2022; Brandsen et al., 2017; Ruuskanen et al., 2020), the legitimacy of the activity should be earned bottom up, or otherwise the activity may suffer a ‘democratic deficit’ (Houlihan & Green, 2009). It is also in the interest of the entire Nordic governance model that the different sectors of society do not too closely resemble each other and the main differences in their democratic governing processes remain. This way, the different societal sectors can complement each other.

Another related challenge is that even if civil society organizations may have other important roles than the role of the representative (Anheier & Toepler, 2022; Brandsen et al., 2017), in order to receive their autonomy and societal position, the civil society organizations, such as sport and the OK, must articulate their boundaries and societal purpose to legitimate their position (Lehtonen, 2017, 86–89). The articulation of boundaries and societal purpose, however, should come from within civil society, in other words bottom up from the people, and not top down, stated by the funders or by the leaders (see Ruuskanen et al., 2020), as the findings of this chapter showed. If the members or participants of civil society question the legitimacy of its institutional leaders, the possibilities of the civil society organization being able to operate and act collectively may decrease (Houlihan & Green, 2009).

Therefore, we argue that the democratic deficit, lack of trust, and legitimacy from the bottom of the pyramid hinder the possibility of the OK performing the other half of the ‘dual role’ of sports’ central organizations (representing collectively the sporting people; see Norberg, 1997) and performing only as a ‘quasi’ authority of the state as discussed above. In terms of achieving the goals of (sports) policy, a civil society with a weak collective capacity is not necessarily an optimal partner for the state, not even as a service deliverer (cf. Anheier & Toepler, 2022). Moreover, if the leading organizations of civil society, such as the OK, detach themselves from their members and the citizens they should represent, the value of the leading organization as a negotiating

stakeholder in state governance and policy-making is vague (see Ejersbo et al., 2023).

Finally, as shown in this case, the formal positioning of a significant civil society organization, in this case the OK, close to a single political party causes a conflicting discussion, especially in citizen debate. The strong presence of politics in the data is paradoxical, because sport overall tends to justify its own existence by arguing that it is an area free from politics and where sport itself is all that matters (Thiel et al., 2016). However, if one of the aims of civil society organizations is to represent citizens and bring forth their voice (Anheier & Toepler, 2022; Eichberg & Loland, 2010; Norberg, 1997), politics serve as one deeply institutionalized arena outlining and describing different value bases. While the institutional leader organization of sport has tried to brush down the political side of sport that once characterized Finnish sport governance (Mikkonen et al., 2022), this chapter shows how politics and political values are still embedded in sport, at least in people's thoughts about sport, sport directors, and organizations. As the role of the OK has broadened to represent the whole sporting community, it is questionable if the differing views and ideologies of citizens can be represented if the organization is strongly associated with party politics and one political ideology, or at least perceived to do so.

The future of civil society institutions as stakeholders and policy negotiators in contemporary Nordic governance may remain formal and stable if their legitimacy is based on resource dependence from the state. It is foreseeable that the state will continue to need at least some formal negotiation partners in sports-related matters, and this is also the case in other domains of civil society. This direction maintains institutional relationships and formal corporatist practices. In terms of operational content, values, and democracy, the sources of legitimacy may already be eroding as indicated by the findings of this chapter. Based on this, the opposite direction might be to focus on the activities corresponding to citizen values, which may find a foothold in the unorganized informal networks engaging in sport of the fourth sector (cf. Jeanes et al., 2019). This trend has been identified in Finnish civil society research (Ruuskanen et al., 2020), but the phenomenon is not sufficiently understood in the context of sports (Lehtonen et al., 2023). In the future, citizens' own ways, habits, and interests will increasingly challenge the organizational and institutional structures of civil society. As a result, general development presents its own challenges to the roles and legitimacy that the leading organizations of civil society may have in the future as negotiators and stakeholders in Nordic governance.

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