



# Leaders in sport organisations who “dropped out”

- A qualitative study about former leaders and voluntary leadership in sport

Report with the first selected results of the study

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Anne Lykke Poulsen & Gertrud Pfister

Institut for Idræt  
Københavns Universitet

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Lay-out: Anne Lykke Poulsen

Institut for Idræt  
Københavns Universitet  
Nørre Alle 51  
2200 København N

Telefon: 2532 0829

Telefax: 3532 0870

E-mail: [IFI@ifi.ku.dk](mailto:IFI@ifi.ku.dk)

Hjemmeside: [www.ifi.ku.dk](http://www.ifi.ku.dk)

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# Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Future perspectives of the drop-out study.....	2
<b>Background, aim, theory and design</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Background of the study.....	4
Aims.....	5
General aims.....	5
Specific aims.....	5
Theoretical considerations.....	7
From work-family balance to work-life integration.....	7
Motivations for voluntary work and leadership.....	10
Gender perspectives.....	11
Methods and design.....	15
Method.....	15
Guidelines.....	16
Selection and description of the informants.....	17
Conducting the interviews.....	20
Analysis of the interviews.....	21
<b>Selected results</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Former leaders – first biographical analysis.....	23
Gender equality – experiences, opinions and explanations.....	47
Discussion.....	52
Conclusion.....	53
Volunteers and volunteering – current issues and problems.....	54
Background – the sport system.....	54
Sport organisations in a crisis?.....	57
Questions to the interviewees.....	58
“Fiery souls” or technocrats - Results.....	59
<b>A short conclusion</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>Literature</b> .....	<b>67</b>

# Preface

The project LEADERS IN SPORT ORGANISATIONS WHO “DROPPED OUT” is a qualitative study about former leaders and voluntary leadership in sport. In this report we present the first selected results of the study as well as we outline the perspectives for presentation and publishing of the study in the future.

## **Future perspectives of the drop-out study**

In 2007, we will present and publish the results of the drop-out study at several congresses and in international journals. Moreover, we are currently working on a report which will be given to the Danish sport organizations. This report will give recommendations concerning how to pay attention to continuance and/or potential return of the former voluntary leaders.

Results of the study have so far been presented at the Congress of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport. Re-Imagining Community/ Re(En)Visioning Sport. November 1-4, 2006 Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

In 2007, the study will be presented at:

- the 4th Conference of the European Association for Sociology of Sport (EASS). Local Sport in Europe. Münster, Germany on May 31 – June 3, 2007. Gertrud Pfister is invited as keynote speaker).
- the Joint World Congress of the International Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport and the International Sociology of Sport Association: Sport in a Global World: Past, Present and Future. Copenhagen, Denmark on July 31– August 5, 2007.
- 18. Hochschultag der Deutschen Vereinigung für Sportwissenschaft. Hamburg, Germany, September 26-28, 2007.

The following publications are in work (working titles):

- “Chances and challenges of voluntary leadership – the perspectives of former leaders”. In *European Journal of Sport Sociology* (accepted).

- “Are the women to blame or the organizations? Former leaders about the lack of women in decision making committees”. In *Sex Roles* – special issue on sport.
- “Ausstieg aus der Führung – Drop-out Prozesse in Deutschland und Dänemark“. In *Spektrum der Sportwissenschaft*.

In addition we plan articles from the following perspectives:

- Voluntary leadership in Danish sport organizations - motivations and drop-out processes.
- Life-work-leadership-integration – how does this work with Danish sport leaders.
- The value and the future of voluntary work – opinions of former sport leaders.

# Background, aim, theory and design

## Background of the study

The idea for the project LEADERS IN SPORT ORGANISATIONS WHO “DROPPED OUT” developed in the course of the work on the research project “Kvinder på toppen” (women at the top) on women and voluntary leadership in sport.

The results of “Kvinder på toppen”, especially the analysis of the decision making committees of DIF, DGI, DFIF and Team Danmark, clearly showed a high degree of marginalisation of women in leadership positions in all four organisations. The percentage of women e.g. in the executive committees of the umbrella organisations varied between 0 and 22%. Even if the participation rate of women in decision making processes was higher in DGI than in the other organisations, everywhere the percentage of female leaders was decisively smaller than the percentage of members and it decreased with the status of positions (Habermann/Ottesen/ Pfister 2003). The lack of women in executive bodies of sports organisations is a worldwide phenomenon. This is shown, for example, by the reports on 16 countries in the book *Sport and Women. Social Issues in International Perspective* edited by Hartmann-Tews & Pfister (2003). However, some of these studies come from countries with a sport system which differs very much from the club based system in Denmark. This makes a transfer of results and comparisons difficult or impossible (e.g. Hall/Cullen/Slack 1990; McKay 1997). However, the results of the German research project “Frauen an die Spitze” (Doll-Tepper/Pfister/Radtke 2006) offer good possibilities for a comparison of the Danish and the German data. There are huge numbers of studies available about different aspects of the broad topic “women/gender and leadership” (see an overview of relevant studies in Pfister 2004 b). The recent discussions focused on gender and organisations and especially on the culture of organisations and the processes of “gendering” and “doing gender” (e.g. Acker 1992; Alvesson/Due Billing 1997).

These studies provide at least some information. Nevertheless, they fail to present up to now a comprehensive answer to the question, why there are so few women in the governing bodies of organised sport. The analysis of the Danish project “Kvinder på

toppen” showed that men and women in leadership positions had very similar and positive judgements about their voluntary work in sport organisations. Female leaders seem not to face more barriers or resistance than their male colleagues. But research in this area has a “blind spot”. All relevant studies deal with current leaders. That means they deal with persons, who have made their way up in the hierarchy, who adapted themselves to the culture of the organisation and who stayed in their position, perhaps in spite of conflicts and problems.

The minority status of women in the governing bodies of organised sport raised questions and concerns, especially among women in the organisations but also among some of the decision making committees. Especially the representatives of the different sport organisations pointed out in discussions that it could be important to include in the research those who voluntarily or enforced finish their “careers” and drop-out. In these terms, this “drop-out project” will extend the knowledge on both women’s and men’s evaluation of voluntary leadership. It will provide more in-depth insight and also new results and perspectives upon voluntary leadership.

## **Aims**

### **General aims**

- To analyse the reasons for the hierarchical gender relations and the under-representation of women in leadership positions in sport organisations
- To analyse factors and processes which support or prevent interest in becoming a leader, commitment as male or female leader and/or “drop-out”

### **Specific aims**

To reconstruct

- the biographies and “careers” of male and female “drop-outs”
- their motives, aims, experiences, chances and problems as leaders
- their life circumstances including their family life, their work and their leisure

To identify

- reasons for the drop-out



- the drop-out process
- their evaluation of the drop-out
- their willingness to take over another leadership position.

To find out about

- their opinions and their evaluation of their time as leaders
- their attitude to leadership in sport organisations today
- their knowledge and evaluation of gender mainstreaming.

A special emphasis of this study has been

- on the comparison between the careers and drop-out processes of men and women
- on the role of gender in the culture of sport organisations and their governing bodies
- on potential connections between gender and “drop-out”

“Drop-outs” are defined as former leaders of sport organisations who have decided to or have been forced to step down from a position before the end of their “career”. We assumed that former leaders are persons with a high amount of information about and insight into sport organisations and have reflected about their reasons to drop-out. Therefore, they are likely able to identify barriers and problems connected with leadership positions. Especially the experiences of female “drop-outs” should contribute to the identification of structures, practices and social relations which are responsible for the under-representation of women in the governing bodies of sport organisations.

## **Theoretical considerations**

As the results of this study will show, there were far more questions and issues raised in the interviews than just the gender relations in sport organisations. The statements of our informants contained information about the careers of sport leaders, about their motivations and their work as well as about their opinions and attitudes, among other things with regard to volunteering. These different issues have been analysed and will be discussed on the basis of various theoretical approaches as gender theories, theories of organisations and approaches to motivation and work-life integration. Here, we include theoretical concepts of gender relations, the gendering of organisations and work-life integration as example. They are the most advanced approaches, but we will deal with other theories more in depth in the course of the work on the different publications.

### **From work-family balance to work-life integration**

The leaders of sport organizations have to integrate their voluntary work in their every day life. This means to find time and energy and to coordinate the work in the working place, duties in the family, leisure time activities and volunteering. Often prioritizing is necessary whereby time is the most important issue. Time is named most often as reason why people do not engage in voluntary work (Koch-Nielsen et al. 2006). This is especially true for the age group between 30 and 49 years of age. Individuals in this age cohort have finished their education, are integrated in the labor market and have started a family. 75% of this group, 80% of the respondents with small children explain their unwillingness to volunteer with lack of time. A German study showed that time is one of the most often named barriers and also a reason to leave a leadership position (Doll-Tepper/Pfister/Radtke 2005).

Therefore, it is highly relevant to draw upon theoretical approaches which focus on the interrelations between paid work, family life and leisure activities. One can assume that all these spheres and the interactions between them will influence the readiness and the motivation to engage as leader in a sport organization. Here, one has to take into consideration that employment, family responsibilities and leisure are "gendered" which means that conditions and meanings are different for women and men. The interrelations between employment, family life and leisure can be very different dependent on individual decisions and the circumstances of life, and these interrelations

can be analysed and interpreted from various perspectives and with the use of different theoretical approaches.

Bonke (1997) presented in his publication "Dilemmaet arbejdsliv – familieliv i Norden" various models which mirror realities in individuals' lives, but which are also concepts which describe, interpret and evaluate the connections between paid work and family life on the basis of different theoretical considerations.<sup>1</sup>

1. The segmentation model considers family and the work outside the home as different spheres which have nothing to do with each other.
2. The conflict model focuses on conflicts between employment and family. It is assumed that the restricted resources and energy will be taken from one sphere and invested in the other which causes frictions.
3. The spillover model assumes that both spheres are overlapping which can have positive and negative effects on both, the work and the private life. An integration of work and family responsibilities can lead to a healthy balance.
4. The compensation model postulates that individuals try to react on dissatisfaction in one role by striving for satisfaction in the other sphere.
5. The instrumental model asks if and how resources and competencies gained in one sphere can be used in the other.

Which models are chosen of and lived by the individuals depends on numerous factors and processes and determines the analytical perspective and the interpretations. The focus of the project suggests searching for the connections and interactions between the various spheres on the one and voluntary work on the other hand. Hereby the various models can be used as hypotheses. In this project, the question has been raised if and how the relations between family responsibilities, paid work and volunteering influenced the drop-out processes. Especially relevant seems in this connection the conflict model because time and energy are restricted and as mentioned above time is one of the most decisive factors for the decision for or against volunteering. However, one has to consider that the investment of resources in one sphere does not necessarily have negative effects on the other areas because engagement in the family or in a sport organization can be connected with joy and satisfaction and thus increase resources which can then support the work in the other spheres.

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<sup>1</sup> See literature on <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/glossary.php>

From the perspective of the integration model one has to ask how volunteering can be integrated in the life where family and paid work are closely interconnected. Does volunteering destroy the balance or does it increase the resources of individuals and families? Here various influences play a role reaching from the economic conditions to individual priorities and competencies.

In the last decades, the integration model with its focus on paid work and family responsibilities has been enhanced to a model of work-life integration. The focus of the integration model on work and family concealed not only the fact that there are many more areas which have to be taken into consideration, it also did not include people without a family and it did not include the structural and organizational levels. This does a rather new approach to work-life integration. In their book about "Beyond Work-Family Balance", Rapoport and her colleagues (2002) reject the idea that there should be a balance between these two spheres, this is not enough. They demand an integration and emphasize that life is both, dealing with the family and doing work which can be paid or unpaid, in the working place or in the family. Volunteering fits into this integration because it is life and work at the same time. In addition, this concept takes various decisions and priorities of the individuals into account and includes e.g. also persons who focus only on one sphere, the family or the professional career. In addition, one should not forget that life – conditions and priorities – change in the course of time. The work-life integration concepts also draw attention to the structures and cultures of societies, institutions and organizations, among others, the ideals, values, norms and rules. A special focus of this model lies on women and the question of gender equality.

Life includes private life and family, work life (paid work, family work and voluntary work), and leisure activities. Prioritizing is possible, and success, performance and satisfaction are not dependent on the invested time. This means that engagement in one part of life does not necessarily mean that other parts are neglected. This model indicates that the integration of various spheres is possible, but it also shows that integration is dependent on numerous and various conditions on the individual as well as on the structural level.

The work-life integration model will be used to analyse how the informants organize the relations between work and life and which place is given to their voluntary

work. A special focus will be on the question if frictions in the work-life integration differ between men and women and if they contribute to the decision to drop-out.

## **Motivations for voluntary work and leadership**

According to Koch Nielsen et al. (2006), around one third of the Danish population is engaged in voluntary work. And sport is one of the major areas for volunteering. But what makes people get involved in voluntary work and sport? What motivates them to work without a pecuniary outcome, what are the attraction and the benefit? As Habermann points out, voluntarism is the “fuel” for the clubs and associations in the communities of the civil society (2001, p. 35). In order to discuss the future of the voluntary organisations and their communities it is necessary to get to know who the volunteering individuals are, what their motives are and what voluntary work means to them.

By motive is meant the “inner” (but not unconscious) reason to take part in an activity, in this case voluntary work. This takes more than an occasion; An action or reaction shown accidentally or on single occasions is not based on motive, but motive is based on a desire to act in relation to what is “believed in”, what is “meaningful” and is “necessary”. The motive can both derive from outer occasions, like the actual situation, necessity and encouragement, and from inner occasions growing out of traditions, belief, conviction, self understanding and life strategies (Habermann 2001, p. 37).

We asked our informants about their motives to go into sport leadership in the first place. All of them started their leader career in a local sport club. Following very different time and career patterns, most of them moved first on to the regional level and then on to the national level of their sport organisation. Only a few moved directly from the club to the national level. Therefore, it is an important question what motivated them to move upwards through different positions and levels in the hierarchy of the sport organisations. Also in their statements about the reasons for their “upwards mobility” the interviewees included information about their general motives to be voluntary sport leaders.

In the interviews several issues emerged in the context of motives. We found the following dimensions which were used as codes and which structured the relevant information: values, learning, identity, social expectations, influence, career, comradeship and “the cause”. Most informants stated not only one but several motives to begin and stay in voluntary leadership; each person has its own mixture of motives.

According to the quantitative survey about sport leaders and leaders in social organisations conducted by Habermann, “the cause” is the most important motive in sport clubs, where as “values” are the most important in social organisations (Habermann, 2001, p. 187-197). In contrary, “career” was not reported as an important motive for any of the categories of voluntary leaders. The majority of our informants did not strive for leadership in order to make a career in a sport organisation; at least this is what they said. Some named influence as a motive. Several informants believed that sport leaders gain prestige, but they also noted that this is important for others but not for themselves. There seems also to be a connection between voluntary leadership and professional careers. Quite a number of our informants mention that sport leadership has various benefits for their occupation.

### **Gender perspectives**

The dominance of men in leadership positions and the gender hierarchies in all areas of society, including sports organisations, is not only the product of but also the driving force behind the gender order, at least in Western industrialized societies. Our theoretical reflections on gender and the gender order are based on constructivist theory, which is both the point of departure and an overarching link to our further theoretical approaches. According to Connell (2002) and Lorber (1994, p. 5; 2000) gender is a process of social constructions, "a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddings in the family, the workplace and the state as well as in sexuality, language and culture". Gendered values, norms and rules, myths and ideologies are 'acquired' by individuals and provide scripts for interactions and the construction of identity. From a constructivist perspective gender is not something that we are or that we have but something that we do. "Gender is both something we do and something we think with ... both a set of social practices and a system of cultural meaning" (Rakow, 1986, p. 19).

On the one hand, society with its gendered values, structures and arrangements influences sport organisations: their aims, ideals and self-definitions, their structures, their cultures and their practices (cf., among others, Winkler & Karhausen, 1985; Winkler, 1988; Jütting 1999; Emrich, Pitsch & Papathanassiou, 2001). (However, these influences, which lead, for instance, to a hierarchy of sports with football, a men's sport, at the highest level, are not attributed to the gender hierarchy but are regarded as discrimination.) On the other hand, the experiences, perspectives and personal life circumstances of the individuals working in the organisations are gendered, i.e. shaped by the gendered scripts of the society they live in. Therefore, we assume that gender and doing gender plays a major role in the biographies and careers of the drop-outs as well as in the drop-out process itself.

There is a considerable number of studies dealing with gender and organisations, although it must be pointed out that political orientation and theoretical standpoint both have a decisive impact on all aspects of the research from the questions asked to the methods used. Calas and Smircich (1996) provide an extensive overview of the various feminist approaches to organisation studies. With regard to the aims of my study, i.e. detecting processes of gender segregation and identifying mechanisms which lead to the marginalisation of women in the sports system, I base my assumptions on a gendered division of labour and tasks in organisations as well as on concepts which focus on the gendering of organising and regard gender and organisations as social constructions (Calas & Smircich 1996, p. 232).

The question arises as to whether or to what extent considerations and findings derived mostly from the labour market can be applied to third sector organisations and in particular to sports federations. There are many reasons for assuming that they are applicable, not least because businesses and sports associations can be regarded as organisations – defined as "institutions, groups and social edifices which consciously work towards a goal, divide the workload systematically and see their activities as long-term" (Lehner, 2002, p. 219).

From a constructivist point of view, Connell emphasises that gender relations "on the large scale" (Connell 2002, p. 97), especially in corporations, are marked by a gender segregation which is "deliberately introduced and actively defended" (ibid., p. 99). He

comes to the following conclusion: "Evidently, the reasons for the absence of women (and minority men) from top management have to do with the broad features of business organisation and the deeply entrenched patterns of division in the workplace" (ibid., p. 100). According to him, the top levels of organisations are dominated by men with specific characteristics and behaviour patterns. If women want to function in these positions, they have to "manage like a man". Similarly, Acker has described how the gendered nature of organisations is masked by the assumption of a "disembodied and universal worker. This worker is actually a man; men's bodies, sexuality, and relationship to procreation and work are subsumed in the image of the worker"(Acker 1990, p. 139). And this permeates structures and operations at the workplace.

Since the 1990s, scholars have been seeking with increasing interest to discover not only why but also how gender hierarchies arise in a society which forbids discrimination on grounds of gender and in organisations which have embraced the principle of equal rights and opportunities. Thus, they have been researching the everyday actions and interactions, procedures and decisions in various organisations (mostly in companies) that have resulted in gender segregation and gender hierarchies. They have described how gender becomes 'embedded' in organisations, i.e. how gender is anchored in structures, underlies processes and pervades the organisation's work and norms, power structure and culture (Alvesson & Billing 1997; Acker 1999; Mills & Tancred 1992; Müller, 1999). The incongruity between the requirements of equal rights and the gender hierarchy has been examined by Benschop and Dorewaard (1998), who, drawing on the work of Smith (1989), have tried to explain it by means of a "gendered subtext" which, "covered by equality" is completely invisible but, as a consequence, all the more intricately and effectively interwoven with the deeply-rooted structures of society.

By "subtext" Smith means "the internally coordinated complex of administrative, managerial, professional and discursive organization that regulates, organizes, governs and otherwise controls our societies" (Smith, 1989, p. 38). According to Smith "the objectified forms, the rational procedures and the abstracted conceptual organization create an appearance of neutrality and impersonality that conceals class, racial and gender subtext" (Smith, 1990, p. 63).



Taking Smith's observations as their point of departure, Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) have identified the conditions necessary for the creation of a gendered subtext. They point to interacting "sets of arrangements", namely structure, culture, interaction and identity in organisations. With regard to the aims and methods of my study, I will focus in this contribution on aspects of organisational culture, taking into consideration structural conditions, interactions and identities, as far as this is allowed by the data at my disposal.

Organisational cultures are enacted via symbols and images in everyday situations and relate, among other things, to aims, ideals, philosophies and corporate identities (Calas & Smircich 1996; Alverson and Due Billing 1997; Acker 1999). But also the written and unwritten rules and expectations as well as social relations and specifically how, where and when work is done is part of an organisation's culture. The gendering of an organisation is the result of "doing gender" on the part of the organisation's members, as well as of gendered values, rules and social interactions and of ideologies which legitimate gender distinctions and hierarchies (Mills & Tancred 1992; Alvesson & Due Billing 1997; Pfister 2004 a). Each member of the organisation is confronted with values, rules and expectations which construct the "ideal" worker and the "ideal" leader. As already mentioned above, the ideal leader is a man – according to Hovden (2000) a "heavyweight man" with energy, the ability to assert himself and "social capital" in Bourdieu's sense of the term (1982). In sports federations, moreover, leaders have to 'have the right pedigree' and must be ready to invest an almost unlimited amount of time (Horch, 1992; Emrich, Pitsch & Papathanassiou, 1996). In all organisations there is a widespread myth that the more time that is taken for a task, the better it is performed. Scholars who have studied life-work integration have emphasised the significance of time for "ideal" workers and leaders (Rapoport et al. 2002).

Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) have pointed to the fact that the gender subtext of organising is based on power. It is, on the one hand, the open and latent exertion of power in the form of force, authority or manipulation which secures gender differences and the hierarchies legitimised by these differences. On the other hand, however, "hegemonic power processes" take effect which contribute towards masking gender segregation. Benschop and Doorewaard define hegemonic power processes as "(a)

consisting of concealed processes of meaning formation, (b) uttered in (non)verbal expressions of common sense, identification, consensus and legitimizing rationalities. These processes (re)produce (c) consent or compliance with the dominant organizational discourse and the acceptance of day-to-day practices, in spite of the possible disadvantages of these practices for some persons involved"

([http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m4339/is\\_5\\_19/ai\\_65379678](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4339/is_5_19/ai_65379678)).

Organisation culture defines norms, rules and ideals, as well as enforcing images, identities and patterns of behaviour in sports organisations. Thus, organisation culture can function as a career ladder for those who "fit in with" this culture and as a barrier for those who cannot live up to the organisation's norms and expectations. Organisation culture also influences the activities and commitment of the individuals involved. Therefore, organisation culture approach can be used to research gender relations in sports organisations with a special focus on barriers, conflicts and "drop-out" processes.

Besides the organisational level, one must take into consideration the individuals and their personal circumstances. Here, theoretical approaches to the dual nature of women's work, i.e. the ambiguities of work in and for the family as well as work in the labour market and the influences of these on women's lives can be used as a theoretical basis (Becker-Schmidt 1994). Women's "normal biographies" and the necessary balance between the different roles they play in the family and in the labour market as well as the different demands made on them by these two spheres may also have an impact on their voluntary work and their willingness to take up positions of leadership (Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002).

## **Methods and design**

### **Method**

This project focuses on former leaders and their reconstruction of the drop-out. We wanted to find out about the reasons for dropping out and we expected insight in the barriers which women and men have to face on their way to leadership positions. We wanted to identify reasons on the organisational as well as on the individual level and to reconstruct the drop-out processes and also the problems connected with the structure and

culture of the organisations from the perspectives of the individuals involved. They are the experts of their experiences, decisions and their lives. It is not the “real” conditions and situations of the drop-out that are relevant, but the way they drop-out is perceived, interpreted and evaluated.

We have used the term drop-out to denote such former leaders. "Dropping out" is understood to mean a process in the course of which, as a result of situations or events, voluntary leaders decide to break off the work they have been doing for the federation before the time at which they originally planned to end their career.

The results of the German drop-out study about former sport leaders showed the complexity and ambiguity of drop-out processes. Therefore, we decided to use the same qualitative approach which allows in-depth insights in and differentiated analyses of “drop-out stories”. This research design allows a holistic perspective and enables us not only to take context, background and subjective experience into consideration but also to make the connection with daily life (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 7). According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative research "provides 'thick descriptions', that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth ..." (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.11). Qualitative surveys are also the method of choice when it comes to studying situations from the point of view of the people concerned or the attitudes, strategies and behaviour of those involved (Clark & Humberstone 1997). Qualitative methods allow an in-depth insight into and differentiated analysis of drop-out reports along with their complexities and ambiguities (Mayring, 1990; Lamnek, 1995).

We conducted problem-centred interviews, in which the interviewer, with the help of a guideline, raised “problems”/issues which were relevant with regard to the aims and questions of the study, thus enabling us to compare the statements of the different respondents, identify similarities and differences between them and search for patterns and ideal types. Moreover, this kind of interview gives the respondents the opportunity of raising their own questions and giving their own evaluations and explanations. Thus, the interviews also included narrative parts.

## **Guidelines**

The interview guidelines were influenced by the above-mentioned aims of the study as well as by our theoretical considerations. Thus, there were several questions about

voluntary work, about the meaning and implications of gender and about gender arrangements. Another area of questions concerned organisation culture and the relations and interactions among the members of the executive committees, including the issue of influence and power.

Other questions dealt with the biographies and careers of male and female drop-outs, especially their gender-specific experiences, opportunities and problems, and their personal circumstances, including their family life, their work and leisure. In addition, focus was placed on drop-out processes, i.e. the reasons for their leaving office, the circumstances under which they left their sport organisation, their own evaluation of these circumstances and their willingness to take over another leadership position in the future. At the end of the interview we asked the informants to give their opinions and their evaluation of their time as leaders and to describe their attitudes to leadership and volunteering in sport organisations. These issues were raised in all interviews which provided a framework for a comparison of the answers and an identification of similarities, differences and variations of the statements. But there were also narrative parts allowing both the interviewer and the interviewees to ask and answer more in depth and to explore areas of their own choice.

### **Selection and description of the informants**

As already mentioned, our “target group” were leaders of sport organisations who quit their position. The choice of the informant had the following rationale.

Voluntary leaders have to 'work their way up' from position to position and from level to level within the hierarchy. Therefore, we can assume that former leaders are persons with considerable experience of sport organisations; they are well-informed about the organisations and have gained an insight into how they work. Because the drop-out process is usually accompanied by a period of reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of continuing in their leadership positions, it was expected that the former leaders had given much thought to the benefits and the drawbacks of holding a voluntary position. Thus, it can be expected that they were well able to identify and evaluate the rewards as well as the barriers and problems which women and men face during their work in executive bodies of sport organisations. Especially the experience of female

drop-outs was assumed to be able to contribute towards identifying structures, practices and social relations which are responsible for the under-representation of women in the governing bodies of sport organisations.

The criteria for the selection of informants referred to the position and to the time of the drop-out. Our target group was former voluntary sport leaders who had left their position within the last two years either on their own decision or forced being not nominated again or not re-elected. Drop-out positions are defined as elected or appointed honorary offices at regional and national levels of the sport organisations. An important selection criterion was that the informants had dropped out earlier than they had planned at the beginning of the career. Thus, elderly leaders who had decided to withdraw after a long career in sport leadership were not selected in this project. Leaders who had left office for age or health-related reasons were also to be discounted.

For various reasons it proved difficult to find drop-outs who fitted to our criteria, although we had contact persons in the three umbrella organisations DIF, DGI and DFIF. These contact persons were members of an advisory board which had accompanied our foregoing project "Women Taking the Lead". This group was only to a limited degree able to provide names of former sports leaders, who had left their office in the relevant time. As a consequence we contacted the sport organisations at the regional and national levels by writing to both leaders and employees of federations, committees and sections in DIF, DGI and DFIF. After we had received the first names, we experienced something like a snowball effect; that means, that the contacted persons provided information about further potential interviewees. This way of selecting interview partners is a valid and frequently used method in qualitative studies.

The fact that it was very difficult to find drop-outs, even with the help of "insiders" indicates that most Danish voluntary leaders serve in their position for a long period of time. Some even left a position, but came back after a longer or shorter "break". In contrast to the result of the German study, a drop-out in the Danish context seems not to be a radical rupture with voluntary sport leadership, but merely a partly withdrawal while serving often still in other positions within the organisation.

Almost all the persons contacted were willing to participate in an interview. We assured the respondents that they would remain anonymous and that we will refrain from publishing information which will make identification possible.

We planned to interview up to 26 former leaders. We stopped interviewing when a certain degree of satiation was reached, that means when the statements did not offer any more new insight.

The 20 informants (10 women, 10 men) had been leaders in DGI (n=8), DIF (n=9) and DFIF (n=3). 17 of the informants had been leaders for more than 10 years.

Table 1 Gender and organisational affiliation

GENDER	DGI	DIF	DFIF
Female (n=10)	4	5	1
Male (n=10)	4	4	2

15 of the 20 informants were active at the national level and 5 at the regional level prior to leaving their position. Almost an equal number of male and female leaders were represented at each level (see Table 2). Only 1 informant (male) had been in the executive board of one of the three national umbrella organisations, while the majority of informants at the national level were on the executive boards of the sport federations (“specialforbund” under DIF), on the national committees of specific sports (“landsudvalg” under DGI) or on the sport sections (“idrætsudvalg” under DFIF).

Table 2 Gender and level of drop-out position of the informants (n=20)

GENDER	REGIONAL LEVEL	NATIONAL LEVEL
Female (n=10)	3	7
Male (n=10)	2	8

On the average, the respondents had held the drop-out position for 4.5 years. The maximum term on this position was 12 years, while the shortest term was three months (a male informant).

Table 3 Drop-out position, by gender and term of position

GENDER	DROP-OUT POSITION	TERM OF POSITION
Male 1	Executive-committee member, DFIF (national level)	5 years
Male 2	Chairman, sport committee, DFIF (national level)	10 years
Male 3	Committee member, DGI (regional level)	3 months
Male 4	Federation vice-chairman, DIF (national level)	10 years
Male 5	Committee member, DGI (national level)	2 years
Male 6	Federation committee chairman, DIF (regional level)	2 years
Male 7	Federation committee member, DIF (national level)	4 years
Male 8	Committee member, DGI (national level)	2 years
Male 9	Federation committee member, DIF (national level)	7 years
Male 10	Committee member, DGI (national level)	10 years
Female 1	Committee member, DGI (regional level)	3 years
Female 2	Committee member, DGI (regional level)	1 year
Female 3	Committee member, DIF (regional level)	4 years
Female 4	Committee member, DGI (national level)	4 years
Female 5	Federation chairman, DIF (national level)	4 years
Female 6	Committee member, DFIF (national level)	12 years
Female 7	Federation committee member, DIF (national level)	1 year
Female 8	Federation chairman, DIF (national level)	12 years
Female 9	Federation committee member, DIF (national level)	2 years
Female 10	Federation committee member, DIF (national level)	2 years

### Conducting the interviews

Following the positive experiences of the German study it was decided to conduct telephone interviews to collect the data. This saved time and costs. All informants were willing to participate in this type of interview which was easy to organise and did not

demand any preparation like finding a meeting place. In the conversations it was endeavoured to establish a relaxed, open and confidence-inspiring atmosphere. The interviewer had the impression, that the anonymous situation of talking via the telephone promoted a dialogue which was more open than in a face-to-face interview.

The interviews were conducted by Anne Lykke Poulsen and directly audio-taped. They lasted on the average one hour. 7 of the interviews with women were shorter than one hour, while the 5 interviews longer than 80 minutes were conducted with three men and two women. In contrast to the German drop-out study, the female informants were not more communicative and confident to speak than the males (Doll-Tepper et al., 2006, p. 318).

The interviews were transcribed by student helpers who had got guidelines for this procedure.

### **Analysis of the interviews**

After being transcribed, the interviews were coded with the use of the *Atlas.ti* software which is designed to support the analysis of qualitative data. For the coding of the transcriptions we developed a set of categories which was firstly oriented to our main topics. Subsequently, we searched the interviews for new topics which had emerged in the course of the interviews. These inductive categories were also taken into account in the analysis of the material.

The analysis of the interviews was carried out by means of a qualitative content analysis, which can be used in the systematic study of all types of texts (Mayring, 1990). According to Altheide, this method is based on the reduction and abstraction of the content of a text, is employed "to document and understand the communication of meaning as well as to verify theoretical relationships"(Altheide, 1987, p. 68). The texts were divided into their component parts by means of a system of categories and processed step by step. The next step of the structuring analysis was to condense the statements of the informants, now ascribed to specific categories, and systematically reduce them further, making sure that the results were checked against the original texts. This enabled us to distinguish trends and to identify not only types and patterns of drop-out processes but also variations and deviations from "typical" career paths. The main



task was the hermeneutic search for structures in the statements made. In this respect interpretation means the disciplined, intuitive and controlled attempt to gain understanding (Kleining 1982; Klein 1986; Tesch 1990).

With regard to the 'value' of statements made by a small number of interviewees Miles and Huberman point out that, since it is not a question of whether these statements are representative or can be generalized, the question of how frequently certain phenomena, events or patterns occur is irrelevant. On the contrary, what is important is the significance they have: "After all, the hallmark of qualitative research is that it goes beyond how much there is of something to tell us about its essential qualities" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 253).

## **Selected results**

In the following we present a selection of the first biographical analysis (14 of the interviews), followed by analysis and interpretation of their statements about gender and voluntary leadership.

### **Former leaders – first biographical analysis**

#### **Female 1 (born 1952)**

Marital status: single, divorced, two adult children.

Profession: low educational level, working as an office assistant.

F1 grew up in a large city in a working class family with a home-working mother. None of the parents were active in sport, neither as participators nor as leaders. The father was active in the Home Guard.

The sport biography was initiated in a local club at the age of 15. She is continuously active in her sport, gymnastics. She is educated as trainer and still teaches once a week. When becoming a leader at the regional level she followed the DGI leader education called "A strong voluntary leader". She finds leader education important.

The career as sport leader started in 1991. At a general assembly in the local club she was encouraged to go into the executive committee of the club. After a few years as committee member she was elected chairman of the gymnastic section of the club. After two years she was elected to the regional committee of DGI (drop-out position). At the same time she left the position as section chairman and became elected as vice-chairman in the local multi-stringed club.

The motivation of F1 to be a voluntary leader was engagement in a specific arrangement in the club. At the drop-out position the motivation was to have "good experiences" and to expand her network in advantage of the work in the local club.

Her general evaluation of her career as sport leader is that it gave her the opportunity to have an "impact on the local society". The evaluation of the drop-out position is positive especially with respect to the social relations and networks with other leaders which lead to a "sense of community" She felt like in a big family. But she was surprised that the time factor turned out to be a problem in this position.

She chose not to stand for re-election, because she did not feel that she had time enough for both her work and her voluntary position. The decisive factor was that her working place was restructured which increased her working load. During the drop-out process she had to give first priority to her occupation, which made her feel bad consciousness in relation to the voluntary position. She was sorry about dropping out and was afraid she was going to miss her network and the sense of community in the voluntary field. For this reason she still holds a position in the regional club culture committee.

### **F2 (born 1977)**

Marital status: single, married at the time of the drop-out position, no children

Profession: middle educational level, teacher on a residential school (efterskole).

F2 grew up in a city. Her father did not at all do sports, but the mother did a little. None of the parents were sport leaders.

The sport biography began in early childhood with several sports on a non-elite level. Today she is only teaching sport through the occupation. She has followed the first step of a trainer education in gymnastics. Through her teacher training she has the skills to be a trainer. By request she followed the first step of the DGI leader education "A strong voluntary leader", but due to sickness in the family she dropped out.

The career as leader began in 2000 after several years as trainer. She was encouraged to be a candidate and was elected to the board of the local club in the town where she studied teacher training. The experience of the first position was quite negative due to a sense of not being included in the "stagnant" board and she left after one year. In 2004, after moving back to her home town she was elected to the regional committee of DGI (drop-out position).

The general motivation for the leader career is explained as a "natural next step" after the years as trainer into the community of her club. Experience as voluntary leader was also expected to be beneficial in relation to her occupational and personal development.

The general evaluation of the leader career is positive because it provided a sense of being part of a community and having influence. She preferred to organize courses and

other activities for trainers and leaders in the local clubs. In contrast, she had no interest in the more structural and political discussions in the committee.

These issues were very much on the agenda in the regional DGI committee and therefore she decided to drop-out from her position in the middle of the election period. She had a bad conscience about her drop-out. Currently F2 holds no voluntary positions. When she will have stopped working at an 'efterskole', she might become a sport leader again, probably at the regional level.

### **F3 (born 1950)**

Marital status: single, no children

Profession: middle educational level, teacher.

F3 grew up in a provincial town. Her parents were skilled workers. Both parents performed sport when they were young, but none of them were sport leaders.

The sport biography was initiated in early childhood by performing several sports on a non-elite level. She still does sport, gymnastics and water sport, regularly. She has a trainer education and is still trainer on ad hoc basis in the club. Regarding leader education, she has attended some short one-day courses organised by DIF.

The career as sport leader started at the age of 18 when she was elected to the committee of a local club. Over the years until the 1990's she held 4-5 different positions in this club. In 1974 she was elected to the executive committee of the regional federation. Due to illness she had to withdraw from this position after 5 years. One year later in 1980 she was elected to the federation's executive committee and held this position for 10 years. After a one year break, in 1991, she became chairman of the executive committee of the regional federation. She kept this office until 1996. As chairman she was a born member of the federation's executive committee. After a five year break from sport leadership she was elected to the regional committee of DIF in 2001. At the time of the interview she is just about to leave this position, earlier than she had planned.

The motivation for the first position was a wish to change the "old-fashioned" club and to develop new possibilities for the young members in the club. The general motivation to serve as a leader in a sport organisation is the influence which is connected

with this type of positions. She stresses that she had “something to offer” and that her expertise was useful to the work in the sport organisation. But also the social relations in the federation were important for her.

The general evaluation of the leader career is positive. She has learnt democratic and economic skills that are useful in her occupation. In relation to the drop-out, she tells that she could not stay in the position because she had not enough time any more to be useful and contribute to the work.

According to this informant, the reasons for the drop-out were the challenges and the new priorities in her occupation life. After 1½ year at the drop-out position, F3 started in a new and more extensive job and she no longer had "the surplus to take care of the leadership work decently". After half a year she was permitted an unofficial leave from her honorary office for a few months. But in the end it turned out, that even more new tasks were given to her in her occupation and she decided to drop-out from the leadership position. After the drop-out she is involved in sport leadership only on an ad hoc basis. This is the way she plans to be involved in sport leadership in the future.

#### **F4 (born 1950)**

Marital status: single, divorced (but married at drop-out position), one adult child

Profession: low educational level, social and health assistant

F4 grew up in the countryside, the father had a small haulage contractor company and the mother worked at home. The parents performed some sport when young only.

The sport biography began at an early age with different sports at a non-elite level. As young she found her favourite sport in which she also has a trainer education. She is still active as a trainer in the local club. Regarding leader education she has attended a leader education at the regional level of DGI and later on also the the DGI-education "A strong voluntary leader". She finds education very important in order to handle the changes in both the sport organisation and in the society in general.

The leader career started late. In 1993, at the age 43 she was elected to a newly established committee for her sport in the local multi stringed club. Soon she became chairman of this committee. At the same time she attended trainer education. As a chairman she attended meetings at the regional level, and in 1996 she was elected to a

committee under the regional committee of DGI. She held this position until 2005, the last 4 years as vice-chairman. When redrawing from the position she became chairman of the regional club culture committee, a position she still holds. In 2002-06 she also went into the national level, when she was elected to a national committee under DGI (drop-out position).

The motivation for the first and later positions was "to do something for the youth", to facilitate sport for them and to encourage them to go into leadership. The motivation for the drop-out position was curiosity about things worked at the national level of her sport organisation. But also personal development in terms of learning and getting experiences is mentioned. The general evaluation of the leader career is very positive. She has learnt about coaching and communication and it has enhanced both the personal network and the network in relation to the local club.

At the drop-out position she was a contact person for international relations and she was also involved in different sports arrangements and camps. The reason for the drop-out was that she lost in an election to another candidate. It was a disappointment to her that her own region decided to nominate the other, male, candidate. She explains her drop-out by gender "I think men have an incredible persuasiveness. I don't know if people believe more in men than in women. Maybe sometimes... and then they have that self confidence..."

After the drop-out she was disappointed but was supported by a mentor in the DGI. Though, she decided to continue her work at the regional level as chairman in the club culture committee. Besides she is still chairman in the committee under the local multi stringed club. If she is encouraged to sign up she is willing to be leader at the national level again.

### **Female 5 (born 1967)**

Marital status, single at the time of the drop-out position, now living with a partner with their young child

Profession: middle educational level, teacher on a residential school.

F5 grew up in a workers family in the western part of Denmark. None of the parents participated in sport. She participated in different sports since the early childhood and

was in the international elite in her sport (a martial art discipline). She is still active participant and trainer in her sport at a club level. It used to be much more, but after she gave birth to her child it's only once a week.

She is educated trainer in the federation, and additionally followed the sport line at the teacher's training college. In order to handle the responsibilities at the drop-out position (federation chairman) she attended leader education in DIF (Idrættens lederakademi).

The career as sport leader started when F5 was 15 years as she was elected to the committee of the local sports club. She was leader in the club for many years. At the same time as she had her elite sport career she was a leader at the regional and national levels of her sport federation; she was chairman of the federation's children's committee; member of the sport for all committee in DIF as well as she held central responsible positions in her national federation. The drop-out position was four years as chairman of the sport federation.

The motivation for being a voluntary leader was "to make a difference" and a sense of obligation; "if one has an idea about how to improve things, then one has to volunteer one's services". She also sees her leadership as a pay-back; "I owe so much [to the world of sport], because if I had never been seen or heard by anybody except from professionals, then I would never have felt worthy". The motivation for the drop-out position was to improve the federation's external relations to DIF and Team Danmark.

The general evaluation of the leader career is that she thinks that she has made a difference.

F4 decided to stop as federation chairman after four years (two election periods). Over the years as chairman she had to handle severe conflicts of interest between two groups in the federation, but apart from this she experienced good internal relations in the federation. Over the years, she also succeeded in improving the external relation and stabilizing the economy of the federation. With these results, she thought that her job as chairman was done; it was time to withdraw. More over, due to the internal conflicts she had experienced unpleasant personal attacks, which also supported her motivation to drop-out.

After the drop-out she is still trainer in the local club, besides she is involved in an ad hoc committee in the federation. For the future, she expects not to return as leader in the federation, but she is very interested in engaging in specific time limited projects. Also, she finds it possible that she will at a time nominate for leadership in DIF.

**Female 6 (born 1947)**

Marital status: single, two adult children

Profession: low educational level, hairdresser

F6 grew up in a provincial city; her parents were skilled workers. The father was a very active sport leader and he was one of the founders of DFIF. As child, F6 liked to join the father when he went out to do sport or to be a leader for his team of female handball players. She also participated in sports herself, handball among others. Today she does gymnastics.

She has no trainer education and has never been a trainer. Neither has she attended a leader education except that she has participated in different courses due to her role in the arranging committee of these courses.

The leader career started when she was almost 40 years, when she was appointed to the exercise section in a city association of DFIF. Here, she arranged sports events and negotiated with the municipality about distributions of sporting facilities. A few years later she became contact person for sport courses in the region and in 1991 she was encouraged to go into the education committee at the national level of DFIF, the drop-out position which she held until 2003.

The motivation to become a leader was that her former husband was already a sport leader in the company sport club where she was also a member; "and then I thought, that when he was there, then I might as well do something. But the motivation for stepping up the levels was an interest in education and a wish to create something she could use both in her leisure time and in her occupational life. And then she was motivated by a wish to work together with people and to explore and see things.

In the evaluation of the leader career F6 mentions that she learnt skills about education, leadership and cooperation, which she could use when she in her professional life became cleaning manager with responsibility for the education of a large cleaning



personnel in the region. She describes the leader career as "an incredible giving and exiting period".

In the last years in the education committee, the drop-out position, the executive board decided a restructuring of the organisation which meant that the education committee would be closed down. This, in combination with a severe occupational strain made her decide to withdraw from the position and from leadership at all. After the drop-out she is not a leader, but she is willing to return; "somebody just has to call me".

### **Female 7 (born 1959)**

Marital status: married, 1 child living at home

Profession: High educational level, teacher, cand. ped.

F7 was born in Copenhagen, her father was a military officer and the mother was an office assistant. Only the father was an active sportsman, playing handball. She started to do several sports at an early age, and later also played handball on a sub-elite level.

Today, she is still active doing aqua gymnastics and pilates.

She is educated as a trainer in several sports and she also attended the sport line at the teacher's training college. After many years as a trainer she is currently a supervisor for the trainers in the local club (a paid position) as well as an instructor in the DGI. She has no education as a leader. Once she started at a leader course but didn't have the energy to carry it out.

The leader career started in the committee of the local club when she was 17 years old. In the club she met her husband who was also a leader; "my husband and I, we were the club in those days..." For many years however, it was the work as a trainer and at a later stage as an advisor for trainers that was the most important to her. In 1994 she was elected to the educational section of the handball committee of DGI at the national level. After four years she withdrew from the position, but returned for a second period in 2003-4 (drop-out position).

The motivation for the first position was to have influence on the pedagogical and social issues in the club, issues where she could use her professional skills. This was also her motivation to join the educational section of DGI-Handball. However, the motivation for re-entering this section in 2003 was that the work was interesting, and that she had

accepted the position under a slight pressure, even though she no longer had the time for the voluntary position.

The evaluation of the leader career is positive. She finds that she had influence and that her work was acknowledged even though it was somehow difficult to realise new ideas and to include the trainers in the new ideas.

The reason for the first drop-out in 1998 was partly a wish to prioritise voluntary sport leadership at the regional level and partly that she was appointed a new leader with responsibilities at her school. The last drop-out from the same position was due to lack of time for voluntary leadership. She managed one period but then dropped out because she "couldn't give what I thought it deserved".

After the drop-out she still helps on an ad hoc basis in the regional DGI, but is not willing to have a real position at neither the regional nor the national level in the future. She is still working as a youth trainer advisor in a local club (a paid job).

### **Female 8 (born 1946)**

Marital status: married, 2 adult children.

Profession: High educational level, cand. polit.

F8 grew up north of Copenhagen, the father was an insurer and the mother worked as a book-keeper. Both parents were involved in the same water sport that F8 also engaged in. The father was a voluntary sport leader, which meant that F8 since early childhood joined him at sport meetings and competitions. The sport biography started in early childhood and she very soon chose the same water sport as the parents. Between the ages of 19-25 she competed on an elite level. In this period she also started to be a national and international judge in her sport and still is. Today, she is still active in the same sport on a non-elite level.

She has trainer education but has only briefly been a trainer. Regarding leader education she has followed education and courses both in DIF and in the special sport federation.

The leader career started in the local club in her early twenties when she became responsible for the boat-races. In the 1970s she held several positions on local and regional levels and also became an international judge. In 1979 she moved to the national

level of her sport federation where she was elected as vice-chairman. She left the position in 1984 due to family (pregnancy) and professional (a requiring job) priorities. Two years later she became responsible for the national elite facilities of her sport. Being back on the stage she was encouraged to take over when the chairman of the special sport federation decided to stop, and from 1989-2001 she was federation chairman (drop-out position).

The motivation for the first voluntary position was her interest in the conditions of the active members. While she was still competing in her sport she had decided to become a sport leader when leaving elite sport, "in order to give her own contribution to the sport." The ambitions for the drop-out position was to chair the federation in a more open and transparent way in order to involve more voluntaries in the decision processes and another motivation was the international work and relations in the position.

The general evaluation of the leader career is positive. She liked to have influence on sport and sport policy nationally and internationally.

The reason for the drop-out was that she, after 12 years in the position, had realised most of her ideas and plans in the federation and that a new person should take over. She didn't like to stick to the position not having specific visions. The drop-out was prepared and cleared with the federation executive committee 2-3 years before.

After the drop-out she still held some voluntary national and internal positions. Today she is a voluntary leader at the club level and still holds some international positions. She is still an international judge. She is not willing to take a full position at the national level; however she is willing to be assigned to tasks on an ad hoc basis.

### **Female 9 (born 1952)**

Marital status: single

Profession: high educational level, originally a correspondent clerk, cand. ling. merc.

F9 grew up on a farm in the countryside, where the mother was working at home. The parents had been gymnasts when young, but were not active in sport during F9's childhood. Her own sport biography started in adolescence; she did gymnastics and horse riding on a non-elite level since the age of 15. She still performs these activities as well as swimming, running and bicycling.

She has attended trainer education in swimming and triathlon in both federations under DIF and in DGI. She is a trainer in swimming on a non-elite level in the local club. She has no leader education and explains it by her lack of leader and organising skills.

The first voluntary position was in the sport-for-all section in a federation under DIF in the beginning of the 1990s. She was encouraged to take the position during a training camp for women and accepted. Later she was also asked to join the woman's section of the federation, a position she held until the section was merged with the sport-for-all section in the late 1990s. For one election period she was also a member of the federation committee from 1999-2002. She held the position in the sport-for-all section until 2003; thus it is also the drop-out position.

As motivation for becoming a sports leader she mentions that she likes to be close to the place where decisions are made.

Even though she likes to be close to the deciding bodies of the sport organisation her evaluation of the leader career is that she was not a very active and influential leader and that she did not have the personal skills to engage in sport at the political level. In the sport-for-all section her only responsibility was to write the minutes of the meetings. She felt most involved in the position in the woman's' section where she arranged sport meetings and camps.

She left the positions in the federation by her own choice because "her heart was not in it". Over some time she had realised that she was more involved in being a trainer in the local swimming club; a job she had continuously held. Another reason was that her local club was closed and therefore she no longer had the mandate to be in the positions.

After the drop-out she continues to be a swimming trainer in the local club; "this is my strong side". She doesn't think she will be a leader in the future; neither at the club nor at higher levels.

### **Female 10 (born 1961)**

Marital status: Married, 2 children living at home

Profession: high educational level, cand. scient. pol.

F10 grew up in the countryside of Denmark. Her parents were farmers. They did some sports, however they were lifelong members in several other associations in the local

community. The sport biography of F10 started at an early age with different activities. When she was 10 she started swimming and was a competitive swimmer until she was 17 years old, followed by five years as a synchronized swimmer at an elite level. Today she is playing handball.

Since she was 15 she attended trainer courses and education in and outside Denmark. Today she is a handball trainer for children but has no trainer education yet. In the 1990s she followed the sports leadership education in DIF.

The leader career started at the age 21 when she moved to a university city to study. A friend invited her to join the synchronized section in the regional swimming federation. After 4 years she became chairman of the section, and thereby she also became a member of the national synchronized section at the national level. She was chairman of this national section since 1992. In 2000-2002 she was on the executive board of a national federation under DIF (drop-out position).

The motivation to become a sport leader was to support and develop the activities in the sport. She liked to plan and realise sport meetings and courses. The motivation for the drop-out position was to contribute to the development of the sport and not least to a more open decision making process in the organisation.

To F10 it is as satisfying to be a children's trainer as to hold a high position as sport leader. The evaluation of the leader career is characterised by negative experiences of the power relations and the inconsequent handling of conflicts in the federation.

The reason for the dropout was conflicts with persons in the federation staff that she thought were solved in an unethical and personalized way. The conflicts peaked half a year before the election period ended. She left the position by her own choice after one period. She considered to leave immediately after the conflict but stayed until the end of the election period.

After the drop-out she is not involved in sport leadership, besides being a trainer in the local club once a week. She liked the "political game", but is not willing to be leader at the national level again because she thinks the power structure in the organisation is too dominated by old men with conservative ideas.

### **Male 1 (born 1941)**

Marital status: married, 3 adult children

Profession: low educational level, during the time of the drop-out position as a collaborator at a local sport centre.

M1 grew up at a farm in the Northern part of Denmark. The father was involved in committees of the local farmer organisations. The parents were not involved in sport, neither as participants nor as leaders.

Sport at a non-elite level was part of his life since early childhood. He is still active in sport, badminton, today. At the age of 35 he was educated as trainer in DFIF, and worked as a trainer for many years. Regarding education as leader, he followed several short term leader courses.

The career as leader began in 1963 when he was elected to the committee of his company's sport club. In 1970 he became a committee member of the local district of DFIF. Since 1994 has been the chairman of this district. For five years in the 1990s he was in the executive committee of the DFIF. This is the drop-out position.

Initially M1 was enrolled as leader via family activities in the company sport club. The general motivation for M1 to be a sport leader was that this seemed to be "interesting" and "challenging". The motivation for the drop-out position was "curiosity", to gain influence and a drive to learn from this experience.

In general the evaluation of the leader career is positive. It has given "good experiences", "has been challenging". Besides it was an opportunity to help others and to be part of a community.

M1 was forced to leave the executive committee, because he was not re-elected. He ascribes this to practical circumstances in the election process and not to conflicts in relation to his role and work in the drop-out position. He describes the working relations in the committee as harmonic and constructive. After the drop-out he continued and spent more time as chairman of the company sport district. In his perspective, it is not an option for him to be leader at a higher level in the future, due to new demands of qualifications.

### **Male 2 (born 1954)**

Marital status: married, 2 children, one child is living at home

Profession: middle educational level, sergeant

M2 grew up in a provincial town together with his mother, since the parents were divorced when he was three years old. His parents were workers. None of the parents were involved in sport. However, the father was politically active and a member of the town council.

The sport biography was initiated by performing sport at a non-elite level at the age of 13. He continued with military sport disciplines as he attended the military. Today he does fitness in a commercial centre. He was educated as trainer both in the sport organisation and during his military occupation. On his own initiative he attended courses in leader education in DFIF. His motivation for education was personal development. The career as voluntary leader started in 1978 when he was elected to the executive committee of a sport section in a city association of DFIF. Later he was treasurer and chairman of this committee. After several years he was member of the executive committee of the city association, with the responsibility for all sports. In 1984, he became chairman of a committee at the national level of DFIF, and held this position for 10 years. In 1993 he was temporary chairman of the city association. Since 1995 he was elected chairman in the association, a position he still holds. 1993-2003 he was chairman of another committee in DFIF (the drop-out position).

The general motivation to be a voluntary leader is to develop and do something for other people. A more personal motive is that he found it challenging to negotiate and discuss with people. He also mentions a more political motive; he wanted to make DFIF more visible.

The general evaluation of the drop-out position is positive with regard to tasks and internal working relations. His committee of DFIF had influence "because we were tough and went strictly by the rules." The relation to the executive committee of DFIF was characterised by conflicts.

M2 was forced out of the drop-out position. Due to former conflicts, the executive committee of DFIF recommended him not to re-nominate for the position, and he decided "not to take up the cudgels". After the drop-out he has continued at the position as chairman in the city company sport association.

### **Male 3 (born 1964)**

Marital status: married, two young children

Profession: middle educational level, graphic technician

M3 grew up in a town in the countryside. The parents were both skilled workers. The father was an active sportsman as well as trainer and leader in the local sport club.

Thanks to the father M3 came into voluntary work at the age of 15, when he was encouraged to be a football trainer.

Since the early childhood M3 performed a variety of sports at a non-elite level. For some years he played football at a sub-elite level. Today he is not physically active. He has a trainer education from a federation under DIF and has been a trainer for many years. He has not attended leader education or courses, even though the organisation offered many relevant courses. If he had continued as leader, he thinks he would have attended courses.

The career as leader began when he was 17 with a position in a youth committee in the local club. Two years later he was elected to the executive committee of the club. At the age of 21 he moved away from his home town. In the new town he was trainer and leader in the local club for 10 years, until he moved again. Once again he was engaged in the club in the new town where he still lives, but soon after he prioritized his professional work and withdraws from voluntary leadership. In 2002, he was encouraged to accept a position as member of the regional committee of DGI (drop-out position). Since the life-work balance was acceptable at this time, he accepted the election, but chose already after three months to leave the position.

The motive to be a voluntary leader is a wish "to help children and young people" to gain access to sport and "fun". The general evaluation of the three months at the drop-out position was positive. There was a positive, non-hierarchic and safe atmosphere in the board, "like a small family". Evaluating the voluntary career, M3 especially emphasizes the acknowledgement he experienced as trainer.

M3 left the regional committee after three months. Due to increased tasks and many travelling days at work, he did not have time and energy to continue at the voluntary position. He is not a voluntary leader for the time being, but will possibly soon



become involved at club level and do something related to children's sport. He sees prospective leadership at the regional level as a possibility, but only if there will be a radical change in his working conditions.

**Male 4 (born 1947)**

Marital status: married, two children, one is living at home.

Profession: middle educational level, teacher, working at a teacher's training college and coordinates further education for teachers.

M4 grew up in a village in the countryside. The parents were working as pedagogues, the father as skilled and the mother as unskilled pedagogue. When the children were small the mother was working in the home. Both parents were active in sport, and the father was until at a great age a trainer and leader at both club and regional levels of the DGI.

M4 began his sport biography in early childhood at a non-elite level. He attended a folk high school (højskole) to perform gymnastics. He developed great skills in gymnastics and was able to participate in gymnastic performance at an elite level. He went on a world tour with the Flensted-Jensen Gymnastic Team and continued for 10 years to do gymnastics in DGI.

He was educated as trainer at the folk high school and attended the sport line at the teacher's training college, but had no trainer education in the sport organisations. In the 1970s he was a trainer in artistic gymnastics and then ended his trainer career. He has no education as leader, although he believes that he and other voluntary leaders need more education and knowledge about organisation and project steering.

The leader career began in the 1970s, when M4 was in the committee of a local club for two years. He was not very engaged in this position; partly due to private turbulences and partly due to a lack of interest, because his priority was to be a trainer. Some years later he was asked to stand for election for the education committee in a federation under DIF. He was in this committee for 10 years, the last 8 years as chairman. He left the education committee in 1995 when he was elected vice-chairman of the federation (drop-out position). He held the position for almost 10 years. In addition, M4 is in the committee of the international federation.

The general motivation for M4 to be a voluntary leader was an interest in education that he relates to his profession. At the drop-out position the prior motivation was to have influence on the development of the federation and its "products", due to an emerging interest in sport policy. But he also stresses the importance of his growing national and international network. In general, his evaluation of the career as voluntary leader is positive. It has contributed to his personal development and he had learned how to speak up in public and he had gained insight into the functioning of organisations.

M4 decided not to sign up for re-election. One official reason was that he wished to make new priorities in his life. The second official reason was related to the election of a new chairperson of the federation one year later. It was expected that he would sign up for this position, but he sensed that the federation was not ready to accept his conditions and pay him an honorarium for his work as head of the federation. But his decision to leave had unofficially also another reason: A highly employed officer with whom M4 had experienced an excellent cooperation had left the federation and he was not happy with the successor. After the drop-out M4 continued in the committee of the international federation of his sport and he sees this position as a peak in his leader career. Whether he will sign up for the position as chairman of the national federation depends on the conditions. He finds that voluntary leadership at this level cannot be combined with a full time occupation, an honorarium is necessary to accomplish the position.

### **M5 (born 1970)**

Marital status: living together with a (male) partner, no children.

Profession: high educational level, lawyer.

M5 grew up in a provincial town. The parents' educational level was middle, the father was engineer and the mother was laboratory worker. Both parents were sport active in their youth and the father was leader in the local club.

He was active in sport from early childhood at a non-competitive elite level in both DGI and DGF. He still performs his sport, gymnastics, today at a non-elite level. M5 has a trainer education in two sports in DIF-federations, and he has also taken trainer courses in DGI. He is still a trainer. On his own initiative, he has attended both the former "foreningslederuddannelse" and the DGI-education "A strong voluntary leader".

The career as sport leader started at the age of 18 when he after some years as trainer was elected vice-chairman of the local club. Later he "moved naturally on" to a committee at the regional level of DGI. He was chairman of this committee 1991-2000. At the beginning of the 1990's, he was also member of two sub-committees at the national level of DGI. A few times he attended meetings in a federation belonging to DIF, but stopped because he felt that he could only have one sport political affiliation. In 2001-2003 he was a member of the committee responsible for a specific sport at the national level (drop-out position).

The general motivation to be a leader is to have influence on the development of the sport and "to be closer to the processes of decision". Personal development and strive for new experiences are named as motives. The general evaluation of the leader career is positive in terms of personal development, organisational and communicative skills that he can use both in his private and professional life.

Drop-out reason: M5 was elected to the committee at the national level for one year. He was re-elected, but decided after another year to drop-out in the middle of the election period. The drop-out process was initiated by a discrepancy between his committee and the executive committee of DGI. From the point of view of M5, the executive committee in a certain matter made an "undemocratic" decision that had directly impact on his voluntary work. As a reaction he immediately left his position at the national level of DGI. After the drop-out he is still leader at both regional and club levels. He is positive about leadership at the national level in the future, and even about the same position as the drop-out position.

### **M6 (born 1952)**

Marital status: married, 3 children, one of them is living at home.

Profession: middle educational level, works as a chief accountant in a private company.

M6 grew up in a provincial town. The father was mechanic and the mother was an unskilled office worker. None of the parents were involved in organised sport, but the father was scout leader. The family was involved in scout life. M6 points out that he had learnt much about organising and leadership from his father.

The sport biography started at an early age. He played different ballgames, one of them at a sub-elite level. Due to injuries, the active sports career stopped in his early 20's. He is not educated as trainer or leader, but has followed shorter trainer courses. He has been assistant trainer and team leader. He never had much information about leader education, and did not think he needed it.

The career as leader started at the age of 27 when he was elected to the executive committee of the local club where he had already been engaged for several years. After one year he became treasurer for five years, not the least, because he as an accountant had the skills needed for this office. For a period in the 1980's he lived in another town where he was involved in the local club as trainer. Returning to his home town, he was involved in a newly established club as chairman for four years. Then followed a period without voluntary leadership. In 1998, he was appointed chairman of a committee which was responsible for the running of the local sport facilities. He still holds this position. From 2004-05 he was chairman of a sub-committee at the regional level of a sport federation under DIF (drop-out position).

The general motivations for M6 to be a voluntary leader were his passion for sport and club life and his aim to do social work through sport. Personal development is also one of his motives; he wished to train leadership and organising skills in sport organisations and hoped that these competencies would be an advantage in his profession. He describes voluntary leadership as a "training ground in relation to my professional career". At the regional level, he hoped to be able "to make a difference" to a higher degree than at the local level. The general evaluation of the leader career is most positive in relation to the positions at the club level. To be chairman of a local club was for him the peak of the leader career.

After two years he decided not to sign up for re-election, due to a feeling that there was a too long distance between the regional committee and the clubs and that there was no involvement from the local clubs. Also the lack of social relations played a role: "there was no fellowship with the people you worked with [...] ...we came to the meetings and left again." According to the informant, the atmosphere in the regional federation was not very enthusiastic and positive and this had negative effects on his involvement in the position. After the drop-out he continued for a while to work in a sub-committee until

a new leader was found. He still holds the position as chairman of the committee which is responsible for the local sport facilities. Besides this he assists his son, who is an elite trainer. Concerning leadership in the future, he does not think he will return to the regional or national levels.

**Male 7 (born 1950)**

Marital status: married, 2 adult children

Profession: high educational level (in finance), runs a private company

M7 grew up in Copenhagen, his father was a florist and his mother was a midwife. Both parents did sport, but were not active as leaders. His own sport biography started in the early childhood. Since the age of 12 and forward he played his favourite sport at a national elite level. He still plays this activity. He has a trainer education and has been trainer for kids at an elite level for many years. He has attended some leader courses in his federation, but has not followed a leader education in DIF. He does not think he needed more leader education.

The leader career began in 1972 at the age of 22 when he was elected chairman of a youth committee in the local single stringed club. He sees the election as a generation revolt. Shortly after, he went abroad to work and study. When returning to Denmark and the old club in 1982, he immediately was appointed as treasurer (1982-86) and later he became chairman (1986-96) in the club. In 1996-2000 he moved to the national level, where he was elected to the committee of a federation under DIF, apparently with the task to change the bad financial situation of the federation. After one year break, he returned to the committee of the same federation until 2005. This is the drop-out position, in which he was sport-for-all responsible.

The motivation for the first position was to get influence on and to develop the activities for the young people in the club. To get influence on the development was also the motivation for signing up for the drop-out position. He had the power in the position to appoint certain people to different sub-committees.

The general evaluation of the leader career is positive in terms of personal development. Voluntary leadership "creates you as a human being". The meeting and dialogue with other people was the most important aspect of the leadership. However, his

evaluation of the drop-out position is quite negative. There were conflicts in the committee and it was difficult to implement the policy of the federation, due to many different local agendas at the regional level.

At the end of the second election period M7 decided not to nominate for re-election. Before the drop-out he was dissatisfied with the organisational structure of federation, which he thought needed to be centralised with a larger number of employed sport-for-all consultants. After the drop-out he has totally stopped as voluntary leader. Regarding the future, he is sure that he will only be leader on an ad hoc basis, either at financial tasks or as a kid's trainer.

### **Male 8 (born 1977)**

Marital status: single

Profession: middle educational level, office assistant, working as IT-coordinator

M8 grew up in a provincial town, his parents were skilled workers. The father participated in sport and the mother was scout leader at local level. His own sport biography began in early childhood with different sports, and he played badminton at a sub-elite level.

He attended trainer education under DGI when he was teenager and was a trainer until he was 22 years. He followed different leader courses specifically for young leaders and later he attended the DGI-education "A strong voluntary leader".

The leader career began at the age of 16 where he was elected to the committee of the local single stringed club. In 1997, after participating in different leader seminars at the regional level he was encouraged to sign up for two positions in the regional DGI. He was elected to the badminton committee and to the regional committee. He held these positions until he moved to another part of the country in 1999. In the new city he, thanks to his network, immediately was encouraged to become member of the badminton committee under the regional DGI until 2005. Since 2002 he was also involved in the region's international committee and via this work he walked his way to the national committee of international relations (the drop-out position), which he held from 2003-05.

The motivation for the first position was curiosity, and he also saw leadership as a natural prolongation of the trainer career. The motivation for entering the regional level

was also curiosity and an openness to learn. Also, he wished to develop new activities for young people in the organisation. At the drop-out position the motivation was the possibility to undergo personal development, a possibility he did not have in his professional occupation. A general motive for voluntary leadership was also the possibility to meet people from another background than his own.

The general evaluation of the leader career is positive in the sense that he was so dedicated to the cases he was involved in. He could participate in developing the area; and he learnt a lot from these developing processes. On the other hand, he thinks that many meetings in the organisation and at the drop-out position were too much ideology with too little attention on actions and activities. He had some disagreements with other members in the international committee regarding what and how much activity the committee should initiate. M8 was of the opinion that the committee should have initiated many more cultural and international meetings.

At the end of the first period in the international committee (drop-out position), M8 nominated together with four other candidates for the four free positions, but he did not get re-elected. He explains this, not as a result of the first two years in the position, but because he and his friend had not been prepared to make a good motivation speech prior to the election.

After drop-out, M8 still holds an appointed position in the international sport-for-all organisation (ISCA) as a representative of DGI. Under certain circumstances he might in the future return to leadership at the national level; if the position takes limited time and if he can be sure to acknowledge the leader colleagues in the position.

### **Male 9 (born 1940)**

Marital status: married at the time of the dropout position, one adult child

Profession: middle educational level, has a private marketing company

M9 grew up in a small provincial town; his parents were unskilled workers in the local jail. None of the parents did any sport. M9 played different ball games as a child and handball on a sub elite level when he was young. Today he goes to fitness activities in a commercial centre and plays golf. He has no trainer education, but has been a trainer for several years. This was when he, in the roll as club chairman, had to take over teams

where the trainers had suddenly left the club. He is educated as a referee and was a national and international referee for many years. He never attended courses for voluntary leaders and explains it by lack of time.

The leader career began when he was around 45 years old. The first position was as a member of the referee section in the regional handball federation. He was also chairman of the local club for many years. In two periods he was a member of the referee section of the national federation under DIF; the first period was from 1988-1994. He withdrew from the position after internal disagreements. Thereafter he was in a referee section at the regional level. In the second period, 1997-2004, at the national level he was responsible for the education of the referees (the drop-out position).

The motivation for the first voluntary position was an interest in the referee education. Also, the motor was to have social relations with other people and a professional interest in development.

The general evaluation of the leader career is positive, because it was possible to have influence in his field. Also, the leader career gave good experiences and positive social relations.

M9 mentions age as the reason for the drop-out. He prepared the drop-out by finding a successor to take over his responsibilities.

After the drop-out he still had small ad-hoc tasks for the national federation, among others as mentor for referees. Due to his advanced age he is not willing to go into leadership again.

### **Male 10 (born 1954)**

Marital status: married with two small children living at home

Profession: high educational level, cand. mag., high school teacher

M10 grew up in a provincial city, his father was a hair dresser and his mother worked at home. Both parents did sport when young, but were not active as leaders. But M10 mentions an uncle who was a sport leader. He started to play football as a child on a non-elite level. He continued to play as an adult, but had to stop 10 years ago due to rheumatism.



He attended trainer education in 1980, when he, due to injuries, had to pause in his active sport career. He attended the trainer education in DBU, but soon became an instructor for trainers on regional and later national levels in DGI. He has no education as a leader; he was invited to courses but said no because his priority was to be with his small children at that time.

The instructor career led to engagement as a voluntary leader. He was related to the regional level of DGI on an ad hoc basis, but had no real positions. In 1997 he was appointed to the education section of a national committee under DGI. This is the drop-out position which he held until 2005. In this period he also held a position in the national committee for education for half a year; but he withdrew from the position because of conflicts, see below.

The motivation for being a voluntary leader was the challenge to work together with people he highly valued. Also M10 wished to have influence on the trainer education.

The general evaluation of the leader career: M10 is positive regarding the social relations and the influence on trainer education, but he raises many critical issues in relation to the conditions for voluntary leaders and decision processes in DGI. In this way, he thinks that DGI has a discrepancy between ambitions and the fact that people working voluntarily have to carry out the ideas. This was the reason for his drop-out from the position at the educational committee of DGI. He had several experiences where the organisation didn't support the internal collaboration and manage to solve problems, even though he, to a certain point, tried to get influence; for example, he mentions a struggle about giving empowerment to young athletes to run their own sport meetings. In the end of the leader career he chose another strategy of silence; "so in a way you can say that I resigned, right?"

The reason for the drop-out: in the last year at the drop-out position he had new responsibilities and tasks in his occupational life. This meant that he had less time for voluntary leadership. This together with his family situation with two small children and responsibilities meant that he felt that it was time to drop-out of voluntary leadership. But he was quite disillusioned about voluntary leadership by the drop-out, not only towards the organisation, but also towards women coaches whom he had tried to include. Shortly

before the drop-out he had suggested that DGI take initiatives towards women in order to develop DGI football and to have more female coaches and leaders. DGI supported the idea, but the efforts stranded due to a lack of attendance from the women. His conclusion was that "... I see the same pattern at my school; the women say that the men are always in the deciding positions, but in the end the women themselves don't want to join in".

After the drop-out he has had no voluntary leadership position. He sees no potential in going back into leadership at the regional or the national level. His perspectives has changed to be more local and private; he thinks that in the future he might only be a leader on a club level and in relation to the sports of his children.

## **Gender equality – experiences, opinions and explanations**

In the interviews with the former leaders, gender issues turned up in various contexts. The first “gender question” of the interview referred to barriers during their careers as voluntary leaders. According to their statements, none of the former leaders, neither the men nor the women, had experienced any barriers because of their sex. However, in other contexts and if one analyses the careers of women in depth, it is very often obvious that gender mattered. Thus, several of the interviewed women, but none of the men felt much marginalized in their leadership positions. The analysis of the career patterns of men and women will be published in a peer reviewed journal.

In connection with the “drop-out” processes, the “drop-outs” were asked, if the situation would have been different if they would have been the opposite sex. Here, gender mattered explicitly. Around half of the interviewees reported that the process and/or the outcome of leaving their positions was influenced by their gender. Especially the women believed that men would have been treated in another way and/or they would have reacted differently than they had done.

Some women argued that men in the same situation would have stayed in the position because they are not so emotional or because men stick to the power even if they have stopped to care for the cause. Thus, the statements about gendered opportunities and barriers were ambivalent or even controversial in quite a number of the interviews.

At the end of the interviews, in a more narrative part, the informants were invited to share their opinions and ideas about the role and the participation of women in decision making committees in sport organizations. The interviewees were aware of the uneven gender balance in the steering committees of sport organizations. Even most interviewees who had been leaders in DGI confessed that there are many male dominated committees in this organization, although it has a high percentage of female members and a considerable high percentage of female leaders.

Was gender hierarchy looked upon as a problem? Eight, four men and four women, were not interested in this issue and did not vote for an increase of women in leadership positions. Four of the eight came from DGI; that means from an organization which emphasizes values like democracy and inclusion, two had been leaders in DIF, one in DFIF. There was no correlation between the attitude to female leaders and age or educational level. Among the informants who did not care about an increase of female leaders, the youngest informant was 28, the oldest was 65 years old.

A majority of interviewees (12 of the 20) stated that it would be preferable if more women would be involved in the leadership of their organizations and that this would be advantageous to the organizations. Women should be included, among other things, because of gender differences; that means, the different perspectives and the different ways of thinking and acting of men and women. Some informants mentioned that women could have good ideas and could alleviate the lack of volunteer leaders. Others pointed out, that women's values would enrich the work in the organization or improve the atmosphere. Only one woman mentioned that gender equality is an issue of fairness and democracy (13).

It can be assumed that the experiences of the women in a men's world, during the career and also during the drop-out processes, influence perceptions, interpretations and evaluations of the gender relations. As mentioned above, all female informants made clear that they were not confronted with barriers, at least not in the first phases of their careers, and that it did not matter that they were women. What experiences they did make during their drop-out? There were different reasons for the drop-out and also different ways of leaving their positions. 6 informants (4 men, 2 women) were forced to leave their office. They were not asked to stand for another election or they were not elected. The

majority of the informants left their position according to their own decisions. 6 (4 men, 2 women) left because they were not satisfied with their work, disappointed or frustrated, 4 (three women, 1 man) left because there were many conflicts, one woman named mixed reasons, including conflicts. Three interviewees (2 women, 1 man) dropped out of office because their life situation had changed.

Did those women and men who experienced conflicts and resistances develop another view on the gender hierarchy? Did they opt for an increase of women in decision making committees? Out of the 6 women who were forced to leave their office or dropped out because of conflicts, 5 were in favour of an increase of women in leadership positions. It can be assumed that their negative experiences with the male dominated organizations influenced their attitude in this matter. However, it has to be mentioned that none of these women named explicitly gendered barriers as a cause of the drop-out. Men's drop-out processes do not seem to have an influence on their attitude towards the imbalanced gender relations in decision making committees.

How did the former leaders explain the gender hierarchy in sport organizations? Here, we have to take into consideration that the narrative form of the interview did not allow to get the opinions of all individuals about all arguments. Everybody could focus on those issues which had been the most important or significant for him/her. Both women and men mentioned in various parts of the interview the good work and high competencies of female leaders. The only negative comment came from a woman who called a women only committee a "henhouse" where everybody talks and nobody listens. Thus, lack of competency cannot be among the reasons for the marginalization of women on leading positions.

According to the majority of the informants, women seem not to be able or not willing to use their competencies and work according to men's premises. Women's roles, responsibility for children, prioritization of the family, there were various wordings for the argument that women with families do not have time and/or energy to engage themselves in voluntary work in executive boards and committees. This argument was put forward by more than half of the informants, women and men alike, whereby some interviewees blamed the "nature", others the society. Whereas some informants were

convinced that it is the decision of women to prioritize their families, others blame the husbands, who do not want their wives to spend too much time in voluntary work.

Several informants mentioned also the other side of the medal, the “relative freedom” of men. The responsibility of women for the families seems to give men an advantage, because they have the expected time and flexibility to engage themselves in and for sport organizations.

Around half of the informants, referred to gendered characteristics and behaviour patterns which were constructed as dichotomies. Often the “family argument” and the stereotypes about gendered characteristics complemented each other.

Women were constructed as lacking confidence and being afraid of competition and conflicts. In contrast, men were characterized as more interested in leadership, more interested in power, more self-confident than women. With one exception the interviewees evaluated the men’s attitude to leadership as “natural”. Only one man referred to the fact that sport organizations are traditionally male domains. Also some positively evaluated characteristics of women were declared as a barrier to leadership. It was mentioned for example that women take things seriously, they are motivated by good causes and not by prestige and influence, they ask themselves if they are competent enough etc.

Several times it was mentioned that women are happy to work at the club level, and that they are not interested in leadership positions at the top of the hierarchy.

With regard to characteristics and leadership styles, the informants’ arguments are based on a mixture of experiences, every day knowledge and stereotypes which lead to expectations and scripts which originated from and condensed to norms of gender duality. The gendered views influence reception, interpretation and evaluation of men’s and women’s decisions and activities with regard to leadership positions. The gender dichotomy perspective was shared by men as well as women. Clearly, the majority of the former male and female leaders blamed the women.

Only four of the informants referred not only to women’s decisions but also to the structure of the organizations. Two interviewees mentioned that there are sports like football where men dominate and that it is no wonder that there are no women in executive boards. Only two of the informants, one woman and one man, discussed the

gendered structures and cultures of the organizations more in-depth. One man, a former leader in DGI, a 51 year old, complained about the male dominance, the hierarchical structure and the orientation towards men's values and behaviour patterns in his organization (16). The other critical comment came from a 38 year old woman, head of a sport federation in DIF. She stated that the existing male dominated hierarchies prevent the access of women (13).

In contrast, more than half of the men and women mentioned or even insisted that the lack of female leaders was not caused by the organizations. Obviously the huge majority of our interviewees did not see any problems related to the structures and the culture of sport organizations.

The fact that the marginalization of women in executive boards was explained by women's decisions, determined the opinions about consequences and actions. Some informants did not see any reason for changes and thus no reason for any actions in order to increase the number of female leaders. Some informants expressed the conviction that things would change automatically in the wake of the changing gender roles. They assumed that women of the younger generation would have equal chances because their partners would share house work and child care. This was sometimes expressed as a hope, but some interviewees also doubted that the equal share of family work between women and men would be possible or would be beneficial.

With regard to strategies and actions in order to increase the percentage of female leaders in sport organizations, the informants were very cautious. Even the two already mentioned supporters of the women's cause were quite reluctant and did not demand a clear strategy or action plans. Those who wanted a change proposed that women should be more often asked and encouraged and that this should start at the club level. In addition, it was mentioned, that current sport leaders should focus on girls and young women. They should be educated and invited to develop interest and responsibility for an organization.

None of our 20 interviewees opted in favour of formal strategy like gender mainstreaming measurements or gender quotations. Especially strong was the resistance against quota regulations. Especially the women emphasized that women should be elected because they are good and not because they are women. Very few of the

informants were willing to engage themselves in activities for women's promotion. They mentioned that they would try to bring the gender issue in a discussion and/or to promote women informally by encouraging and supporting them.

## **Discussion**

The interviews showed that the gender hierarchy in sport organizations is not looked upon as a major problem. There is a far spread belief that women do not experience barriers from the side of the sport organizations. In their attempt to explain the male dominance in the world of sport, male and female (former) leaders draw a stereotypical picture of women giving priority to their families rather than to sport organizations. In addition, lack of ambitions and leadership qualities are mentioned. Thus, women are not "ideal leaders" and do not provide the characteristics which are expected in an allegedly gender neutral organizational culture. The structure and culture of organization determine the access and define the ideal leader which according to the statements in our study seems to be a man with a high degree of flexibility and a high amount of time. If the "ideal leader" is a person without family obligations, the culture of the organization excludes women. Most of the interviewed men had wives who did the lions share of the house work.

Most informants took women's responsibility for the family as self evident. From this perspective, the segregation of work in the families is not seen as a structural problem. Denmark has an equally high employment rate of men and women, even if women are more often part time workers. Women's employment is possible because of an excellent child care system. This supports the ideology of equal chances even if there are numerous mechanisms which lead to a gendered segregation of tasks and duties in the family as well as in the society. The real or imagined responsibility of women for children fosters stereotypes of women as disinterested and uncommitted leaders, which prevent women climbing the career ladder. Thus, the gendered subtext on organisations remains invisible.

Does the life-work (im)balance of women really impede the careers of women in sport organizations? If we look at the situation of the interviewed women, only some of them seemed to experience work, family and voluntary position as a burden, and even

these claimed that they could manage. No woman dropped out only because of their work for the family. However, all the women interviewed did at least half of the house work.

On the other hand, there are some good examples among the interviewed women how one can integrate voluntary leadership, employed work and the care for children. A woman, one of the few heads of a sport federation, and her board decided to take their families with them when they went to weekend meetings. This example shows that not only the women can change but also the organizations.

During the interpretation of the interviews several contradictions emerged. The most important question was: Why did even those women not blame the organizations who suffered in their positions?

Some of the women who left their position against their will, after conflicts or because they were not re-elected reported that their gender could have had an influence on the drop-out process. Also women who denied any gendered barriers at the beginning of the interview reflected about problems differently when they talked about their experiences in the long run. But they did not use these experiences to blame the structures, but interpreted them in a gender neutral way.

## **Conclusion**

The “framing” of gender issues, pointing to the contexts in which the gender hierarchy is described and discussed, seems to follow patterns which have emerged in other Scandinavian and German studies. Organisations and their representatives tend to focus on the "supply" side, i.e. on women's individual decisions, choices and resources, without a discussion of the organisational conditions in which these decisions are taken. The Danish material also showed that senior officials in Danish sport organizations was not very interested in a discussion of the organisational side of gender issues and hierarchies. The (former) sports leaders looked upon the organisational structures and cultures as abstract, given and gender neutral. Thus, it can be difficult to establish relevant arenas in which more critical views on organisational gender relations can be framed.

All in all, the replies given by the respondents seem to reflect more general Danish attitudes towards gender politics. Gender equality and gender equality policies and especially feminism are currently not an issue of debate or a matter of interest in



Denmark. Gender equality is perceived as achieved, gender hierarchies are looked upon as the outcome of individual decisions, and proactive measures are not considered necessary (Borchorst and Dahlerup, 2003). These attitudes – and the resulting lack of actions – must be looked upon as major barriers hindering an increase in the numbers of women leaders in the Danish sport system as well as in the society.

## **Volunteers and volunteering – current issues and problems**

### **Background – the sport system**

In many Western countries, volunteers and volunteering, communitarianism and civic engagement etc. are current and contested topics, mainly, because the increasing demands on welfare and the increasing expectations towards the welfare state tend to exceed the resources of the public authorities. Volunteers seem to offer a solution. This is especially true for the sport organizations which are traditionally based on voluntary work.

In the last decades, Danish sport experienced enormous differentiation processes. On the one hand, top level sport got an increasing importance and more and more public attention, on the other hand, a growing number of very diverse physical activities from yoga to Nordic walking or roller skating became popular. Most of these “alternative” sports are not orientated towards competition and performance. In addition, the idea to integrate physical activities in the every day life and to develop an active life style found an increasing number of adherents. This “de-sportification” processes motivated new target groups – women and senior citizens, disabled persons, among others – to take up sport, a whole new “sport market” developed. All these developments changed the face of sport decisively. At present there is a broad spectrum of different forms of sport with differing aims, purposes, rules, rituals and practices. The spectrum ranges from top-level competitive sport to mass sport and recreational activities, from health sport to team games.

In the last years, the Danish discourses on physical activities focused more and more on health. Health is currently one of the most debated issues in Denmark. The public discourses focus on the interrelation between health/fitness and weight/obesity on the one side and nutrition and physical activities on the other. An overwhelming amount of information is available about how to stay or how to become slim, fit and healthy.

Health is conceived and advertised as a product which can be acquired or at least improved by the right behaviour, among other things by physical activity. The aim of the increasingly intensive health promotion is not only the well being of the individuals but also the prosperity of the Danish society, which seems to be threatened by the costs of illness. Thus, health is perceived and constructed as a social obligation and a symbol of “Danishness”. The other “hot issue” which dominates current debates is the integration of immigrants, especially of immigrants with a Muslim background. Here Muslim girls and women, but also male adolescents are in focus.

Sport seems to provide strategies and tools to contribute to a solution of both urgent social problems – it offers numerous opportunities for physical activities ranging from intensive training to exercises embedded in everyday life and it promises to be open for all and include marginalised individuals and groups.

Today sport is played informally or organised by different providers in different settings. Private firms have established themselves alongside municipalities and even informal groups are providers of sport courses or facilities from tennis courts to fitness studios. Although the monopoly of sport clubs as sport providers is gone, clubs are still the most important suppliers of physical activities. According to Bille et al (2004), 35 % of the grown up Danish population, 43 % of the men and 27 % of the women, are members of a sport club.

Denmark is the only Scandinavian country with three major sport organisations instead of one: the Danish Sports Federation (DIF), the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations (DGI) and the Company Sport Federation (DFIF).

The Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) was founded in 1896 in Copenhagen; it has its roots in the sport movement according to the English model. Today DIF has 1,6 million members (39 % women) and is responsible for "sport for all" as well as elite sports. DIF “is committed to keeping Danish sport based on volunteers, democracy and a culture where the participants are given influence and responsibility”. The other main principle of DIF is autonomy: “DIF commits itself to maintain the autonomy of sport but acknowledges the great social importance of sport. Therefore, DIF co-operates with the authorities to solve social tasks, e.g. by making it easier for the socially less privileged to participate in sport “ ([http://www.dif.dk/eng\\_index/](http://www.dif.dk/eng_index/))

DIF is the umbrella organization for 58 national sport federations and is responsible for issues of common interest to the federations at a national level. The sport federations handle tasks within their specific sport; they are regionally organized in district organization and cooperate with DIF's county committees which interact with the county authorities and are responsible for not sport specific issues.

The Danish Gymnastics and Sports Associations (DGI; with 1,3 million members) cater exclusively to "sport for all". The organization has its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the present organization is a unification of gymnastics and shooting associations and was founded in 1992. DGI highlight its internal democracy and the intention, "to strengthen the voluntary associations as the framework of sport emphasizing the importance of fellowship, challenge and health in order to promote the educative qualities of the association activities" ([http://www.dgi.dk/forside/sprog/eng\\_dgi.aspx](http://www.dgi.dk/forside/sprog/eng_dgi.aspx)).

DGI are the umbrella for 23 regional associations whose members are the local clubs. Traditionally, DGI have had a strong focus on gymnastics which developed as women's domain at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This explains the relatively high percentage of women (47 %) among the members of this organisation. Many clubs are members in DIF and DGI.

The Danish Company Sport Federation (DFIF) (founded in 1946) is a national organization with around 350,000 members. It provides and organises sport and physical activities in the context of the working place. The aim of the DFIF is to increase the interest in sport and physical activities and to bring activities and health to the working places (<http://www.dfif.dk/frontpages/dfif.asp>).

The structure and culture of the Danish society is reflected by the structure, organisation and division of responsibilities in the field of sport. Sport is organised according to sport specific needs, but also according to the regional structure. This means that DIF consists of federations for the various types of sports as well as of regional organisations. DGI has regional organisations as well as committees for various activities.

All three organizations coordinate sport in Denmark and represent and advocate its members towards the state and the public. Especially DIF and DGI mention as central

objectives to contribute to the Danish society in form of education, democracy and inclusion.

The umbrella organisations conduct numerous and various initiatives and campaigns which reach from programmes to increase the activity level of the population to projects aiming at the integration of immigrants. The promises with regard to health and immigration meet the expectations and demands of the Danish state which supports sport organisations in various ways.

In Denmark, sport organisations from the clubs to the regional organisations and the federations and to the umbrella organisations are based on the principles of democracy, autonomy as well as volunteering and reciprocity. The principle of reciprocity means, that the engagement of volunteers is compensated by the engagement of others. The parents who are willing to coach small kids in a club know, for example, that their children will be taken care of later when they want to play in a league. The leaders of sport organisations are volunteers and many of the coaches and instructors only get a compensation for their expenses or a token payment for their work.

### **Sport organisations in a crisis?**

Today, professionalisation of sport organisations is a much discussed and contested issue. At the end to the 1990s, many of the bigger clubs and the national federations started to employ at least some paid persons, mostly responsible for coordination, but also for the training. In spite of the concerns in many clubs and federations, the cooperation of the paid and the volunteering personnel seemed to have functioned well.

It is not only the increasing number of tasks which cause problems to sport organisations, but also the real or imagined decrease of volunteers, in the area of instructors and trainers as well. Thus, football clubs have decreased their engagement of children and youth, because they could not find enough voluntary coaches and helpers. This alarmed the mayor for integration in Copenhagen and he is willing to give financial support so that football clubs can give a substantial honorarium to coaches and leaders (Nyhedsavisen 24. November, 2006, København & Sport). In this way the clubs should be enabled to keep their youth groups and to strive, among other things, for the integration of adolescents with an immigrant background. The reason behind this

generosity is the assumption that it is cheaper to support the clubs in their social engagement than to pay later for the effects of the lack of education and integration, misconduct of adolescents.

Whereas the public discourses suggest that sport organisations are under pressure because of a lack of volunteers, the existing studies deliver an ambivalent picture (Seippel 2004). Surveys about civic engagement, for example in Germany, show that there is an abundance of potential volunteers, at least in principle (Radtke 2006). Also in Denmark, the willingness to volunteer in various areas is far spread among the Danes. According to Koch Nielsen et al. (2006), around one third of the Danish population is engaged in voluntary work. And sport is one of the major areas for volunteering.<sup>2</sup> As Bjarne Ibsen, Laila Ottesen and others in several publications showed, voluntary work in sport organisations is an ambivalent issue: On the one hand it is very valuable and provides material as well as immaterial goods and benefits as education to democracy and social capital. On the other hand, the dependence on volunteers may result in certain risks, among others, the lack of professional knowledge. In the light of the public discourses, the discussions in the sport organisations and the results of research projects, it will be interesting to have our experts' assessments of voluntary work in sport organisations and the future of volunteering.

### **Questions to the interviewees**

All informants in this interview study have had a long and continuous career in their sport organization. Most of them have been active in various areas and at numerous levels dealing with different issues. As already mentioned, they have long experiences with and an excellent insight in their organizations. Therefore, we consider them as experts, especially with regard to the structure and culture of their organizations which up to now are based on voluntary work. What do they think about volunteering? Where are the benefits and disadvantages of a leadership being based on voluntary work? Are the debates about the lack of volunteers justifiable?

We asked the following questions:

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<sup>2</sup> See the results of the John Hopkins Research in Denmark  
<http://www.frivillighedsus.dk/Web/Site/Om+Frivillighedsunders%F8gelsen>

- Shall the leaders in sport organizations (members of executive boards and committees) continue to be volunteers without a salary?
- Will it be possible to find enough voluntary leaders in the future?
- Does it give prestige and appreciation to be a voluntary leader in a sport organization?

The questions obviously met current concerns, and the informants answered willingly and in-depth. They discussed the issues on the basis of their own experiences, but often they also referred to the public debate.

### **“Fiery souls” or technocrats - Results**

All informants showed a high appreciation of volunteering which to everybody seemed to be the preferred form of leadership – at least it would be the preferred form in an ideal world. Most of our informants describe the ideal leader as highly dedicated, a “fiery soul”, burning for the good cause with intrinsic motivation, a high engagement, with ideas and visions. Explicitly or between the lines, volunteering is looked upon as a Danish tradition connected with “typical” Danish values, with values like responsibility, reciprocity, democracy and equality which are deeply rooted in the Danish society. None of the interviewed former leaders argued principally against voluntary leadership in sport organizations. However, the degree of agreement and the number and content of concerns as well as the proposed strategies varied.

Half of the informants could be called “idealistic”; they are adherents of the nearly mythical traditional ideal of a voluntary sport leader. They are convinced that the sport system should be based exclusively or at least predominantly on voluntary work. Voluntary work and commitment are looked upon as the core and the most valuable assets of the Danish sport system. The informants highlight the benefits of volunteering which reach from happiness and enjoyment for both, the volunteers and their “clients”, to internal responsibility. Many of the former leaders talk about their own motives and experiences which are often examples from the club level and refer to activities as instructors and trainers or as members of the committees in clubs. The direct contact with the “clients” seems to have been experienced as especially rewarding. In some interviews the work for and with children and youth played a relatively large role. The joy of the children and their shining eyes, their trust in the instructors, the gladness when small

problems could be solved etc., all these experiences are described as the best and most valuable incentives for doing voluntary work.

All in all, the arguments of these informants reflect the principles of traditional sport organizations – voluntary work, reciprocity, benefit to the public and equality. From their point of view, the motives of the volunteers are noble and unselfish; they are willing to invest time, energy and ideas in their voluntary tasks. Several times the term “fiery soul” is used to describe the internal motivation and the excitement for service to the common benefit. One of the informants made fun of the “fiery soul“, who burns for a good cause, but it also smells like smoke.

However, the statements to the question if volunteer leaders gain prestige, made clear that not all volunteers are working only for the good cause. Not for themselves, but for others getting influence and gaining prestige is named as an important motive. The “idealists” devalue paid work. According to them, the identification with the organization and the dedication to the task get lost when salaries are involved and individuals are employed. The “idealist” informants assume that employees only do work which they must and that they will not engage themselves more than necessarily. A far spread opinion among the “idealists” is that one does not attract the “right” persons if money gets involved.

Who are the idealists? Two had been engaged in DIF and five in DGI. All three DFIF informants could be found in this category.

The values and the philosophy of the two “sport for all organizations” seem to have influenced the attitude of their (former) leaders. Danishness, welfare and democracy played and play a central part in the discourses of DGI which legitimates its existence with the values which distinguish DGI’s values from DIF’s performance orientation. In addition, nobody from the group of idealists had worked at the highest level of the organization or as head of a board or committee.

The “idealist” perspective is not shared by the other half of the interviewed former leaders. Although they agree upon that it would be desirable if the sport system could continue to be based on volunteering, they express their doubts if this would work also in the future. These informants express ambivalent opinions which reach from “yes to volunteer leaders, but” to more or less sceptical assessments.

The concerns about honorary offices and leadership are based on three different arguments which are all related to the changes in the Danish society. One string of arguments focused on the changes in life style, taste and habits of the Danish population. According to some informants, people are not interested in volunteering anymore and everybody expects to get money or at least some compensation.

Whereas here the motivation seems to be lacking, another argument emphasizes the increasing pressures on the individuals who have to balance paid work, tasks in the family, leisure and volunteering. This is especially true for women, who are today employed like the men, many strive for a career, and in addition, women are still responsible for children and family. The demands seem to grow in both areas continuously, in the family and on the labour market. Thus, people have just not enough free time anymore to engage themselves in a club or a federation. The third argument focuses on the demands which are made on the officials in sport organizations. Today efficiency and visions, administrative skills and charisma are expected. The requirements connected with the organization and administration of sport associations – especially at the higher levels – are highly complex and take much time. The communication and cooperation with various agencies from the communities to Team Denmark, the human resources management, the organization of activities, but also the administration, the meetings etc. are so time and energy consuming that all this cannot be expected from a volunteer and done beside a full time job. This was at least the opinion of those informants who had positions at the executive level of DIF federations.

The various solutions which were proposed in order to solve this dilemma went all in the same direction: to buy working capacities. None of the former leaders recommended restricting the tasks of the sport organizations, and there was not a lot of confidence in recruiting more volunteers (more on this issue later). The proposals of our informants went in three directions: either should the number of employers be increased or the leaders with very time consuming tasks should get compensation in form of financial resources. In addition, there was the opinion, that there should be some “symbolic payment as an incentive and as a sign of appreciation, as a “thank you” to the volunteers.



Those who voted for the compensation were especially the presidents/vice presidents of sport federations; this means leaders who were highly affected by the pressures as well as the responsibilities. But also those informants made it clear that they did not want to have full time employed leaders and they also did not want to abolish the principle of democracy – the leader in sport organizations should be elected by the membership. Those who wanted to employ staff proposed that the volunteers should be relieved especially from routine work and administration.

Only one of the former leaders described a scenario where the future of volunteer leaders seemed to be endangered. She described the conditions of work in sport federations and the complexity of the tasks which increased decisively in the wake of commercialization. In order to deal with sponsors and politicians, a professional administration is necessary. But who should be responsible for decisions and the whole course of the federation? One option would be that the elected leaders in the governing body are volunteers, but it will be difficult for them to deal with the professional organization at the operational levels.

As a short resume one can conclude that there is a broad consensus about the values of volunteering, but that half of our informants opt for strategies which involve financial resources and investments. They believe that organizations are fit for the future with the help of paid work only. There are no gender and no age differences in the attitudes towards volunteering. Also the career does not play a part – those informants who started at the instructor and trainer level – most of them did this – do not think differently than those who started to volunteer in leadership boards and committees at the club level.

The drop-out process, too, does not seem to have influenced the attitude towards volunteering. Also those drop-outs who had been forced to leave their positions and those who reported about major conflicts did not doubt that the principle of volunteering should be the basis of the organized sport, even if this “system” leads to the loss of their positions. Their long and dedicated engagement as volunteers may have influenced their positive evaluations. But there were decisive differences of the opinions with respect to the level of their position and the organization. DIF leaders and those with the highest positions opted for compensations of the leaders or support by employees.

But what about the future? Will there be enough volunteers? The question about the future of volunteering produced controversial statements, but the large majority of the answers was on a continuum which reached from optimist to pessimist perspectives. Only four of our informants expressed the opinion that there will be no problems to recruit volunteers in the future. One former leader explained his optimism by strategies and practices in his federation which had led to an increase in volunteers. Two others connected their positive estimation with a change of the conditions of voluntary work.

Nine of the former leaders looked more or less optimistic in the future – three tended to believe in a solution of the problems with volunteers, six were more sceptical. Seven informants believe that it will not be possible to recruit enough people for the numerous and various voluntary positions in the sport system. Only one of the “pessimists” answered with a categorical “no”. He did not believe at all that people would be willing to volunteer in the future. The other pessimist informants stated that it will not be possible to recruit enough volunteers under the present conditions. But they also mentioned strategies and measurements which, according to their opinion, could solve the problem.

Neither age, gender, position nor sport organization (DIF; DGI, DFIF) seem to have an impact on the opinions about the future of volunteering. Also the evaluation of the volunteer principle did not influence the view in the future. Also those who believed in the values and benefits of volunteering and who disapproved of a “professionalisation” of sport organizations were sceptical about the future.

What are the problems and why does it seem to be increasingly difficult to find volunteers for leadership positions in sport organizations? Our informants discussed several developments which have been already mentioned in their assessment of voluntary leadership. The main explanation was the change of the mentalities and habits of the Danes. Especially informants who believed in the traditional values of volunteering and in sport organization based on voluntary work (the “idealists”) complained about the lack of motivation, commitment and the increasingly hedonistic orientation of the Danish population. Traditional values seem to have been forgotten and the craving for money and conspicuous consumption take over. Therefore, volunteering has become out of

fashion and it will be difficult if not impossible to recruit enough and committed persons who are willing to serve a good cause without being paid for this.

Some informants mention the drop-out of young volunteers. Only few informants referred to the increasing demands on sport leaders and the difficulties in finding time and energy for voluntary work in the view of the growing requirements in the family and the employed work.

Many informants proposed strategies and measurements in tackling the volunteer problem. They recommended improving the information about roles and duties, to focus on the motivation and education of young people, to reduce the tasks of volunteers, to create more “ad hoc” tasks, to work in teams, to create incentives, and to “outsource” tasks to employed personnel.

An incentive for current or potential volunteers could be the prestige which is connected with the position and with the work. The interviewed former leaders understood prestige as a good reputation and as appreciation, but some also subsumed influence or other benefits under this term. There was only one informant who denied totally that a leadership position is connected with prestige. He argued as follows: Because there is a lack of volunteers, everybody who is willing to stand in an election will be elected. Three informants used this question to talk again about the benefits of volunteering and/or stated that prestige should not be the motivation for the work in a sport organization. Some mentioned, that prestige is important for others, but not for themselves. The large majority of the interviewees agreed upon that honorary leadership positions can be prestigious. However, there were a lot of restrictions referring to the quality of work and the range of the appreciation. Appreciation can only be gained by excellent and continuous work, and it is restricted to “insiders”, that means the colleagues or members of the organization. Quite often it was mentioned, that volunteering is judged positively by employers and can be an advantage when applying for a job. The belief that volunteering is prestigious, at least to a certain degree, is shared by the informants independent on their gender, age or organization.

The statements of our informants with regard to volunteering mirrors current discourses and focuses on a situation which is experienced as a substantial change or even a crisis. This becomes also evident by the discrepancies between the ideals and the

realities, between the nearly nostalgic views to an idealized past and the future, where traditional values and practices seem to be endangered or even lost. All interviewed individuals share this sense of living in a time of changes, conflicts and crises, some – a minority – believe in a new balance between individualism and communal responsibilities, others demand changes of the structure and culture of the sport organizations. These changes reach from the re-arrangements of tasks to financial compensation of leaders and the employment of administrators. In spite of all the scepticism, there is a strong conviction that the sport organizations will survive and contribute to the public benefit.

## A short conclusion

The project LEADERS IN SPORT ORGANISATIONS WHO “DROPPED OUT” reached its various aims in spite of several difficulties. One of the main problems was to find informants who complied with the criteria which we had decided upon. The criteria should allow a comparison of our findings with the results of the German project. It took a long time and many emails and phone calls till we had found the “right” interviewees. The informants were very open and willing to share their experiences. The interviews contain a large amount of very valuable material. We have analysed the material with respect to the major questions of the project with the help of atlas which helped to structure the texts and to gain insight into connections and interrelations. We are currently writing articles about the main results as well as a more practically orientated report for sport organisations. Our main aim was to contribute to the understanding of gender hierarchies in sport organisations. Although the statements about gender equality at the end of the interviews did not show gender specific differences, the career patterns and the experiences in their positions as well as the opportunity for a work-life integration is gendered. For example, none of the male informants was the main caregiver in the family, and many of the men were not expected to do any house work at all. In contrast, all women did at least half of the family work, several did much more. One of the most surprising outcomes was, that the informants – with very few exceptions – had not left with animosities, in the contrary, they are willing to serve as volunteers again, if they are asked and/or if their living conditions allow this. This shows not only the high motivation and the positive experiences of the former leaders, but it is also a certificate for the good atmosphere and the warm social relations in the sport organisations.

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