INTRODUCTION

Background and issues
In Norway – as in most other western countries – voluntary sport organizations have during recent decades, undergone comprehensive and rapid changes. An increasing commercialization and market integration, particular of top sport, have generated a transformation from voluntary ideals towards more business like and professional structures. We find today a situation where sports bodies both at the national and local levels are seeking corporate sponsorships and emphasizing the primacy of the market as their most important financial source. The voluntary sport organizations have thus shown great benevolence in facilitating transactions involving exchange relationship with sponsors, transactions, in which athletes, sport activities and events are profiled and sold as commodities. As a consequence market attraction has become a central policy issue as well as criteria of success in most Norwegian sport organizations.

Analyses of gender political discourses in Norwegian Sport over the last 30 years indicate how shifting ideological climates have been shaping meanings of gender as well as how gender is made relevant in the policy making.(Fasting 2003, Hovden 2000, 2002). It is possible to identify transformations from an emphasis on rights- and justice-oriented discourses towards more utilitarian- and instrumental-oriented discourses, where meanings of gender as difference occur in renewed forms. We can trace a shift adjusted to the landscape of new liberalism and increased market integration.
In this paper I will address some shifts in gender political discourses and indicate how increasing political pressure from sponsors/investors influence the discursive development. I will more precisely highlight how gender political discourses and strategies mirror gendered power structures both within and outside sport. The paper will be divided into three parts:

The first part will serve as a back-drop to the second part and describe some central components linked to gender political discourses and strategies within Norwegian sport organizations over the last thirty years.

The second part will highlight and exemplify how gender is made relevant, discursively framed and constructed in market oriented sport bodies today.

In the third and concluding part I will very briefly reflect upon how market integration and the influence from sponsors/investors challenge the stated gender equality policies of Norwegian Sport.

**Theoretical and empirical basis**

The paper is mainly based on my former and ongoing studies analyzing gender/power relations in Norwegian sport organizations (e.g. Hovden 2000, Hovden 2002). The empirical examples presented in the second part of the paper derives mostly from my ongoing project about how market integration may influence gender political issues in sport. Here I refer to my qualitative interviews with staff working with sponsorship and marketing in three Norwegian Sport Federations; football (soccer), handball and volleyball as well as in one local football (soccer) club.

The underlying theoretical framework underpinning my studies is mostly shaped by constructs from the feminist bodies of research dealing with gender in sport and gender and organizations. In the framework gender is seen as an integral part of all social processes (Acker 1990, 1992, Calas & Smircich 1992, 1996). According to Acker gender is not an addition to organizational processes, conceived as gender neutral, but rather an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without analyses of gender. (Acker 1990:146). Studies of institutional power (e.g. Bourdieu 1993, 1999, Johannessen 1994) suggest that meanings of gender and how gender is made relevant are dependent on hegemonic power relations as well as the normative constructions of contexts. In male
dominated contexts like sport and sport politics, the gender ‘habitus’ - in accordance with Bourdieu’s (1993,1999) conceptualization - most often occur as active, generative and unarticulated dispositions or tacit rules governing strategies and political practices. One of the main objectives has been to map unarticulated and underlying dispositions and in this way indicate how gender meanings are shaped by - and built into institutional power structures.

GENDER POLITICAL DISCOURSES AND STRATEGIES IN NORWEGIAN SPORT

I will in this brief outlining highlight the most essential components and ideological shifts which have formed the time period from the 1970’ties until today. The focus will be on the policy making at the national level and in this way represent a top/down description. Due to gender political shifts during this period; from right- and justice-oriented discourses towards more utility-and difference oriented – I have chosen to divide my descriptions into three historical periods (Hovden 2002).

1. The period 1970 -1984: Formal equality and participation on equal terms with men
The most extensive mobilization of women into Norwegian sport organizations came in the beginning of the 1970’ties. The mobilization resulted in a fast growing participation among women at all organizational levels. Several societal conditions and changes influenced this explosive participation. Among the most important were the impacts linked to a strong, fast growing and active women’s movement as well as a political climate shaped by social democratic ideals based on equal opportunities regardless of class, geographical location and gender. Accordingly the overall goal for organized sport was:” Sport for all”. The political demands and fight for equality in sport were shaped by liberal discourses. The gender political credo was equal access to all sports and participation on equal terms with men. Women claimed equal treatment and were strongly fighting discrimination - and particular those based on biological and bodily differences.

Women’s claims and fights for participation on equal terms turned out to be very successful. During the seventies’ most sports and sports events opened their doors for women. For example in 1976 the most prestigious male bastion of Norwegian sport –the Norwegian Football Association – after several years of resistance and fight - decided to include women (Lippe 1983).
However, similar results were not mirrored in the proportion of female leaders or women holding honorary positions. The strategy of equalization based on men’s norms and standards led to a rebuilding of gendered hierarchies where women were still found at the bottom rung. With male standards women were seen as a lag and not possessing the “right” competence to compete on equal footing (Hovden 2000). In the beginning of the 1980’s, there was a growing consciousness among women in Norwegian sport connected to this situation and accordingly to the insufficiencies of strategies built on discourses of liberal feminism and formal equality to equalize influence and power. This ideological shift indicated a transition towards new gender political strategies.

2: The period 1984 -1994: Visualization, justice and equalization of outcomes

The ideological changes were influenced by radical feminist discourses, which questioned the liberal view of ethic individualism and formal equal treatment as a sufficient principle to redistribute power between the genders. It was emphasized that discrimination because of one’s sex is hidden and built into institutional power structures and this situation give men and women, as a result of discrimination, unequal conditions to become equal partners. Because women and men have unequal starting points, equalization must be based on unequal treatments and positive discrimination to obtain equality in outcomes. This point of departure was inspired by the ideological platform of the Norwegian Equal status Act passed in 1979, which opened for special action or preferential treatment to obtain equality in outcomes.

This ideological platform promoted women-centered perspectives and strategies based on preferential action. I 1984 the Norwegian Confederation of Sport (NCS) – the umbrella organization for all organized sport –appointed a Central Women’s Committee with an overall responsibility for an implementation of an action plan targeting women’s situation in sport. The overall objectives were to develop a common sport organization based on a political platform, rooted in values and experiences found in both men and women’s sport culture. (Fasting & Skou 1994). Women were seen as a group facing certain discrimination and invisible barriers in male dominated organizations. In addition it was important to visualize women’s sporting experiences and preferences. Preferential actions were thus legitimated by arguments of creating a more just, woman-friendly and democratic sport organization.

The most controversial strategy proposed was linked to use of gender quota regulations to increase women’s participation in the organizational decision-making. Most of the leading
women in the organization considered gender quotas as the most effective way to recruit women into leadership positions as well as into the organizational decision-making. Thus indicated a belief that gender relations can be changed as a result of political-legal forms (Teigen 2001). The first Gender Quota Regulation in Norwegian Sport was passed in 1987. The main objective was to improve the gender balance in decision-making bodies by securing a minimum representation of each sex on all boards and committees and in this way give women’s interests and experiences a stronger and more equitable position. At this time the Gender Quota Paragraph was unique among the documents of the European sport organizations. The quota regulation contributed rapidly to change women’s organizational position in Norwegian Sport. It changed women’s position - according to Kanter’s terms (1977) - from tokenism to a larger minority group with influence and potential to raise collective interests.

The women-centered strategies in this period were also legitimated by the importance of building more democratic and women-friendly infrastructures so more of women’s capacity could be used as an organizational resource (Fasting & Skou 1994). Thus the women-centered policy also reflected utility-oriented discourses and not only concerns for realizing socio-ethical values as democracy, equality and justice. Lack of gender equality was in this perspective considered as a waste of organizational resources. The utilitarian arguments were often based on meanings of gender as a difference - the advantages of adding complementary competences by including more women.

The increasing market integration and commercialization of sport in the 90’ties, led to a strengthening of difference and utility-based discourses and a downplaying of justice- and equality based (Hovden 2000). This new political climate opened for a gender policy in sport underpinned by instrumental values. Among other factors this shift led to a gradually unrolling of gender political programs based on preferential actions to promote women’s interests and organizational conditions.

3. The period 1994-2002: Integration and gender as difference and utility
In 1994 – in spite of protests and resistance – a policy of so called “full” gender integration was stated. The protest was grounded in arguments maintaining that it was too early to unroll
the separate programs targeting women, because the male dominance in most activities was unchanged. From this point of departure the unrolling of preferential actions were seen as a pragmatic strategy initiated by the opponents of women-centered programs. The expressed aims for the new integration policy were to take into account the needs and interests of both women and men. And all organizational branches should be involved in promoting gender equality. The main focus should change from women to gender. There was, however, little discussion how to integrate a gender perspective and no political program or action plans were worked out (Hovden 2000).

Recent studies (Fasting 2003, Hovden 2000) have indicated that the change of gender political approach had as a consequence that most concerns for the advancement of women more or less disappeared. Political concerns for women’s marginal situation in leadership and coaching have gradually crumbled and central political documents and practices give today very little attention to gender equality issues as well as significances of male dominance and gendered hierarchies. An organizational reality shaped by culture-specific definitions related to male dominance is still—or once again—perceived as normal and gender-neutral.

This discursive and political development is difficult to explain without a consideration of how the outside market forces are influencing gender political issues and discourses. And this bring me to the second part of this paper—where I will highlight and exemplify how gender is made relevant, discursively framed and constructed in market-oriented sport bodies.

### GENDER POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN MARKET-ORIENTED SPORT BODIES

#### Market rationality and meanings of gender
As mentioned earlier—from the beginning of the 1990’s—we can trace how increasing market integration and commercialization of sport—particular top-sport—influence gender political discourses. The approaches to gender as a significant social relation and to values like gender equality are different in market organization and in voluntary organizations or public institutions. They are in some respects built on different and opposing rationalities and thus generate discourses grounded on different kinds of values and starting points. Business organizations or sponsors/investors are not as ideal and political organization focused on promoting absolute values like gender equality, justice and democracy. On the contrary sponsors provide money to sport because they will be associated with the popularity of sport,
the visibility of event or the high profile nature of the athletes involved. It is believed that these factors will ultimately help to sell more products and increase the profit. In other words sponsorship is business relations built on a rationality that is instrumental and utility-oriented and directed towards commercial advantages. This is the opposite of the rationality of gender equality policies in voluntary organizations or public institutions, which is based on promoting socio-ethical values; values, which represent an end in itself and something to fight for independent of costs.

The increased market integration and the primacy of the market as the most important financial source for sporting activities, indicate that the voluntary sport system is facing a new normative situation. The situation is influenced by opposing rationalities, which generates controversies, interests’ conflicts as well as increased complexity and inconsistency in norms and values. Recent studies of sport politics (Hovden 2000) indicate a situation, where the policy making is more and more concerned with economic and business issues.

Concerning gender political discourses we trace a shift from a focus on rights and equality – towards a focus on utility and difference. This discursive shift actualizes instrumental meanings of gender linked to organizational and commercial advantages rather than socio-ethical meanings. Utility approaches - and particularly the renewed justification to profile the ‘utility’ of women as a difference - have proved to be an especially successful discourse in the sense that it has met little opposition in the dominating political climate. But why is it so? Why do we find these features in a voluntary organization with an overall stated gender policy based on socio-ethical values? I will shortly describe a few gender political aspects, which characterize the current situation at the sponsor market.

**Gender political features in sponsorship**

Among sponsors – male athletes, men’s sports and sport’s events are most often valued and provided of much more money and attention than their female counterparts. For example in Norway – despite we have one of the best women’s national football team in the world - and the men’s team is only ranked on a place somewhere in the twenties- the sponsors provide very little money to the women’s team and to women’s football in general (Hovden 2001). One of my informants, a market consultant in the Norwegian Football Federation, expressed about the Olympic gold medal for the women’s team in Sydney in 2000 the following
”I think there has never been a Norwegian Olympic gold medal, which effects have disappeared so fast”.
This expression was directed to the effects related to sponsorships and market interests.

This situation is typical for most sports, sports events and top athletes. Female top athletes and female-dominated sports experience that it is not enough to achieve outstanding performances to become equaled valued. They experience that gender make a difference. Female gender and women’s sports are found less valued. Outstanding performances seem in most cases only to represent the entrance-ticket to the sponsor market. One of the reasons given by the sponsors is that female athletes and women’s sports are less attractive to media and thus become less attention and visibility. Today, however, we find a kind of symbiotic relation between media institutions, market interests and gender (Klausen 1998). Despite an explosive increase in women sporting performances and participation since the seventies’, statistics indicate that media interests and media covering of female athletes and women’s sport have not increased very much the last twenty years. It show that less than 10 % of the media coverage is dealing with women’s sport and female athletes and over 80 % only with men’s sport and male athletes (Lippe 1998).
In other words women performances and experiences in sport compared to men are still almost invisible.

Media institutions dealing with sport as well as market agents working with sponsoring and marketing of sport are very male dominated. In this context it is interesting to ask how this feature influence women situation and the fact that top female athletes experience to get more media attention and be much higher valued by sponsors when they are willing to expose their heterosexual attributes and femaleness. In other words an exposure of bodily and sexual difference associated with stereotyped sexuality and femininity is seen as the most profitable utility of women’s increasing participation and outstanding performances. Thus female athletes increasing display of sexual attributes and erotic power can be seen as a compensating strategy to become more equalized with men in sport. I will in the further give you some examples of how market-oriented sport organizations actualize, construct and frame meanings of gender through their marketing and image building of female top athletes.

**Image building and gender as difference—some examples and dilemmas**
My interviews with market consultants and market managers indicated that the image building to sell female athletes and women’s sport were much concentrated around women’s capacity to make a difference to male athletes and men’s sport. They maintained that women’s potentials to make a difference and expose their femaleness and sexual attributes were the most profitable way to sell them and give women higher sur-plus value at the sponsor-market. The sponsor market stimulate in this way to a renewed focus on meanings of gender as biological and bodily difference. As mentioned earlier the fight for gender equality in Norwegian Sport in the seventies was opposing those discourses, because they contributed to legitimate essential-oriented meanings of gender differences, which served as a basis for discrimination and unequal treatment between men and women in sport. I will in the further give a few examples from Norwegian Sport, which may illustrate some main components in the image building of female athletes.

**Example 1:**
This is photo of the Norwegian world class freestyle athlete Kari Traa. (photo- transparent)
This exposure occurred in Norwegian media (first in the magazine “Ultra Sport” –than in Norwegian newspaper) in January 2002, about one month before she won her Olympic gold medal in Salt Lake City. The president of the Norwegian Ski Federation characterized her exposure like this:

“*What she has done is courageous... And maybe this is the reason why she is so good in freestyle, too,*” (expressed in “Dagbladet”).
She reported herself that she has not received money for the exposure - but short afterwards she signed - among others - a million-sponsor contract with “Clear Channel”.

**Example 2:**
Several of my informants dealing with sponsorship confirm that women’s situation at the sponsor market is a lot more difficult and complicated than for their male counterparts. A market manager in a football club reported that the only sponsor interested in the women’s team was an firm selling women’s clothes. The main reason was that they wanted to use the female players as mannequins/models and other work tasks in the marketing of their products. As a general comment to this situation, he stated:
"...sponsor contracts related to female athletes are always more complicated .....have always a variety of duties involved. They include a lot more work outside the sporting activities – I use to call this for ...the extra smiling and body work. (...) ....But, we are not very happy for it - in many occasions it turns out to be too much extra work for the players”.

Example 3:
A market consultant in the Norwegian Football Association stressed that they were very consciously and carefully concerning the image-building of the female players. And among other things she maintained:
“Concerning image building we direct much attention towards how they are dressed – we don’t want an image of female players dressed in too big male costumes – we want to expose them more feminine ... also to avoid to strengthen the stigma of football women as lesbian”.

Example 4:
In the Norwegian Volleyball Federation a right-based as well as an equal treatment/justice based discourse on gender have been important components of their policy making since 1970’ties. The market consultant, responsible for the beach sector, maintained that in the current situation these principles are crumbling, and the political relevance of gender is more and more directed towards commercial advantages, e.g. how women and women’s participation can contribute to strengthen the economy. She commented that arguments for women’s participation were often connected to their attraction as heterosexual females for spectators and media, and that today it is much easier to go through with this type of arguments than claiming women’s rights to equal opportunities on equal footing. She exemplified the situation in this way:
“It is for example quite obvious that the most decisive argument for the inclusion of women in the World Cup Tournament in Stavanger last year, were their potentials to attract more spectators ...in other words to represent a show window by the exposure of their bodily attributes as women”.

Example 5:
In the Norwegian Handball Federation, a discourse of difference with a clear concession to utility-based arguments was found. The approaches to make a difference as woman were, however, less sexualized. The manager of the market sector stated that they their objective was to sell the concept “handball-girl” as a branding. The ambitions were to make the female
player on the national team to the most profiled media favorites in Norway. The image building was constructed both on the individual players and the team’s capacity to display charm, authentic feelings and community spirit directly on the TV-screen. In other words to expose a repertoire of emotions like joy, delight, excitement, disappointment, tears and despair - in addition to abilities like caring and team-building – the latter to represent alternative associations of a winning culture. In this case we find a discourse and image building not dominated by sexual attributes, but nevertheless a profile emphasizing gender differences by connotations of stereotyped and essential orientated images of femininity.

**Market integration and gender equality – consequences and challenges**

My analyses of the gender political landscape in Norwegian Sport indicate a situation shaped both by right-, justice-, and utility-based gender political discourses. These are partly living side by side and partly woven into each other. However, as highlighted in this paper – the difference and utility- based approaches are the most dominating and visible. The organizational acceptance and adaptation to a market logic and thus to an instrumental approach to gender political issues, have brought about new frames, challenges and dilemmas to promote women’s position and opportunities. The climate to articulate gender equality policies rooted in socio-ethical aims and values seem to crumble. I will in the further make a few reflections around these challenges. E.g. about what ideological and symbolic messages about meanings of gender and equalization of power are embedded in difference- and utility - oriented discourses found in market-oriented sport bodies. And what consequences an emphasis of these discourses may have for the policy-making to realize gender equalization as an end in itself.

One obvious consequence of increased market integration is a construction and framing of gender, which facilitate sexualization and erotization of women’s sport and female athletes. What kinds of gendered meanings and power relations seem to underlie these constructions?

There have recently been an ongoing discourse in Norwegian media focusing if- and if possible how - sexualized displays like Kari Traa’s “Madonna display” can have feministic potentials or can be seen as expressions of obtained gender equity. It is questioned if
sexualized and eroticized display primarily motivated by economic concerns, mediate new forms of female power and control - or renewed forms of patriarchal control and power?

Scholarly discourses on the body (e.g. Bordo 1990, Foucault 1979, Haug 1987) describe e.g. the body as a powerful symbolic surface where conventions, rules and hierarchies of the modern society are inscribed. It is maintained that female bodies in sexualized postures most often are displayed as an ornamental surface, to which the desire and satisfaction of the male gaze seems to be most significant. In this way sexualization indicate an objectification of the female body; a body exposed as an object for the gaze of others, which symbolizes subordination and subjection (Haug 1987, Widerberg 1989). Besides, sexualized displays often reinforce stereotypical and oppressive forms of femininity and sexuality and mediate gender relations shaped by domination and exploitation - rather than equality.

Messner (1988) has in his analyses of top female athletes in modern sport characterized the sexualization of female top athletes as an expression of a trivialization or “normalization”. In a presentation of the most sexy athlete of the year, the Norwegian newspaper “Dagbladet” (2002) presented among others, these photos (photo copy/transparent), which may indicate some of these features. It exemplify also challenges and dilemmas connected to a display where meanings of gender as heterosexual differences become an important instrument to strengthen the economy.

However, the most significant gender political effect of a domination of difference-and utility oriented discourses, is that right-and justice-based discourses disappear or are downplayed. Discourses based on gender equity as an absolute value loose political relevance and priority. The political justification of gender as an instrumental value or “women as a gift to the economy”, make it difficult to be critical and speak loudly about inequalities, subordination and male dominance. When gender is seen as a potential for making a profitable difference, it is not pleasurable to argue that gender equality costs both in economic and political ways. In this way the dominance of utility –based approaches generate and stimulate a crumbling of right and justice-based discourses in Norwegian sports.

My analyses indicate that this situation represents a back-clash for promoting policies targeting women’s situation and issues related to social justice and equity in sport. And it seems like women in sport once again need to fight for their rights to be equally valued.
To contribute to change this new gender political reality supported by strong market forces and a consolidated male hegemony, will, however, represent a formidable political challenge.

The sport sociologist Henning Eichberg (1995) states that “Sport is not only a mirror, but an indicator of social change and social contradiction- maybe a part of their material basis? “ (Eichberg 1995:4).

From this point of departure it is relevant to ask if the gender political situation in sport may reflect some features in the society as the whole. Or more precisely - can identify similar discursive trends and gender/power relations in other powerful societal institutions shaped by increasing market integration?

REFERENCES


