Increased participation in mass sport and youth sport is often utilized by Olympic host cities and nations as a justification for bidding for major and mega sport events, such as an Olympic sports event (Girginov & Hills, 2009; Veal, Toohey, & Frawley, 2012; Coalter, 2004; Veal & Frawley, 2009; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Hanstad & Skille, 2010). The Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports’ (NIF’s) bid for the 2016 Lillehammer Winter Youth Olympic Games (YOG) was based on the promise that the YOG would increase young people’s sport participation, as response against increasing drop-out rate of adolescents from organized sports (NIF, 2013). The operationalization of the youth sport policy, the so-called ‘youth lift’, should ensure to recruit more young sportsmen, leaders and coaches (NIF, 2013). However, the trickle-down effect of a sport event on the sport behavior of the mass does not happen per se (Hanstad & Skille, 2010) but has to be actively supported by a practical policy implementation. As well, the “apparent contradiction in seeking to promote grassroots participation by hosting elite-level international sporting events” (Veal et al., 2012, p. 158) requires to critically questioning the participation legacy of the YOG. This paper aims to scrutinize how NIF’s objectives concerning Norwegian youth sport are pursued. The research question therefore is: How is the Norwegian youth sport policy implemented in connection with the YOG?

Institutional theory helps to understand the way of how organizations act due to institutional processes (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan) and therefore serves as foundation to understand change and continuity within sport organizational fields (Kikulis, 2000). While there have been many studies conducted about that organizations change their behavior, practices and structures, a continuity in governance and decision-making has been proven (Kikulis, 2000; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). The discussion of this article draws on the changes and continuity of the youth sport policy, its governance and its implementation within NIF and the Lillehammer Youth Olympic Games Organizing Committee (LYOGOC).

Sources of data are semi-structured interviews with 14 representatives of NIF and LYOGOC as well as field notes from meetings, such as courses for young leaders, volunteers, and coaches organized by NIF and the LYOGOC in regard to the YOG. As well, archival material concerning the bidding and planning of the YOG and the Norwegian youth sport policy has been collected. These include policy documents, hereunder the candidature files and strategic documents of the bid committee and later the LYOGOC which give a brief description about the strategical focus on the youth. Further, NIF’s annual reports, the sport political documents, reports of board meetings and general assemblies, letters to the Norwegian government and the IOC, as well as reports of the Ministry of Cultural Affair such as The White Paper on Sport. Other key documents are reports from the courses for young sports leaders and coaches. These documents provide data about youth sport participation in Norway as well as youth sport political issues. The review of documents helps to understand the history, context and actions of NIF regarding their youth sport policy, not at least because these documents portray inter alia NIF and LYOGOC implementation plans and strategies. Applying the analytic approach of Miles & Hubermann (1994), the data are firstly coded inductively, which corresponds to an descriptive, open coding (Saldana, 2012), followed by a deductive coding which is based on the framework of institutional theory.

The research is still in data collection stage and valid results could not have been identified yet but will be discussed during the presentation at the conference. Tentative analysis shows that even though the youth sport policy has been introduced already in the 1990s, long before the existence of the YOG, the YOG seem to be the driving engine for the implementation of the youth sport policy. The institutionalized formulation of the youth sport policy from the top seems to finally arrive at the grass root level (Top-down implementation). Nevertheless, the addressed target
group is limited to young people that are already involved in sports; an impact of the youth sport policy on young people outside of sports could not have been identified.

The implication of the research is to unravel structures and practices of implementing the youth sport policy (for the mass) with the help of a youth elite sport event (for elite athletes). This can be a base to develop a framework for understanding how Olympic sports events can facilitate the implementation of national sport policies. Furthermore, since this study is focusing on the youth, it sheds light on what impact the YOG actually can have on the target group that the Games are meant for.