



# PROJECT RAILS



**REVIEWING AND ANALYZING  
THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL OF  
SNOWBOARDING**

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# CONTENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PAGE 4

## REVIEWING SNOWBOARDING TODAY & IN THE FUTURE

PAGE 6

## THEORETICAL APPROACH

Stakeholder analyzis  
Network theory  
Scenario planning methodology

PAGE 8

## METHOD

Document review  
Interviews  
Survey  
Limitations

PAGE 10

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LIFESTYLE SPORT

PAGE 13

## THE CURRENT SITUATION OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE SNOWBOARDING

PAGE 15

## THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE SNOWBOARDING

PAGE 23

## FINAL REMARKS

PAGE 34

**BACKGROUND.** Project RAILS (Reviewing and Analyzing the International Level of Snowboarding) is a master student project developed in cooperation with the Norwegian Snowboard Association (NSBF). This report seeks to answer two questions: *Who organizes international competitive snowboarding today, and who will organize competitive snowboarding in the future?*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First, the report produces a map of the current situation of the organization of international competitive snowboarding. Second, based on the current situation, the project outlines five possible future scenarios for the organization of international snowboarding. Little research has previously been done in this field.

**METHOD.** Using a qualitative approach we conducted 15 interviews with key informants. The informants were chosen because they are knowledgeable about the issues being researched, as well as being able and willing to communicate about them. The key informants were chosen through a consultation with NSBF, as well as through the snowball method. A survey was sent to representatives of the World Snowboard Federation's member nations. The total amount of invitations were 45, of which 1 was not verified. Response rate was 38,6 %, which is 17 of 44 possible. Together with interviews and the survey, we gathered our data from newspapers, Internet sites and academic articles. The data were analysed using stakeholder analysis, network theory and scenario methodology.

**CONTENTS.** The report is focused around two main variables based on information gathered through the data collection: (1) a unified ranking system, and (2) the

Olympic qualification. The base scenario, which is the current situation, shows an organization of competitive snowboarding that holds an uncoordinated diversity of different events, actors and systems. The network seems fragmented because of little and informal communication. The actors taken into account in our analysis is TTR, WSF, WAS, X Games, Dew Tour, IOC and FIS. Five future scenarios were developed based on the map of the current situation. The scenarios are named: *Fragmented, Cooperation and co-existence, FIS-dominated, Centralized and FIS-free and Chaotic*. The scenarios depict some possible futures for the organization of international snowboarding.

**CONCLUSIONS.** There is an inherent friction within international snowboarding between a need for coordination and professionalization on one side, and basic values such as independence and play on the other. The international organization of competitive snowboarding can develop in quite different directions, depending on the actions of the main stakeholders. Based on our findings, more cooperation within the snowboarding community, alongside constructive coexistence with FIS when it comes to Olympic qualifications, seems like the most desirable and realistic scenario, at least in the short run.



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If it get's too organized and too many frames, you lose the freedom to decide, decide what I want with my career or my own riding. You might lose motivation and development. It is important to have an inner motivation and very important to have your own goals to get anywhere at all

- LISA WIJK,  
POFESSIONAL SNOWBOARDER

# REVIEWING SNOWBOARDING TODAY & IN THE FUTURE



**THE AIM** of Project RAILS is twofold. First, analysing and mapping how international snowboarding is organized today, to produce clarity and an input for strategic planning for the Norwegian Snowboard Association (NSBF). Second, to construct scenarios that depict some possible and plausible narratives of the future of international snowboarding. This report seeks to answer the questions: *Who organizes international competitive snowboarding today, and who will organize international competitive snowboarding in the future?*

**THE DEBATE** concerning the international organization of snowboarding has gained momentum in recent years. The skill level of professional snowboarders is high and spectator interest is increasing. However, the sport is fairly young and the international organization of snowboarding seems eclectic. It is characterized by many autonomous events and tours with overlapping

arrangements and competitions, which have different qualification systems. In addition to the snowboarding events already included in the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has decided to include slopestyle in the Olympic program. IOC are currently discussing whether slopestyle will enter the Olympic Games in Sochi, 2014 or in the 2018 Olympic Games. A new snowboard event in the Olympics gives further momentum to debates concerning the international organization of snowboarding. The recent establishment of a riders union named *We are snowboarding* (WAS) has also contributed to the debate.

**SNOWBOARDING** originated back in the 1960s inspired by activities such as surfing and skateboarding, introducing a new movement of leisure (Booth, 1995). These types of sports have been described in the literature with terms like “action”, “extreme” and “lifestyle sport”. The term “lifestyle sport” indicates that the

sport has an influence on the individuals' values, mindset and way of life in general. Independence and play are seen as foundational values in snowboarding, but throughout its history it has also expressed an ambiguous relationship with some of the general foundations of sport: organization, practice and competition (Christensen, 2001).

**RESISTING** mainstream sporting values, emphasising dif-

ferent rituals and behaviours, and opposing the dominant culture through style and confrontational behaviour are some of the descriptions used for lifestyle sport participants (Coates, Clayton & Humberstone, 2010). There is tension within snowboarding between a need for coordination and aversion of becoming standardized. On one hand, better coordination of events could lead to a smoother organization. On the

other hand, the bureaucratization that comes with professionalization is unpopular because it does not mix with the basic values of snowboarding (Steen-Johnsen, 2008). The current international organization of competitive snowboarding seems confusing for media and spectators as well as for riders and organizers. However, some actors find the current organization preferable, while others see a need for change.



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## GUIDE FOR THE READER

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The first two chapters explain the theoretical and methodological basis for this report.

The next chapter gives an overview of the historical events and relevant information leading up to the current situation of international competitive snowboarding.

The following chapter draws a map of the current organization of the international competitive snowboarding, explaining each actor's role, interest and influence on the questions of a

unified ranking and Olympic qualifications. Based on the current organization of international competitive snowboarding,

The final part of the report outlines five possible future scenarios.

The report is summed up with final remarks, explaining our main findings. Basic information of the different actors discussed in this report is gathered in boxes, so that those unfamiliar with the field can get an overview.



# THEORETHICAL APPROACH

## STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

International snowboarding consist of a number of stakeholders. Stakeholder analysis is a method for identifying how individuals or groups will influence or be influenced by a specific organization. Information from a stakeholder analysis is often used to assess how the stakeholders should be addressed in processes of change. The goal of the stakeholder analysis is to ascertain who and what really counts when planning for the future. The term "stakeholder" is not always used consistently, but Freeman's (1984) definition still provides the core boundaries of what constitutes a stake: "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives" (in Rowley, 1997, p. 25). This implies that stakeholders have something at risk. They have invested human or financial capital, and have therefore something to lose or gain depending on the orga-

nizations behaviour.

Stakeholders operate in networks. Thus, it is important to move beyond a dyadic conceptualization of the stakeholder environment, limited to the tie between two stakeholders. This is because relations between two parties in a network of stakeholders will affect other relations in the stakeholder network as well (Frooman, 1999; Rowley 1997) The snowboarding network is characterized by informal relations, and by the absence of formal leadership (Steen-Johnsen, 2008). There is no single global governing body in to which all stakeholders relate. Hierarchical organizations, where activities are coordinated towards a common goal usually have a strong homogeneity and identity (Stalder, 2006, p.99 in Steen-Johnsen, 2008). Networks are different, they coordinate their actions without having a central au-

thority, they are open and they may tolerate strong heterogeneity without losing the ability to reach shared goals. Decisions emerge through interaction in the network, and not as a result of a particular leaders decision (Steen-Johnsen, 2008). The snowboard community is a complex network of stakeholders, rather than a simple hierarchic or solar structure.

The researcher has to operationalize the network boundaries when constructing a representation of the stakeholder network. This means deciding which actors to include and exclude in the network (Rowley, 1997). According to Frooman (1999) there are three main questions that need to be answered when mapping the stakeholders: (1) Who are they? (2) What do they want, and (3) how are they going to try to get it? This report uses a influence-interest grid to display the stakeholder analysis.





Rowley (1997) suggests two variables to define the status of a stakeholder in a network: density and centrality. Density is defined by the number of relations in the network, while centrality depicts the ability to control flows of information and resources in the network.

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# NETWORK THEORY

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Density and centrality are defining features of a network

## DENSITY

is a characteristic of the whole network and illustrates the number of ties in the network. It is calculated as a ratio of the number of existing relationships in the network, compared with the total number of possible ties if each network member were tied to all other member. The density of networks implies two trends. First, as density increases communication across the network becomes more efficient. Second, a dense network structure leads to a voluntary diffusion of norms across the network. In sparsely connected networks some

sections of the network may become isolated, or segregated cliques develop, restricting communication between groups of actors. Thus, many inter-organizational links produce similar behaviours among the actors and homogeneity in the network.

## CENTRALITY

Three aspects define the concept of centrality: degree, closeness and betweenness.

**DEGREE CENTRALITY** implies the number of ties the actors has in the network. The more «well connected» an actor is, the more access she/he has to alternative sources of information and resources.

## CLOSENESS CENTRALITY

is an actor's ability to access independently all other members in the network. An actor with low closeness is highly dependent on other actors as intermediaries to access other positions in the network. Closeness is associated with efficient communication because it means fewer message transmissions, shorter times and lower costs.

## BETWEENNESS

is the extent to which an actor has control over other actors' access to various regions in the network. Actors with high betweenness are gatekeepers in the sense that they facilitate exchanges between less central actors.

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# SCENARIO PLANNING METHODOLOGY

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One of the main purposes of this report is to serve as a basis for the strategic planning of the Norwegian Snowboard Association (NSBF). Because of this we have drawn on scenario-planning methodology, which many leaders and scholars hold as the best-suited process for long-term strategic planning activities (Ralston & Wilson, 2006; Van der Heijden, 2005). According to Lindgren & Bandhold (2003, p. 45): "scenario techniques are powerful tools to identify contextual challenges and opportunities". Ralston & Wilson (2006) establishes a basic understanding of the term scenarios as "stories of possible futures". Such scenarios should describe both possible and plausible futures. Scenarios, like stories, also seek to take a holistic point of view. Our scenarios aim to outline possible and plausible future situations, but they are also to

a certain degree exaggerated stories of how the different scenarios could play out, thus keeping with the narrative quality of scenarios. The scenarios identify "success factors". These are factors needed in order for the specific scenario to materialize. Considering such "success factors" is key to assessing scenarios plausibility (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003).

A stakeholder analysis serves as the first step in the development of our scenarios. Such an analysis is a fundamental method in scenario planning (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003). By mapping the different stakeholders and their influence on international snowboarding in relation to each other, key actors or factors are identified. This creates an image of the current situation. This image is used to establish what is called

a base scenario: "a broad picture of what we can take for granted" (Lindgren & Bandhold, 2003, p. 163). The base scenario is used as a point of departure for the development of distinct future scenarios. According to scenario methodology the future scenarios should be presented to the organization that wants strategic action is to be taken, in this case the NSBF (Van der Heijden, 2005). A "strategic conversation" with the NSBF is used as a final tool for going through the details and probability of each scenario before finalizing the report. An effective scenario model "should have enough hooks into the current organizational mental models to make them plausible to a 'critical mass' in the organization". But it should also "contain an element of novelty and surprise..." (Van der Heijden, 2005, p. 45).

# METHOD - A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

**THE MAPPING** of the current situation and the development of scenarios in this report is based on a qualitative approach. The study has utilized different methods according to the stages of the data collection. These were; document review, survey and interviewing. A qualitative approach is appropriate since the report seeks to uncover who means what, and not how many means what. As Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p. 1) puts it, we are trying to “understand the world from the subject’s point of view”. In this case the “world” is the organization of international competitive snowboarding. In the initial stage of the study, we used document review together with exploratory interviews to gain insight to the field. As the study progressed in-depth interviews were used to pursue questions of interest more deeply. In addition, a survey was sent to representatives of the World Snowboard Federation’s member nations.

## DOCUMENT REVIEW

The document review was done by reading available research papers, media reports, organization websites, strategy documents from the NSBF and other written material concerning the international organization of competitive snowboarding. This was done in order to gain insight into how the field is organized and who are the main actors.

## INTERVIEWS

Special care was taken to identify key informants related to the organization of international competitive snowboarding. This was done through as part of a preliminary consultation with the NSBF, and through the snowball method. We utilized so-called SWOT interviews as well as in-depth interviews tailored specifically to each key informant. SWOT interviews are useful in an initial stage of the research when the field

is unknown, since it is a data-driven approach to the field. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The questions asked are open-ended and the objective is to get the informants opinion on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the object in question. In our case these four questions are posed as “what are the strengths of the organization of international competitive snowboarding; what are the weaknesses”, and so on. This type of interview is appropriate to our analysis since the questions are related to both present and future (Helms & Nizon, 2010). As the study progressed and insight into the field was gained, targeted questions were developed in order to obtain the diverse knowledge needed to answer the research question. This is referred to as “thematizing an interview study” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p.105). The interview-guides were prepared and adapted to each informant according to his/her position and knowledge.

## SURVEY

A survey was sent out to the member nations of World Snowboard Federation (WSF). The purpose of the survey was to receive input regarding the organization of international competitive snowboarding from a wide range of nations, because this information has not yet been retrieved or put into system. The contact addresses for the different countries were obtained from Gunnar Tveit, the president of the WSF. The survey consisted of 33 items, of which 4 were open-ended questions, and the remaining 29 were statements to be responded on a 5 point Likert Scale. The survey was divided into 3 categories: (1) Background; (2) Current organization of snowboarding; and (3) Future organization of snowboarding. It was sent out on March the 8th, and end date was set to May 16th. Total amount of invitations were 45, of which 1 was not verified. Response rate was 38,6 %, or 17 of a possible 44.

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# METHODOLOGICAL STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

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**There are a number of potential advantages and limitations attached to this project. Regarding the use of key informants, the advantages are that it is a method that provides information directly from knowledgeable people. It also supplies flexibility to explore ideas and issues not anticipated during the planning phase of the project. This was important because there is no existing overview regarding how international competitive snowboarding is organized today.**



In order to draw a map of the current organization, such flexibility was needed. Limitations regarding the use of key informants are that it may be biased if the informants are not selected with care (Kumar, 1986). The selection for the project was done in consultation with the NSBF, and there is a potential chance that we have not interviewed all relevant actors needed to get a complete overview and enough information for the project. As an example, although X Games and Dew tour were included in the network, interviews with representatives from these events have not been achieved. In addition the Snowboard Department of FIS were approached for interviews, but failed to respond in time, and therefore was omitted from the project. FIS is represented through vice president Seeberg, but a key informant from the Snowboard Department would have been desirable. All in all there is however reason to believe that most of the

key informants were essential for the project, as they were not only suggested by the NSBF, but also by other informants through the snowball method.

Another limitation attached to the use of key informants is both interviewer and informant biases. According to Kumar, Stern & Anderson (1993) researchers usually don't obtain any explicit verification of the competency of the informants, but merely assert that the selected person is qualified to answer questions about the issues under investigation. This was also the case for the current project. Having no information prior to the interviews about the respondents knowledge on the subject matter, this could potentially lead to validity of key informants' reports not being as high desirable. As an example, research has shown that points of view may systematically vary according to the informants roles and levels in an organization.

Regarding the current report key informants varied from young athletes riders to people with much experience and high positions in sports organizations. The aim of the project was however to get a diverse range of input regarding both the current organization and potential future organization. The seemingly low degree of consistence between some informants' reports is therefore regarded as a key finding rather than a problem; there is a wide range of viewpoints regarding the international organization of competitive snowboarding. Finally interviewer bias may be a limitation, especially for the in-depth tailored interview guides that did not follow the same standard. It may be possible that the questions asked emphasized some aspects of the international organization of competitive snowboarding more than others and thus lead to the respondents giving more input regarding certain aspects to the detriment of others. There was however SWOT questions in most interviews that potentially would limit such bias. Regarding the survey there is one main advantage of using this method for the project. It is the first time this type of research has been done on the field, and the survey facilitates for insight into opinions of key decision makers for the future; namely the national association. The results of the survey show that there are certain clear trends of consistent opinions amongst the nations for

some items.

The primary limitation of the survey concerns the response rate, which was 38,6%. This means that 27 of the possible 44 national representatives opinions are missing. As a result it is difficult to estimate what the picture would look like if these were also represented. On the other hand, it is fairly common with this level of response rate when it comes to internet-surveys. Based on interview data, it has been pointed out that there are large individual differences when it comes to how well-organized and active the different national associations are. There may therefore be reason to believe that the representatives that have responded characterize nations that are active in influencing the organization of snowboarding also on the international level.

There are also potential advantages

and limitations regarding the selection of main variables for the project; a unified ranking and Olympic qualification. Initially a larger set of variables was the focus of attention when reviewing literature and producing the survey items.

These were (1) funding/sponsors; (2) organization of events/tours; (3) fragmentation; (4) ranking systems; (5) judging systems; (6) qualification systems; and (7) power distribution/ power relations. As the study progressed the need for a limitation of variables and an operationalization of international competitive snowboarding became apparent. Our choice of two main variables was based on the common factors that key informants addressed in their interviews. The advantages of this choice were that it reduced the focus to a size that was manageable given the time and scope for the project. In

addition many of the other variables seemed to fall under one of the two main categories. The main limitation is that this operationalization does not capture the complexity characterizing international competitive snowboarding. As mentioned there is very little literature on the field, and the attempt to find an established operationalization therefore failed.

A final potential limitation concerns the choice of actors that were not included in the analysis. International snowboarding is also heavily influenced by the industry surrounding it, and by a large amount of film production. These were not considered to have a stake or have power over the international organization of competitive snowboarding per se. It is however possible that by including these, new insight could have been gained that especially might have impacted the future scenarios.

PHOTO: IDA HESTMAN





That's one of the very most important things of snowboarding, it's to know a bit of the history, the legacy of the sport, and how the sport has been evolving, and where it came from. We developed it into something that has been snowboarding itself, like taking the values of skateboarding and surfing, and transforming them unto the snow

**- RETO LAMM, PRESIDENT OF TTR**

# DEVELOPMENT OF A LIFESTYLE SPORT

**THE SNOWBOARDERS** represented something different from skiing, which led a majority of the ski resorts to ban the sport in the 1960's and 1970's. The bans led to snowboards only being used in backwoods powder, limiting snowboarding's growth potential. Throughout the 1970's, snowboarding remained more of an underground sport. Competitions existed, but these were more social gatherings than organized contests. In the 1980's some resorts opened up for the snowboarders, which increased the sports popularity and growth. Improved equipment and augmented media interest brought snowboarding one step closer to becoming a commercial and competitive sport. Snowboarding became a new platform for reaching an attractive youth market, and the number of companies involved in the snowboarding industry increased. Once exposed to the commercial world, the popularity of snowboarding increased (Coates et al, 2010; Humphreys, 1997). This

provided athletes with an opportunity for profit and fame. In the 1990s, large corporations staged action sport events that included snowboarding, such as the ESPN X Games (Rinehart, 1998). Along with the growing interest in snowboarding, snowboarders formed the International Snowboard Federation (ISF) in the early 1990s. The aim was to create a global governing body for the sport. The intentions were to control international competitions and to develop snowboarding in a way that would ensure the maintenance of the lifestyle (Popovic, 2006).

## **ENTERING THE OLYMPIC GAMES**

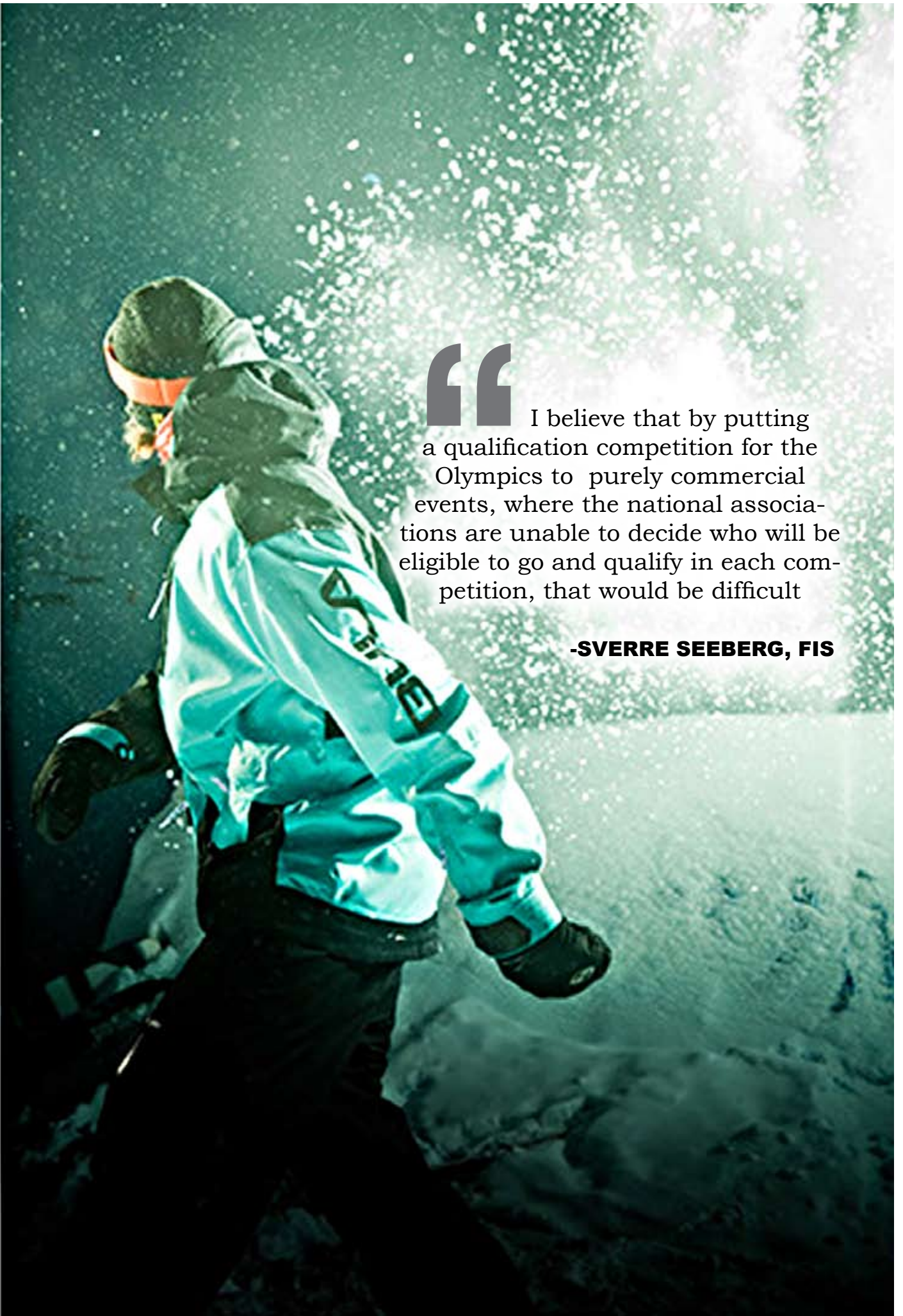
Snowboarding became a sport in the Winter Olympic Games in Nagano in 1998. The qualifications for the Olympics were handed to the International Ski Federation (FIS). This decision caused reactions and disputes within the snowboarding community. ISF was not regarded as a suitable

organization for cooperation with the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Snowboarder Terje Haakonsen decided to boycott the Olympics. Some snowboarders, like Haakonsen, worried that snowboarding values such as creativity and individuality would lose ground to nationalism and professionalism with FIS in the large Olympic machinery. Furthermore, the idea of being regarded as a discipline of skiing under the FIS umbrella seemed preposterous to some athletes. However, many riders regarded competing in the Olympic Games as more beneficial than boycotting (Coates et al., 2010). Despite the lack of support by some of the members of the snowboard community, FIS became a central actor in the international organization of snowboarding. Following the 1998 Olympic Games, the ISF ceased its operations in 2002 because they lost influence and sponsors to FIS. To fill the void of the ISF, the World Snowboard Federation was founded in 2002.

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I believe that by putting a qualification competition for the Olympics to purely commercial events, where the national associations are unable to decide who will be eligible to go and qualify in each competition, that would be difficult

**-SVERRE SEEBERG, FIS**



# THE CURRENT ORGANIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE SNOWBOARDING

Based on the data collection for this project we have chosen two variables to constitute the operationalization of the organization of international competitive snowboarding. These variables are (1) a unified ranking system and (2) the Olympic qualifications. The variables appear to embrace the majority of debated topics that surfaced through the interviews and literature review. Given this operationalization, the representation of the current organization of international competitive snowboarding will be done by using a stakeholder analysis, together with network theory.

## CLUTTER OR DIVERSITY: IS THERE A NEED FOR A UNIFIED RANKING SYSTEM?

*"I can understand that the sport suffers. That there are different ranking systems and different events at the same time, and that the riders are pulled in different directions. Very unfortunate for the sport" - Heiberg, IOC-member*

There is a broad range of snowboard events on the international scene. TTR events, Dew Tour, X Games, the FIS World Cup and the Olympics are major events in competitive snowboarding today. International competitive snowboarding can be described as fragmented. Fragmentation refers to the diversity of events and the low degree of coordination between them. Whether this is perceived as positive or negative varies. Jeremy Forster, director of US Snowboarding, USSA (United States Ski and Snowboard Association) comments that:

*"I think that's a strength that there are opportunities and there are different pathways and not a traditional sport. (...) snowboarding has excelled with the structure it has had, and I think it can continue to excel with it.(...) I think that one of the key*

*foundations of snowboarding is that it's about choices (...) I like the fact that there are a lot of choices. I think it represents a healthy sport"*

Lisa Wiik, professional snowboard athlete, has a different opinion:

*"It is chaos beyond compare, the year of the Olympic qualifications. Wanting also to compete in the Ticket to Ride tour, I think I had to compete in 18 competitions that year, because my goal was to also get a top three result in TTR (...) It was very stressful, I was on the run all the time because there were com-*

*petitions all the time."*

In the snowboarding community, some see the need for a common ranking system because it could make the sport more coherent, and it could contribute to avoid internal competition for attention within snowboarding. Currently, there are different ranking systems within TTR, Dew Tour and the FIS World Cup; in addition to this is X Games, which is a single standing event.

This was the feedback when representatives of the WSF member nations were asked to rate the following statement (Table 2.7):

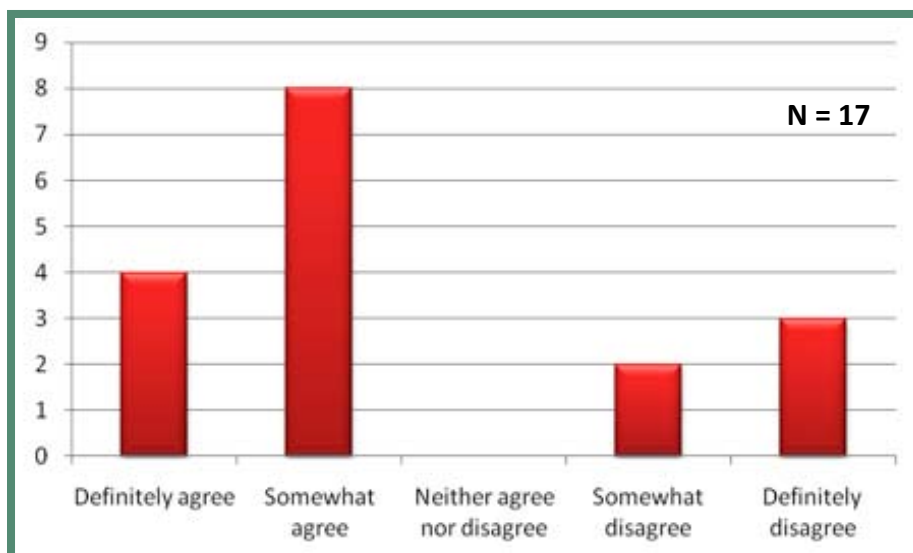


Table 2.7: The event organizers would benefit from one international ranking system across all event and tours.

## ONE RANKING

**SYSTEM** could clarify who is the reigning world champion at any given time. This is a potential benefit for mainstream media coverage as the following statement response shows:

However, a unified ranking system can be problematic:

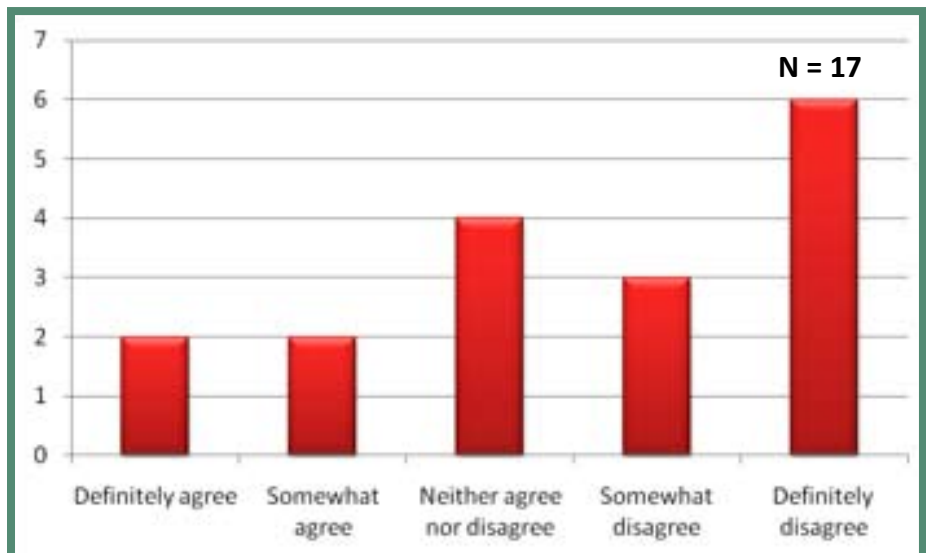
*“I think there’s a danger that we become a one structured system. (...) I think there’s concern any time (...) you give one group all the control and that creates a monopoly that can be abused in a negative way.”*

-Jeremy Forster, director of US Snowboarding, USSA

**THE SURVEY** shows that the majority of respondents agreed that there is not enough coordination between international snowboarding events today. Event organizers are competing for the presence of the best athletes. From an athlete’s perspective the large pool of events creates many options, but it is a challenge to decide which events to participate in. In general, the biggest challenge is not the number of events per se, but rather the lack of coordination between them. Therefore, international competitive snowboarding might need a reorganization to ensure further development of the sport. The question of a unified ranking system has appeared to be a central matter of discussion from several voices with differing opinions.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATIONS

Since snowboarding entered the Olympic Games in the late 1990s, the snowboard program has included halfpipe, snowboard cross and parallel giant slalom. According to Jeremy Forster, director of US Snowboarding in USSA, the work towards getting slopestyle accepted as an Olympic event started in 2006. It has now been decided by the IOC that slopestyle will enter as a new event on the program for the Olympic Games. However, it is not yet decided whether it will be part of the 2014



**Table 3.7: In our opinion FIS (International Ski Federation) should arrange qualifications for the different snowboarding events to the Olympic Games.**

Olympic Games in Sochi, or if its debut will be postponed until 2018. Slopestyle is popular for both riders and spectators. But its entrance into the Olympics have caused discussions regarding who should organize the qualifications and on what conditions. The debate is not restricted to the organization of Olympic qualifications, it also raises fundamental questions regarding the way snowboarding is organized internationally.

When snowboard was first included in the Olympics, the IOC searched for an international organization that could represent snowboarding. FIS was the only eligible organization in the eyes of IOC, and was therefore awarded the responsibility for snowboarding. This was unproblematic for the IOC, but it has caused much debate amongst snowboarders and event organizers. There are three major complaints seem to reoccur: first, discontentment amongst snowboarding athletes over the fact that a ski organization, with a different set of sports values is given so much power over key decisions in snowboarding. Second, a lack of coordination between the Olympic qualification competitions and other well established events. Third, a lack of opportunity for the athletes to voice their opinions with regards to the process and organization of the Olympic qualifications and competitions. Our survey shows that many WSF member nations are unhappy

with FIS arranging Olympic qualifications, see chart above (Table 3.7).

This has resulted in two initiatives from professional riders: the Snowboarding 180 Olympic charter, and the establishment of We are snowboarding (WAS), a riders union for competitive snowboarders. The issue of the Olympic qualifications is currently a major topic in both initiatives. The 180 Olympic charter states that:

- *We do not want a new world tour for Slopestyle qualifications.*
- *We want an Olympic ranking to reduce the date conflicts of major events.*
- *We believe the International Olympic Committee has a responsibility to listen to our voices and make way for the unleashing of snowboarding’s true potential*

However, IOC member Heiberg says that IOC will only deal with one, and only one responsible organization for snowboarding. This is currently FIS, and from the IOC perspective it is FIS who has to deal with internal debates in snowboarding. IOC will not deal with internal disputes in any sport. Heiberg does however acknowledge the problematic side of this:

*FIS represents snowboard and the snowboarding athletes – and I do believe that neither of them are*



*completely satisfied with this (...) the snowboarders are from a different environment than what we're used to (...) and has fought against it and not understood why we only deal with the FIS, but for us it is incredibly much easier.*

The claims from snowboarders that the IOC is responsible for listening to the voices of snowboarding athletes, and making sure that the sport reaches its true potential, is therefore considered misplaced by the IOC. All communication in the snowboarding community must be directed towards FIS when it concerns the Olympics.

### **WHO ARE STAKEHOLDERS IN INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE SNOWBOARDING?**

The following section is an overview of key actors in the current organization of international competitive snowboarding.

This report uses a stakeholder analysis to establish a base scenario, which is a presentation of today's situation. It serves as a basis for elaborating scenarios for the future. The stakeholder analysis contains three elements. First, naming which stakeholders this report takes into account and why. Second, identifying the key stakeholders interests, and third assessing the influence of the stakeholders in relation to a unified ranking system and Olympic qualifications.

This report understands international snowboarding as a network structure consisting of IOC, FIS, TTR, WSF, WAS, X Games and Dew Tour. These are the most prominent actors on the international field in competitive snowboarding. The snowboarding industry and sponsors were not included as individual actors in our analysis because these are not single actors: The sponsors are a diverse set of actors who cannot be lumped together as one body. However, commercial pressure from the industry is taken into account in the analysis.

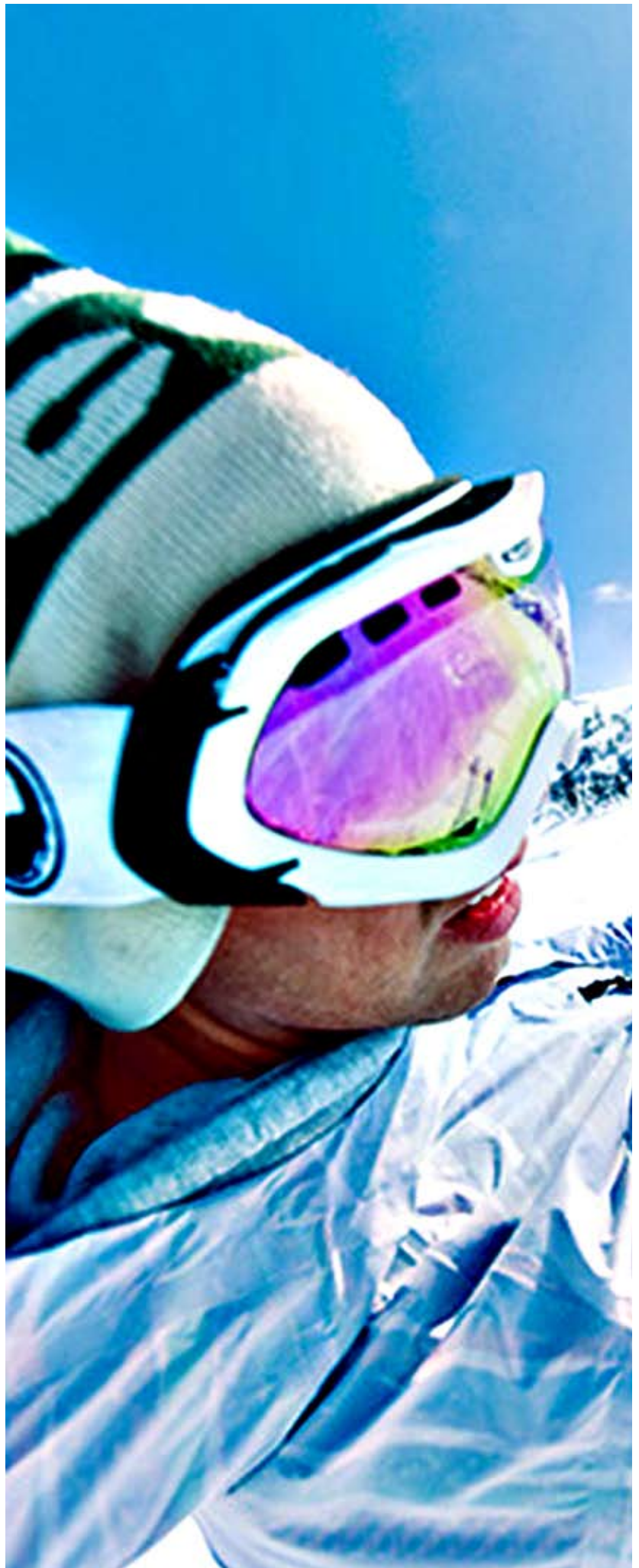


PHOTO: VEGARD BREIE

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# ACTORS, INTERESTS &

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## WORLD SNOWBOARD FEDERATION (WSF)

WSF is a non-profit organization focusing on advancing the sport on a national level. They organize international events and rookie tours for athletes under the age of 18. They function as a coordinating structure for the national associations. WSF is currently collaborating with TTR; they share the same ranking system, and they will be hosting a World Championship in Oslo 2012. WSF has little influence on the top level competitive snowboarding. However, since WSF organizes the national snowboarding associations outside FIS, the WSF is a very attractive partner for the TTR. WSF does not engage

in sport politics, but functions as a facilitator for the national associations. They provide these with a platform for discussion and exchange of experience across the national borders.

### UNIFIED RANKING/TOUR

WSF is a part of the TTR ranking system. This provides the opportunity for the rookie level athletes to be ranked in the same system as the professional riders. WSF interests will most likely be aligned with the TTR interests, which is to create one international ranking system across all levels and events.

### OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

WSF has little influence on the top level competitive snowboarding, but

they are likely to be interested in letting TTR administer the Olympic qualifications in the long run.

## X GAMES & DEW TOUR

are commercial action sport events. Winning the X Games and/or Dew Tour is considered a very prestigious achievement. Dew Tour is a tour with three events, and X Games is a single standing.

### UNIFIED RANKING/TOUR

If any actor wants to build a legitimate unified ranking, the X Games and Dew Tour has to be part of that ranking. These events have high credibility and are financially well off. They are therefore not easily persuaded to submit to a ranking without strong incentives. Their interest is probably to keep status quo because of their high status.



## WORLD SNOWBOARD FEDERATION

The World Snowboard Federation (WSF) was formed in 2002 in Munich, with delegates from 14 nations. The Federation was established to fill the void after the collapse of ISF. Today the World Snowboard Federation is an international non-profit organization representing a network of 35 national snowboard associations with cooperation worldwide. The federation is working on developing the sport at all levels, including competitions, education, disabled and adaptive snowboarding, as well as snowboard activities for riders at any age.

### OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

The X Games and Dew Tour's stake regarding the Olympic qualifications, only surface every four years. There is a risk that the FIS' qualifying events overlap with their competitions, and that some athletes prioritize the Olympic qualifications. X Games and Dew Tour have little interest in Olympic qualifications, and they do not have had much influence in this regard.

# INFLUENCES

## WE ARE SNOWBOARDING (WAS)

WAS interest lies in creating one, coordinated tour, safety for riders, transparent judging and practical issues concerning the organization of events. WAS wants snowboarders to claim ownership of their own sport.

## UNIFIED RANKING/TOUR

WAS will probably support/contribute to the development of a unified ranking, if this is done to benefit the athletes. WAS is a wildcard at this point, but if WAS manage to unite the demands of the top athletes internationally they have a lot of bargaining power on the international scene.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

WAS is not satisfied with the current qualification system for the Olympics. They do not want a new FIS world tour for slopestyle qualifications. However, they recognize the Olympics as a pinnacle event of snowboarding. WAS has approached the IOC with these concerns, but without success. WAS has to communicate with FIS when it comes to the Olympics. WAS' influence is yet to be established, but their influence will depend on whether WAS gets all the best riders to unite their demands.



## DEW TOUR

The Dew Tour is an American action sports tour owned by the Alliance of Action Sports (Alli) and funded by a number of commercial brands. It is broadcasted by, among others, the NBC Universal. In 2008 they arranged their first winter action sports tour, made up of three events featuring snowboard Superpipe and Slopestyle. They give away \$2.5 million over the course of the year and award the Dew Cup winners at season's end based on a cumulative points system.



## WE ARE SNOWBOARDING

A new riders union was established spring 2011: "We Are Snowboarding" (WAS). Seven world-elite snowboarders started an action movement with the purpose of uniting the athletes. The athletes in WAS wants to voice their opinions in snowboarding. Fairness, equity, safety, health care, scheduling, scoring, training and recovery are some of the topics that WAS focus on.



## X GAMES

The American TV-company ESPN runs the X Games. This is a commercial annual sport event, which is considered one of the major prestige events in action sports. In the snowboard community X Games has high prestige. The event is recently also launched in Europe. The Winter X Games snowboard events include slopestyle, superpipe, big air and snowboardcross.

# ACTORS, INTERESTS &

## THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

The IOC is only interested in matters of the Olympics. They want the best of the best athletes in their contests. IOC relate to only one governing body for each sport.

## UNIFIED RANKING/TOUR

The IOC has no interests regarding a unified ranking/tour. As long as their customers deliver a satisfactory product to the IOC, they do not get involved in the organizational matters for the different sports. In the case of snowboard this responsibility lies with FIS.



## THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC)

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is the leading organization for the Olympic movement. Their overall goals are making the Olympic Games come true, bringing Olympic values to life and supporting sports worldwide. The IOC also sets the criteria for sporting events applying for Olympic participation, and is the supreme decision authority regarding eligibility for the Olympics. The committee relates to one governing organization for each Olympic sport. In the case of snowboarding this organization is the FIS.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

The IOC has the ultimate say in which sports are given the rights to participate in the Olympics. However, Heiberg explains that if the situation regarding the qualifications for snowboarding in the Olympics becomes a "matter of war", it is a possibility that IOC will not accept snowboard as part of the Olympic program.

## SWATCH TICKET TO RIDE SNOWBOARD TOUR (TTR)

TTR is a ranking system and an organization of events. A board of directors governs it, and all member event-organizations have a vote in decision-making. TTR promotes core snowboarding values and wants to develop the sport, for instance by developing better judging systems.



## SWATCH TICKET TO RIDE WORLD SNOWBOARD TOUR (TTR)

Terje Haakonsen together with key event organizers and brand representatives established the Ticket to Ride (TTR) in 2002, as an alternative to the FIS world cup. Today, there are a large number of events under the TTR umbrella. The Swatch TTR World Snowboard Tour events are organized in a ranking system classifying the events from 1-6 stars, with 6 stars constituting top level. The top level events have the most price money and give the most points. The 1-3 star events are on a national level and rookie tours. The TTR has a close relation to and ranking cooperation with the WSF, who organizes events up to the 3 star level. This cooperation links the grassroots-activities of the WSF to the professional level of snowboarding.

## UNIFIED RANKING/TOUR

TTR wants all snowboarding athletes to be part of one ranking, according to TTR President Reto Lamm. Currently they have their own ranking system for events in their own tour as well as the WSF events. In order to obtain their goal of one global ranking system, TTR need to cooperate with the X Games and the Dew Tour. This appears to be a challenge for the TTR. As Chairman of the TTR Board of Directors, Maria McNulty explains:

*"We have an open dialogue with those guys [X Games and Dew Tour] and talk quite a bit. But even if they would come on as TTR events, it doesn't mean they would do less events (...) they are locked in because of marketing dollars, advertising dollars. They have a totally different incentive to put on events, than say Burton does."*

The inclusion criterion for events to be part of the TTR tour is alignment with the TTR philosophy and values,

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# INFLUENCES

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but also a set of rules concerning issues such as prize money and promotion of TTR. Including the X Games and Dew Tour without them ascribing the same values and rules, is not desirable for TTR. Technically, TTR has already developed a suggestion to a ranking system that includes all events. So, obtaining a unified ranking is a question of values as well as power to implement the system.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

TTR is in dialogue with FIS concerning a potential cooperation regarding the Olympic qualifications. In the long run it appears that TTR might be open for cooperation with FIS regarding the qualifications. In addition they might also participate in creating an alternative solution to the current qualification system, if the snowboarding community is able to unite on this matter. However, the IOC does not consider TTR as a viable alternative to FIS.



## THE INTERNATIONAL SKI FEDERATION (FIS)

The International Ski Federation (referred to as FIS from its French name: Fédération Internationale De Ski) dates back to the first Winter Olympics in 1924. It has developed into an umbrella organization for national ski associations worldwide. FIS also works with snowboarding in cooperation with its national member nations, and organizes a World Cup. The FIS is given mandate by the IOC to organize the qualifications for the current snowboard events in the Olympic Games: halfpipe, boarder cross and parallel giant slalom.

## THE INTERNATIONAL SKI FEDERATION (FIS)

People are still talking about skiers organizing snowboarding events. The riders who are competing regularly can confirm that the snowboarding events are organized by snowboarders. It has nothing to do [with] skiing. We are part of the organization, yes, but the snowboard department is separate. - Uwe Beier, FIS' race director (www.espn.com 2011)

FIS organizes snowboarding along with many other winter sports like alpine-skiing and cross-country skiing. From the beginning, FIS focused mainly on traditional skiing disciplines. FIS has a snowboard committee with representatives from different nations. There are many nations where snowboarding is a part of the national ski federations. These are commonly organized under FIS, and thereby snowboard representatives from those nations have a voice in the FIS system.

## UNIFIED RANKING/ TOUR

FIS organizes their own World Cup

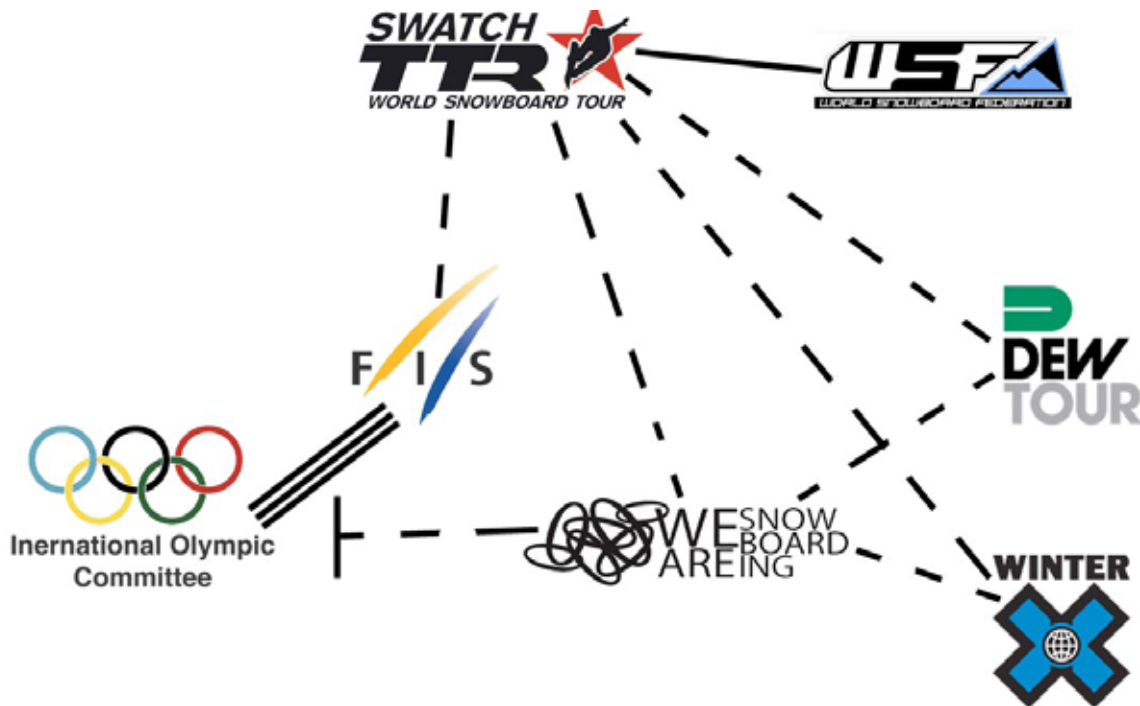
with their own ranking system. According to FIS Vice President Seeberg FIS' main interest regarding the snowboarding is to develop the sport and work strategically with their snowboarding events, especially when it comes to increasing the attention of mainstream spectators/media. Another key issue for the FIS is to empower the national associations. They want to ensure that the power to decide which athletes goes to which events / qualifications rest with the national associations. FIS would like their ranking to be dominant. However, FIS' race director Uwe Beier states in an interview with ESPN Action Sports that they want all the riders and athletes to have a fair chance to go to the most important events, and that those events do not overlap. Additionally he says that a good solution would be for TTR events to be FIS sanctioned and therefore part of the Olympic Qualifications.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

FIS has had responsibility for Olympic qualifications in snowboarding since the first snowboarding event was included in the Olympics in 1998. Their interest is to maintain this mandate. Other event organizers have approached FIS concerning a potential cooperation regarding the qualification. On one hand race director Uwe Beier has responded that there are possibilities for FIS sanction existing events to become an Olympic qualifier. On the other hand FIS Vice President Sverre Seeberg is restrictive when it comes to letting commercial events be responsible for Olympic qualifications. This is because the sport should be governed by the sport itself, and not commercial actors.

# THE SNOWBOARDING NETWORK

The following section will provide a presentation of the key actors and the network relations in international competitive snowboarding, using the concepts of density and centrality.



## DENSITY IN THE NETWORK

Density is a characteristic of the whole network and illustrates the number of ties in the network. The density is calculated as a ratio of the number of existing relationships in the network, compared with the total number of possible ties if each network member were tied to all other members. In this snowboarding network, the number of possible ties is 56. The existing number of ties is 9, resulting in a ratio of 9/56. This implies that the network has a low density. Network theory describes low density as characterized by restricted communication lines between the actors. It also entailed the likeli-

hood of different sets of norms between the actors. In sparsely connected networks sections of the network may become isolated, restricting communication between groups of actors. An example of this is WAS' attempt to approach the IOC directly by sending a letter stating their wishes for the Olympic Committee's engagement in the organization of snowboarding. The IOC did not acknowledge the approach, and repeated that all organizational concerns must be directed to FIS, not to the IOC. The FIS is a gatekeeper when it comes to the Olympics. This demonstrates that there is no direct link, which poses restriction in communication between actors.

## CENTRALITY IN THE NETWORK

Centrality is divided into three dimensions: degree (actors number of ties), closeness (actors access to other actors) and betweenness (actors control over other actors access in the network). These concepts describe the qualities of relationships between each actor and the other actors in the network. Based on the illustration below it is apparent that there is a closeness centrality between FIS and the IOC, as well as between TTR and WSF. TTR has a relatively high degree of centrality. However not all TTR ties are particularly strong. FIS has a high degree of betweenness centrality as it functions as a gatekeeper for IOC contact.

# THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE SNOWBOARDING

This part of the report draws up possible future scenarios. The fragmented situation of snowboarding today leads some stakeholders to wonder about the direction of the sport in the future. The scenarios aim to answer part two of our main question which is who organizes international competitive snowboarding in the future? The two main aspects that we are focusing on are a unified ranking system and the Olympic qualifications. We will be discussing who are

the key actors in each scenario and what their power is in relation to the other main stakeholders. We have also drawn up a map that illustrates the organizing network in each situation.

The scenarios are narratives of the future. They contain success factors, which are key elements that need to be realized for the specific scenario to materialize. The success factors contain a probability assessment which discusses the likeliness

of each factor to occur. We have also included some perspectives on best and worst case consequences of each scenario.

The scenarios are grounded in reality, but they are also thought experiments – they aim to be thought provoking. Because of this, our scenarios are slightly idealized and might be perceived as exaggerated or unlikely. Reality could perhaps be found “in between” some of our scenarios.

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I can understand that the sport suffers. That there are different ranking systems and different events at the same time, and that the riders are pulled in different directions. Very unfortunate for the sport

**- GERARD HEIBERG, IOC-MEMBER**

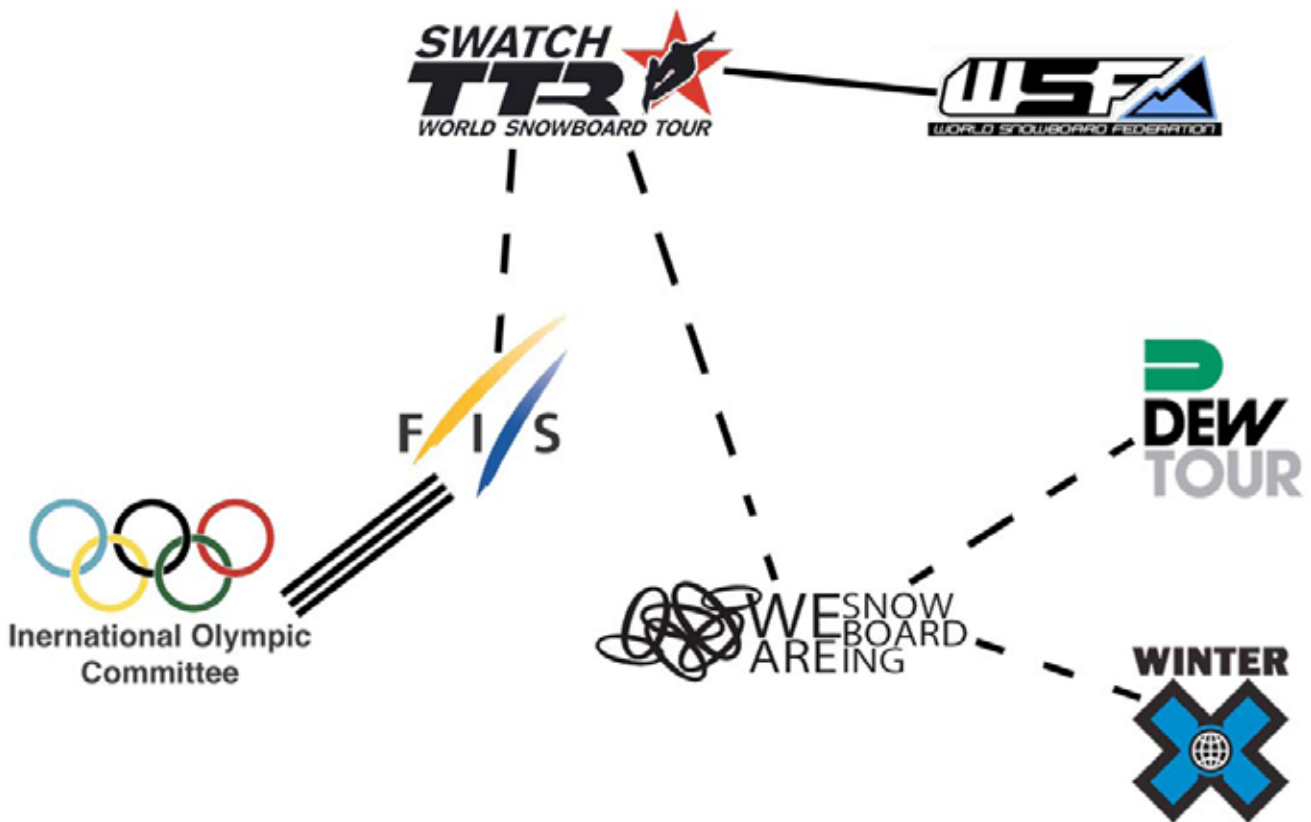
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I think that's a strength that there are opportunities and there are different pathways and not a traditional sport. [...] Snowboarding has excelled with the structure it has had, and I think it can continue to excel with it. [...] I think that one of the key foundations of snowboarding is that it's about choices [...] I like the fact that there are a lot of choices. I think it represents a healthy sport

- **JEREMY FORSTER,**  
**DIRECTOR OF US SNOWBOARDING, USSA**

# SCENARIO 1

## SNOWBOARDING IS FRAGMENTED: CONTINUATION OR STAGNATION



As we have seen, the current organization of international competitive snowboarding is fragmented. A possible future scenario is a more or less direct continuance of today's situation with low density in the snowboarding network: Little or no progress is made when it comes to

unifying international snowboarding, and communication continues at a low and informal level between the different stakeholders in the network. Apart from FIS, which is a gatekeeper with regards to Olympic qualifications, no single organization emerges as a central actor in the

network. Important stakeholders like the TTR-Tour, the X Games and the Dew Tour continue pursuing their own interests unilaterally. Unified ranking There is no single governing body that can organize and speak for international competitive snowboarding.



Because of this, the event schedule is highly uncoordinated and there is no dominant ranking system on the international level. Rather, there are still several competing ranking systems; Dew Cup, TTR-Tour and FIS World Cup. The TTR/WSF World Championship in 2012 and beyond is yet another event whose legitimacy depends on who actually competes, and X Games have announced they will expand with additional global action sports events in 2013. New sponsors create new events that lead to further fragmentation in the snowboarding community.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATIONS

Since there are several different organizations with conflicting interests, it is hard to reach any sort of consensus on scheduling of events in the Olympic qualifying season. From a FIS perspective, it would have to keep track of many actors and events if it were to adapt to such a schedule. From the rider's perspective, it will be hard to coordinate FIS events with the schedule of other events, since there is no single organization that can negotiate this with FIS. The FIS World Cup will not be a high priority for most athletes, except in the Olympic season where they will participate in the minimum required events. Our survey shows that most WSF member nations are unhappy with the current Olympic qualifications (Table 2.10):

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- TTR and WSF fail to integrate or merge their interests. This seems less likely, since cooperation has already started, and they're organizing the first Snowboard World Championship together in 2012. However, it is not certain that the TTR/WSF World Championship manages to attract all the best riders. So it might not be a "real" World Championship, just yet another event.

- TTR fails to include X Games and Dew-Tour events into their tour or ranking system. This seems likely as attempts have already been made unsuccessfully, and there is no clear short-term gain for X Games or Dew Tour in having to adjust to TTR.

- Little progress is made when it comes to dialog between FIS World Cup and other tours in relation to schedule and Olympic qualifications. As long as there is no single organization that can negotiate with FIS, it seems likely that some schedule complications will continue to occur, at least in the Olympic qualification season.

- TTR fails in convincing FIS to include 6-star events in the Olympic qualifications. Although TTR has started pursuing more dialog with FIS on this point, it seems unlikely that much progress will be made as long as most TTR events remain highly commercial.

## CONSEQUENCES

Snowboarding has grown a lot since the 1980s with the current eclectic model with no central governing body. Maintaining the status quo could maintain the identity and creativity of the sport and lead to further development of new tricks and styles. The playfulness, independence and freedom from bureaucratic structures could uphold the status of snowboarding as an attractive lifestyle sport.

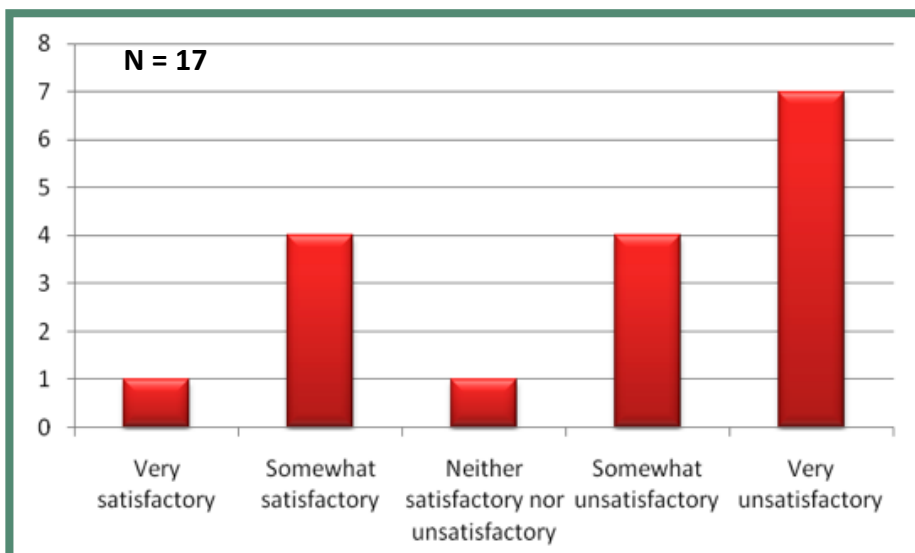
On the other hand, this scenario could represent a situation where interest for snowboarding has already peaked: From here snowboarding could experience not only stagnation, but a decline in its popularity. The fragmentation makes it difficult to follow professional snowboarding for the mainstream audience, with its variety of tours and independent events. Access to prime-time media coverage remains in the shadow of other sports. With increasing competition from sports like freestyle skiing, snowboarding could start losing ground. In the end, not enough money is generated from sponsors and results in a downward spiral with less attention, less revenue and less recruitment to the sport.

*"(...) you could have a structure underneath, and a division system that makes people (athletes) able to climb and gain rights in the system. If it doesn't happen, the sport is done. And then it stays the way it is now, for sure. You will get here, but no further." – Henning Andersen, The Arctic Challenge*

## WINNERS AND LOSERS

In this scenario there would be no clear winners or losers, as things would mostly stay the same. A possible loser are the riders, who through WAS have stated that they want more influence. If spectator interest more or less peaks here, the sport as a whole would also lose out.

On the other hand the biggest events such as the X Games and Dew Tour could be seen as winners, as they have become very prestigious within the current model.



**Table 2.10: We think the current qualification and organizing of half-pipe, snowboard cross and parallel giant slalom in the Olympics are satisfactory.**

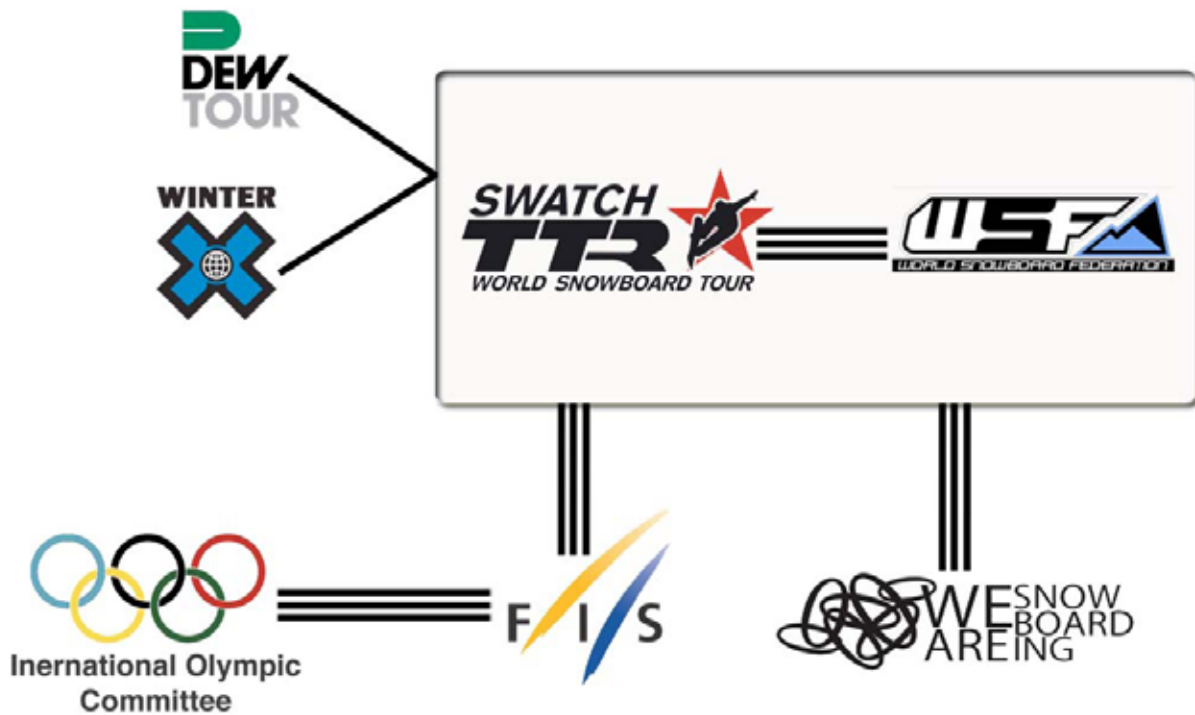
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A common tour –it’s right there! Dew Tour and X Games could have been part of it. Then you have the enrollment, out-switching, and education of the judges which is the crucial part. Then you have the management of the judging system and the qualification criteria and other stuff which makes it possible to finance it, like TV-rights

**- HENNING ANDERSEN, THE ARCTIC CHALLENGE**

# SCENARIO 2

## COOPERATION & COEXISTENCE: DIALOG & COMPROMISE



This scenario considers the prospects for cooperation and coexistence in the snowboarding community: The snowboarding network grows denser because of extended cooperation between organizations and a more central actor emerges. A possible candidate is an alliance where TTR

merges with WSF, with the backing of WAS.

*“I think we are looking at the concept at where we are merging, so the WSF and the TTR become the TTR World Snowboard Federation. So we build a whole house together”.* – Reto

Lamm, TTR

If the TTR/WSF World Championship in Oslo 2012 is a great success it could make this alliance strong. With the backing of WAS, this alliance forms a common ranking system that applies to all or most main events.

The alliance becomes a central actor in the network but would still have to negotiate scheduling etc. with FIS and with the X Games and Dew Tour. Unified ranking

A common ranking for all events is established, possibly even including FIS-events. With a common ranking system, riders could more freely choose which events to participate in while still having a chance at climbing to the top of the ranking. For such a ranking to be fair, qualification to events would have to be more open, reducing the amount of invitationals.

### OLYMPIC QUALIFICATIONS

With the existence of an organization that has the backing of most main riders, a more routinely dialog with FIS is possible when it comes to qualifying for the Olympics. The TTR/WSF+WAS alliance could negotiate event scheduling with FIS, and possibly the inclusion of certain 6-star events in the Olympic qualifiers. Such cooperation could benefit both parts, with more important riders being able to compete at each event. TTR events would probably have to rearrange their qualification systems if they want events to be included in Olympic qualifications.

### SUCCESS FACTORS

- TTR/WSF would need to merge successfully. This is already progressing and could depend among other things on the success of the 2012 World Championship. Who would be represented in this merged organization could be an issue however.

- WAS would have to succeed in uniting the vast majority of riders behind the TTR/WSF ranking in order to give it legitimacy. WAS has stated that it wants a single ranking, but whether it chooses to support a TTR/WSF alliance remains an open question.

- The TTR/WSF alliance and WAS would have to accept FIS' role as responsible for the Olympic qualifiers. The IOC has made it clear that they're not willing to negotiate any

alternative to FIS at the present, and as FIS vice-president Sverre Seeberg puts it:

*"as far as I know one is trying to have a dialog around scheduling and so on. I think it slowly but steadily will be established. (...) but you can say that as long as they are trying to lift it out of FIS, then I don't really think the conditions for dialog are there in the long run".*

Lack of communication has prevented much co-operation between FIS and parts of the international snowboarding community so far. Since there is still some resistance towards FIS in the snowboard community, a to aggressive approach from actors such as WAS could undermine dialog. Willingness to make compromises from all actors is key.

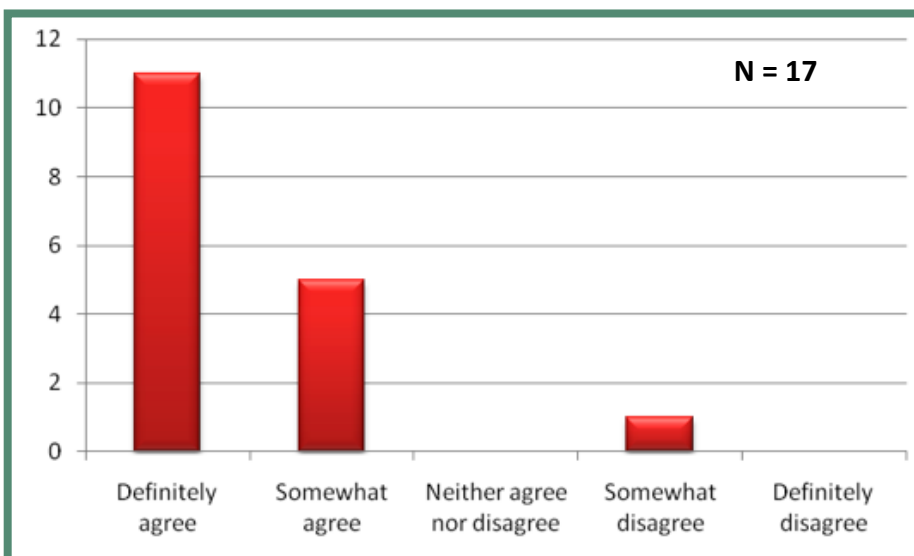
- Our survey shows that there is a clear perception in WSF member nations that international snowboarding would benefit from a common ranking system (Table 2.6):

tion to negotiate sponsor and media deals and increase general interest in Snowboarding, as well as a better income distribution for the riders. On the other hand, a democratic alliance could contain many conflicting voices and be ineffective and unable to develop strong business concepts, and therefore not generate more revenue for the sport. Resistance towards FIS could also still be an issue among some riders and stakeholders.

### WINNERS AND LOSERS

The X Games and Dew Tour could perceive such a scenario as a threat, as it would take away some of their autonomy to be included in a common ranking system.

The obvious winners would be TTR/WSF who would increase their influence in the network. Also the riders influence would increase, with WAS backing and having a voice in this alliance. A more coordinated schedule would benefit the athletes.



**Table 2.6: Competitive snowboarding would benefit from one international ranking system across all events and tours.**

### CONSEQUENCES

A more coordinated schedule would primarily benefit the athletes, and a common ranking could make the sport easier to follow and increase spectator interest. The TTR/WSF alliance would include the voices of many nations and be more democratic than what TTR is today. With the backing of the athletes, such an alliance could strengthen its posi-

FIS could also have something to gain by their World Cup events being included in a common ranking, as it could lead to important riders participating in their events more often. With a more coordinated dialog, friction could be reduced between FIS and other parts of the snowboard community.

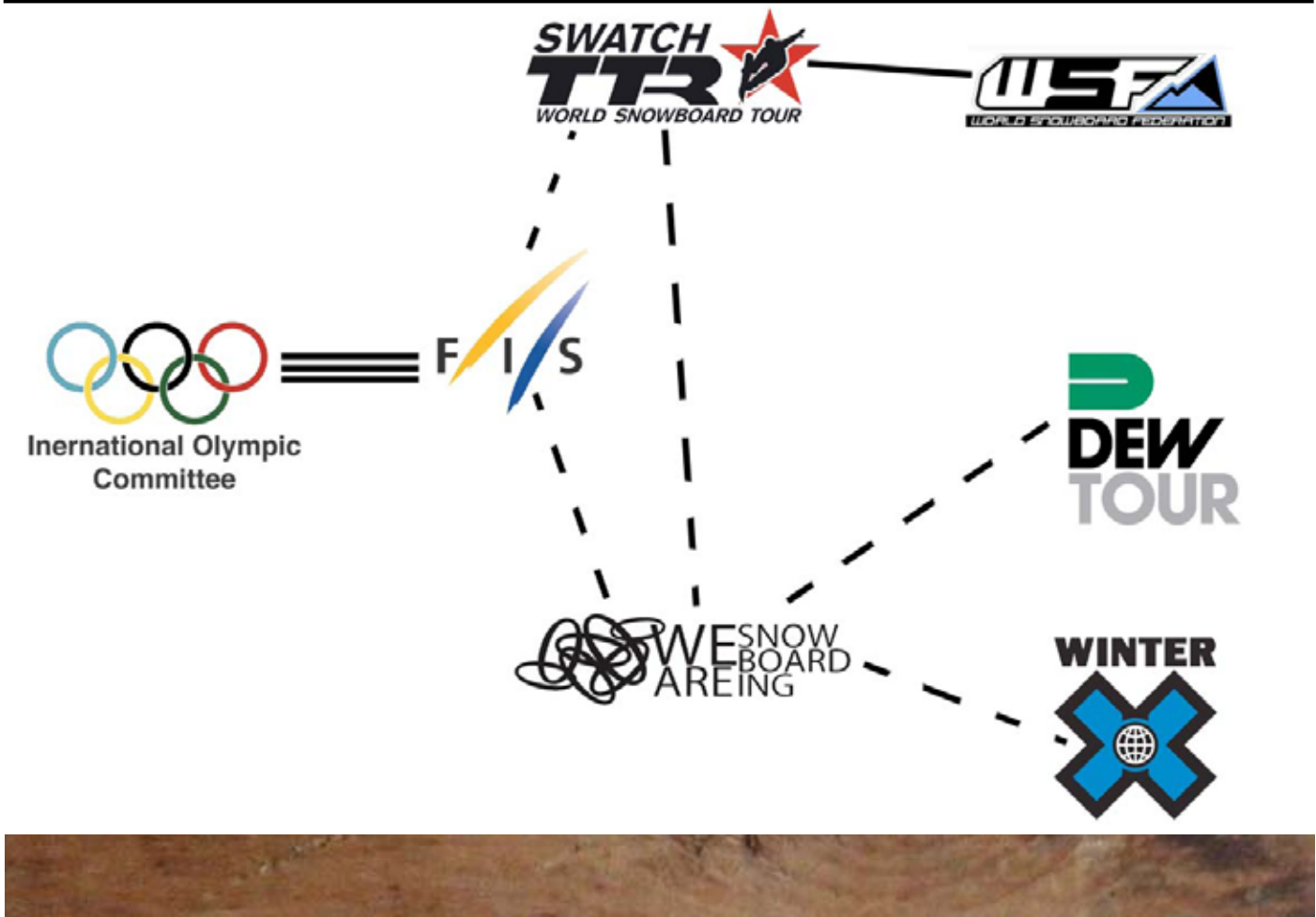


For all I know FIS all of a sudden gets Coca Cola as sponsor. Then FIS gets the snowboard World Cup... and what happens then? They do a TV deal with live on every [event] on Eurosport or ESPN [...] They could probably turn it around pretty fast, cause they have a great setup. And then they just buy the best shapers and everything and make it great [...] It would be a big shame. Or great, if it became really good.

**- THOMAS HARSTAD, COACH  
THE NORWEGIAN NATIONAL TEAM**

# SCENARIO 3

## FIS-DOMINATED



This scenario portrays a future where the situation in international competitive snowboarding remains similar to today's situation outside of the FIS. There continues to be a network of low density with lack of communi-

cation and coordination between the main events, organizations and industry. The FIS World Cup however is strengthened and becomes a dominating force within the organization of competitive snowboarding.

Snowboarding outside of the FIS continues to be a progressive sport with highly skilled athletes. Yet the understanding of the sport in mainstream media and the access to main TV time is low. When the sport is

presented in large media channels during the Olympics, this generates increased interest for the sport, both among the general public and sponsors. Thus the Olympics become an increasingly important arena for the sport, and the importance of FIS grows accordingly. As snowboarding together with freestyle skiing starts generating revenue for FIS, they decide to make snowboarding a more central part of their organization and give it's own World Cup more resources. They are now more aggressively fronting their snowboarding events and hiring top people to work on it. Eventually, they could manage to stage snowboard and freestyle skiing events together, cutting arena costs and increasing sponsor revenue.

### UNIFIED RANKING

In addition to the growing importance of the Olympics and the qualifying events that FIS controls, FIS is able to attract main TV time and big sponsors to its World Cup. The FIS World Cup becomes more and more financially attractive for sponsors and starts attracting top athletes. Eventually the FIS World Cup becomes the most important tour and ranking, also outside the Olympic qualifying season. Events outside FIS are struggling to attract mainstream TV and spectators and is therefore becoming uninteresting for sponsors. Only a few events like the X Games survive, and a few riders survive outside FIS doing films.

### OLYMPIC QUALIFICATIONS

*"One extreme scenario is that FIS takes over everything. And that's probable. And this is what we're fighting against. But what they do when they promote halfpipe and slopestyle in the same competition concept and put them in the Olympic family, money will rain in from the IOC. And then it becomes a rich branch of FIS" – Henning Andersen, The Arctic Challenge*

The vast majority of athletes (and their sponsors) want to go to the Olympics, and FIS already control the Olympic qualifications.

### SUCCESS FACTORS

- A success factor is that the Olympics continue increasing its importance within snowboarding both for spectators and athletes. FIS will then receive larger funding from the IOC. In a future with no clear World Champion or dominant ranking, it seems likely that winning the Olympics will become ever more important.
- Another success factor would be that FIS, being an overall organizer for freestyle skiing and snowboarding, was successful in running these events in the same competition concept and thus cut their arena investments in half. Such an arrangement will also be attractive for TV productions, as it generates higher return for their production investments. All in all it would be a financial loss to be positioned outside this system.

### CONSEQUENCES

In this scenario snowboarding becomes a rich branch of the FIS. FIS has a strong presence in many countries already, so this could lead to more fronting of the sport, more recruitment, more funding for national associations also in smaller nations. The overall international organiza-

tion would be more democratic, also providing opportunities for the athletes to be heard. The sport would become more mainstream and easy to understand for the general public. On the other hand, many in the snowboarding community would feel that they were losing ownership of their sport. The sport would be organized in bureaucratic structures within the FIS. The foundational snowboarding values of playfulness and independence could therefore be threatened. The underground feeling and anti-establishment culture would also be lost. This could lead some kids to turn their back on the sport.

### WINNERS AND LOSERS

FIS would clearly be winners in this scenario, while the losers would primarily be many of the event organizers outside of FIS, as well as the national associations that operate as independent organizations. Snowboard organizations that have been established and developed through decades could disappear. While some big events like the X Games could be less affected, sponsors and industry would lose the direct influence they have on the sport today.



PHOTO: ROGER KLEIVDAL

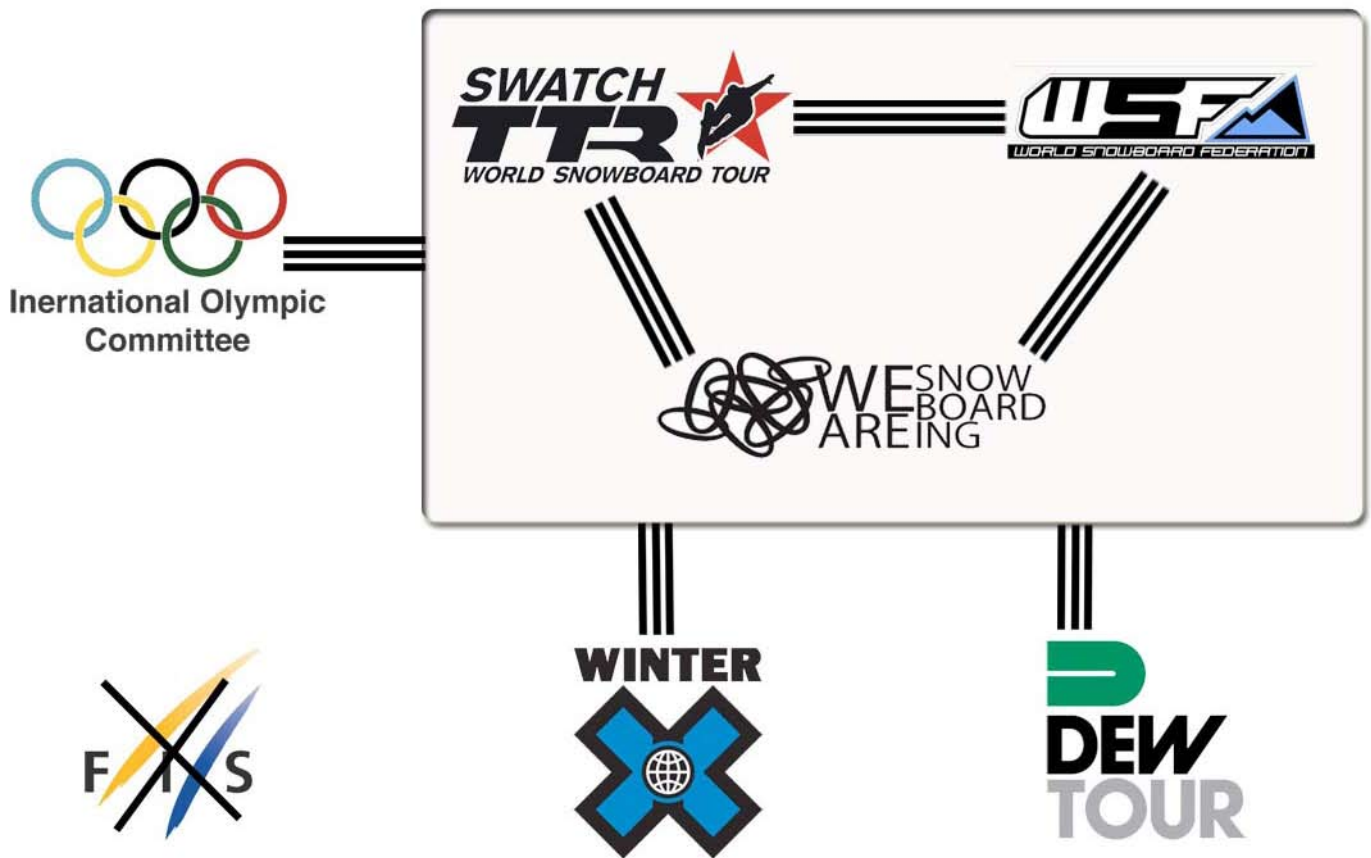


Maybe one day Snowboarding will be as big and important and function so good, that the IOC may put them up at the same level as FIS. But we are not there today. Maybe in five till ten years, but maybe never – that’s pretty much up to the athlete’s themselves. But it is not precluded

- GERARD HEIBERG, IOC

# SCENARIO 4

## CENTRALIZED & FIS-FREE



An alliance between TTR, WSF and WAS creates a single governing body for snowboarding that speaks for all of snowboarding internationally. This new organization is inspired by

sports such as surfing and tennis. All snowboard events are organized into a Pro Tour and a Rookie Tour. Eventually, further into the future, since international competitive

snowboarding now has one governing body that represents it, IOC is even willing to negotiate the Olympic qualifications.

## UNIFIED RANKING

WAS organizes all top riders and is able to force all events including X Games and Dew Tour to adhere to the requirements of its Pro Tour. Events that don't accept being included in the international ranking are boycotted by WAS riders.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATIONS

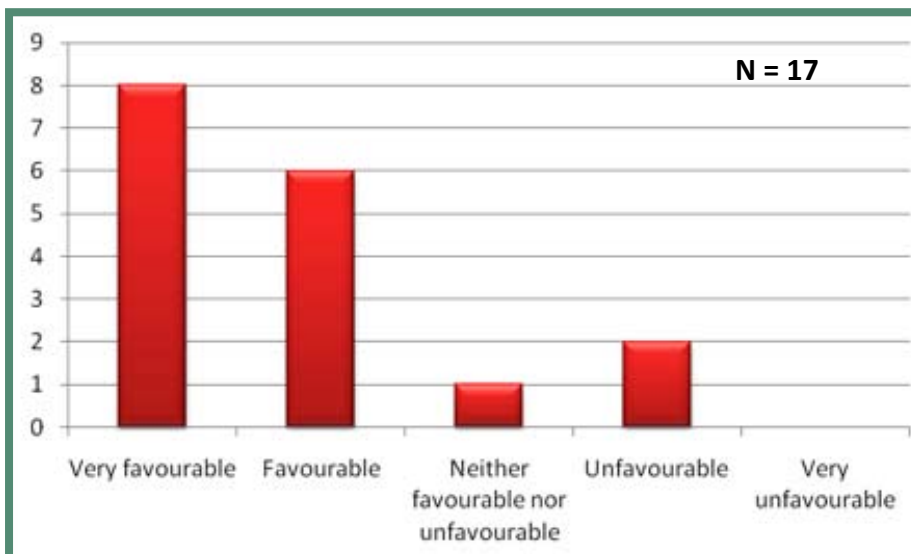
IOC demands when it comes to judging systems, ranking and qualification to events are so well implemented that eventually IOC hands the Olympic qualifications to this new organization, to the exclusion of FIS.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- TTR-WSF+WAS alliance is so successful that it creates a governing body which is able to control international Snowboarding and speak for all riders. The likeliness of this factor is unclear, it depends among other things on the direction of WAS. Other big organizations related to events like X Games who are outside the TTR tour would probably resist such a governing body.

Based on our interviews, there is some scepticism about the benefits of one organization becoming hegemonic within the network.

On the other hand, our survey shows that most respondents are positive towards one governing body:



2.8 There is a potential need for one unified international association that functions as a governing body for all levels of competitive international snowboarding



The new governing body bids its time and adapts its organization to the requirements of the IOC. It starts transforming the organization of events: All events must now adhere to a transparent and fair system of judging and qualification, as well as rider hospitality etc. As long as most big snowboarding events are highly commercial, it seems less likely that their events would be transformed to the point where the IOC would be willing to exclude FIS altogether. This scenario is therefore unlikely, at least in the short run.

## CONSEQUENCES

As all snowboarding is promoted by one organization, it is able to attract main TV time and sponsors, and the sport grows exponentially – competing with other world class sporting events. With WAS turning into a unified a well led riders union, the governing body is able to dictate the sport on the riders terms. Snowboarding is now wholly “owned” by

the snowboarding community. Athletes will have a more direct impact on their own sport and top riders will have a less crowded competition calendar as well as a fair chance to influence the development of event formats, judging etc. IOC revenue could become an important source of income for the new governing body for snowboarding, creating a base for developing the organization and sport further.

On the other hand, in its efforts to gain acceptance from the IOC, the single governing body becomes bureaucratic and painfully similar to FIS. Although it is “owned” by the community, the spirit of anti establishment could now be directed towards this organization, creating some tensions within the network. The IOC does not accept several different actors, so ALL forms of snowboarding including snowboard cross would probably have to be included in the governing body, with its own tour and ranking.

## WINNERS AND LOSERS

FIS is excluded altogether. The individual importance of the X Games and Dew Tour is reduced as they are now just single events in a larger tour.

The diversity of organizational forms, judging systems and event setup could suffer, and snowboarding could lose some of its creativity if it was not well protected in the new organization.

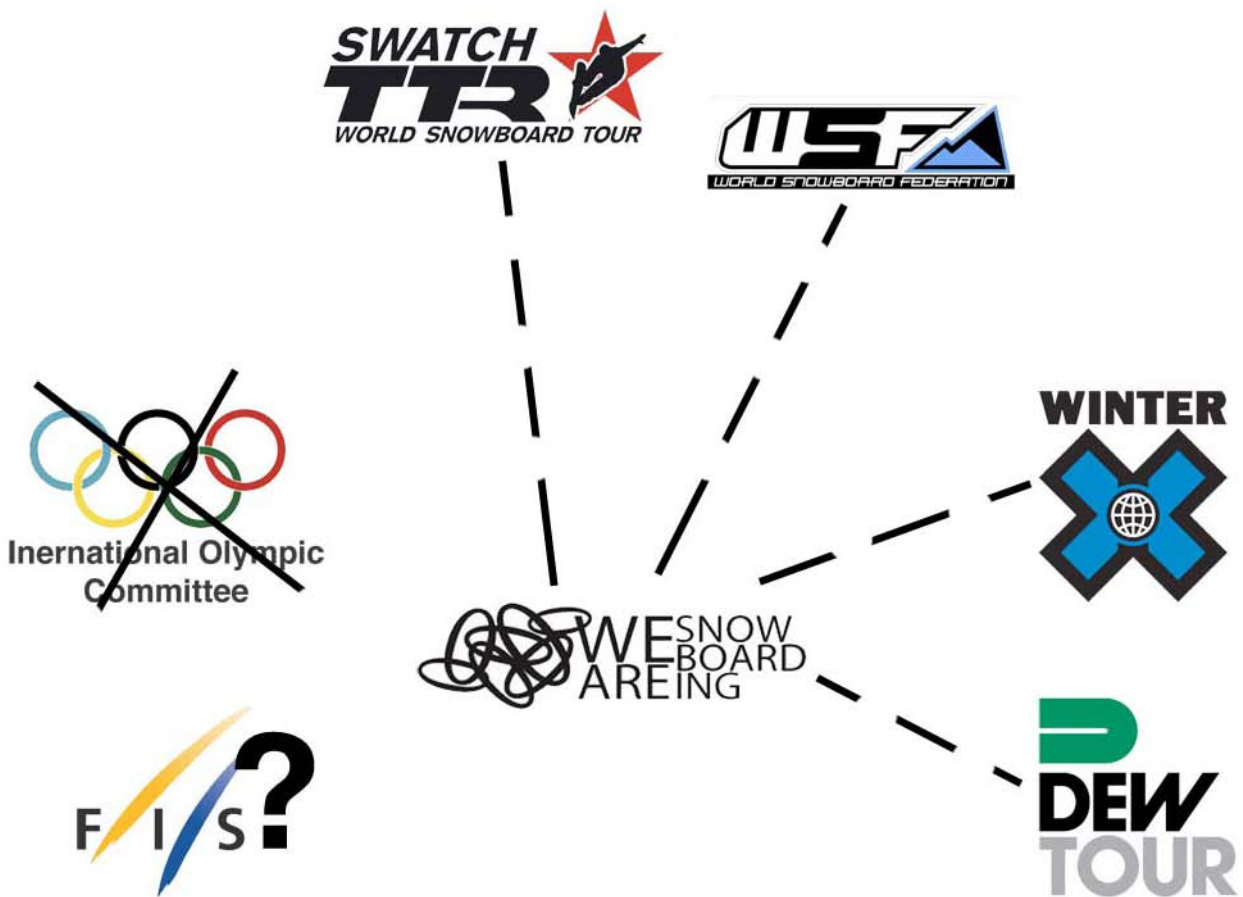
“

The board of IOC got a letter from...what's their name... WAS, which was totally out of place, it should never have been written

- GERARD HEIBERG, IOC

# SCENARIO 5

## CHAOTIC



This scenario is less probable and serves as a mental exercise portraying a situation where the organization of international snowboarding is not only fragmented, but where the conflicting interests of differ-

ent stakeholders creates a chaotic power-struggle within the network. TTR and WSF are not very successful in merging their interests, and their World Championship is not a big success – just another big event.

X Games and Dew Tour expand their venues unilaterally, creating more events. WAS is not willing to compromise with other actors and exercise their new-found influence arbitrarily. Unified ranking WAS tries forcing



through a pro tour on the athletes conditions. The WAS riders sign a contract where they can only participate in the WAS tour, but not all riders join. Because of this, and because of a lack of clear direction within the WAS, they are not successful in uniting all events in their tour and ranking. Instead, the arbitrary actions of WAS complicate relations in the network even further.

## OLYMPIC QUALIFICATIONS

If WAS riders can't ride FIS competitions because of their contract, many of the best athletes will not be able to qualify for the Olympics. Since the IOC is only interested in having the best riders in the Olympics, they will consider this as a boycott.

If WAS is not willing to compromise, and parts of the snowboarding community continue pursuing a confrontational communication strategy towards FIS and IOC directly or through the media without any proper dialog, both these organizations could grow tired of all the controversy. Because of this and the WAS boycott of FIS events, the IOC could eventually exclude snowboard events from the Olympics altogether.

## SUCCESS FACTORS:

- WAS decides to go their own way, instead of engaging in dialog and cooperation with existing stakeholders. This seems less likely, because WAS has already started communication with existing actors in the snowboarding community. However, lack of leadership within WAS or arbitrary use of its power could undermine the possibility for any positive change within the sport.

- WAS miscalculates its influence and the importance of snowboarding in regards to the Olympics. There is a risk here, as the communication from WAS has been quite confrontational, especially towards the IOC. The question is also whether snowboarding is as important to the Olympics as many within the community seem to believe.

## CONSEQUENCES

Snowboarding could still be creative and playful. It could continue as a lifestyle sports and big events like the X Games would still attract riders and spectators.

On the other hand it is now all but impossible to tell who are the best snowboarders for people outside the community, making snowboarding resemble boxing. The exclusion from the Olympics makes the market share of snowboarding smaller. It could be hard to attract new sponsors because of reduced exposure of

riders on TV, making it more difficult to make a living as a professional snowboarder. Snowboarding could end up becoming a very niche sport.

## WINNERS AND LOSERS

All stakeholders seem to loose within this scenario. The different events and tours would have to relate to a new influential organization, who on their part are unable to unify snowboarding and become a central voice in the network. Little improvement is made for the riders, and the sport as a whole could loose ground with the loss of the Olympics.



PHOTO: VEGARD BREIE

# FINAL REMARKS

International competitive snowboarding is characterized by a friction between a need for coordination and aversion of becoming standardized. During the phase of project RAILS, this friction has been made evident through the diverse range of opinions and ideas regarding the questions: Who organizes international competitive snowboarding today, and who will organize international competitive snowboarding in the future. These final remarks aim to sum up the main findings of the current situation, and to leave the reader with some impressions of the choices to be made regarding the future organization of international competitive snowboarding.

## GENERAL ORGANIZATION

International competitive snowboarding is organized in a network of different actors. The network as a whole is characterized by a low degree of density with few formal informational lines between the actors. A consequence is that the flow of communication in the network is arbitrary. In today's situation there is no global governing body in international snowboarding. Neither is it possible to point out one actor with a superior power to control the flow of information and resources, as this depends on the context and subject matter. For example FIS has higher centrality as it is a Gatekeeper regarding snowboarding in the Olympics. It appears that different actors have power over, and for, different aspects of international competitive snowboarding. The low degree of

density and centrality may explain why international snowboarding seems fragmented and uncoordinated. In addition there does not appear to be an established consensus or operationalization for the term international competitive snowboarding. A key question is therefore: How does this affect actors that are working actively to improve the current situation in snowboarding? One answer that emerged from the data is that this leads to disagreement regarding what should change, why it should change, and how much change is needed.

## A UNIFIED RANKING SYSTEM / OLYMPIC QUALIFICATION

Currently there are a large number of events in international snowboarding. These events are not part of a unified ranking system. The data analysis shows that the number of events is not necessarily a problem, but rather the lack of coordination. With no unified ranking system, the athletes are drawn in different directions, as they have to decide which ranking and thus which events to prioritize any given year. For the event organizers this gives little predictability. For the athletes the desire to be part of different events may lead to a crowded schedule and increased risk of injuries. Additionally there are few, if any events where all the best snowboarders in the world are present. For mainstream spectators, it is therefore impossible to understand who is the world's best snowboarder any given season. The World Championship in Oslo 2012 will only

be a true world championship if the world's best riders actually decide to prioritize this in the myriad of other events. According to key informants representing the professional athletes, it seems to be a trend to prioritize FIS World Cups only in the year of the Olympic qualifications. The reason being is that these events do not have the level of credibility as for example X Games and Dew Tour. The question regarding who should run the Olympic Qualifications is therefore much debated, especially in the nations where snowboard is not organized under FIS. It is however made very clear from IOC that unless the international snowboarding environment is able to unite their interests and energies managing to come up with a viable option to FIS, the Olympic qualifications will continue as they are today. FIS' willingness to cooperate with commercial actors regarding this is limited; especially if the intention is to ultimately lift the qualifications out of FIS.

## WHO ORGANIZES INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVE SNOWBOARDING IN THE FUTURE?

Five different scenarios were developed to describe possible outcomes for the future.

Based on the findings of this report it is fair to say that scenario 1: "Snowboarding is fragmented: continuation or stagnation" and scenario 5: "Chaotic" represent potential, yet undesirable scenarios for the organization of international competitive

snowboarding in the future. For the first scenario TTR and WSF play the main role. If these actors fail to unite their interests and fail to include X Games and Dew Tour, the possibility of one unified ranking system is put to the test. The consequences will then be a continuance of a fragmented organization of snowboarding, no clear world champions among the athletes and possible stagnation of the sports development. Additionally if the dialogue between TTR/WSF and FIS cease to develop in a constructive manner, the Olympic qualification will remain with the FIS. A consequence will then be the same schedule complications that are occurring today, at least every fourth year.

In the “Chaotic” scenario WAS plays a key role. They fail to organize the riders in a functional manner and fail to cooperate with the key events and organizations in snowboarding. Because of the total lack of cooperation and constructive communication between the actors, snowboarding loses its position in the Olympics, as well its popularity – causing it to become more of a niche sport.

Scenario 3: “FIS-dominated” and scenario 4: “Centralized and FIS-free”, describes two opposite outcomes. On one hand, the future could lead to an organization of international competitive snowboarding where FIS becomes the main actor. FIS could provide more funding for the national level, strengthen the sports position in mainstream media and operate through a democratic model. However, a possible consequence might be that the snowboarding community would risk losing ownership of their sport, and its values of independence and parity. A centralized and FIS-free scenario, on the other hand, would make TTR, WSF and WAS important actors. An alliance between the three, making up a new governing body for snowboarding could diminish FIS’s role and eventually be in a position to take the role as organizer for snowboarding in the Olympic Games. IOC has however

made clear that their willingness to evaluate a potential alternative to FIS in the future, does to a large degree depend the snowboarding environment’s willingness to cooperate and work out an agreement with FIS in the current situation. A strong alliance between TTR, WSF and WAS may also make the X Games and Dew Tour forced to cooperate and to be included in one common tour and ranking.

Based on the findings of this report, Scenario 2: “Cooperation and coexistence: dialog and compromise” could seem to be a likely outcome for the near future. FIS continues to organize snowboarding in the Olympic Games, but an alliance between TTR, WSF and WAS negotiate event scheduling with FIS, and possibly the inclusion of certain 6-star events in the Olympic qualifiers. The cooperation could benefit both parties, with more important riders being able to compete at each event and make comprehensive organization increasing spectator and sponsor interest. However, a democratic alliance could contain many conflicting voices and be ineffective and unable to develop

strong business concepts, and therefore not generate more revenue for the sport.

The opinions regarding the future may be divided into two main camps; (1) “keep it as it is”, and (2) “things must change”. Representatives from camp 1, points out that snowboarding has developed with the current structure, and will continue to grow with it. There is also concern that creating one governing body or a unified ranking may lead to monopoly over important decisions and that snowboarding will lose its diversity and creativity. Representatives from the second camp emphasize that although snowboarding has grown with the current structure, this structure will not be sufficient to handle the level of professionalization that the sport is now heading towards. This report shows that things are likely to change, however the direction will be depending on which actor takes the main role and which actors who manages or fail to cooperate. The question remains for the stakeholders involved: How do we want international competitive snowboarding to be organized in the future?



PHOTO: STALE SANDBECH

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