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### **Citation**

Beek, W. E. Avan, Fumerton, M. A., & Pansters, W. G. (2003). Meeting culture in meetings. Experiences from an international sports arena. *Meeting Culture : Essays In Honour Of Arie De Ruijter*, 275-293. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/9693>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

From

"Meeting Culture. Essays in honour  
of Arie de Ruijter"  
eds. W.E.A. van Beek, M.A. Fumerton  
& W.G. Pausters  
Shaker 2003 ISBN 90-423-0221-6-6

## Meeting Cultures in Meetings Impressions from an International Sports Arena

Walter E.A. van Beek

### The arena

Arenas are the natural habitat of Arie de Ruijter: he lives in them, creates them and he uses them as a dominant metaphor of modern society (de Ruijter 2000). They are for him a way of life, as well as a way of studying life: arenas are both culture *and* the meeting place of different cultures. When he decided, long ago, to pursue a professional life of academic leadership, he mentioned in a conversation with me that part of his fieldwork would be done in meetings from now on. And so it was. For the most part my own fieldwork took on a different path, meeting cultures in other habitats – in fact, as exotic as I could find – but over the last years I have also increasingly been encountering cultures in office meetings as well. I speak here about sports, about draughts. International sports administration is an arena in itself, and often a hotly contested one at that. For instance, elections of IOC, FIFA, or UEFA presidents produce stories strongly reminiscent of national elections, with the politicking, networking, maneuvering, and bullying that are part and parcel of many the elections the world over. Many people, for a whole gamut of reasons covet high positions, among which the interest of sports is but one. People will go to great lengths to achieve their goal of being elected.

But besides being a regular arena in itself, these organizations are also a meeting place of various styles of leadership, of national expectations and priorities – in short, of cultures. The ways in which people strive for positions, exert power, and wield their personal influence over international organizations, are influenced by both their personalities and their cultures of origin. Different cultures, different notions of power, and different ways to run an organization – these all are revealed in the way meetings are conducted between the representatives of these various cultures. Thus, meetings are essentially intercultural arenas. It is one such an arena that I want to highlight here: the World Draughts Federation (FMJD, i.e. Fédération Mondiale du Jeu de Dames). I will closely analyze one specific case: an attempted coup against its president – namely, *me*. This is therefore an account of a personal experience of meeting cultures in meetings, with some theoretical reflections to highlight the main points of that intercultural encounter. The "other" culture in this particular case is the Russian organization culture, but the conclusions that arise from this essay roam wider than just to our Eastern European neighbors.

The date is March 2001, and the story begins in Moscow, at a hotel in the remote outskirts of the city.

### The attempted coup

It was the only Assembly that I could not attend, due to the death of my father-in-law. So for the first time in the history of the Federation, a General Assembly (GA) was held without its president in charge. Also, for the first time, the meeting was in Moscow, as the World Championship was being played there, also for the first time. Strange as it may sound, during the now 64 years of Russian membership in the FMJD, the "Russians" had never ventured to organize a full-blown title tournament – not after the "change" in 1991, nor before, during the Soviet days. All the more remarkable as such a tournament would have been easy for them to organize. Matches, with two players vying for the title; yes, those had been played on Russian territory many times, along with minor championships for youth – but never a world championship. In retrospect it seems strange, and begs for an answer. Why? Perhaps we might be able to offer an answer later in this paper.

What was quite clear, however, was the reasons for holding the championship-cum-assembly in Moscow this time round. The president of the Russian Draughts Federation, a Moscovite of Oekrainian extraction, who we shall call "K.," had offered to use Moscow as a venue at the last GA, held in Huissen in August 2000. The tournament, due for 2000, was in trouble. Riga, Latvia, the candidate of long standing had withdrawn at the last moment, and in fact announced its withdrawal during the Huissen Assembly. The GA made a courageous effort to rescue the Riga tournament – it was to be part of the Riga 2000 celebrations. The Latvian delegate, Mr. L., was also the



A scene from the 1998 Tallinn (Estonia) Assembly with the back of mr K. at the far left

organizer-to-be and received the full support of those assembled at the meeting. One argument for the withdrawal was curious, at least for me. There was to be no GA during the WC. Indeed, as the GA was to be financed from the tournament funds, and formed a serious budget item, the FMJD had tried to help the Latvians by financing the GA itself, in Huissen. This was a new argument for me – it had never surfaced before in the correspondence – and I proposed to have the present GA, and have the second half during the Riga tournament, should they be able to save the tournament.

In fact, the Executive Board had foreseen this eventuality, and I had contacted two other options, Italy and Brazil. Italy was not present at the meeting but had already indicated it had problems organizing at such a short notice. Brazil was present but had used its funds for the soon-to-be-held championships 64, and their budget did not allow for a second tournament. Then on came Mr K., promising that if the championship could not materialize in Riga, Moscow would host the tournament as well as the second part of the GA. The minutes state: "Mr K. announces that he will organize the GA and the WC in Moscow. He has the opportunity to find an emergency organization in Moscow and a prize money of \$25,000 very easily." He harvested a loud and ringing applause, and really carried the day.

Personally, I was unconvinced, and with me many of my board members. Mr K. had quite a track record with the FMJD; had been part of the Executive Board, and had also been in the center of quite some controversies in the past. For instance, during the 1998 GA in Tallinn, Estonia, he had been severely reprimanded by the meeting for staging an unofficial championship on the small board ("64") without recognition by the FMJD. And even earlier, during the Assembly of 1990 in Groningen, he had been at the heart of a power struggle inside the Russian Draughts federation that spilled over into the General Assembly meeting.

In October 2000 it became clear that a major part of the Latvian Federation did not want to organize the WC after all, so the FMJD Board, meeting in November, began preparations for the Moscow event. We were worried waiting for the final OK by the Russian Sport Minister, about the prize money. "Russian promises" had become a standard expression in the FMJD. They are like election promises that never materialize.

The main Russian drive behind the tournament was clear: they wanted to organize the Assembly. Up for elections were two vice-presidencies: one for the 64-square board and the other for coordinator Asia. During the summer Olympic Games in London, the two main contenders for these posts had already indicated their intentions to me, and had tried to make a deal with the president: Mr K. for 64, and the Turkmen representative Mr D. for Asia. The sitting officials, respectively from Oekraine and Yakutsk (Sakha Republic, the far east of the Russian Federation), were also up for reelection, so we looked forward to an electoral battle. I was open for a change though I had my reservations about the Turkmen, who in a previous bout as Vice-president had done nothing. As far as I can remember, he did not attend even one board meeting. It was clear what was happening. Here was a tournament organized in order to win an election! And so, with some misgivings, after I had insisted that the Russians

send all correspondence through the office – we still had heard nothing from the Sport Minister – and not my home. I went to Mali for a period of fieldwork in December.

Coming home a week later than expected due to a nasty fall in Bamako, while also recovering from a brain concussion, I found the letter of the Russian minister on my doormat. It had taken three weeks to arrive without a fax or copy to the office, and had been waiting over a week for me. In fact, the date on the letterhead was from before my departure to Mali. A fax would have cleared everything one month earlier.

So, here we were, in a hurry, with the tournament only two months away. In any case, Italy had become a chimera, so we decided to accept the Russian final offer: a tournament in hotel Kosmos, which I knew well. It was not a bad venue. The office sent out the invitations to the qualified players, and the complicated preparations to procure Russian visas for 20 players and numerous officials began. The delay of the Russian snail-mail had rendered the original dates obsolete, and negotiations started with Mr K about the final dates. I wanted a period at the end of March. He has a different window, and finally the dates were set for the period from 22 February right through to 14 March. We communicate these, but later he proposed to postpone it a week in order to give him more time to find prize money. However, one can change dates only once for an event, and both the visas and the tickets had already been issued and booked.

The usual communications problems with Africa and Asia, and the perennial problem of the reserves were solved in time, though every decision took time and put the visa procedures under pressure. Visas are the Achilles heel of an international sport organization. The procedures vary according to country, and those of Russia are among the most complicated. For a tournament held in the Netherlands, the organization itself is in charge of issuing the invitations. Most embassies demand originals as e-mails and faxes are suspected of being forged. Russia is different. There, Mr. K. had to take a definitive list to the ministry of sport, which the ministry had to approve. The list would then be forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is then their duty to fax the list to all relevant embassies, with specific code numbers, which they had to communicate to Mr K., and he with us, and we with the invitees. Only then, after this entire procedure was complete, was the invitation valid.

With a great effort on our part, we finally realized the presence of four Africans in Moscow (one well-known Senegalese grandmaster, three totally unknown players from Cameroon). Yet here, too, the communication was too slow. Their names and invitations came too late to be included for the championships in Moscow. In the end, the African players would arrive one day after the planned opening of events. I tried to convince Mr K. that he should start a day later, and compensate by deleting a rest day. But he refused. It later appeared that he had invested too much for the grand spectacle of the opening (TV and radio coverage, officials invited etc.), and an organizational failure – even a minor one – would not be welcomed. But the Dutch referee founds a solution, and the Africans were given a reasonable tournament start after all.

To compound the problems, the prize money was nowhere in sight. The \$25,000

had become nothing more than a faint rumor. From the Netherlands we tried to find some interested parties, and kept insisting that the organization did its utmost to do the same elsewhere. I was not convinced of Mr K.'s efforts, and I was forced to grasp at a last straw. To aid Mr K. I decide to convert three special prizes (best win, best combination, best end game) from a cup into dollars, hoping to "shame" the Russian into also offering money prizes. But it didn't. In the end, there would be no prize money given, though the players only gradually become aware of this fact towards the end of the tournament.

Now, with the wisdom of hindsight and additional information from Russia, I think I misjudged Mr K., with some misunderstanding accruing from a difference in culture. Before the tournament I thought he gave the matter too little attention, and I wanted to spur him on (by our giving some prizes ourselves). Just after the attempted coup, I suspected him of deliberately having failed in coming up with prize money in order to heap more guilt upon the head of his scapegoat – me, the president. But it seems I was mistaken on both accounts. He did try to find prize money, but probably too little too late, and was not successful in the end. So our own gesture did not work. And also, although he did use the absence of prize money to discredit me during the coup, that was not planned as such. It simply happened. Russian complots, as we shall see, do exist but that does not mean they are always deliberate and planned long before their execution.

Then come the tournament, the GA, and – quite unexpectedly – the death of my father-in-law. This last, and quite unexpected, episode left me no choice but to hand over the gavel to my Polish VP, Mr P, and bid a distressed farewell to the Western delegates heading for Moscow. For their part, the players left with severe apprehensions – like entering into "the lion's den," as one of them put it.

Some of the things that eventually transpired were entirely expected. Mr K. did, indeed, use the GA as his personal day of triumph, as we all assumed he would. He had financed quite a few East European and Central Asian delegates from federations we hardly ever see represented in the West: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgistan, Turkmenistan, the Baltic Republics, Belarus, Mongolia, to mention but a few.

Mr K. was in full control and make the most of it. He took personal charge of arranging the lodgings in the hotel, translations, TV and radio coverage, and the flow of information. Moreover, the venue had been changed to a much cheaper hotel, deep in the Moscow woods, far from the end of the metro line.

The opening was a media spectacle that prominently featured Mr K., supplemented by the usual Russian folk dance group and the customary breaking of the large loaf of Russian bread – an ubiquitous ceremony in Eastern Europe. Interviews were held only with Mr K., and the FMJD board was kept in a continuous barrage of meetings, dealings, talks, and private conversations.

In far away Utrecht, I got wind that something more was afoot than just an election for two VP posts. Mr K.'s loyal Belarus partners has prepared a motion of distrust against the president, and at the start of the first day of the Assembly this motion was



Interruption of speeches during the Moscow coup. The Polish Vice President, tournament director Adam Drogala, and the Polish Vice President still has to conduct the session.

of inter defeat when the motion to carry on with the elections was defeated for now  
 lations could not keep up. What was to be Mr K's day of glory turned into a moment  
 many rapid, angry interchanges in all varieties of the Russian language that the trans-  
 the top players? Who of course were present. The entire day was one of turmoil, of so  
 Netherlands Moscow, forcing an election now would mean harming the interests of  
 one especially since most of the financially well endowed tournaments are held in the  
 This threat of future boycott by the non Eastern European delegates was a serious  
 polcovan and other FIMD event in the near future.

to the Board. They not only opposed elections for President, they even threatened  
 was neither a functioning Board nor business on the agenda to appoint new officers  
 France, the Africans, and Poland refused to have elections at all, arguing that now there  
 ing the blow that came. The non-Russophone delegations, headed by the Netherlands,  
 anything he did, and his presumed mastery of the situation prevented him from expect-  
 for Mr K. He was rightly confident that the East European delegates would approve  
 protagonists were invited to witness the great event that was to be the moment of glory  
 shock came when they wanted to proceed with the VP elections. Television and radio  
 was not expected by the Russians and came as a shock. However, an even greater  
 the Polish VP, declared his solidarity in standing behind me and resigned as a bloc. This  
 But then things started to go wrong for Mr K. The entire board, expertly led by

ing the enjoy at the funeral  
 very moment I was giv  
 to occupy me, for at that  
 which I had other things  
 delegations besides  
 was not aware of these  
 ceased to be president. I  
 motion was carried and I  
 my resignation, the  
 elected this. Despite  
 my absence I had not  
 seemed to be implied by  
 ed in being president, as  
 I was no longer interest  
 to ask if it was the that  
 Americans telephoned me  
 and even my own  
 absence of prize money  
 other than a hint at the  
 was never indicated,  
 Why for what reason  
 proposed and carried

and joint destiny  
 of two years), their voices were largely drowned out in a general feeling of closeness  
 Although they did manage to extract a compromise (a first term of the new structure  
 not been to Moscow - and the delegates from Belgium tried to mount some opposition  
 but an old friend of mine from the Ukraine. Only two delegates from Israel - who had  
 It was neither Mr K nor the sitting Board member from Russia who got the position,  
 supporter of the change was Mr K from Russia. The post of vice president got was filled  
 Board, including the president, were reinstated. The coup was ended. The most significant  
 the propositions were carried through without any problem, and most of the executive  
 (100 delegates, 67 speakers, and Anglo American). In the GA of Huisson in August 2001  
 from a monolithic federation into a federation with three semi autonomous sections  
 This the Board did. We initiated a change in structure, thus transforming the FIMD  
 and so I fought and we fought.

bers Ben in mind, I was also physically "out of the fray," and viewing the arena from  
 After all, I was being voted against, but I did have the full support of all Board mem-  
 meetings made it easier for me to carry on the times I had undertaken nine years ago.  
 or not to fight or not to fight, that was the question - also for me. My absence at the  
 actually happened, and to decide whether they wanted to carry on in their functions  
 It was an emotional time when the Board members tried to sort out what had  
 tions to sort out the impasse.

most of the former Soviet satellites abstained from voting and the "West" carried the  
 vote. Finally, the GA decided to ask the sitting Board (although all its members had in

bydecessor was. I implying the core, then, would have given him more leeway in his  
 found by these, as well as be continually checked for compliance to these rules, as his  
 a clear and detailed system of rules and regulations. A vice-president got the would be  
 the way of his ambition, then, was the FIMD, which is a centrally led Federation with  
 in his own territory, and that is how I now interpret the coup attempt. What stood in  
 ties beyond greater Russia. The only thing he wanted was to have his hands free with  
 was he a monolithic Russian speaker, he also had no interests or feelings for coun-  
 beyond the vast confines of the Russian Federation, held no attraction to him. Not only  
 mutual friend created this up he felt out of his depth outside Russia. The wider world  
 FIMD. At that time I did not believe him, but later conversations with him through a  
 had had enough of disagreements, and that he certainly did not shake after that of the  
 nated himself as a crusader. Ever since London 2000 did he frequently express that he  
 ident ready. I had expected Mr K himself to vie for the position, but he never nomi-  
 edit my ongoing would have brought to the coup makers they had no alternative pres-  
 power struggle was not very evident in so far as to this day it is still unclear what had  
 than a mere power struggle. Several cultural elements were at stake here. In fact, the  
 What was "Russian" about the attempted Russian coup, in my view it was much more  
 Analysis of the attempted coup



Despite all politics the Moscow 2001 World Championship produced a worthy champion Alexei Ichizhov in interview

own territory. It was also likely that he thought that a Dutch friend of his would be interested in the presidency, but that never materialized. On the other hand, it might not even have been so calculating after all. From the eternal tension between East and West in this sport, the option for one upmanship was tempting in any case. A final possibility was that by this action, he could have diverted the widespread criticism directed at him by his own organization by finding the perfect scapegoat. Me, the FMJD president.

The attempted coup was full of cultural elements, and of ways to solve problems and handle relations between peers. The first cultural thing that sticks out was the Western view of an executive board in sports as a collegial organization of peers, with a division of portfolios that leaves each and every one secure in his own mandate: the president in general and representative functions, the tournament director in implementing the rules into proper tournaments, the treasurer for the money, etc. For Eastern Europeans, however, presidents are always at the center of power, the 'man who can decide anything'. In their view, a president should rule, not propose, and should dictate, not argue. Also, a president is someone who always has to win; his proposals, when turned down, are defeats.

In the Russian media coverage of draughts, great emphasis was paid to the fact that certain of my proposals were turned down at board meetings. This was portrayed by the Russian media as my defeat, as a president, and the victory of the Russian vice-president (who, in any case, is a good friend of mine) who had raised the perfectly valid arguments on which these proposals were turned down by the other members of the board. What, in other words, was being carefully crafted by the media was an image

of me as an 'unworthy' and 'weak' president. This can be understood in the light of the fact that a meeting in Russian governance is an arena where one – particularly the president – has to win, to win not just one battle, not the battle that one picks, but all battles. For the Russians, their image of a champion is someone who always wins, and life is only bearable when one always wins (a definition formulated by a Russian gymnast). The structure of a board is never between equals, but always a power arena where one has to score points, where getting what one wants is more important than the arguments.

Thus, when the motion against me was carried in the GA, the Eastern federations expected me to resign, after having been defeated. In fact, after the vote, they immediately thought that I was no longer president. However, Dutch organizational law operates differently (the FMJD is a corporate body under the Dutch law); the president can only be ousted if the motion specifies that it had the force of suspension (*schorpende werking*). In this case, none of the attempted-coup takers had thought of that. For Eastern Europeans, such a contentious vote brings a loss of face, which in their countries would normally bring early retirement to the official in question. The fact that the FMJD board nevertheless carried on its usual work, changed the statutes, and was reelected, was a possibility the Easterners never thought possible.

Russians are used to having presidents who furnish the money for the organization, and have the work done by the vice president. Though disappearing, this still is the ideal of many lower Russian officials and sportsmen. A corollary is that a president has to show this status as well; he has to display that he is financially well off, or even rich. In Russia, it is a rich man who vies to become president, he foots the bills for tournaments and travel expenses. This is one reason why reelections of presidents hardly ever took place in the past, and why both instances of my reelection were highly contested after it became clear that my intended solution to problems was not to pour



All sports officials get full press attention: a press conference in Russia

Promises are the essence of elections, of course. My main concern during my

first hotel but in fact all I had in hand was a universal wish.

I went on paper. When I came back from Africa, I read the letter of the Russian sport

businessman - this is not so, a promise is a wish, something that one hopes to bring about

a responsible administrator, as good as word. For a Russian politician - and just

use is a commitment, whether oral or written down, and has to be kept. One has to be

could paper my walls with Russian promises, in the governance of the West, a prom-

cent. Related to this is the notion of promise. I once said in an interview in 1990, "I"

statements about that last about five times longer than it would to say the actual con-

cluded. If a Russian wants to say something, he stands up and makes an extended,

(characteristically) opinions, arguments and explanations are never delivered while

mundane life. Intense but fleeting emotions also make for easy shifts in loyalties.

between Russian politics show the same alternation between outbursts of activity and

to work through bursts of creative energy, and little happens in the periods

of change and any work seems a combination of high intensity and emotion. Russians

emotions and intensity in Eastern business. Russian cultural governance carries a high

(with the West. Russia (Hofstadter, Cooper and Carr 1997), the authors focus on examining

politics is a highly emotion business, also in sports. Why this intensity in Downing

of the hotel.

through pressure and discipline are intertwined with such things as moving them out

interests or respecting one's right to women for a decreased private. Votes are subjected

to a conflict inside a party becomes a matter of life and death, shunning even the

The second aspect to note is the intensity of the battle in sport politics and in any

challenging works of power or alliances of interest, and of friendships for the day.

it dissolved and new ones emerged. Governance is the creation of communities

on the board is more important than any personal solidarity, and old alliances are eas-

with his toothbrush and a change of clothes, if the last does not work out. A position

cases in his case with the international governing documents on his opponents, and one

government concept. As someone once said: "Anybody in Russian politics has two sin-

board shows us solidifying behind the president. In Russian politics solidarity is not a

it unexpected for the Republicans when in the course of the campaign the entire

the system ways are first as responsible for the other side. I or instance, it was entire-

get whether the knew anything about his candidacy.

I Turkmen captain of industry was put forward as an official candidate, and I still won

party was mentioned in the corridors of the Russian Sport Committee. Two years ago

been investigated. And recently, the name of Zhuravskii leader of the ultra nationalist

Krasnoyarsk and one of the candidates for the Russian presidency, was said to have

right. Russians who tried for a presidential bid the late general led by then governor of

candidate. In all of their political elections there had been rumors about powerful and

money into commitments. Riches and power are thus powerful arguments in favor of a

Sports Executive Boards, a continuous battle rages between socially active and generous

tioned and shown off in each social context and event. As a consequence, within the

symbolic capital is the life blood itself of sport, and sports titles and trophies are men-

by winning the competition (and the prize money, of course). For Eastern players the

sions of their exploits, and eager to garner recognition directly through their actions -

disrupt and chess players typically show some distance towards these symbolic expres-

tenly in West and Eastern Europe, at least in the world of sport. Western I understand

cases and trophies. This main symbolic capital of sports technicians is judged quite dif-

The coalition for the players is then huge insistence on titles, medals, cups, certifi-

is still around, a living legend by now, but so is Kozlov.

1990, marking the definitive entry of Russian players at the Olympics scene. Kuznetsov

1994, and he accompanied Kuznetsov in his march against the Canadian Desjardins in

ation for 30 years. Kozlov was in the delegation that brought Russia into the FIMD in

tion in 1995, at which he was present, he had already been around for in the organ-

as a guide for K, and he knew that I knew Mi Kozlov well. By the time of my elec-

produced as an aide Mi Kozlov, a man who will well easily years of age. Kozlov served

attempted coup, was afterwards still as busy on his Russian turf. At our first meeting he

around for two decades already in disciplines. And despite his apparent loss after the

by the staying power of officials. Mi K is no stranger in this territory, as he has been

cars remain. In mind, sports players also tend to stay a long time, but are still expected

officials rather than just athletes, or sportsmen. Athletes come and go, but offi-

(like the Olympic ideals). Moreover, a sport consists first and foremost o

important, rather than serving an abstract cause (and as the sport) or a higher, fur-

tence that should never be relinquished. The aim is to become someone and someone

sport officials as an identity, a crucial part of oneself, an official definition of one's exis-

just a job, more than a title, and definitely much more than a task to perform. Being

one like the FIMD - is, in and of itself, of supreme importance. It is much more than

contenders. One's position in an international organization - even a relatively small

very position has a totally different bearing on situations than it does for their Western

reason for the superior investments that Russians make to their sports officials, one

themselves. Not only is the highly charged atmosphere of Russian decision making the

The third aspect is the importance of the managerial and governance position

been working together on the best of terms ever since.

revealed to be nothing more than a table. It then became vice-president and we have

When he could not or would not do so, the promise of that huge prize fund was

the competitions due from the Russian Olympic Federation, of which he was the head

election where I challenged him during the meeting to play on the spot. All signs in

really believe it. Of course all the other players believed him. This resulted in a fierce

was willing to step down and be vice president if this would be true, but I did not

believe, I never was totally sure - half a million dollars in prizes should be expected.

Russian Federation. He promised - or rather his campaign manager promised on his

first bid for reelection in 1990 was the Minister of Finance of the Slovak Republic of the



In official pictures players form the entourage for the 'core of sports' – the officials

allotment. Western board players are afraid of title inflation, while Eastern players consider titles as easy coinage – the more the better.

So officials never die – they just fade away, and return when most unexpected. One additional reason is that sport officialdom is not only about status and identity, but also provides a gateway to the West. In Soviet times both sports officials and sports men were among the very few who were permitted to leave the country, to compete abroad. The advantages were many and far-reaching: experience of another world, a chance to buy Western commodities, and above all a means to make money by exchanging money. Officials were often in a unique position to buy foreign currency against cheap official prices and sell them at a profit.

### Theoretical reflections

The governance culture of the East – and for that matter also of other areas of the world such as Africa – shows some clear differences as compared with the notions of sports governance as they exist in the West. Sport governance in the West reflects, in fact, Weberian notions of bureaucracy and rationalism. In that notion the explicit goals of the organization and Weber's *Zweckrationalität* are absolutely dominant. The implementation of these principles constitute the following criteria for good governance in sports:

- the general goal dominates over personal aims

- the general good is not identical to state good
- the main loyalty is to the proper aim of the organization
- merit should prevail over favor
- performance should prevail over connections
- contracts should prevail over gifts

This model leads to a definite profile of a sports official – as someone who

- has no financial interest in his position
- has no economic interest in specific decisions
- has an identity independent of his post as an official
- combines personal distance with commitment in governance
- is loyal to rules and regulations, and the abstract notion of the good of the sport
- is not overly impressed by authority and hierarchy
- is oriented towards result rather than towards power
- is efficient rather than ebullient
- has a clear notion of time constraints
- leaves his post when his time is up

From the above it is clear that our nearest neighbors, Eastern Europe, do not share this model at all. The model described above is, in fact, the one for able volunteer amateurs – the official with many hats who, by virtue of his stature in other aspects of his life, can link external resources with the organization he serves. For the West this is the heroism of distance, the glory of commitment to a higher goal. For the East, on the other hand, such a person is not to be trusted for he is un-captured – and his motives are hard to trace. Personal glory and private gain, the quest for power and status are far easier to gauge in an opponent, than an 'amateur' who strives simply for the good of the sport. And in the East, the term 'amateur' bears no positive connotations at all, one is either a professional or transient. The Russian model of the official is, I think, one for whom the following principles apply:

- personal good is never secondary
- main loyalties are towards oneself
- personal relations are more important than abstract rules
- organizations are power arenas
- the ideals and goals of the organization are a discourse to be used in battles
- gifts, favors, and privileges accrue as a matter of fact and right to officialdom
- promises and contracts are merely expressions of hope and intent

This leads to a sport official who

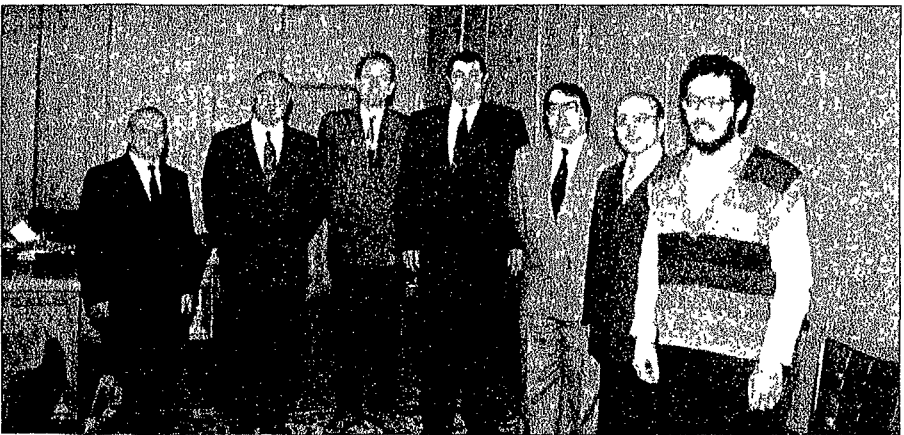
- is principally interested in power
- derives identity from his position
- does not shun the perks of his position
- is an apt window dresser

- stays or comes back
- broadly respects authority and is sensitive to hierarchy
- is careful with his dignity
- sees his colleagues at least as sporting partners

This summing up reads like a difference between ideal and practice, rather than cultural differences between Western and East European sport. The Western official as sketched is an ideal type, who conforms to Weber's approach. In reality many (or most) sports officials do not measure up to all the standards mentioned. What is important however, that in the organizational-cum-meeting culture of the West, these ideals are engrained and incorporated. Checks and balances are created to rein in excesses and abuses against the Weberian model. Russian realism is based more on a Machiavellian approach, conditioned by particular circumstances. First, the economic realities of sportmen from these two European regions are starkly different. For East Europeans, the notion of the "gentleman amateur", is absent, and sheer survival is still at stake. Second, the national political identity is, for East Europeans, not as self-evident as in the West, with its comparable national identities, nicely bolstered but not dependent upon sports performances. But most importantly, the values of the West are not recognized as values in Eastern Europe: the gentleman model is not at all valued as an appropriate model for Eastern Europe by Eastern Europeans. It may use the same discourse, but it does not share its fundamental tenets.

Throughout this essay I have used connotations with Russian culture as the prime example of two styles of governance in the world of sport. But the differences are by no means restricted to East and West Europe. Examples from other culture areas can easily be added to show that the Weberian model, based a democratic division of power, on societal checks and balances, and on well-demarcated separation between private and public good, is in actual fact a rarity in the world, and in the world of sport. The model of the gentleman-official, like the original gentleman-athlete, is a model not shared by the majority of the world. Other cultures, such as those of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, exhibit their own variations in meeting cultures, their own complex blends of aims, goals and ideals in sports, which are all different from the Western European ideal. Some of those may result in amusing incidents, at least in Western eyes.

When in the 1970s the great promoter of athletics in Mali, Grandmassere Mamina N'diaye, needed an airplane ticket or an "ordre de mission", he went to Mali's vice-president. With a dignitary board under his arm, he easily got past the guards, as the vice-president was well known as a dignitary aficionado. N'diaye then played with the vice-president, careful to win a few games, but to lose more (which in fact was not easy). Then the vice-president asked why he came, and N'diaye got his wish. In the course of this "flashing", he was giving N'diaye, the vice-president got



Being a sports official is serious business!

known from teaching situations, where the discussion of multicultural communication accounts of cultural clashes within meetings are rare. To some extent they are but they function fully within a single socio-cultural system.

(Schwarzman 1989:275, Smith and Peterson 1988:96) which as such can be compared, natural ends. Still, the great majority of her material stems from mono-cultural situations of society, and into cultural differences in the use of meetings for socio-cultural-*duction of meaning in social gatherings, thus yielding multiple insight into the con-* (1989:30). This ethnography of meetings provides a privileged perspective on the pro-non-verbal behavior with multiple functions for organizations and communities," "a communicative event such as a meeting may constitute a framework for verbal and much more than simply a way to make rational decisions. As Schwarzman points out, meetings may often be dull and uninspiring boring and tiresome; but they are processes and contradictions, the conditions and clashes of the steps called the meeting. Helen Schwarzman (1989) describes in great detail the

**Towards an ethnography of intercultural meetings**

The main point of this amusing anecdote is that this is that – simply an anecdote – for with through personal relations.

preside over the opening of the tournament. Eventually the vice-president agreed just to your dignity", he argued. Mamina had quite a job dissuading him from that idea. "It would not suit in the world, for didn't he always win, even grandmasters like N'diaye. After all, he must be (at least in his own mind) one of the best the idea of participating in World Championships, to be held in Bamako

has led to approaches which aim to create a "discursive intercultural" (Koole and Ten Tije 1994:68, cf. Scollon 1995). In the tradition of the ethnography of communication, from which Schwartzman takes his lead, the focus is on differences in codes and on code switching of participants in multi-cultural settings. The contrast with the case of multiculturalism in the Netherlands is clear: in the setting of most multi-cultural debates in this country, a clear hierarchy between the host culture and the immigrants is compounded by the presence of their home communities, which produce these different codes. Code switching depends on community backing.

In international meetings, the setting is different. The home communities are absent: the format of the meeting, although standardized, is open to idiosyncratic cultural definitions, and so an arena is created for the display of individual prowess through cultural means. These gatherings do provide a subtle angle not only into understanding cultural differences, but also into the relationship between personality characteristics and socio-cultural setting (i.e. between agency and structure).

In the case of the attempted coup described here, personality was very important. Mr K. is undoubtedly a flamboyant figure, revered by his compatriots and follower, or dislike by his opponents. Western journalists found him an easy target for their most dangerous weapon – ridicule. Owing both to his personality and to our cultural differences, I found it very difficult to interpret his behavior. It was only thanks to the help of an emphatic "middleman," who was also a member of our Board and who also had lodged at Mr K.'s home, that I began to understand what had happened. In a long conversation I subsequently had with Mr K. in Moscow in April 2002, I found him amicable and cooperative. At our next meeting in the Ukraine in June 2002, I found him his usual ebullient and overconfident self. At our last meeting in August 2002, once again in Moscow, after political positions in Russia had changed once again, he was very business-like. Clearly, any problem between him and me was my own: I



Kuperman, seven times World Champion and a living draughts legend, is the epitome of staying power in mind sports

simply had to get used to the quick changes of a personal relationship that was constantly changing in relation to the vicissitudes of politics.

Russian culture, at least the political culture of contemporary Russians, throughout this tale, has been at the background of this small upheaval in the World Draughts Federation. The assessment between personality and background, between agency and culture, is difficult and the relation remains shifting and dynamic. Some features of Mr K.'s behavior are recognizably Russian (as compared with Dutch behavior): intensity of action, the small gap between dream and reality (cf. Tismaneanu 1995), and the supreme importance of (network) relations (see Leenders in this volume), documents, and formal insignia (cf. Billington 1998). But his way of transforming these cultural preferences into performance was uniquely his very own.

Russian political culture is in vogue, as many studies have indicated (Shalin 1996, Lukin 2000, Tismaneanu 2000), and the actors in our little drama easily straddle the eras before and after 1991: sports politics in the East is still mostly made up of old "apparatchik," led by the remnants of the "nomenclatura." Occasionally, usually at the top levels, new elites who had formed elsewhere enter the arenas, but the bulk of officialdom is culturally still firmly rooted in the Soviet past.

All in all, international meetings offer an interesting window on the multicultural arena, and sport in particular provides a good example of the clash of cultures, and of the power of cultures to reinterpret formats, structures, and events. Sport is the most successful of all colonial exports in world history, together with the concept of the nation-state. As a concept inherited mainly from the British (van Beek 1997) sport has generated a huge general appeal, swept over the world, conquered all continents and been welcomed by all cultures. In so doing, it took a lot of extras in its slipstream: organizational structures, rules and regulations governing encounters, and a Western political culture. However, the host cultures, which eagerly adopted sports as a concept, adapted these extras to their own priorities, and so redefined formats, contents, and procedures of the organizational cadres of sport and the definition of sport officials, thus adding to the arena of sport proper another fascinating arena of cultural clashes.

#### Notes

- 1 We were adamant to prevent such an attempted takeover from ever happening again in the future, and especially to prevent the problems of the "64" version (the main bone of contention in our assessment of the attempted coup. The Board quickly got together to prepare a change in structure, and we transformed the FMJD from a monolithic federation into a federation with three semi-autonomous sections (100 squares, 64 squares and Anglo-American).
- 2 The farewell of Mr B., my predecessor who had lingered on as vice-president 64, was a highly emotional affair. At the Board meeting after our anniversary reception, the members of the Board and some representatives from national federations said good-bye to him. There was ample reason to take leave of him, especially after the 1996 elections in Abidjan, but still all present took pity on him. He was in tears, shattered to say farewell to a job, to people, but first foremost, to an identity.
- 3 Characteristically, when speaking about draughts, the Eastern officials never speak about it as

is sport, but as the "clubhouse movement", a term evidently reminiscent of past times, but also one that denotes struggle, competition with other sports, without any connection to leisure recreation, and general well being.

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Trust and Distrust in Russian-Dutch Relations  
An exploration

Risks Leaders

Introduction

Russian immigrants who start a new life in the Netherlands and want to become friends with Dutch people often confront a serious problem. Owing to their cultural and social background, their idea of friendship is often different from that of Dutch people. Consequently, instead of trust – a necessary element for friendship – this difference frequently provokes mutual distrust.

In this era of globalization and multicultural copulation, Russian and Dutch people meet each other not only through friendships but also in collegial teamwork. Some times, the result of these interactions is marriage. On the micro-level of social life, these kinds of social ties presuppose durability, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocity. As a first attempt to explore the problem, it is worthwhile to look more closely to the well-known anthropological concept of "reciprocity" (Mauss 1957). The "politics of emotions" implies that people weigh deliberately the pros and cons of "balanced", "generalized" and "negative" reciprocity, as Marshall Sahlins noted. In intercultural meetings, this seems all the more imperative.

During Soviet times, an extremely elaborate system of reciprocity, called blat, operated in the U.S.S.R. Everything that was rationed by the state was redistributed according to blat. In general, blat was embedded in horizontal, non-hierarchical, compassionate and warm social networks, and was generally perceived as morally acceptable. As the Russian sociologist Elena Ledeneva pointed out in her excellent study *Russia's Economy of Favors: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange* (1998), blat had also many resemblances with notions of bribery, corruption, and other informal practices, like patron-client relationships. However, blat was intricately bound up with the Soviet system and far more elusive. It meant "the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures." (Ledeneva 1998:180). Due to the perennial shortage and to the state system of distribution, Russian people used friends to survive.

After perestroika, "using friends" simply as a means to survive became less common. Post-Soviet conditions brought into being the rationalization of relationships even with the very closest" (ibid.:198). Mutual help decreased as the market economy expanded. Social networks were condensed to the family circle and personal networks broke up. This raises the question of what of the phenomenon of friendship was sub-