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Gerard, S & Zintz, T

Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

Gerard, S & Zintz, T 2017, 'The IPC as a change-maker?: Insights from the institutional theory' *Diagoras: International Academic Journal of Olympic Studies*, vol 1, no. 1, pp. 95-116

<http://www.diagorasjournal.com/index.php/diagoras/article/view/9>

ISSN 2565-196X

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The IPC as a change-maker? Insights from the institutional theory

Simon Gérard

Faculty of Business and Law,
Coventry University, United Kingdom
Faculté des Sciences de la Motricité,
Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
ac6769@coventry.ac.uk

Thierry Zintz

Faculté des Sciences de la Motricité
Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium
thierry.zintz@uclouvain.be

Abstract

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) increasingly becomes a key actor in the sport movement, yet its organizational development remains under-researched. This paper explores how the IPC, since its creation in 1989, emerged from the margins of the “able-bodied” sport movement and developed new sport opportunities for para-athletes. To do so, the literature in institutional entrepreneurship is investigated as well as the two concepts of institutional boundaries and practices. Methodologically, the research is based on content analysis of archival records. The study reveals two main stages during which the IPC significantly transformed the legitimated boundaries and practices within the sport movement. Based on this analysis, some of the key institutional challenges the IPC is currently facing are highlighted and discussed.

Keywords

Institutional change, Institutional work, Power, Paralympic Movement, Processual analysis.

Gérard, S. & Zintz, T. (2017). The IPC as a change-maker? Insights from the institutional theory. *Diagoras: International Academic Journal on Olympic Studies*, 1, 95–116. Retrieved from <http://diagorasjournal.com/index.php/diagoras/article/view/9>



Introduction

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is the global governing body of the Paralympic Movement and has undergone tremendous organizational changes since its creation in 1989 (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2010; Howe, 2008). The IPC's goal is to promote sport for para-athletes at the world-wide level with the ultimate aspiration of making "for a more inclusive society for people with an impairment through para-sports" (IPC, 2017). The IPC's Vision is "to enable para-athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world" (IPC, 2017). Equality – one of the four core values of the Paralympic Movement alongside courage, determination and inspiration – emphasizes that "through sport, para-athletes challenge stereotypes and transform attitudes, helping to increase inclusion by breaking down social barriers and discrimination towards people with an impairment" (IPC, 2015). The Paralympic Games are considered as strategic assets to achieve these goals and aim to be "the world's number one sporting event for transforming society's attitudes towards impairment" (IPC, 2015). The 1st Paralympic Games were held in 1960 in Rome (Italy) while some view the 1988 Seoul Paralympic Games (South-Korea) as the birth of the modern Paralympic Games (Legg & Steadward, 2011). The last Paralympic Games in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) featured 22 sports and gathered more than 4300 athletes from 160 countries, making those Games the 2nd largest multi-sport event held behind the Olympic Games themselves. Since 2001, a formal agreement between the IPC and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) ensure that the Paralympic Games are held in the same city as the Olympic Games, under identical service level and promotional standards.

Arguably, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) is today a key actor in the international sport movement and has developed strategic partnerships with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as well as with many stakeholders including the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), the International Sport Federations (IFs), several corporations (e.g. Visa, Atos, Toyota) acting as IPC Worldwide Paralympic Partners and governmental agencies (UN, UNESCO). Similarly, the level of participation in sport for para-athletes has risen in most parts of the world (Lauff, 2011), while these athletes still have fewer opportunities in sport (Hums, Moorman, & Wolff, 2009) and face lower media interest (Le Clair, 2017) and public recognition (Brittain, Legg, & Wolff, 2017; Purdue & Howe, 2012).

Moreover, the organizational growth and development of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) remains little known and an under-research area (Brittain, 2010; Legg & Steadward, 2011). This paper hopes, in part, to shed new lights on this process by exploring how the IPC, in less than 30 years, emerged from the margins of the international sport movement and developed new sport opportunities for para-athletes. We do so by investing the literature in institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988; Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby, & Sahlin-Andersson, 2008) and we capture this organizational process with the help of two key concepts, namely 1) boundary defined as the distinction between group and people (Lamont & Molnàr, 2002; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) and 2) practice considered as “the set of distinctive forms of action employed by or know to members of a particular group or society” (Clemens, 1997, p. 59). Theoretically the research question is how do organizations transform institutional boundaries and practices?

This paper contains four parts. First, the theoretical framework discusses elements of institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work defined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 215) as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions”. The second section is devoted to the methodology and describes a multi-step analytical process. The history of the Paralympic Movement is also briefly outlined with the aim of introducing key actors as well as their relationships. The third section analyzes the institutional work developed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) - considered in this paper as an institutional entrepreneur - to transform both the legitimated practices and boundaries in its institutional environment. Finally some key institutional challenges and issues the Paralympic Movement is currently facing are discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars suggest that new organizational forms have resounding institutional implications (DiMaggio, 1991; Perkmann & Spicer, 2007; Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011). Ingram (1998, p. 262) for example asserted that “significant institutional change is championed by new organizational forms and resisted by existing organizations”. In this paper, organizational form is defined as “an archetypal configuration of structures and practices given

coherence by underlying values regarded as appropriate within an institutional context” (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 30).

Stinchcombe (1965) argued that the creation of new organizational forms “is pre-eminently a political phenomenon”. Similarly, Rao, Morrill, and Zald (2000, p. 241) suggested that the creation and propagation of new organizational forms “entails an institutional project, wherein institutional entrepreneurs actively define, justify and push the theory and values underpinning new organizational forms”. Examining the roles granted to agency in institutional theory, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, p. 215) conceptualized institutional work as “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions”.

The recent literature further highlights two key concepts that are relevant for understanding institutional change (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), namely the concepts of boundary (Gieryn, 1983) and practice (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012). Boundaries are a well-known concept in sociology (Pachucki, Pendergrass, & Lamont, 2007) and organizational studies (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). They refer to established categories of objects, people or activities (Lamont & Molnàr, 2002). Lamont and Molnàr (2002, p. 168) argued that boundaries act as “tools by which individuals and groups struggle over to agree upon definition of reality and further argued that such boundaries among group and people could provide “unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities”. Such consequences make boundaries “the objects of strategic interests for actors motivated either to maintain or to disrupt systems of privilege (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 192). In turn, practices are defined according to the notion of repertoire (Clemens, 1997, p. 59) which refers to “the set of distinctive forms of action employed by or know to members of a particular group or society”. Such repertoire provides “templates, scripts, recipes or models for social interaction” within a group of actors (Clemens, 1997, p. 49). In other words practices are not simply “what people do, but [refer] to the socially legitimate routines in any given community” (Phillips & Lawrence, 2012, p. 227).

Relationships between boundaries and practices can stabilize institutions but can also foster institutional change. Material consequences of boundaries and practices (in terms of

distribution of power, access to resources etc.) can worsen conflict among actors both within and across institutions. Consequently, relationships between practices and boundaries can motivate actors “to try to affect them through both boundary work and practice work” (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 194). Boundary work refers to actors’ efforts to establish, expand and reinforce or undermine boundaries. As Zietsma and Lawrence (2010, p. 190) argued, practice work involves “efforts to affect the recognition and acceptance of sets of routines, rather than... simply engaging in those routines”.

To sum up, this study considers the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) as an institutional entrepreneur and explores how it has transformed its institutional environment since its creation in 1989. More specifically, this research investigated how the IPC has related to its environment and defined its domain of action (boundary work) and granted the sport movement with a new repertoire in the form of new sporting opportunities for the para-athletes (practice work).

Methodology

Analytic process

Building upon this understanding of institutional entrepreneurship, this study uses content analysis of archival records (Harris, 2001; Welch, 2000). Approximately 4000 pages of archives related to the Paralympic movement were gathered and analyzed, starting from the late 1980s until the beginning of 2017. Archives were collected in relevant international sport organizations and in the personal documentation of key actors, having hold or still holding executive positions in the Paralympic Movement. Official website of the International Paralympic Committee was also consulted, in particular the IPC Annual Reports from 2004 to 2015 and the IPC Strategic Plans since 2004. The archives included press releases, minutes of meetings, official reports, proceedings and official correspondences. Private correspondences between leading sports executives were also made available while embargo (from 1993 to 2006) was successfully left on recent and sensitive documents in the IOC’s archives. This set of archival records then allowed a deep intimacy with the field under study.

The data analysis was composed of multiple analytical steps. Firstly, a comprehensive examination of the archival records was

carried out. Relevant quotes were assembled in an electronic file and were coded according to their sources and preserved original wording. This represented about 150 single-spaced pages of text and around 1300 quotes. This provided a broad picture of the development of the Paralympic Movement since the late 1980s and enabled the authors to identify “relationships and hypothesize cause-effect sequences” (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 199). Secondly, the core characteristics of the institutional system were identified. The analysis at this point was an exercise of “latent analysis” (Berg, 2004), in which a researcher interprets the data using what he/she knows about a subject and the context in which the data were gathered. Through several iterations between the raw data and the theory, we identified the relevant boundaries and practices at the field level. In keeping with other studies (Brittain, 2010; Howe, 2008; Legg & Steadward, 2011), we considered sport classification systems developed over time as the defining core practices of the Paralympic Movement, that can also be understood as “organizational repertoire”, or “models, recipes” (Clemens, 1997). In parallel, we tracked boundary decisions the IPC made over time. Following Santos and Eisenhardt (2009, p. 647) a boundary decision was defined as “an organizational choice that shapes the demarcation of an organization relative to its environment”. Examples of boundary decision were developing an alliance, signing an agreement, establishing a joint commission. Finally we compiled a “comprehensive set of boundary work and practice work incidents” (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 200) and then linked similar types of boundary and practice works together. Finally, we devised “a process map” to link boundary and practice works to their consequences for the boundary and practice at the field level.

Historical background of the Paralympic Movement

With notable exceptions, people with an impairment had limited opportunities in organized sports during the 20th century. Following the Second World War, sport was introduced as part of the rehabilitation program for spinally injured veterans in various European and North-American countries. The most famous of these was when the British government appointed in 1944 the neurosurgeon Ludwig Guttmann to director of the Spinal Injuries Centre at the Stoke Mandeville Hospital (Aylesbury, GB). Active cure was at the core of Guttmann’s philosophy and wheelchair sports were soon being practiced by Stoke Mandeville’s patients.

From a recreation base, sport competitions then emerged between spinal units throughout Great Britain and in 1948, the 1st National Stoke Mandeville Games brought together 16 ex-service men and women in an archery tournament. The Stoke Mandeville Games were held annually and became international in 1952 when a team from the Netherlands participated. In 1959, Guttman became the 1st President of the International Stoke Mandeville Federation (ISMGF) dedicated to promoting and organizing sports for people with a spinal injury.

During the 1960s, International Organisations of Sports for the Disabled (IOSDs) were created to meet the needs of various other “groups” of people with an impairment. Previously the whole international sport movement exclusively focused on people with a spinal cord injury whereas the IOSDs were now structured according to disability and not with regard to the sport as more commonly found in mainstream “Olympic” sport. This structuration reflected a medical understanding of disability, in which sport was considered as a mean to the rehabilitation of people with an impairment (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2010). The International Sports Organisation for the Disabled (ISOD), not to be confused with IOSD, was founded in 1963 and developed opportunities for athletes with a visual impairment, amputation or within the category “Les Autres” which translates to “the others”. Over time those in the specific disability groups choose to create their own organizations and in 1968 the Cerebral-Palsy – International Recreation and Sports Association (CP-ISRA) was created while the International Blind Sport Association (IBSA) was founded in 1981. ISOD, meanwhile, continued to provide oversight for amputee and Les Autres athletes. Finally, the International Sports Federations for People with a Mental Handicap (INAS-FMH) was created in 1986. Each IOSD established its own rules book and controlled its games and sports championships at the technical and medical levels and in particular classification. It was during this evolution that the medical classification system was developed where competitors were grouped according to a medical evaluation of their impairments and the sport of concern. The medical classification systems “reflected the structure of a rehabilitation hospital, with separate classes for people with spinal cord injuries, amputations, brain impairments and those with other neurological and orthopedic conditions” (Tweedy & Vanlandewijck, 2011).

In March 1982, the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) of World Sports Organisations for the Disabled was created by ISOD, ISMGF, IBSA and CP-ISRA with a Declaration of Authority published in January 1983, formalizing ICC's *modus operandi*. The ICC, composed of IOSDs representatives, was in charge of coordinating administratively the multi-IOSDs international competitions such as the Paralympic Games. Acting under the ICC umbrella, IOSDs remained fully-autonomous for what concerned their respective "disability-groups". But concerns from various sources quickly emerged with the way ICC was developing. National representatives (e.g. Canada, Sweden) increasingly contested the IOSD based-structure of the Paralympic Movement and called to support national influences in the ICC. The medical classification system was also questioned because it resulted in too many classes as well as too few participants in too many events. Forms of integrated classification were progressively proposed to group athletes with equivalent functionalities in fewer classes, regardless of the impairment. As one example, Birgitta Blomqvist, a member of both the ISOD and ISMGF swimming committees, developed the so-called Functional Classification System for Swimming which "analyzed the motor functional requirements of the four strokes"¹. The examination was "in two parts, and focuses not on an athlete's disability but on the functions that are present. A medical examination was followed by a water-test, and the results recombined"². As a result, the number of classes in swimming was drastically reduced from more than 30 to 10.

The national representatives pushed the ICC to set up a "Seminar on the Future and Structure of Sport for the disabled" on March 1987. At this seminar, sport delegates debated "sports programme and classification principles and organizational structure"³. As a result, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) was officially launched by the 6 IOSDs and 31 national representatives in September, 1989. The IPC was thus recognized as the supreme governing body of the Paralympic Movement. Key constitutional objectives were soon set up which included "to organize all the Paralympic Games and multi-disabled world and regional Games, to liaise with the IOC and the International Sports Federations and to be responsible for the integration of sports for the disabled into the able-bodied world"⁴.

1. Simplified guide for classification, swimming - locomotor disabilities, Gothenburg 1986 Published in September 18th 1985.

2. ICC Newsletter 87/1, April 1987.

3. ICC Seminar, March 13 – 14th, 1987 (Arnhem, Netherlands).

4. The IOC and the Paralympics by A. Napier, IOC Public Relations Director, March 18th 1994.

Institutional work of the International Paralympic Committee

Using the period 1989-2017, the analysis revealed two main stages during which the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) developed a high level of agency and significantly transformed the institutional boundaries and practices at the field level.

Stage 1: 1989 - 2001, from a disability-based movement to a sport-based movement

Created in September 1989, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) developed in a pre-existing network of actors, prevailing power relationships and with established boundaries and practices at the field level. Two groups of actors had considerable influences on the early-development of the IPC. The first group is symbolized by the Olympic Movement and is encompassed, in particular, by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Sports Federations (IFs) and the Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games (OCOGs). The second group was represented by the International Organizations of Sports for the Disabled (IOSDs). Our data revealed that the IPC simultaneously engaged in two broad categories of boundary work, namely 1) establishing and protecting its own boundaries and 2) breaching institutional boundaries. In parallel the IPC worked to develop and promote a new practice at the field level – the functional classification system.

Since the very first months of its creation, the IPC worked to established its own boundaries and protect them. This boundary work had three main facets. First, the IPC was constitutionally structured according to the sports and not with regard to the disability as previously with the IOSDs. Accordingly, the IPC developed Sport Assembly Executive Committees (SAECs) that were in charge of marrying the IOSDs rules together and to centralize governance of some multi-disability sports – which means a sport practiced by more than one disability group. By 1993, twelve sports were officially recognized by the IPC (e.g. Swimming, Athletics, Archery, Alpine, Equestrian...). This means that the IPC SAECs had the responsibility to develop sport rules and classification systems and monitoring all regional and world championships. Importantly the IOSDs were involved in the SAECs and influenced the sport rules for what concerned their disability groups.

Simultaneously the IPC negotiated its boundaries with other key actors in the sport movement, in particular with the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Early 1990s and in part as a request of the IOC, agreements were also signed with the Comité International des Sports des Sourds (CISS) and the International Coordinating Committee (ICC) to define respective roles and responsibilities in the Paralympic Movement. In 1991 the IPC signed an agreement with the IOSDs that acknowledged that every IOSD would represent and bear responsibility for its particular disability group on a world level. In turn, the IPC would focus on multi-disability sport championships and the Paralympic Games.

Despite these agreements, interferences and tensions occurred between the sport organizations. The Paralympic Movement was composed of different international governing bodies in the form of either IOSDs, or federations per sports or sub-committees per sport. In 1995, 73 different governing bodies were active in 31 sports. With up to five interest groups active in some sports (e.g. swimming or athletics), the governance of the Paralympic Movement was highly confused. So-called multi-disability championships were part of the IPC mandate but the IOSDs did not accept being “compelled to surrender that right and privilege to a third party”⁵ and defended their freedom to engage in mutual agreements to organize their competitions. Moreover the IOC remained the ultimate decision-makers in many issues and the Olympic Games’ Organizing Committees (OGOCs) were in strong position when negotiating the organization of the Paralympic Games. As a whole the IPC spent a big deal of efforts and energy to protect its boundaries and promote a common framework for multi-disability sports.

In addition to this, the IPC declared in its constitutional objective II.4 that “the IPC is committed to increase the integration of sport for athletes with a disability into the international sports movement for able-bodied athletes, whilst safeguarding and preserving the identity of sports for disabled athletes”. It therefore developed intense lobbying strategies to breach the institutional boundaries of the sport movement. Among these initiatives, one of the most important was certainly the creation of the “Commission for the Inclusion of Athletes with a Disability” (CIAD) – first called the Commission for Integration - in November 1990. The CIAD sought to develop and implement a lobbying strategy for the inclusion of selective events with full medal status for para-athletes, beginning

5. Paper by ISOD & ISMWSF presidents for the 1995 IPC Congress.

with the Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games⁶. The CIAD succeeded with the inclusion of six demonstration events for para-athletes in the 1994 Victoria Commonwealth Games which then led to full inclusion of para-athletes the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games. While demonstration status events were held in Summer Olympic Games from 1984 to 2008, the IOC never granted the athletes with full Olympic medal status, and the demonstration status events were cancelled.

Aside this initiative, the IPC constantly adapted protocols and procedures to match those of the IOC and dedicated time and efforts to develop relationships with the international “able-bodied” sport movement including the IFs, OGOs or General Assembly of International Sport Federations (GAISF) – later called SportAccord and named in 2017 Global Association in International Sport Federations (GAISF). The second half of the 1990s was also marked with evolving relationships with the IOC. In 1999, IPC members were included in several IOC Commissions such as the IOC Athletes Commission and the IOC Medical Commission and while reluctant at first⁷, the IOC included Paralympic representation in the 2008 Olympic Games Evaluation Commission.

A breakthrough occurred when the IOC and the IPC signed a first “cooperation agreement” in October 2000. This agreement laid down general principles of relationships between both organizations (e.g. that the IPC President would become an IOC member, there would be partnerships across commissions and a financial contribution from the IOC to the IPC). On June 2001, a second agreement detailed the conditions “under which the IOC agreed to assist the IPC in securing and protecting the organization of the Paralympic Games, effectively including the obligation to organize the Paralympic Games in the IOC Host City Contract with the OCOGs”. This model of cooperation became known as the “One City Games model” and ensured that the Paralympic Games were held in the same city as the Olympic Games, under identical service level and promotional standards.

In parallel to this set of boundary works, the IPC developed and promoted a new institutional practice at the field level – the functional classification system. In opposition to the medical system, this new system assessed the functional ability of an athlete in one particular sport or discipline. Athletes with similar level of functionalities were grouped in the same class, whatever the

6. Progress Report of the CIAD for the 1993 IPC General Assembly, September 1993.

7. Quote from a letter from G. Felli to R. Steadward, October 8th, 1998.

impairments of concerns. Research was undertaken to assess “the uniqueness and comparability”⁸ of the different disability groups as represented in the IOSDs in order to group para-athletes and reduce the number of classes. The IPC also rewritten the rules more in line with the able-bodied sport rules. The development of the functional classification system was very contested, as it was considered by some in the IOSDs as being unfair for their athletes⁹ and was not scientifically validated.

In parallel to the creation of a functional classification system, the IPC also investigated the notion of having a minimum impairment to qualify as a para-athlete. In doing so the IPC questioned its roles and responsibilities within the global international sport movement by defining to whom athletes it was in charge of. Aligning with the trends towards a relative autonomy of the sports, each IPC Sport developed its own criteria of eligibility and functional classification system.

Stage 2: 2001 – 2017, towards the autonomy and independence of the para-sports

Despite remarkable world-wide development of the Paralympic Movement during the 1990s, a comprehensive institutional framework was still missing at the international level. Since the mid-1990s, issues and concerns arose relating “the future position and roles of the IPC”¹⁰ in the sport movement. Some IPC members also highlighted inappropriate IPC legal rules which did not give “certain Paralympic Sports the headroom and breathing space in order to further their development”¹¹. The IPC then worked to bridge its boundaries with the international sport movement while resisting to stakeholders’ influences. It also empowered the functional classification system at the field level.

In view of the unclear and confused situation of responsibilities and roles among international sports governing bodies, the IPC discussed elements of “Governance, roles and responsibilities” during the 2001 IPC Strategic Planning Congress (Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia) and encouraged the development of one organization per sport as well as a change in the IPC mandate. One of the main output was that “the IPC’s core activity is the Paralympic Games only and the governance of the IPC Sports should not, in the future, be part of IPC’s primary focus”¹². This meant that IPC endorsed “the right to any IPC Sport Championship to become independent from the IPC without prejudging which organizational model it adopts (whether it be the inclusion

8. IPC Newsletter Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1990.

9. Colin Rains, CP-ISRA President in Theme I: Governance for the 2001 IPC Strategic Planning Congress, April 25-30th, 2001.

10. 1995 IPC Task Force report, July 9th, 1996.

11. Position paper by Phil Craven (IWBF President) for the 1995 IPC Congress.

12. IPC Strategic Review Diagnosis by Mc Kinsey & Company, March 2003.

within an Olympic International Federation or the creation of an independent Federation for athletes with a disability, etc.)”¹³. Conversely the role of IOSDs remained open to discussion and was framed in a sport development and grass-roots perspective. Such strategic direction was voted during the 2003 IPC General Assembly (Turin, Italy). According current strategy of IPC, sport interest is then best served by one International Federations per sport, having space to establish what the best model is for their sport and enhancing opportunities for para-athletes in the global sport movement. The IPC launched the “2006 IPC Sport Governance and Management Initiative” devise to assist IPC sports towards self-governance and autonomy, followed by the 2013 IPC Sports Strategic Plan.

The IPC also built strategic partnerships with a broad range of strategic stakeholders including the IFs and the WADA, non-governmental agencies (e.g. Right to Play, Rehabilitation International), governmental agencies (e.g. UN, UNESCO) and the scientific community. For example, the IPC signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN Secretary General on Sport for development and Peace in 2005 and was part of the drafting process for the 2006 UN Convention on the rights of people with a disability. The IPC also enhance its ability to monitor the delivery of the Paralympic Games. This period was also marked by an increase in the IPC’s commercial and sponsorship activities. The IPC delivered its first ever presentation to the Olympic TOP Sponsors¹⁴ during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games and VISA, a credit card company, became the 1st worldwide partner the same year. This was further supported by initiatives to develop a coherent Paralympic Brand at the world stage level.

Ties between the Olympic Movement and Paralympic Movement also increased as more “Olympic” Sports Federations assumed governance roles for para-sports. Similarly, collaboration between the IOC and the IPC administrations reached a day-to-day level familiarity and the IOC-IPC existing agreements were extended and refined. The One City Games model now runs until the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and have brought the Games to an unprecedented level of excellence.

The IPC progressively wondered how to build on “the unique Paralympic identity” and similarly, how to avoid the “Olympification” of the Paralympic Movement. A clear vision emerged, that “the IPC needs to protect and enhance its own

13. Ibid.

14. Created in 1985, the Olympic Partners (TOP) Programme is the worldwide sponsorships programme managed by the IOC. The TOP Programme provides each worldwide Olympic Partners with exclusive global marketing rights and opportunities within a designated product or service category. Between 2013-2016, the TOP programme generated US\$ 1003 million (Olympic Marketing Fact File, 2017 Edition).

identity within any relationships”¹⁵. The last agreement between the IPC and the IOC evidenced such view. This agreement – The Partnership Agreement – was signed in 2012 and aimed to extend relationships between the Paralympic and Olympic Movement on the long term and particularly outside the Games context. The negotiation process initiated in 2010 and has proven to be sensitive. The main subject of discussion was the initial claim by the IOC that they held “ownership rights over the term “Paralympic” and IPC’s refusal to accept that the IOC was correct on this point”¹⁶. After months of harsh negotiations, the IPC safeguarded its rights regarding the Paralympic symbolism and terminologies¹⁷. Ultimately, the agreement recognized “the mutual benefits of a close cooperation between both organizations to support their vision, mission and strategic objectives”. It further stated that the IOC will not use the word “Paralympic” without the consent of the IPC.

In parallel the IPC worked to empower the functional classification system and encouraged very sports-specific functional classification systems. The IPC drafted the “IPC Classification Code and International standards”. The Code wished to provide a framework for classification policies and procedures that were common to all sports. Negotiations took place to find “a balance between a Code specific enough to obtain harmonization on classification issues where required and general enough to allow flexibility for its implementation according needs of the different IPC Sports”¹⁸. The Code was first published in 2007 and revised in 2015. The Code is complemented by the International Standards, notably to identify what an eligible impairment is in Para-sports. In other words, each para-sport has to clearly define for “which impairments they provide sports opportunities” and establish minimum disability criteria. While some sports include athletes of all Eligible Impairments (e.g. athletics, swimming), other sports are limited to one impairment (goalball, boccia) or a selection of impairments (e.g. equestrian, cycling).

Discussion

This study explores a new range of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) by highlighting specific patterns of boundary and practice works the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) developed these last 30 years (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). The IPC first created its own boundaries and protected them from several

15. Priority Themes “Enhancing the Partnership with the Olympic Movement”, IPC Membership Gathering, October 3 – 5th 2014.

16. *ibid.*

17. The word “Paralympic” derives from the Greek preposition “para” (beside or alongside) and the word Olympic. Launched during the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games, the current Paralympic symbols are three “agitos” (Latin for “I move”) colored red, blue and green. The symbol also reflects the Paralympic Motto, “Spirit in Motion” representing the strong will of every Paralympian (retrieved from Paralympic.org, consulted in August 2017).

18. IPC Athlete Code – Rules, policies and procedures for Athlete classification – July 2015.

organizations such as the IOC, the OGOCs and the IOSDs. At the same time, the IPC developed strategies to breach institutional boundaries of the sport movement and aligned its protocols to those of the IOC. It also worked to develop a new practice at the field level – the functional classification system that opposed to the medical classification system. Thereafter, the IPC shaped strong links and partnerships with the “able-bodied” sport movement and various stakeholders. As a result the IPC progressively became in position to resist the influences of these stakeholders. It finally empowered the functional classification system in several para-sports that redefine sport classification and athletes’ categorization in sport.

This study also makes several contributions to the literature on institutional change. Previous research on organizational boundaries mainly focused on single boundary-decision (Rosenkopf & Nerkar, 2001; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). In contrast this study emphasizes the interplay between different types of boundary work and describes the “overall patterns of strategic action” (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009, p. 644) the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) have deployed. Moreover the analysis shows how the IPC simultaneously developed different strategies – boundary works – with different groups of stakeholders in the sport movement. By tracing IPC’s boundary decisions since 1989, the research also addresses the evolution of organizational boundaries over time and captures the agency dimensions (Perkmann & Spicer, 2007) underlying processes of institutional change. In line with Rao et al. (2000) and Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) this analysis finally highlights the interdependence between boundary and practice where boundaries delimit sets of legitimate practices and recursively, practices sustain particular boundaries. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) indeed created its own boundaries and protected them from various stakeholders in order to develop and secure a new practice at the field level – the functional classification system. Similarly this practice become the “defining feature”¹⁹ of the para-sports and empower the Paralympic Movement.

Today the IPC is inextricably linked to the “able-bodied” sport movement and become an influent actor in it. This claim is for example supported by the recent decision of the IPC to ban Russian para-athletes from IPC-sanctioned competitions following allegations of nation-state doping system. This decision significantly

19. IPC Athlete Code – Rules, policies and procedures for Athlete classification – July 2015.

shaped the dynamic of the global sport system and surprised many observers, as the IOC decided to let the International Sport Federations (IFs) to independently deal with this issue. Arguably this decision is aligned with the IPC desire to take a more confident approach to its development and influenced relationships where necessary.

The partnerships with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has always received considerable attention since the creation of the IPC. With regard to the growth of the Paralympic Games, the IPC currently explores the ways to improve its relationships with the Olympic Movement. Such concerns have been highlighted in the recent Paralympic Games Strategic Review, which was an IPC membership led exercise in 2014. While the IPC membership recognized that the partnerships with the IOC was key for the development of the IPC and the Paralympic Games, there is also “a clear view that the IPC needs to protect and enhance its own distinct identity with any relationship”²⁰. Similarly, the Strategic Review identified an “overwhelming” support for the One City Games model within IPC membership which, at the same time, recognized that the dependence to this model is a “major risk” and therefore supported the continued strengthening of the Paralympic Games on the long-term.

Likewise, the IPC membership also questioned the shaping of the (Winter and Summer) Paralympic Games Sport Program. Concerns arose about reconciling “strategic objectives such as universality, gender, impairment representation and the combination of different types of sport (individual, teams, endurance, power, combat etc.) with the requirements of professional sport, professional governance, broadcasters, sponsors and spectators”²¹. This is a key consideration given the implications these choices could have, including in term of Paralympic branding (Legg & Dottori, 2017). At the time of writing the IPC follows a model referred to by some as the “best of the two worlds” that aims to find a balance between these two trends while for others this model prevents the IPC from fulfilling its strategic objectives.

The classification system was described as “both its jewel in the crown as well as its Achilles Heel”²². Tweedy and Vanlandewijck (2011, p. 5), two eminent experts in Paralympic classification, recently asserted that “the current classifications systems are still based on the judgment of a small number of experienced classifiers rather than on empirical evidence”. A key challenge

20. Priority Themes “Enhancing the Partnership with the Olympic Movement”, IPC Membership Gathering, October 3 – 5th 2014.

21. Priority Themes “Developing the Paralympic Games Sport Programme”, IPC Membership Gathering, October 3 – 5th 2014.

22. Minutes of the 2007 IPC General Assembly, November 24-25th, 2007.

for the IPC is therefore to develop evidence-based classification systems that improve the validity of the methods and the tests used in the functional classification system. Another consideration emerged with regard to how to translate the complex subject for all Paralympic stakeholders including athletes, official, media and spectators. ‘Transparency and effective communication’²³ were also underlined as major factors in the successful development of the Paralympic Movement. Such concerns were recently highlighted as the IPC had to deal with allegation of athletes’ misrepresentation during the classification process. Intentional misrepresentation is a form of cheating in which a para-athletes deliberately performs under his/her real level of abilities in an effort-dependent test, with the aim of being allocated to a class with para-athletes with more severe impairments.

To conclude, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has acted as an institutional entrepreneur these last 30 years and developed new boundaries and practices for para-athletes in sport. It also progressively become a change-maker, shaping the global dynamic of the sport movement. But many challenges threaten this growth and much works are still necessary to sharpen its roles and responsibilities in the sport movement and strengthen the functional classification system in para-sports.

23. Priority Themes “Developing fair and understandable athlete classification”, IPC Membership Gathering, October 3 – 5th 2014.

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Authors

Simon Gérard (PhD) is lecturer in sport management in the Faculty of Business and Law at the Coventry University (United Kingdom) and a research associate in the Olympic Chair Henri de Baillet-Latour in Management of Sport Organizations (Belgium). He was also a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Ottawa (Canada). His research is oriented towards the organizational theory and institutional change in major international sport organizations, with a special interest for the Paralympic Movement.

Thierry Zintz (Prof.) is a professor of Sports Organisations Management at the Faculty of Sports Sciences of the Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium). He is in charge of the Olympic Chair Henri de Baillet Latour – Jacques Rogge in Management of Sport Organizations at the same university. In this framework, he is a senior researcher and member of the Center for Research in Entrepreneurial Change and Innovation Strategies (CRECIS). His research is oriented towards the governance of sport governing bodies and their social responsibilities, as well as towards the institutional change in major international sport organizations. He is the director of the MEMOS in English, an Executive Master in Management of Sport Organizations, organized by the International Olympic Committee and twelve universities in the world.

