Original Article

An exploration of the institutional environment of the National Olympic Academies by following a mixed method approach

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ABSTRACT

Within the present framework of the Olympic Charter (2019) the International Olympic Committee (IOC) supports educational issues through the International Olympic Academy (IOA), the National Olympic Committees (NOCs), and the National Olympic Academies (NOAs). However, there are a number of de facto variations in the arrangements adopted in different national settings. To that end this study seeks to identify the organisations within the institutional environment of the NOAs and how these determine the strategy and the decisions made by NOAs. How does the environment affect the effective operation of the IOA, and of the NOAs in the Olympic academy system? In order to address this question, an archival research along with a set of exploratory semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 key stakeholders from the IOC (4), IOA (2), NOAs (8), Academics (5). The archival research along with thematic analysis of the interview data, provided themes to be incorporated into a questionnaire conducted with NOA officials (response rate 67.8% - 99 of the 146 registered NOAs) focusing on the strategic and organizational factors involved in their functioning. The paper highlights future amendments and changes and a number of ways in which the IOC and the IOA can respond to NOA's needs and expectations.
Keywords: Olympism; Governance; Education; Strategy; Committee; National.

INTRODUCTION

According to Pierre de Coubertin, education is the main point of reference in the Olympic movement (see Müller, 2000; Kidd, 1996; Gruneau, 1993). In one of his principal texts, Coubertin argued that 'Olympism' had to be linked to education in order to avoid failure, as had happened earlier in history (Coubertin, 1934/2000, p. 218). Today, Coubertin's view is timelier than ever, given that, in recent years there has been reduced interest in hosting the world's leading sporting event (e.g. Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012; MacAloon, 2016; Smith, Ritchie, & Chien, 2018; Scheu & Preuss, 2018). This research was prompted by the current challenges faced by the Olympic Movement (OM) and focuses on the issues related to the work of the IOA and the NOAs, two of the educational pillars of the IOC.

The principal objectives of this study are twofold: First, to investigate the organizations operating in the institutional environment of the NOAs, including the IOC the decisions taken by the relevant IOC Committee, and how these affect the decisions made by NOAs. Second, to explore how the IOC, the overarching organization in the institutional environment of the NOAs, directly (through funding) or indirectly (through capacity building) imposes the organizational structure, content, and behaviour of the academies. A critical appraisal of how well the IOC fulfils this specific role in terms of the organization's current directions, regulations, and strategies is also presented.

INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORKS

In order to answer the research questions, an analysis of the institutional environment in which the NOAs operate was carried out. According to Butler and Wilson (2015), the term 'institutional environment' refers to the aspect of the environment of an organization that establishes the core values, standards, and rules within which it operates. Kikulis (2000) claimed that institutional theory became dominant not only in the literature of sport management and organizational theory but also in the organization and administration of sport. Washington and Patterson (2011) argued that '*sports provide a rich empirical setting to elaborate and illuminate some of the basic tenets of institutional theory*' (p. 2).

The first key tenet of institutional theory concerns isomorphism. The central idea of institutional isomorphism is that the environment pushes organizations to adopt specific practices and procedures in order to survive. It refers to the assumption that organizations operating in the same environment adopt similar courses of action and appear more homogeneous. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe three pressures that drive organizations to become increasingly similar: coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures. A number of influential studies (e.g. Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Danisman, Hinings, & Slack, 2006; Slack & Hinings, 1994) have examined changes in a variety of national sport organizations (NSOs) under the supervision of Sport Canada, the top government actor regarding the management and organization of sports in Canada. The Slack and Hinings (1994) article examined the impact on changes in 36 NSOs as a result of institutional pressure applied by Sport Canada. They concluded that, following the intervention, the NSOs adopted more professional bureaucratic structures and there was a clear reduction in structural fluctuations. Following other studies in institutional theory, Slack and Hinings provided a discussion on the impact of the three types of institutional pressures and how they contributed to a reduction of structures within the NSOs. Hoye and Cuskelly (2007) reported that the phenomenon of institutional isomorphism is also found in the sports systems of Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, where national, state or local sports organizations primarily use traditional organizational models. Organizational models concern the second key tenet of institutional theory. According to Greenwood et. all (2008, p. 261), it provided 'greater specificity to understanding and theorizing about how, why, and which organizations respond in particular ways to

institutional expectations'. According to Scott (1995, p. 5), beneath any given organizational field there is a definite 'template' of 'common meaning systems' based on 'shared cognitive or normative framework'. Common languages, common patterns or understandings, and common ideologies can describe the boundaries of an organizational field. Seldom research has been conducted on the second key tenet of institutional theory. One notable exception is O'Brien and Slack's (2003; 2004) research into the organizational fields of professional rugby in England (see below). The third key tenet of institutional theory is institutional logics. Friedland and Alford (1991) suggested that organizational fields operate under diverse belief systems that differ fundamentally in their content, nature of central assumptions, and ordering of principles referred to as institutional logics. A growing area of research is the institutional logics of sports institutes. For example, O'Brien and Slack (2003, 2004) examined the emergence of a professional logic in the sport of rugby union in England, and Southall and Nagel (2008) tested to see if education logic conflicted with the commercial logic of the National Collegiate Athletic Association of the USA (NCAA). While there is a lack of research on sports from an organizational perspective, studies on institutional change are also absent in the literature. Institutionalization and legitimacy, the fourth key tenet of institutional theory, is the process by which 'social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action' (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p.341). The institutionalization of practices may be attempted by organizations that desire an increase in legitimacy where certain practices can be seen as the only natural way of action. Such organizations may enact institutional strategies aimed at defining boundaries and activities that lend more legitimacy within the institutional context. To that end, there is lack of research related to the key tenet of institutionalization. By 1988, the shift in institutional theory moved from stability to change, from isomorphism to practice. Since DiMaggio's (1988) insights about the addition of 'power' and 'organization' to the institutional lexicon, scholars began discussing institutional strategy (e.g. Lawrence, 1999) and organizational and institutional change (e.g. Haveman & Rao, 1997; Lawrence, 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), the fifth key tenet of the theory.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Archival material
Primary archival material was studied at the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, specifically the minutes of the IOC committee, in which the IOA belongs (1962-2019). The study of the IOC archives contributed to a comprehension of the importance of these IOA meetings in the spread of the NOA network as well as to notice the evolution of the specific committee in relation to the progressive growth of the NOAs. The document analysis conducted, using QSR Nvivo 10 contributed to the identification of important events during the evolution and development of the IOA (from 1961 to 2019), thus relating to six decades of the IOA's operation. Each decade was given a specific designation, namely a codification based on the orientation of the work produced by the IOA. The proceedings of the Annual NOA Session that the IOA organises in Ancient Olympia (official appellation is: either '*International Session for Presidents or Directors of NOAs*' or '*Joint International Session for NOA Presidents or Directors and Officials of NOCs*'), over the last 14 years, with particular emphasis on the results of the discussion groups, were a valuable source of information and analysis. The following materials were also studied: Sessions proceedings of the NOA's annual session, the Olympic Charter, the IOA's biannual magazine, the e-journal for the OSC in Lausanne. The above sources were of fundamental importance, both in the preparation of the interviews and questionnaires and in the subsequent interpretation of the results.

Interview design and sample selection
Stage one of the empirical investigation, the interview element of the study, represents an exploratory approach in which perceptions of 19 key stakeholders concerning the institutional environment of the

organisations under study were investigated. In specific, senior officials from the IOC (4), IOA (2), NOAs (8), and (5) Academics with specialist research backgrounds, gave an expert insight into the topics covered in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data on the basic needs and current problems faced by the NOAs, their weaknesses and deficiencies, and reveal the contribution of the dominant institutions. Information about the date, the place and the recording of the data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The number of NOAs surveyed per continent.

Participation of 99 NOAs			
Continent	NOA	Participation in Survey	Participation percentage
America	31	19	61%
Asia	28	20	71%
Africa	43	27	62%
Europe	42	32	76%
Oceania	2	1	50%

The researcher conducted the interviews a) at the premises of the IOA in Ancient Olympia, Greece, during the Annual NOA Session, from 2014 to 2019 b) at the IOA headquarters in Athens in 2019, and c) in 2014 at the IOC headquarters and at the OSC in Lausanne, Switzerland. The majority of the interviews were conducted in English, with only two of the nineteen interviewees having English as their native language, while two of the interviews were conducted in Greek. The non-use of the mother tongue did not affect the quality of the interviews of this study as the interviewees had sufficient command of the English language.

Thematic analysis of the data
The transcripts of the interviews and of the four written interviews were subject to thematic analysis. The method of thematic analysis used for the transcription of the oral and written interviews was a hybrid approach, incorporating the inductive (themes emerging from the interviews) approach of Boyatzis (1998) and the deductive (answers to questions posed by the assumptions associated with the institutional environment), approach developed by Crabtree and Miller (1999).

The interviews results were grouped together based on the answers given in order for important issues to be recorded and for similar views to be traced. The coding of the specific data was classified under the broader 'experts' opinions' framework, (a) for the IOA and (b) for the NOAs. The qualitative data was coded to capture the 'experts' opinions' for the IOA on the obstacles and controversies concerning the IOC-IOA relationship, the benefits of the IOC from the functioning of the IOA, the presence of the IOA and its contribution to the OM.

The same procedure was followed for the analysis of the qualitative data derived from the 'experts' opinions' for the NOAs. Key themes extracted were: a. essential work b. their relationship with the IOA and c. obstacles in the work and recognition by the IOC.

Questionnaire design
Regarding the design of the questionnaire, information was sought about a) the organisations operating in the institutional environment of the NOAs b) the organizational structure, content and behaviour of the NOAs. It consisted of twenty open-ended and closed-ended questions concerning the following areas: (a) the way in which NOAs are organised, managed, and operated, (b) exploratory questions about their work, (c) relationships with stakeholders, and (d) their needs and the problems they are currently facing. The questions were in English and translated into French. The Annual NOA Session in Ancient Olympia offered the

researchers the opportunity to meet the majority of the NOA directors. The questionnaire was distributed during the Annual NOA Session and collected gradually from 2014 to 2018. The questionnaire recorded the work of 99 NOAs (Table 2) out of 146 currently in operation (149 are officially registered in the IOA registry).

Table 2. Information on the interviews and interviewees.

Serial Number	Position	Date & Duration of the interview	Method
1	IOC member	19/6/2013 (55 min.)	In person
2	IOA President	18/07/2019	In writing
3	Honorary Dean of the IOA	24/7/2019 (45 min.)	In person
4	IOC Supreme Executive	8/5/2018 (57 min.)	In person
5	Employee of the IOC OSC	13/2/2014 (43 min.)	In person
6	IOC employee	13/2/2014 (75min.)	In person
7	NOA Director / President	07/11/2017	In person
8	NOA president	05/10/2016	In writing
9	NOA president	13/5/2019 (32 min.)	In person
10	NOA president	13/5/2019 (19 min.)	In person
11	NOA president	31/05/2019	In writing
12	NOA president	30/05/2019	In writing
13	NOA president	12/5/2017 (32 min.)	In person
14	NOA president	12/5/2017 (54 min.)	In person
15	Academic	12/5/2019 (2hrs&4min.)	In person
16	Academic	14/5/2019 (11 min.)	In person
17	Academic	21/6/2012 (50 min.)	In person
18	Academic	2/11/2012 (49 min.)	In person
19	Academic	12/5/2019 (17 min.)	In person

Questionnaire analysis
Microsoft Excel functions were used to meet the numerical and statistical research requirements, while data were depicted linearly in histograms or graphs for each of the 17 closed-ended questions. The answers of the three open-ended questions, 9, 19, and 20, were grouped and coded. After grouping the answers of questions 19 (on the problems that the NOAs face) and 20 (on the support the NOAs expect from the IOA), the resulting data was coded as follows: (a) constant funding, (b) guidelines for clear strategic targeting, (c) human resources, (d) political support, and (e) communication.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Analysis of the NOA institutional environment
Analysis of the institutional environment of the NOAs, demonstrates the contribution of the two dominant organisations, the IOC and the IOA. The IOC acts as a moderating force that serves the Olympic ideals. It establishes the core values, standards, and the rules in which organizations, companies and units that are in the service of the Olympic Movement operate. The NOCs (206 worldwide) have been entrusted with educational duties in addition to their standard role in the preparation of athletes for continental and international competitions. 149 NOAs typically undertake educational obligations in collaboration with the corresponding 149 NOCs. From the above, it is clear that the NOAs are dominated by the IOC. Located in Greece, the IOA, is subject to a number of institutional commitments. The survey affirmed that the IOA is classified in the central government category due to its financial transaction with the Greek public sector. The President of the IOA (Serial No.2) points out that, besides this, the IOA has further commitments as a result

of its relationship with the IOC, which "…*are part of an overall framework that every organization affiliated with the IOC has, and are based upon the principals and values of the Olympic Movement and, by extension, the commitments of IOC itself to its sponsors*".

The NOAs are non-profit organizations that operate in a common environment. According to the Dean of the IOA (Serial No.3), NOAs *"were created from inside the IOA and the idea was to act as their arms in disseminating the principles and values of the Olympic Movement"* The survey has further demonstrated that they both adopt similar courses of action and appear to be homogeneous in many ways. As participants in the survey, Presidents of the NOAs characterized the IOA as the 'parent organization' that they tend to want to 'imitate'. This is especially the case on the issue of staffing: 52.5% of them have a Director, 40.4% a President, while only 3% have a Librarian, which is incongruous considering that 48.5% of the NOAs examined have a library. Moreover, the vast majority of the NOAs organize an annual session similar to the 'Session of the Young Participants' of the IOA. What happens in the NOAs falls under the first principal of institutional theory: isomorphism. Due to the fact that the NOAs emerged from the IOA, their work shares many similarities. By incorporating this into the theoretical framework of institutional theory, the result is that mimetic pressures are applied to the NOAs. Mimetic pressures arise from uncertainty and organizations often copy other successful organizations in an effort to gain legitimacy with their peers (Haunschild and Miner, 1997). Specifying the institutional environment of the NOAs, the dominant position is held by the corresponding NOCs, 90.9% of which are the main source of funding. The institutional environment is complemented with more actors that make up sources of funding for the NOAs, including sponsors (35.4%) and state governments (18.2%). Organizations with which the NOAs enter into partnerships, namely the ministries of education (65.7%), sport federations (72.7%), universities (63.6%), schools and other educational institutions (47.5%) are within the organizational fields that make up a recognized area of institutional life. Within each of the specific fields, the relationship with the NOAs is neither stable nor permanent but it depends on the social, economic, and political conditions of the country. Therefore, it is possible for them to be characterized as non-permanent/non-stable actors within the institutional environment of the NOAs. In each case, the limits of the organizational fields that are integrated in the institutional environment are determined by the ideology of Olympism, which forms their normative framework. Moreover, the organizational fields operate under different institutional logics. In the specific case, institutional logics related to organizational fields of the permanent or stable bodies of the institutional environment of the NOAs (IOC–NOC–IOA) are common to all NOAs, based upon the philosophy of Olympism and Olympic values, the principle driving force behind the Olympic Movement. Nevertheless, the same is not the case for institutional logics related to organizational fields of the non-permanent or non-stable bodies of the institutional environment of the NOAs. The different social, economic, political, cultural, and religious environments of the country in which an NOA operates has a direct impact on its work. As institutional logics identify diverse sources of interest and diverging bases of action, it is difficult to achieve homogeneity in the presence and actions of all the NOAs worldwide. In many cases, possibly because of the lack of coordination and a diverging base of institutional logics, the functioning of an NOA may be problematic or even impossible (See Tables 3 and 4). In the case of the non-functioning NOAs, the Dean of the IOA concluded: 'what we need in this is the support of the IOC; mainly its moral support' (Serial No.3). He explicitly referred to the need for a greater emphasis on education, something that had happened in the 1980s and 1990s when most of the NOAs were established. The Dean further concluded that the network of NOAs should be developed 'equally' to the NOCs.

The IOC contributes to NOAs work through funds allocated to the NOCs, and indirectly funds part of the annual IOA representatives' session in Olympia, it is clear that the NOAs form part of the IOC's training arm. The present situation places NOAs under the supervision and financial control of the NOCs. This situation

has been accepted by all, especially when there is a harmonious relationship between the two actors. The survey has highlighted the main problems that the NOAs face, including the lack of financial and human resources, political support, and the complete absence of a clear strategy. In addition, according to the literature, due to the non-technically focused institutional framework in which the NOAs operate, they are more influenced by the dominant institutions in the field, namely the NOCs and, more obviously, the IOC. In response to a question regarding the IOA leadership, (Serial No.2) responded that the '*IOC should be more sensitive to NOAs and strengthen them financially while controlling, through the IOA, their profitability*' (Serial No.2). The academics who participated in the survey (Serial No.12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19) argued that the IOC's policy should invest in education and strengthen the NOAs. In the case of the NOA representatives, some raised the issue of their lack of participation in the IOC. The IOC's contribution to addressing the issues, which, following the findings of this survey, have been confirmed to hamper or even impede the work of the NOAs, is crucial, and something that was emphasized by the interviewees.

Table 3. Current Status of the NOAs.

146 NOAs Current Situation		
Current Situation	**Number of NOAs**	**Percentage**
Active/Regular participation in the IOA session	100	68%
Non regular participation in the IOA session	31	21%
No participation in the IOA session	15	10%

Table 4. Current Status of the NOAs per continent.

Continent	Active/Regular Participation in the IOA Session	Non Regular Participation in the IOA Session	No Participation in the IOA Session
America	20	8	2
Asia	20	4	5
Africa	29	11	4
Europe	30	8	3
Oceania	1		1

The role of the IOA in the institutional environment of the NOAs

The Honorary Dean of the IOA in his speech at the Annual NOA Session in 2008 highlighted some of the most important elements that helped to explain and clarify the IOA's presence in the institutional environment of the NOAs (Georgiadis, 2008). According to his comments, the IOA contributes to the work of the NOAs in two ways. Firstly, it is the organization from which the NOAs were initially created. The establishment of the first NOA in 1968 and all those that followed emerged as the intention of those who had participated in an IOA session and conveyed that knowledge to their country of origin (Georgiadis, 2011). This likely contributes to the NOA's being structured and developed and also functioning in much the same way. In the open-ended question (No. 20) on the questionnaire, NOA Directors noted that, in addition to their expected assistance, the IOA provides inspiration and stability, and human resources, most notably in the form of young people trained by the IOA. The second way in which the IOA contributes, is the communication of their work to the IOC, thus forming the link between the NOAs and the IOC. At the Annual Session of the NOAs, representatives present their work to other NOAs, which serves as a means to inform the IOA and the NOAs community of their actions. It is necessary to emphasize here that the promotion of the work of the NOAs at this session is entirely optional; that is, the IOA does not require or impose on the academies the promotion of their work. As such, it does not evaluate the NOAs. Instead, the Annual Session serves as an opportunity to meet, exchange views, ideas, and reflections — something that was highlighted by the NOA managers

who participated in the interviews. As a result, the IOA is then able to inform the supreme actor, the IOC, regarding their institutional environment.

The expectations and needs of the NOAs

In the relevant open-ended question (No. 20), three issues where NOAs expect the support of the IOA were brought up. The first concerns their contribution to educational issues. Generally, the NOAs need and expect that the IOA should be able to provide experts who will create educational programs to enhance the capability of the NOAs, and also be able to provide the necessary pedagogical tools, up-to-date materials, and useful information on Olympic education. It was highlighted the need for permanent staffing of the NOAs with qualified personnel. A public forum for communication and knowledge sharing controlled by the IOA was also proposed. A president of an African NOA commented that the '*IOA has created NOAs but now should strengthen them*' (Serial No.14). The second issue to which NOA representatives awaiting the guidance of the IOA, regards the general rules for structure and strategic targeting, which the majority of NOAs have not yet clarified. In particular, the IOA is required to be '*a global strategic partner for the NOAs*' (Serial No.11,12). The IOA is required to provide '*a five-year strategic plan to guide the NOAs, so that their activities should be synchronized and be able to trigger the least productive NOAs*' (Serial No.13). NOA representatives stressed the need for their activities '*to be controlled on the basis of the IOA guidelines in order to assess the effectiveness of the project*' and provide '*key performance indicators*' (Serial No.9,11,12). It seems that, as support of the IOA is perceived, the guidance on issues of the strategy and mission of the NOAs, which should inspire. As the Honorary Dean of the IOA argued, '*the IOA's mission is to train the executives of the Olympic Movement*' (Serial No.3)*,* whereas the President of the IOA states that *'the loose institutional relationship that currently exists between them (the NOAs) and the IOA does not allow the latter to exercise the requisite control over their functioning and effectiveness'* (Serial No.2). The third concerns issues of a mainly economic nature. Every NOA that seeks financial assistance has to prepare a proposal which they forward to their respective NOC. The request is then transmitted to the IOC via an online platform. If Olympic Solidarity approves the project, the money is given to the NOC. NOCs then finance the project, but some NOA representatives claim that a '*certain amount of money is withheld by the NOC administration*' (Serial No.9,10,13). This issue was taken up by a Director from an African NOA in his/her interview, stating that '*some of this money goes to the NOC*' (Serial No.13). In addition, a Director from a European NOA argued that '*I personally know that the IOC gives money to the NOCs to support the work of the NOA, but when this money goes to the local NOCs, who knows what happens? I have heard this from many of my colleagues…*' (Serial No.14). Representatives of the NOAs consider it important that the IOA should establish control mechanisms, so that the money given to the NOCs is actually paid to the NOAs. The release of IOC financial capital and resources for NOA projects in order to provide them with all the necessary means to form their policy, was raised. A solution raised is that the NOAs are given special status and autonomous funding so that they have their own budget instead of the NOCs managing their money. On the issue of lack of experience by NOA officials when preparing a proposal, the Director of an Africa NOA commented that '*many NOAs are not using the funding*' (Serial No.13). A further obstacle concerns project planning: '*these two issues, to get structured, to learn how to prepare projects and implement projects* (Serial No.13). Another NOA spokesman commented, '*most NOAs lack the capacity to draw programs that can be accepted for funding. So training is important for NOA officials*' (Serial No. 12).

One of the key observations highlighted by the archival research is that, since 1994, when the IOC's committee for the IOA merged with the Olympic Education Committee, there has been a gradual decline of in-depth discussion on all issues arising in the IOA and on issues relating to existing and 'emerging' NOAs as IOA 'subsidiaries'. An IOC member (Serial No.1) explicitly stated that the '*IOA lost its superiority after its integration with the Culture and Olympic Education Committee. Bringing both committees together,*

everything got confused'. In the case of the integration with the Culture Committee in 2000, an academic who has been for many years a member of the Committee in which the IOA is included, reported that this was a '*terrible situation… a decision of the then IOC leadership*' (Serial No.15) which was, in his personal view, '*incorrect*'. An NOA spokesman reported that '*the IOA should have more representatives there. NOA members can be representatives of the IOA to the commission. More members at the IOC commission, more voices for the benefit of the IOA*' (Serial No.13). The same spokesman reported that, '*with the current situation we just got lost sometimes*'. The President of the IOA (Serial No. 2) stated that currently any discussion held in the IOC on the NOAs is '*of minor importance and significance*', while the Dean of the IOA (Serial No. 3) reported that "*in the past there was extensive reference to IOA issues*" and that "*the framework of cooperation on this issue should be re-discussed and redesigned*". More IOA representatives, in their answer to question 20 of the questionnaire, also expressed the view of additional representation in the Committee by representatives of the NOAs in order to strengthen the presence of the IOA.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE AMENDMENTS AND CHANGES

How can IOA respond to NOA's needs and expectations

Regarding the first objective it confirmed that the IOA is fundamental organization in the institutional environment of NOAs. One research outcome is the need to consider IOA's contribution to the support of the NOAs, mainly by notifying their work to the IOC and the decisions taken by the relevant IOC committee. The strengthening of the communication with NOA representatives is considered as fundamental and should not be limited to the organizational needs of the Annual Session of NOAs. A systematic approach of consulting the NOAs on issues that they face and the provision of clear guidelines for the establishment of a new NOA is required. Furthermore, there is no template for the establishment of a statute. It could be argued that this was a positive thing to happen, because the IOA gave autonomous action space to the NOAs. Nevertheless, the IOA's handling of the NOAs may indicate that it was unprepared to meet the wave demands for three consecutive decades (1980s–2000s). Conversely, the network of NOAs is so heterogeneous that actions that do meet the needs of all academies are not necessarily feasible. In addition, the IOA has limitations in both its own financial and human resources. The great achievement of the IOA, which has contributed to the establishment of 149 NOAs, should not be underestimated. It is necessary for the IOA within the current framework of its activities to treat the NOA industry differently. In above, NOAs established due to the IOA, they constitute the IOA's contribution to the Olympic Movement and thus require special treatment.

How can the IOC respond to NOA's needs and expectations

The other objective of this research was to investigate the contribution of the IOC, the dominant body in the institutional environment of the NOAs, and how the IOC imposes directly (through funding) or indirectly (through capacity building) their organizational structure, content, and behaviour.

As regards to the improvement or even the resolution of the issues that render the work of the NOAs difficult, the IOC is in a position to contribute through their institutionalization and legitimacy as the dominant institution. In the case of their functioning, what is perceived by NOA representatives as institutionalization is the clear support by the IOC, initially through the Olympic Charter, where the importance of their presence in the Olympic Movement is clearly stated. Once this institutionalization and legitimacy is achieved, it is likely that the shift from isomorphism and homogeneity presented by the NOAs will result in the development and progressive improvement of their work and services. As such, institutionalization and legitimacy will bring about the organizational and institutional change that falls under the fifth principal of institutional theory. The change will bring about rights and obligations that the NOAs will be called upon to face. The closest cooperation with the IOC requires, clarity of purpose and clear actions.

Practical implications, theory contribution and further research

The practical implications associated with the real-life practice of the NOAs according to this study require three actions. First is a strategic development plan for the NOAs, one that is going to reflect their long-term direction. A carefully-structured framework should contain: a) specific objectives for the work they are expected to produce, b) the rights and obligations towards the actors of their institutional environment (NOC, IOC, IOA), c) specifications on how to select future leaders and executive officers. Second is the creation of a separate section for the NOAs within the IOA. That would be an incentive for the work that the NOAs do under challenging and adverse conditions. Remaining updated on a daily basis would also contribute to the effective management of the NOAs, not only from the perspective of evaluation and criticism, but assisting them when necessary, and to promote and reward their work. Through the evaluation of the work of the NOAs, excellence can be rewarded based on criteria that takes into account their economic and social environment, which is highly diverse. A possible future evaluation of the work of the NOA needs a cautious and careful planning in order not to undermine NOAs autonomy. Third is the reconstitution of the IOC Committee for the IOA. A conspicuously slow and steady 'lessening' in the discussion of issues related to the work of the IOA within the committee since 1994 but accelerating after 2000. Before this situation deteriorates even further, one thing that would be essential for the IOA to request from the IOC is the reconstitution of a Committee. Such a claim could be based upon the following arguments: 1. The number of NOAs has increased by 15 times since the 1960s 2. The IOA's activity has now entered higher education, formally integrated into the academic environment 3. In the last ten years, the operation of the IOA in Ancient Olympia exceeds eight months per year (April through November) 4. The actions of the IOC for the promotion of the educational dimension of Olympism and the Olympic Games in recent years (e.g. OVEP and Agenda 2020) entails support with bold initiatives of the IOA.

The analysis of the institutional environment of the NOAs through the use of institutional theory, highlighted the problems faced by the NOAs, their weaknesses and deficiencies, and revealed the contribution of the dominant institutions. Institutional theory facilitated the researchers to clarify the ways in which the NOAs can achieve institutionalization and legalization and bring about effective organizational and institutional change. Moreover, it helped reach to the conclusion, that the 99 NOAs studied can overcome problems and impediments, which may be due to miscellaneous institutional logics, based on common vision of promoting the principals and values of Olympism.

Further research is required to monitor the three NOAs (out of a total of 149) that the survey showed to be no longer functional, and for 10% of NOAs (out of 146) that had no work to present and no participation in the annual IOA Session (See Tables 3 and 4). Another important concept to be investigated is that of the NOA industry in order the NOAs to maximize their contribution to the Olympic Movement. Finally, further research is needed on how to connect funding competencies and training issues to close the gap that NOAs face concerning the wider organization and management of non-profit organizations. To that end, the present functioning of the NOAs warrant further research and scrutiny.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Salepi Paraskevi is the main author of the manuscript. Prof. Georgiadis, Prof. Travlos and Prof. Kriemadis had a general advisory role at the finding of the proper theoretical framework, the methodology and the general structure of the manuscript.

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