An Olympic-sized challenge: The effect of organizational pathology on maintaining and repairing organizational legitimacy in sports governing bodies

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Abstract

Private organizations increasingly wield public authority, with substantial impact on the lives of individual persons. Such authority is often paired with enhanced public scrutiny and decreased trust in the relevant organization, leading to a loss of legitimacy. This paper uses sports governing bodies to contribute to the literature on governance by developing theory on the interaction between organizational legitimacy and pathological internal structures. It takes a nuanced view of legitimacy and extends a model of organizational pathology. While primarily conceptual, the paper uses the well documented cases of the International Olympic Committee and, to a lesser extent, Fifa to illustrate how organizational pathology can not only undermine an organization’s legitimacy but can also interfere with its ability to perceive a path to legitimacy repair, even when it recognizes the necessity of doing so. The paper concludes with recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research looking beyond sports governing bodies.

Keywords:

Governance; legitimacy; organizational pathology; International Olympic Committee; sports governing bodies; private authority

An Olympic-sized challenge: The effect of organizational pathology on maintaining and repairing organizational legitimacy in sports governing bodies

A corollary of the well-documented rise in power of private actors in contemporary societies is a corresponding fall in the power of governments (Albareda 2008; Moon et al. 2011): the public-private distinction is arguably becoming “blurred” as private organizations now affect public policy in various ways (Scherer et al. 2009, p.331). Consequently, private organizations are coming under increasing moral scrutiny (Van Prooijen and Ellemers 2015). Sports governing bodies (SGBs) like the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Football Federation (Fifa) or the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) (Flyvbjerg, Stewart and Budzier 2016), have an impact on citizens, particularly through their mega-events. They, too, face public scrutiny (e.g., Abend 2014; amaBhungane 2015; BBC 2016, 2017), though the focus on individual leaders by the media sometimes obscures the organizational perspectives on which we are focused here, and which provide the context for those sometimes corrupt leaders to flourish. As Rowe (2017, p.515) argues, although entertaining, the focus on individuals such as Joseph Blatter (of Fifa) covers up a failure to “to deal seriously with the institutional politics of sport”. This paper is determinedly organizational in perspective, and deals with the organizational challenges sporting organizations face in maintaining and (particularly) repairing legitimacy.

The paper has two theoretical foundations. First, it introduces and expands Barnett and Finnemore’s (1999) model of organizational pathology to build a picture of the ongoing challenges that some international sport organizations are facing. Our second theoretical foundation is Suchman’s (1995) seminal model of organizational legitimacy1, which is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p.574). Here we take a deeper perspective than is commonly adopted, incorporating the essential and temporal dimensions of Suchman’s model. An important political aspect of international SGBs is their position as a private authority, defined as the ability of private actors to “make rules or set standards that others in world politics adopt,” and in which the “the rule maker is recognized as legitimate” (Green 2014, pp.4, 7)2. It is with this as a backdrop that we present the concepts of organizational pathology and legitimacy, and assert that successful governance of international sport requires organizational reform that accounts for organization-internal dynamics. We argue that the organizational pathology model explains why the effectiveness of some SGBs’ attempts at reform has been limited.

This paper focuses on SGBs, but suggests that the general mechanisms and challenges identified may inform other actors wielding private authority, which are a growing group of organizations, in both developing country contexts (e.g., Muthuri 2007) and in the West (e.g., Palazzo and Scherer 2008; Scherer and Palazzo 2011). As we show, SGBs’ dual nature – prosocial yet commercial – leads to interesting organization-internal tensions. We illustrate our conceptualization by drawing on SGBs in general, and the IOC and the London 2012 Olympic Games (London2012) in particular. We choose this particular instance of the Olympic Games because of the quality and quantity of data which remains available on it, and the opportunity to review it in recent historical context.

The paper proceeds as follows. It begins by introducing SGBs as an interesting category, and our approach to using the IOC and Fifa as illustrative cases. It then offers an overview of our conceptual framework: first introducing and extending Barnett and Finnemore’s (1999) organizational pathology model, then discussing an unusually nuanced view of Suchman’s (1995) legitimacy theory. Thereafter, the paper provides a sketch of SGBs and the legitimacy challenges they face, with particular emphasis on attempts at legitimacy repair. The paper concludes with reflections on limitations, consequences for practitioners, and with suggestions for the direction of future research.

International sports governing bodies

An international sports governing body (ISGB) is an organization with global membership that oversees a sport (e.g. Fifa) or an event (e.g. the IOC). ISGBs are the supreme, global, organs of governance in sport (Forster 2006). Their responsibilities include setting the sporting and organizational rules for the sport or event. They tend to be treated as having special status by politicians and national governments (Geeraert, Alm and Groll 2014), and are at the apex of a pyramidal, vertical chain of command running from the local, to national to regional level, ending with the supreme governing body. The IOC is a good example. As a consequence of its position as a powerful and wealthy (IOC 2014a) private authority, it has enjoyed quasi-state-like treatment (e.g., United Nations 2014). Within a year of becoming IOC president, Thomas Bach had met with 95 heads of state or government (IOC 2014b, p.8). Many ISGBs are located in Switzerland, where there is also a quasi-unregulated legal system (Geeraert, Mrkonjic and Chappelet 2014). Roles and responsibilities vary, but they are broadly split into areas relating to the sport itself, and to the governing organization and its structures and processes. Table 1 provides a summary. Some ISGBs will encompass all of these aspects; others a selection.

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| **Orientation**  | **Roles and Responsibilities** |
| Sport focus | Create and maintain the laws and rules of a sport and its competitions |
| Develop a sport at all levels, globally |
| Develop and govern the athletes within a sport (includes athlete welfare) |
| Arbitrate and/or resolve disputes within a sport |
| Hold global events (e.g. world championships) within the sport |
| Promote the reputation, image and popularity of the sport |
| Develop new sporting products |
| Organisational governance focus | Foster cooperation and collaboration among member units within a sport, especially affiliated national governing bodies |
| Maintain relationships with governments, regulatory authorities and sporting bodies outside the sport |
| Steward trust, democratic processes and leadership in the sport  |
| Generate and share resources (e.g. maintain relationships with sponsors); enhance member capacity to generate funds |

**Table 1. Roles and responsibilities of international sports governing bodies. Adapted from Forster (2006) and Chelladurai (2015)**

SGBs have their own timetables: many hold peripatetic main competition events either biennially (e.g. the World Athletics Championships and the World Aquatic Championships) or quadrennially (e.g. the Olympic Games and the Fifa World Cup), though some SGBs have a more frequent timetable, which may be geographically stable (e.g., the annual tennis circuit). Some SGBs regulate individual sports (e.g. football, tennis), and others govern multiple disciplines (e.g. athletics). Whilst the latter have grown to be truly global, bodies governing individual sports have variable reach, in line with the popularity of the sports they govern. Thus, Fifa enjoys global recognition, whereas World Rugby and the International Cricket Council have lower global profiles (Economist 2011). The overwhelming majority of international SGBs originated in Europe, as Table 2 illustrates.

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| Federation | Founded | Headquarters | Notes |
| International Olympic Committee | 1894 | Lausanne (originally Paris) | Current president: Thomas Bach |
| International Football Federation | 1904 | Lausanne (originally Paris) | Current president: Gianni Infantino |
| International Association of Athletics Federations  | 1912 | Monaco (originally based in the office of the secretary general) | Current president: Sebastian Coe |
| International Tennis Federation | 1913 | London (originally Paris) | Originally the International Lawn Tennis Federation with 15 members, all but two (Australasia and South Africa) being European. Current president: David Haggerty |
| International Cricket Council | 1909 | Dubai (London until 2005) | Originally the Imperial Cricket Conference. Remit has expanded over time. Current chairman: Shashank Manohar |
| World Rugby | 1886 | Dublin | Until 2014, The International Rugby Board. Current chairman: Bill Beaumont |
| World Swimming Federation | 1908 | Lausanne (originally London) | Initial membership: 8 European country federations. Current president: Julio Maglione |
| World Cycling Federation | 1900 | Aigle, outside Lausanne (originally Paris) | Current president: David Lappartient |

**Table 2: Illustrative sample of international sports governing bodies. Sources:** [**https://www.worldrugby.org/spirit-of-rugby**](https://www.worldrugby.org/spirit-of-rugby)**;** [**http://www.itftennis.com/about/organisation/history.aspx**](http://www.itftennis.com/about/organisation/history.aspx)**;** [**https://www.icc-cricket.com/about/the-icc/history-of-icc/1909-1963**](https://www.icc-cricket.com/about/the-icc/history-of-icc/1909-1963)**;** [**http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/cricket/4326601.stm**](http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/cricket/4326601.stm)**;** [**https://www.icc-cricket.com/about/the-icc/history-of-icc/icc-office-bearers**](https://www.icc-cricket.com/about/the-icc/history-of-icc/icc-office-bearers)**;** [**http://www.fina.org/content/fina-aquatics-bit-history**](http://www.fina.org/content/fina-aquatics-bit-history)**;** [**http://www.uci.ch/inside-uci/about/**](http://www.uci.ch/inside-uci/about/)**;** [**http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/history/index.html**](http://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/who-we-are/history/index.html)**;** [**https://www.iaaf.org/about-iaaf/history**](https://www.iaaf.org/about-iaaf/history) **(all accessed 8 October 2018).**

Three common features are relevant in the context of this paper. First, we note that the SGBs retain their original Eurocentric focus, as the location of their headquarters indicates. Their governing bodies were founded in liberalism (Geeraert, Alm and Groll 2014), largely in the age of Empire-building, and they frequently stress their independence from all external influence (see Annex for the example of the IOC). On a more individual level, SGBs are typically run by men, the overwhelming majority of whom are European or North American (see Table 2). The extent to which national differences affect leadership, decision-making and organizational culture is not clear. The effects of such individual characteristics are of great interest, though they are beyond the scope of this paper.

Second, we observe that SGBs have undergone substantial transformation, particularly over the past generation: they have moved from being amateur organizations with a non-instrumental, prosocial teleology, to a more professional status, combining prosocial interests with more instrumental commercial aims. For example, MacAloon (2011) analyses ongoing tensions within the IOC between the Olympic Movement (prosocial) and the Olympic sports industry (commercial), a divide that emerged as a consequence of the IOC’s greater emphasis on revenue since the 1980s.

Third, international SGBs are by their nature, umbrella (or pinnacle) organizations. That is, they are not national associations and do not typically engage with individuals. As such, we argue that they are prone to be somewhat insulated from the societies in which their events occur. Note that, in this respect, international SGBs are even more similar to the international organizations upon which Barnett and Finnemore’s (1999) model of organizational pathology is based than a standard corporation would be. SGBs are therefore an excellent (because extreme) exemplar of the theory as it could be applied to private organizations.

Our focus is on ‘pure’ SGBs; that is, SGBs with a prosocial *raison d’être*, and which concentrate exclusively on sport. Some SGBs are thus excluded from consideration. An example is Amaury Sport Organisation (http://www.aso.fr), a private company that owns and runs 80 annual sports competitions, including the Tour de France and the Paris-Dakar Rally.

In this paper, we draw most of our examples from the IOC and Fifa, because they are so dominant: the Olympic Games is *the* iconic multi-sports event and Fifa the world’s premier single sport. This can be illustrated by global audience: about 3.6 billion people watched the 2012 Olympics (IOC nd), and 3.2 billion people watched the 2014 football World Cup (Fifa 2015a). By comparison, the 2015 Rugby World Cup final match attracted a relatively modest audience of 120 million (World Rugby 2015). In seeking news reporting on SGBs as data for illustration, we chose a representative sample from a wide range of media outlets: from tabloids (e.g. Daily Mail and its Mail Online presence) and broadsheet newspapers (e.g. The Guardian, Financial Times) to weekly magazines (e.g. The Economist), and from public broadcasters (e.g. BBC) to newswires (e.g. Reuters). This ensured that we had access to a range of information and views, on both factual reporting and public opinion.

Organizational pathology and legitimacy

A private organization exercises private political authority by exerting “legitimate authority in the international system and effect[ing] political outcomes directly” (Kobrin 2009 p.354; see also Hall and Biersteker 2002). SGBs like the IOC, Fifa and World Rugby are good examples: they own the rights to the sporting mega-events associated with them, and countries have historically competed to host these events. The host city contract regulates all relevant aspects of such events (see Table 5 below). For detailed analyses of Olympic Games and the challenges in holding them, see work on costs (Flyvbjerg et al. 2016), risk (Jennings 2013) and various aspects of sustainability (CSLondon 2013; Davies and Mackenzie 2014; Van Rheenen 2014). As international organizations, SGBs’ challenges and weaknesses can be understood via the lens of organizational pathology.

Organizational pathology

Focusing on the power and legitimacy of international organizations and the characteristics of bureaucracy, Barnett and Finnemore (1999, p.699), “develop a constructivist approach rooted in sociological institutionalism to explain both the power of [International Organizations] and their propensity for dysfunctional, even pathological, behavior.” We are drawn to their critical approach, because of its explanatory power for private organizations that engage in the public sphere, particularly those with diverse membership. The core of Barnett and Finnemore’s argument (1999, p.719) is that, “the very nature of bureaucracy – the ‘social stuff’ of which it is made – creates behavioral predispositions that make bureaucracy prone to” organizational pathology. Organizational pathology means examining the deficiencies, malfunctions and internal contradictions within an organization which hinder effective functioning, promoting self-defeating behaviors that undermine its ability to achieve the goals for which it was established. Put simply, organizational pathology makes an organization ‘blind to its faults’.

Barnett and Finnemore (1999, pp.720–725) identify five mechanisms by which organizational pathologies emerge, categorizing them into two groups. *Irrationality of rationalization, universalism,* and *normalization of deviance* make up the first group. These are expected to be present in any bureaucracy to at least a limited extent, as they “all flow from defining features of bureaucracy itself,” the “connection between these mechanisms and pathological behavior [being] probabilistic, not deterministic” (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, p.719). We therefore tighten their model, categorizing these as *constant mechanisms*. As an example, universalism involves imposing universal rules and perspectives, and ignoring contextual factors around place and time, due to the assumption of universal applicability. Barnett and Finnemore provide the example of the International Monetary Fund’s response to the Asian financial crises of the 1990s. In terms of SGBs, we could point to the IOC’s approach to the host city contract before it engaged in reform; what one IOC member has called a “made in Switzerland” approach (see MacAloon 2016, p.775).

For Barnett and Finnemore, the degree to which the constant mechanisms are present in a given organization is partly determined by “specific empirical conditions” (idem). These include *vague* mission (“few clear criteria for success or failure”, p.704), *weak* environmental feedback (successful performance is hard to measure and competitive environment is absent, p.723), and *strong* professionalism (shapes normative orientation and worldview, as well as technical knowledge, p.722). All three exacerbate the constant mechanisms, so we categorize them as *empirical modifiers*.

Barnett and Finnemore argue that under the right conditions, these empirical modifiers can also create two further mechanisms, which make up their second group of pathologies: *organizational insulation* and *cultural contestation*. We characterize these as *resultant mechanisms*, as they depend on specific conditions in order to manifest. We expand their model by positing a third resultant mechanism: *organizational narcissism*. In common parlance, a narcissist is an individual with unhealthy self-absorption (Roberts 2001 uses the term to illustrate corporate governance issues). Clinically, narcissism is pathological when an individual’s healthy self-esteem becomes “a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (American Psychiatric Association 2000, p.717). It is part of a suite of personality disorders, which are “enduring pattern[s] of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual’s culture, is pervasive and inflexible, …and leads to distress or impairment” (American Psychiatric Association 2000, p.685, also, p.686). A key feature of narcissism is that treatment is difficult, long-term, and indeed impossible without the affected individual recognizing that there is a problem and being willing to work on change. The model as a whole is outlined in Table 3.

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|  | **Features of International Organizations** | **Description** |
| Constant mechanismsExacerbated by empirical modifiers(*vague* mission, *weak* environmental feedback, and *strong* professionalism) | Irrationality of rationalization | The extension of rules and procedures to such an extent that they become an end in themselves |
| Universalism | The flattening of local diversity due to the desire to generate universal rules and categories |
| Normalization of deviance | The routinization of deviance from rules (i.e., unintentional precedent-setting) |
| Resultant mechanismsCreated by empirical modifiers (*vague* mission, *weak* environmental feedback, and *strong* professionalism) | Organizational insulation | The development of an internal culture and world view which is protected from external performance feedback |
| Cultural contestation | Development of contrasting cultures in different factions of the organization |
| Organizational narcissism | Exaggerated organizational regard and lack of stakeholder understanding: members perceive organization as inherently virtuous and thus nearly incapable of doing wrong |

Table 3. Mechanisms of Private Authority Pathologies. Based on Barnett and Finnemore (1999: pp. 720–725), modified and developed by the authors

We posit that *organizational narcissism* is a distinct phenomenon in which vague mission and weak environmental feedback lead to a culture emerging in which the organization becomes pathologically self-obsessed, self-satisfied and self-referential. This goes beyond the *organizational insulation* resultant mechanism that Barnett and Finnemore (1999) identify. We argue that organizational narcissism is a particular risk for organizations with a prosocial mission as, we suggest, such organizations may more readily identify themselves as virtuous by definition, and their activities thus as inherently acceptable. Such self-referential narratives, we posit, make the organization institutionally incapable of fully grasping the views of external stakeholders, even when it acknowledges a need to do so. As we discuss later, the IOC shows this in its Agenda 2020, where its legitimacy repair strategy is fatally limited. We see our paper as making a contribution by embedding organizational narcissism in Barnett and Finnemore’s (1999) model of pathology, rather than treating it as a standalone phenomenon. By doing so, we place it within the wider context of dysfunctional internationally-active organizations.

Extant literature on organizational narcissism typically draws on Brown’s (1997) seminal contribution. Examples include work by Crevani and Hallin (2017), Duchon and Drake (2009), Iivonen and Moisander (2015) and Stein (2003). Such literature is not directly relevant to *our* use of organizational narcissism, in two key ways. First is the direction of causality. For example, Iivonen and Moisander (2015, p.651) summarize the literature on organizational narcissism as follows: “When facing an otherwise intolerable conflict, anxiety, or situation that threatens their legitimacy, organizations, motivated to protect their collective sense of identity, and legitimacy, may resort to a number of narcissistic ego-defense mechanisms.” That is, the literature posits narcissism as an organizational defense-mechanism against the loss of legitimacy. By contrast, we see organizational narcissism as part of a wider spectrum of pathology that *causes* legitimacy loss, in line with Barnett and Finnemore’s (1999) view of pathology (and see Tables 3 and 6). The second key difference relates to the definition of narcissism. Iivonen and Moisander (2015, p.651) summarize the extant literature’s view that, “all organizations can be argued to be narcissistic” and (p.652) that there is ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ narcissism. By contrast, following the American Psychiatric Association (2000), we see ‘healthy narcissism’ as a non-sequitur, considering it to more properly be thought of as healthy self-regard. In our view, organizational narcissism is always pathological.

Whilst we present our conceptualization of organizational narcissism as a *theoretical* innovation, there is also some evidence for it, suggesting a potentially fruitful avenue for empirical testing and further inquiry. In the case of the IOC, an analysis of the organization’s approach to ‘peace through sport’ indicates that the IOC sees itself as having a “vital role in inspiring” peace, as part of “building a better world through sport” (IOC 2014d). Commercial restrictions associated with SGB events have prompted critical reporting in the West (e.g. Greenhill 2012, on London2012) and street protests in developing world host countries, whether in Brazil (BBC 2013) or South Africa (Lopez Gonzales 2010). The narrow interpretation of rules designed to protect sponsors’ interests can be seen as a good example of a lack of empathy, a key aspect of narcissism. Similarly, the 2015 Fifa corruption scandal was widely reported. “At last, a challenge to the impunity of FIFA,” said one newspaper(Economist 2015, p.13; see also amaBhungane 2015; Ronay 2015, p.4). This led to Fifa introducing reforms, such as term-of-office limits and slightly broader stakeholder representation (Fifa 2015b). Yet, two years later, Fifa replaced key members of its ethics committee, prompting claims that this meant the “de facto end to the reform efforts” (Economist 2017a); to which Gianni Infantino (the head of Fifa) responded that the criticism was a “storm in a teacup” (ibid.).

Earlier, we mentioned universalism in the IOC as an example of a constant mechanism. We can also consider *cultural contestation* within the IOC as an example of a resultant mechanism. The IOC has endured internal tension for numerous years, between idealistic proponents of the Olympic Movement and more commercially-minded representatives of the Olympic sports industry (see MacAloon 2008 for thorough analysis). The tension has led to the presence of the *vague mission* empirical modifier; the lack of clarity on the IOC’s mission resulting in *cultural contestation*. Similarly, the empirical modifier of *strong professionalism* can lead to cultural contestation, with different professional roles and backgrounds of organization members leading to contests within the organization.

Organizational pathology presents the affected organization with numerous challenges, most notably in undermining legitimacy (Barnett and Finnemore 1999). Without legitimacy an organization “will meet with resistance, either active or passive, at every turn. Cooperation will be induced only through material quid pro quo, payoffs. Trust will be thin to non-existent” (Finnemore 2009, p.62). In the case of some SGBs, all three resultant mechanisms can be observed (see below). For SGBs dependent on cities to host iterations of their sporting events, such a reliance on ‘quid pro quo’ provides fertile ground for corruption and perceived corruption.

Legitimacy

Suchman’s (1995) well-known model of legitimacy distinguishes between three primary *bases for legitimacy*: pragmatic (self-interest) cognitive (comprehensibility) and moral (normative approval). The literature building on Suchman’s work has tended to focus on these three primary legitimacy types. Here, we also use a less well-cited and more nuanced aspect of his model: two cross-cutting dimensions of *legitimation dynamics* (Suchman 1995, p.584, see Figure 1). The first of these dimensions is about the *focus* of legitimation, distinguishing between action and essence (operating desirably vs. being intrinsically desirable). For example, SGBs can be intrinsically legitimate, but their specific actions be criticized on a case-by-case basis. The second cross-cutting dimension is *temporal*, distinguishing between episodic and continual dynamics. In this case, one can distinguish between the organization (e.g., Fifa) and the events that take place under its aegis (e.g. World Cup). Suchman’s framework can be used to investigate the kinds of legitimacy over which SGBs have some claim: we do so here mainly with reference to the IOC.

The continued staging of the Olympic Games suggests that sufficient countries have aspired to host the Olympics and that the IOC therefore enjoys sufficient legitimacy to continue to operate. The same holds for other SGBs and their events. International SGBs operate on a global stage, yet rely on local acceptability, meaning they have both global and local audiences with differing expectations. SGB legitimacy can therefore be understood in several ways, in line with Suchman’s model. To use the example of the IOC, the organization enjoys ongoing legitimacy across all three bases (see Table 4). Yet, closer examination of legitimation dynamics reveals a more nuanced picture, in which its legitimacy is also in doubt. In recent years, the IOC’s legitimacy deficit has become acute; consider the impact on willingness to host an event where local acceptability is missing, such as in the cases of Hamburg, Oslo or Munich (Reuters 2013, 2014; BBC 2015). Taken together, the legitimacy lens allows a good idea of where the IOC’s problems are located and the nature of the challenges it faces; the organizational pathology lens provides a useful means of understanding the genesis (and maintenance) of those problems, and a first insight into the kinds of changes needed to counteract them. Although the IOC is the most complete, and thus clearest, example, we suggest that other SGBs are in a similar position (e.g. Fifa). Table 4 illustrates the manner in which the IOC enjoys legitimacy in terms of Suchman’s model.

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|  | **Legitimation dynamics** |
| Focus action (operations) / essence (intrinsic desirability) | Temporal episodic (transitory) / continual (long-lasting) |
| **Bases for legitimacy** | Cognitive | The nature of the IOC, its legal ownership of the Olympic Games, and associated rights and intellectual property: these map to comprehensibility (episodic aspects) and taken-for-grantedness (continual aspects). |
| Pragmatic | Phenomenon of IOC support for sports (e.g., the IOC giving away at least 90% of its revenues), maps to (e.g.) the exchange aspect of legitimacy (focus on actions intersecting with the episodic dynamic). |
| Moral | The nature of the IOC as a not-for-profit organization promoting the Olympic ideals: this is a structural aspect of legitimacy, mapping to the intersection between focus on essence and the continual temporal dynamic.The IOC’s engagement in promoting the Olympic ideals: this is a procedural aspect of legitimacy, mapping to the intersection between a focus on actions and the continual temporal dynamic.The manner in which the IOC selects the host cities and manages the bidding and preparation process: this is a consequential aspect of legitimacy, mapping to the intersection between focus on actions and the episodic temporal dynamic. |

**Table 4: Illustration – Suchman’s legitimacy model as applied to the IOC. Sources: Barnett and Finnemore (1999), IOC (2014c), and Suchman (1995)**

This paper’s main contribution is to develop a conceptual framework that marries a modified and expanded version of Barnett and Finnemore’s model of organizational pathology with Suchman’s legitimacy model. The framework suggests that greater organizational pathology can undermine the basis for an organization’s legitimacy, even weakening or potentially removing it. More importantly, it indicates that an organization recognizing the need to engage in legitimacy repair is likely to be stymied in doing so if it is unable to recognize, understand and thus address the root causes of its organizational pathology.

To return to the IOC example: the organization enjoys legitimacy in a number of ways, as illustrated in Table 4. It owns the rights and intellectual property associated with the Olympic Games, and has legitimacy *qua legis*. This maps to cognitive legitimacy in Suchman’s typology, with a focus on the essence of the organization. The IOC is associated with the episodic Games, and gives away 90% of its revenues – more if one includes the continuous work of the Olympic Foundation (IOC 2014a). This suggests that the IOC enjoys pragmatic legitimacy. Moreover, the IOC has historically enjoyed moral legitimacy in a number of ways associated with its promotion of the Olympic Games and the prosocial Olympic ideals. Structurally and procedurally, this is arguably still the case, but from a *consequential* perspective the IOC’s moral legitimacy is subject to challenge. Altogether, the IOC and other SGBs should be in an enviable position, enjoying strong legitimacy, insulated from criticism on specific actions. As Finnemore (2009, p.83) notes, if an actor “has great legitimacy and others believe deeply in the value claims that legitimate its power, they may simply overlook or excuse a certain amount of hypocrisy, even of a venal kind.”

However, the IOC suffered a legitimacy crisis in 2013/2014 that led it to enact changes that it perceived as substantial, and which were designed to repair its legitimacy (IOC 2013). We speculate that the IOC’s loss of legitimacy is related to the rising importance of moral legitimacy. Palazzo and Scherer (2006, p.78) argue that moral legitimacy “has become the core source of societal acceptance,” with cognitive legitimacy “eroding,” and pragmatic legitimacy “provok[ing] growing resistance.” With their inherently prosocial *raison d’être* SGBs should enjoy strong moral legitimacy. Yet organizations such as Fifa and the IOC have been facing significant challenges to their legitimacy, having had to engage in legitimacy-repairing reforms, as we go on to show.

It is beyond the scope of the paper to give detailed analyses of the IOC’s structures, its current troubles, or of the challenges it faces in implementing its Agenda 2020 reforms: the IOC’s own website (www.olympic.org) and analyses by MacAloon (2008; 2011; 2016) provide a primer. For now, it is sufficient to make two observations, which we unpack later. First, the IOC now faces numerous challenges to its *essential* legitimacy, casting doubt onto the cognitive and particularly moral legitimacy of the IOC and by extension over the Olympics as an episodic phenomenon. These are related to the size and cost of hosting the Games, to the process of awarding the Games, to the structure and governance of the IOC, and to specific terms of the contract governing the relationship between the IOC and a host. Second, challenges to the IOC’s legitimacy is increasingly manifesting itself in observable consequences. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the IOC’s difficulty in finding host cities to bid to host iterations of the Games, most recently the Winter 2022 and Summer 2024 Games (e.g., BBC 2016; BBC 2015; Economist 2017b; Reuters 2014).

By remaining a closed organization, the IOC has paradoxically insulated itself against criticism – now, however, the greater demands for openness cannot be ignored, particularly as they are accompanied by skepticism based on suspicion of malpractice (e.g. Economist 2017b). By comparison, whilst World Rugby’s Council3 is also *that* organization’s supreme, independent authority (bye-law 2), the institution is more inclusive than the IOC, representing national unions and associations (bye-law 6) rather than individuals in their own right, and including representatives from all member associations (bye-law 9). Much of the criticism of the IOC has been around its episodic actions (i.e., the manner in which the Games have been run). The IOC has clearly recognized that persistent decline in legitimacy is a threat. The Agenda 2020 reforms (2014b; IOC 2013; see next section) were designed to repair legitimacy and protect the future of the Games. Yet the criticism continues (e.g. Economist 2017b) and many potential host cities remain reluctant to bid to host the Games. When the hosts of the 2024 and 2028 Games were announced in September 2017, it had been clear for some time that Paris and Los Angeles were the only two candidates (BBC, 2017). The award process was therefore not competitive in any meaningful sense. Future work could usefully compare the terms of the contracts governing these Games with those awarded more competitively. For some additional detail on the consequential factors undermining the IOC’s legitimacy, consider the formal arrangements for London2012.

The Host City contract for London2012 was signed in 2005 between the IOC, the City of London, and the UK’s National Olympic Committee (IOC et al. 2005). It has 12 chapters and 78 sections, and governed every aspect of the 2012 Games. Table 5 shows the IOC’s exercise of power in London2012 by setting out some of the main points of the contract4. This is arguably a good illustration of actions that have contributed to undermining the IOC’s moral legitimacy, from a consequential perspective. The consequences are felt by governments and local populations and is a good explanation for the IOC’s loss of legitimacy despite continued legitimacy in other areas.

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| **Area in which IOC exercised power** | **London2012 illustration** |
| Sovereignty | Taxes and charges: Olympics-related revenue was to be tax-free for the IOC and for other actors such as competitors, commercial partners and broadcast rights holders.Immigration and local services: Holders of IOC-issued accreditation could work in the UK on Olympic business; were exempt from labor rule restrictions; and enjoyed free public transport and medical attention.Currency: The IOC was to receive a 3% share of “the face value of coins and banknotes from the circulating programme.”  |
| Intellectual property | The IOC exclusively owns every possible aspect of the Games, including London-specific permutations. This includes all relevant IP and copyright on symbols, emblems, mascots, posters and medical-related data.  |
| Commercial arrangements and marketing/media rights | Free-market suspension: Sponsors enjoyed a temporary and geographically-limited monopoly in their specific business areas for the duration of the Games.Ambush marketing: The host had to “take all necessary steps … to prevent and/or terminate any ambush marketing or any unauthorized use of Olympic properties.” |
| Payments | The IOC committed to making a number of payments, at the IOC’s sole discretion. Any revenue from profit-sharing was to be hypothecated, “for the general benefit of sport in the Host Country”. |
| Other aspects | Disputes: Depending on its specific nature, a dispute between the host and any part of the “Olympic family” was to be settled by the IOC, the Court of Arbitration for Sport, or the regular courts in Lausanne.Olympic ideals: The Olympic goals are mentioned in the preamble and reappear later, in a requirement that the host organize a program of cultural events. |

**Table 5: Summary of the areas in which the IOC exercised power in the London 2012 Olympic Games (source: IOC, City of London and UK NOC 2005)**

The cost of hosting a mega-event such as the Olympics is clearly a contributing factor in a post-crisis environment (see Flyvbjerg et al. 2016; Jennings 2012; 2013; also Toohey, 2008). However, we consider it unlikely that it is causative: countries of varying wealth have shown that they are capable of committing to high expenditure where sufficient political will exists (e.g. the 2010 Fifa World Cup in South Africa, or London2012). A lack of public support is more significant. This, we argue, is a reaction to the IOC’s lack of governance and accountability, which has undermined its legitimacy. We illustrate our theoretical contribution by arguing that the IOC’s troubles are rooted in its institutional structures, and draw on three kinds of data: IOC documents (e.g., IOC 2013; IOC 2014b); the London2012 host city contract (IOC et al. 2005); and media reports about both London2012 and reduced political will to host subsequent iterations of the Games (e.g., Abend 2014; Die Welt 2014; BBC 2013; BBC 2015; BBC 2017; Greenhill 2012; Bondy 2014). Diminished legitimacy discourages cities from bidding to host the Games, and negatively affects sponsors’ willingness to pay. That undermines the IOC’s model: it lost a major, long-term sponsor in 2017 (Ahmed 2017). Similarly, Fifa lost five sponsors over its governance crisis (Rumsby 2015), and had difficulty in attracting sponsors for its 2018 World Cup (Economist 2017a).

Consistent with a wider loss of legitimacy, there is now some evidence of *governmental* withdrawal of support in response to public skepticism. For instance the city of Hamburg considered a bid to host the 2024 Summer Olympics, but was concerned about the IOC’s governance structure (Die Welt 2014), and in late 2015 decided via referendum to withdraw its candidacy (BBC 2015). This was similar to the experience of Munich: whereas the city had had sufficient support in 2011 to bid to host the 2018 Winter Games (DW 2010), in 2013 popular opposition thwarted Munich’s planned bid for the 2022 Winter Games (DW 2013; Reuters 2013). Campaigners said that their protest was “against the non-transparency and the greed for profit of the IOC” (DW, 2013). In October 2014, Oslo then became the fourth city to withdraw its bid for the 2022 Winter Games (Reuters 2014), leaving only Beijing (China) and Almaty (Kazakhstan) as candidates. These developments prompted *Time* to publish an article suggesting that the IOC needs to reform itself if hosting an Olympic Games is to remain attractive (Abend 2014); an argument subsequently echoed by *The Economist* (2017b). MacAloon (2016) provides a useful examination of the IOC’s bidding crisis. The IOC’s authority and legitimacy appear to be under threat in the Western world on multiple fronts; a view supported by the media reports. We can explain the changes in development over time with reference to the theories we introduced at the start of our paper. In particular, we now go on to show in Table 6 how changes and transformations in the nature of legitimacy can occur, through the mechanisms of organizational pathology. It suggests that legitimacy repair needs to focus on addressing the specific aspect of legitimacy that has been damaged – in this specific case, that means addressing consequential aspects and moving beyond symbolic actions. The Table uses London2012 as an example, because it is the last Games to have been conducted before the IOC enacted its reforms. Thereafter, we move to discussion of the IOC’s attempts at legitimacy repair.

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| **Pathological mechanisms of International Organizations** | **Description** | **Empirical modifiers …** (vague mission, weak environmental feedback, strong professionalism) | **Manifestation**(in London2012) | **Consequences**(in the London 2012 Games) |
| Constant mechanisms | Irrationality of rationalization | The extension of rules and procedures to such an extent that they become an end in themselves | … Exacerbate this mechanism | Unnecessarily vigorous IP protection; Olympic Games in themselves – gigantism (excessive growth) | Social criticism and ridicule; reduced pragmatic and (especially) moral legitimacy |
| Universalism | The flattening of local diversity due to the desire to generate universal rules and categories | … Exacerbate this mechanism | Host City Contract; although contracts are not public documents, the wording of the London contract suggests universal wording | Contract not public knowledge; reactions from Rio suggest public disquiet |
| Normalization of deviance | The routinization of deviance from rules | … Create this mechanism | Potential for corruption; focus on revenue | Loss of moral and cognitive legitimacy |
| Resultant mechanisms | Organizational insulation | The development of an internal culture and world view which is protected from external performance feedback | … Create this mechanism | Membership: IOC members accountable only to the IOC | IOC does not adequately respond to criticism, loss of legitimacy |
| Cultural contestation | Development of contrasting cultures in different factions of the organization | … Create this mechanism | IP management and broadcasting rights vs. promoting Olympism | Social criticism, loss particularly of moral legitimacy |
| Organizational narcissism | Unqualified organizational self-regard and lack of stakeholder understanding: members perception of organization as inherently virtuous | …Create this mechanism | Dictation of terms of contract; self-congratulatory rhetoric (as per MacAloon) | Loss of legitimacy; public anger |

**Table 6. Interactions between organizational pathology and legitimacy, using the example of London2012**

Attempts at legitimacy repair

In response to the threat to its ongoing success, the IOC has engaged in a public and well-documented attempt at legitimacy repair, in the form of a change of leadership and its Agenda 2020. Suchman (1995, pp.597-600) discusses three broad prescriptions for legitimacy repair: two strategies (offer normalizing accounts, and restructure), and a piece of advice (don’t panic). Both strategies can be broken down into constituent parts. Normalizing accounts include: denial of pragmatic concerns; excusing behavior by “questioning the organization’s moral responsibility” (p.598); retrospective justification of actions; and explaining actions or events so as to preserve the organization’s legitimacy. The IOC appears to have recognized the severity of its legitimacy crisis, and thus moved straight to the second strategy: restructuring. This involves making changes to the organization, and has two aspects: creating monitors and watchdogs (symbolically “‘post[ing] a bond’ against future recidivism”, p.598); and disassociation, which involves distancing the organization from “bad influences” (p.598), most often in the form of individual leaders, but also procedures, structures or even places. Suchman’s Table 1 (p.600) details legitimacy repair strategies divided by type of legitimacy.

 We now move to discuss the IOC and its attempt at regaining legitimacy through its Agenda 2020 reforms, which can be seen as a clear attempt at disassociation from previous procedures and structures. Crucially, the IOC has set the terms under which the Games are to be held, the host city contract including numerous temporally-limited interruptions of the host country’s sovereignty. Table 5 presented some key aspects of that contract, illustrating the extent of the IOC’s private authority and showing the “franchise/franchisee” model (MacAloon 2016, p.772) that pertained until Agenda 2020. The IOC recognized the need for change in 2013, and in 2014 adopted a package of reforms entitled “Olympic Agenda 2020” (IOC 2013; IOC 2014b), and an update to the Olympic Charter (IOC 2014c). Fifa, too, has seen a need to change, adopting new statutes and standing orders at an Extraordinary Congress in February 2016 (Fifa 2016). Olympic Agenda 2020 contains “20+20”, i.e. 40 recommendations. These range widely, covering the bidding process, a range of specific issues such as gender equality and clean sporting, relationships with stakeholders such as sponsors and the organizers of other sporting events, as well as principles of governance and autonomy. For example, the bidding process is now shaped as an invitation (IOC 2013, p.9 recommendation 1). This means, for example, the IOC making the contract public (recommendation 1.6) and providing it at the start of a bid process (recommendation 1.10), rather than revealing it to the winning city. Thus, the Tokyo 2020 contract (IOC, City of Tokyo and Japanese Olympic Committee 2013) was made public in May 2017 (TOC 2017), albeit in the form of a 25MB non-searchable image PDF file. Moreover, the IOC published the principles for the 2024 Games shortly after they were agreed (IOC 2017). All of these reforms map to Suchman’s legitimacy repair strategy of disassociation.

Have the IOC’s reforms done enough to repair legitimacy? MacAloon’s analysis (2016, p.779, also p.775) suggests not: “There is not yet any certainty that the IOC can continue to attract future Olympic bids from liberal democratic countries, even with all the hosting reforms put in place by the Agenda 2020 process.” Our own analysis agrees with his assessment: the elements that have eroded legitimacy remain unaddressed, because the IOC has not restructured in a way that allows outsiders to engage meaningfully. In particular, legitimacy repair would suggest a need to involve monitors and watchdogs external to the organization, and to clearly distance itself from procedures and structures that are ‘bad influences’, but the IOC does not do so. Its internal focus – exacerbated by organizational narcissism rendering the organization blind to its faults – has made it inconceivable to look outside the organization. As a result, the IOC’s procedural and structural reforms focus almost exclusively on members of the Olympic family, paying little attention to non-Olympic stakeholders.

In terms of irrationality of organization, which manifests as unnecessarily vigorous protection of intellectual property, the picture is mixed; Agenda 2020 recommends extending “access to the Olympic brand for non-commercial use” (IOC 2013, p.23, recommendation 36), but there is no indication of addressing the local commercialization that garnered the IOC so much criticism in London (e.g. Greenhill 2012). More importantly, the IOC fails to address its organizational insulation. Although it now commits to some transparency (e.g. p.9, recommendation 1.6–1.10), the IOC’s structure remains essentially unchanged, with very little engagement with stakeholders beyond a very general commitment (p.19, recommendation 23.3) to “engage with the general public” and (p.25, recommendation 39.1) “engage in a dialogue with representatives from all walks of life and backgrounds on the role of sport and its values in society” every four years. Moreover, Agenda 2020 places great emphasis on sponsors (e.g. pp.22–23, recommendations 33 and 35). Further organization-level research would be needed to more fully understand the extent to which the IOC is indeed addressing its organizational culture. In that work, questions of leadership would be of great relevance.

In short, whilst the IOC has clearly tried to repair its reputation, a theoretical and practical analysis of its Agenda 2020 suggests that it has not succeeded. The IOC’s measures elide stakeholder engagement, and the reforms appear to not fully address critics’ concerns. Indeed, the argument could be made that Agenda 2020 does nothing to change the nature of the IOC as an elitist structure, cut off from important stakeholders that are not part of the Olympic Movement. In this view, the IOC is continuing to self-delegitimate (Finnemore 2009, p.68). The focus on autonomy and on accountability to only the Olympic Charter, which are maintained in Agenda 2020, substantially limit the organization’s ability to see beyond its own borders. One convincing reason for this is that decision-makers’ judgement may have been impaired through widespread organizational pathology (for further discussion on paying attention to stakeholders, see Mitchell et al. 1997; Hall et al. 2015; Boesso and Kumar 2009). We propose that the IOC's relatively unreformed and inherently elitist structure, insulated from non-sports stakeholders and with its roots in colonial-era Europe all contribute to this phenomenon. Overall, our analysis suggests that organizations like the IOC would need to place greater emphasis on maintaining legitimacy (and should have started earlier to repair it). More generally, our analysis suggests that organizations suffering from organizational pathology are unable to successfully engage in legitimacy repair on their own, even when they see a need to do so. To succeed in repairing legitimacy, they would first need to address their ‘illness’, which is likely to mean turning to external assistance.

Conclusion

In this paper we have drawn together legitimacy and organizational pathology. We have also introduced the notion of organizational narcissism, which applies particularly to organizations with prosocial goals. We have done so with illustrative reference to SGBs, and particularly the IOC. The present paper is therefore clearly relevant to international SGBs, which are significant social, cultural and economic actors in their own right. That theoretical weaving is our principal contribution: it can be used to explain and predict challenges faced by SGBs, as well as pointing to the difficulties they face in repairing legitimacy. It therefore has the potential to provide a rich vein for future research on SGBs. We have posed questions throughout this paper, such as what the role of individuals might be. These provide fascinating areas for further work on the governance of SGBs. Moreover, what about new SGBs, such as the recently-established World eSport Association? To what extent does the governance of a very new sports governing organization differ from those a century or more its senior? On a similar track, what differences might there be between classic SGBs and private, for-profit SGBs such as Formula 1?

However, by amalgamating legitimacy and organizational pathology, we have developed a framework that, we argue, has clear potential to be applied beyond SGBs. It is possible to identify similarities between prosocial SGBs and other kinds of prosocial non-governmental organization that operate internationally. As an example, our theoretical developments may prove useful for understanding what went wrong with such organizations as Oxfam in their aid operations (BBC 2018), as well as for informing those organizations’ attempts at legitimacy repair. Further research could fruitfully expand the range of empirical sites. The tension between the ideals of a prosocial organization and the commercial imperatives associated with promoting those ideals is evident in a range of international non-profit organizations. By providing greater emphasis on the prosocial aspect of our work in the revised manuscript, we are able to extend our theoretical contribution to look beyond SGBs. Comparing the approaches (and relative success) of legitimacy repair in various contexts would be a good way to further develop the theoretical work we have begun here.

Future empirical work on pathology and legitimacy could also look to commercial organizations. For example, to what extent is it relevant to geographically bounded organizations whose interests are significantly wider than promoting regular sporting events? An example of such an organization would be a multinational mining company with a long-term concession to operate in a remote region of a developing country, in which government were largely absent (Muthuri 2007).

Moving to broader research implications, Helm (2013) suggests that job satisfaction and turn-over intentions are related to employees’ perception of external reputation and pride in their organization. This is highly salient, as staff turnover is a major source of disruption and reduced productivity (see De Winne et al. 2018). Related work examines the relationship between the orthogonal positive features of competence and achievement, and moral values and ethical conduct, finding that, “the perceived morality of the team or organization has greater impact on its attractiveness to individuals than its perceived competence” (van Prooijen and Ellemers 2015, p.225). That research suggests that an increasingly embattled organization may struggle to recruit and retain good staff. In the example of the IOC, eliminating tension between proponents of the Olympic Movement and those of the Olympic sport industry noted earlier in this paper (also MacAloon 2008; 2016) may require substantial changes to staff. New staff could start to move the IOC towards a more unified purpose, though almost certainly not without cost. The antecedents and implications of this require closer investigation.

While we see it as an important context for our study, we have only tangentially alluded to the role of the dominant hegemony of white, male, elite, Western European perspectives in the Olympic movement: it was beyond our scope to investigate this. We suggest that there is good mileage in this area of work, at both organizational and individual levels. One intriguing avenue of enquiry would be a historical analysis of SGBs, tracing their sources of power and organizational culture.

Inevitably, a paper such as ours has numerous limitations. These include the use of secondary data for our illustrative cases, and reliance on available documentation, though we believe that the ready availability of information on the well-documented London2012 has mitigated potential barriers in this respect. Nevertheless our arguments could have been further substantiated if we had had access to primary data from strategic level actors at London2012 and the IOC. These were unfortunately not readily available, and not aggressively pursued since this paper is principally conceptual. Our work is most readily relevant to international sporting bodies, though it may have wider relevance, as we discuss below. The individual leaders – and senior figures – of SGBs have a significant role to play in their organizations’ governance and legitimacy, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. A longer piece of work, or a separate paper, would be more suited to addressing the individual level as well.

We end with remarks on implications for practitioners. Given the parallels between the IOC and the still-more-embattled Fifa, we suggest that the critical media reports and cities that have withdrawn from the bidding process are indications of a potential legitimacy death-spiral, which could lead to such organizations being abandoned by even more sponsors. The IOC’s current structure places great emphasis on sporting stakeholders, but does not appear to ensure reflection on its role outside its narrow remit. Consequently, criticism from outside the IOC is fulfilling that role. In building for the future, the IOC would be well-advised to place greater emphasis – in practice – on a wider range of stakeholders. This means looking beyond sporting and commercial stakeholders. The IOC has recognized this, but appears not yet to have acted upon its knowledge, as outlined by MacAloon (2016), for the reasons presented in this paper. Doing so would be both better for the IOC’s legitimacy and more commensurate with the IOC’s position as a major player on the world stage. The lessons SGBs thereby learned could be valuable for other private authority organizations. From a practitioner perspective, the work of this paper could be also developed into an organizational risk checklist, which could be used as a managerial tool to assist decisions on whether and when to seek ‘therapy’ in the form of independent consultants.

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Annex: IOC history and structure

The IOC was founded in 1894 in Paris, with an explicitly prosocial aspiration to promote education and peace (see IOC, 2014c). It enjoys the status of an international non-governmental organization and is now based in Lausanne (see IOC 2015). The IOC promotes *Olympism*, which the Olympic Charter defines in seven principles, and whose focal point is the Summer and Winter iterations of the quadrennial Olympic Games. The first two principles can be summarized as: Olympism is a philosophy of life that exalts in sport, both for its own sake and as a means of spreading peace (see IOC 2014c, p.11). Principle 3 defines the nature and ownership of the Olympic Movement and Olympic Games:

The Olympic Movement is the concerted, organised, universal and permanent action, carried out under the supreme authority of the IOC, of all individuals and entities who are inspired by the values of Olympism. It covers the five continents. It reaches its peak with the bringing together of the world’s athletes at the great sports festival, the Olympic Games. … (IOC, 2014c: 11)

The IOC experienced a major turning point in the 1980s when, financially moribund, it launched the Olympic Partners program, a sponsorship program intended to develop a diversified revenue base for the Olympic Games (IOC, 2016: 10). MacAloon (2011) refers to a tension between the Olympic Movement and the Olympic sports industry, a divide that emerged as a consequence of the greater emphasis on revenue, and which has remained in place ever since even as the IOC underwent further change in response to a corruption scandal around the turn of the century. Revenue in the 2009–2012 period, up to and including the London 2012 Games, was US$5Bn, nearly all of which came from licensing arrangements: 73% from broadcast rights, 18% from sponsorship, and 5% from the supplier and licensing program (data from IOC 2014a). The IOC distributes 90% of its revenue to organizations within the Olympic Movement, retaining 10% for itself. At 2012 figures, this meant an annual budget of some $125m, which includes support for the Olympic Foundation.

The Olympic Charter (IOC 2014c) acts as both a constitution for the Olympic Movement and as the statutes for the IOC, as well as setting out the rights and obligations of each of the ‘members’ of the Olympic ‘family’. It also addresses such issues as legal protection for the Olympic intellectual properties.

The IOC has up to 115 members, who are recruited and elected (by IOC members), “from among such eligible persons as [the IOC] considers qualified” (ibid, p. 32). Members are accountable to the principles of the Charter and to the IOC, serve eight-year terms (ibid, p. 32, Section 16.1.6), and are required to swear an oath of office upon their investiture to this elite status (ibid, pp. 32-33, Section 16.1.3). Autonomy is very important to the IOC, a point it has reiterated in its Agenda 2020 (IOC 2013). The IOC’s stakeholders have been conceptually limited to those within the Olympic Movement, in the form of the Olympic Congress, a consultative gathering of representatives from the constitutive members of the Olympic Movement, convened by the IOC president at intervals determined by the organization (IOC 2014c, p.18, Rule 4). The limited conceptualization of stakeholders may be changing (IOC 2013), though there is no evidence yet of change in practice (see, e.g., MacAloon 2016, p.776). The IOC’s governance structure may reflect the foundations of the IOC as a universalist organization founded in the colonial era by members of the social elite.

Footnotes

1. We have chosen to focus on legitimacy, because SGBs such as Fifa, World Rugby and the IOC are both prosocial and hold a monopoly in their respective fields, making such cognate concepts as reputation (more associated with competitive advantage) comparatively unimportant (Wæraas and Sataøen 2015, provide empirical support for this approach).

2. For a primer on private authority, see Hall’s (2005) accessible discussion of private authority. Readers may usefully consult foundational work by Cutler, Haufer & Porter (1999), and by Hall & Biersteker (2002; notably chapters 1 and 10). For more diverse perspectives, see Porter & Ronit (2006) on processes, Knill (2001) who offers a European perspective, or Kobrin (2009) who has a human-rights focus.

3. See http://www.worldrugby.org/handbook/bye-laws

4. Host city contracts have not generally been in the public domain. The London contract was obtained under the UK’s Freedom of Information rules and made available online on 24 January 2008, as a searchable PDF: <http://www.gamesmonitor.org.uk/node/553> (working as of 9 October 2018).