



The IOC and the doping issue—An institutional discursive approach to organizational identity construction



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ABSTRACT

To show why the 1998 doping scandals led to the establishment of the World Anti-Doping Agency, this paper investigates how the IOC has created its organizational identity once confronted with the emergence of doping in sport. The paper endorses a new institutional understanding of organizations, which is combined with a critical discourse analytical framework. Through a systematic reading of the Olympic Review between 1960 and 2003 four main anti-doping discourses are outlined: health scientific, ethical, legal and educational discourses construct the meaning-providing horizon of IOC anti-doping commitment. The 1988 Ben Johnson doping incident is crucial for the understanding of the organizational changes occurring 10 years later. Immediately following the Seoul Olympic Games the IOC applies a warfare genre, which frames anti-doping as a declaration of war and constructs a narrative of the IOC as leading a successful battle against doping. The 1998 doping scandals reveal the opposite. Subsequently, WADA can be labelled IOC's institutionalization failure.

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1. Introduction

In 1983, while giving an account of other “facts”, Dr. Albert Dirix, a sport physician and leading member of the International Olympic Committee's Anti-Doping and Biochemistry sub-commission, maintained that “anabolic steroids are under control and other substances will be in the near future”, leading him to his final remark: “The anti-doping fight is now very efficient” (IOC, 1983a, p. 288). Seen in the clear light of the present development, he was obviously wrong. The purpose, though, of this article is neither to judge past organizational attempts to fight doping in sport nor to evaluate their (lack of) efficiency. Its purpose, rather, is to examine how, in the course of time, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) creates and develops its organizational narrative when encountering a serious problem, as doping in sport has become. It does so by focusing on how Critical Discourse Analysis as a method can enrich a theoretical approach anchored in new institutionalism. Thus, it demonstrates how a textually based discourse analysis provides new insights into our understanding of organizational changes and identity creation.

Although the notion that synergies between sport and organization studies provide an inspiring and valuable point of departure for both empirical research and theoretical conceptualizations (Wolfe et al., 2005), the IOC, as perhaps the most powerful and oldest global sport and event organization, has remained surprisingly under-investigated within mainstream management research. At the same time, other scholars have pointed explicitly to the IOC and other sport organizations as

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Table 1
Discourses in IOC doping communication.

Discourse	Object(s)	Subject positions	Core concepts	Strategy
Health-scientific	Knowledge related to the definition and protection of athletes' health	Physicians (1960–1978) Medical Commission International Sports Federations Medical associations	Medication Risks Body Mortality Anabolic steroids Amphetamine EPO	Outlining the true scientific definition of health
Ethical	Individual morality The morality of sport (1960–1980)	Physicians (1960–1978) Athletes (1981–) De Merode Samaranch IOC members Politicians (1998–1999)	Evil Threat Plague Olympic spirit Amateur ideals (until the early 1980s) Commercialization	Highlighting pathologies by pointing to the values of (1) Olympic sports and (2) the proper conduct of the individual athlete
Legal	Rules Testing procedures Sanctions	CoE (1963–1964), IOC MC (1972–), CAS (1990–), Lawyers (sporadic), Politicians (1990s–)	Testing procedures, Prohibited list Charter Laboratory accreditation Strict liability	Defining the legal practice in matters related to athletes and performance enhancement
Educational	The personality of the young athlete	Medical Commission Educationalists (sporadic) Psychologists (sporadic)	Information Education Olympic Academy Olympism	Ensuring correct socialization to sport

Prince Alexandre De Mérode (1934–2002) led the IOC Medical Commission from 1967. Juan Antonio Samaranch (1920–2010), President of the IOC between 1980 and 2001. Council of Europe (CoE) founded in 1947 in order to promote co-operation between all European countries. Court of Arbitration in Sport (CAS), situated in Lausanne, was created by the IOC in 1984 to settle disputes in sports.

important contributors to the establishment of world culture (Boli & Thomas, 1997). There are, however, exceptions in recent management-related studies dealing with aspects of the IOC, for example focusing on consumer receptions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Walker, Here, Parent & Drane, 2010), critical discussions of measuring the social impact of the Olympic Games as a mega event (Leonardsen, 2007) and exploring how hosting the games has an impact on civic community (Glynn, 2008). Despite these studies, the IOC unfortunately remains to a large extent a task for a relatively limited academic community of sport management and sociology of sport.¹ Our assertion is that insights into sport organizations, and especially the IOC, provide relevant knowledge for management and organization studies in general because such studies bring together elements such as organizational culture, business, event and peak performance management, globalization and public policy, to name just a few.

Based on this preliminary introduction the aim of this paper is to apply Critical Discourse Analysis in order to understand how two doping scandals in 1998, which occurred during events not directly related to the IOC and the Olympic Games (World Cup Swimming and Tour de France respectively), could have such a huge impact on this organization and led to radical organizational changes, e.g. the subsequent establishment of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). After an introduction to research referring to the IOC and doping, our next step is to explain how we believe a new institutional frame can benefit from a discourse analytical approach both in terms of improving theoretical complexity and in relation to our methodological set-up. Empirically we have founded our analysis on a comprehensive reading of the Olympic Review – the official magazine of the IOC. Accordingly, we briefly outline the discourses which contribute to IOC's understanding of its anti-doping commitment. Subsequently we investigate the organizational identity construction employed by the IOC in dealing with the doping issue in the period between 1988 (from the Ben Johnson scandal during the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games) and 1998.

2. Doping in sport and the Olympic movement

Founded in 1894, the IOC has been one of most successful organizations of the 20th century, and one can argue that the IOC has today attained an almost hegemonic position in global sport (Zakus & Skinner, 2008). As claimed by Carter (2012), this development has gained momentum since the early 1980s when the IOC claimed (or at least attempted to claim) sovereignty which enables it to make "... its own form of subjects, ones unbound by any state-based premise of citizenship, as global cosmopolitan 'citizens' who embody the ethos of the Olympic movement" (p. 55). One can also emphasize, however, that the end of the Cold War provided new space to manoeuvre for the IOC in general but simultaneously initiated an era of increased political awareness towards drugs in society, including sport (Houlihan, 2012). Thus, while at many levels of global sport, such a mass media appeal, the branding of its logo, financial turnover and political support, the IOC gained a hitherto unattained position of power during the 1990s, its relations with governments in matters of doping remained tense. Furthermore, it is important to understand the complexity of the IOC. It can be argued that the IOC operates in multiple

¹ The Olympic 2012 special issues published by Taylor & Francis journals represent exceptions.

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