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## The Alpine Ski World Cup: a ‘game changer’ for the International Ski Federation (1967–1975)?

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### ABSTRACT

On 5 January 1967, the small ski resort of Berchtesgaden in Germany made skiing history. The men’s slalom on that day was the first race on the newly created World Cup circuit. While media coverage is booming with the democratisation of television, which the newspaper *L’Equipe* wants to develop its activities, the international ski scene is undergoing a profound revolution that will have consequences on the very structure of the governing body of world skiing, the *International Ski Federation* (FIS). If the beginnings of the World Cup were briefly explained by Montéréal, it’s interesting to analyse the repercussions and the dynamics that are taking place within the FIS before and after this event. Based on a rich corpus of archives from the FIS, the IOC and the sports daily *L’Equipe*, this research reveals the dynamics that led to the creation of the Alpine Skiing World Cup, questions the way in which the FIS governing bodies managed the arrival of a private player, *L’Equipe*, on the international ski scene, and notes the consequences of the creation of the Skiing World Cup on the development and finances of the FIS.

**KEYWORDS** Ski competitions; institutionalisation; international federations; governing bodies

In August 1966, the small Chilean town of Portillo entered skiing history when it became the first and (so far) only southern hemisphere ski resort to host the Alpine World Ski Championships. However, this was not the only event that gave Portillo its place in sports history, as it was here that the International Ski Federation (FIS) announced the creation of an alpine skiing world cup. The new circuit, which came into being on 5 January 1967 with a men’s slalom race in the small German resort of Berchtesgaden, would have major and long-lasting repercussions for international ski racing. But why did the FIS decide to create its Alpine Ski World Cup?

Although Gilles Montéréal<sup>1</sup> showed that the skiing world cup had its origins in an initiative by France’s famous sports newspaper *L’Equipe*, which launched the competition as a way of increasing its winter circulation, several other interesting aspects of the circuit’s creation remain to be

addressed. For example, what was the background to the creation of the world cup and how did the event come into being? How did the FIS react to the appearance of a private commercial player in the form of *L'Equipe*? What were the structural and economic consequences for the FIS of the creation of the new international circuit? What were the stakes for the various parties involved?

Apart from Montéréal's paper, very little has been published on the history of international ski racing and of the FIS. Works for a general readership include a book commemorating the competition's 20th anniversary in which Serge Lang, who first conceived of an alpine skiing circuit, and his son, Patrick, look back on the early history of the Alpine Ski World Cup.<sup>2</sup> Other than this, Jacques Goddet,<sup>3</sup> who ran *L'Equipe* when the skiing world cup was created, mentions the event's beginnings in his memoirs, entitled *L'Equipée Belle*, but he does not look at its creation in detail.

From a more scholarly perspective, in their paper on how the Swiss came to play a prominent role in every aspect of international skiing, Sébastien Cala and Grégory Quin<sup>4</sup> briefly examined the creation of the skiing world cup and showed that it resulted from the emergence of new stakeholders in international skiing. In addition, Heather Dichter<sup>5</sup> looked at the Cold War's repercussions for the FIS and Philippe Vonnard and Sébastien Cala<sup>6</sup> compared the ways in which the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) and the FIS dealt with the 'German question,' but neither paper directly examined the birth of the Alpine Ski World Cup.

Relevant studies outside the world of skiing include Philippe Vonnard's analysis of how the European Champion Clubs Football Cup<sup>7</sup> came into being, and Timothée Jobert adopted a similar approach to Montéréal in a paper entitled 'L'AUTO, un organe de presse?',<sup>8</sup> which discussed the role *L'Equipe*'s predecessor played in developing sport competitions. Finally, Jörg Krieger's research has focused on the economic aspects of launching international sport competitions. His analysis of the financial, political and commercial interests surrounding the birth of the International Association of Athletics Federation's world cup and world championships is of particular interest here.<sup>9</sup>

The present paper, which analyses the FIS's reaction to the creation of a competition by outside stakeholders, follows on from the above-cited studies to help fill a gap in the historiography of skiing and of international federations. It is based on a varied and mostly new corpus of information compiled from the FIS's archives in Oberhofen, notably the minutes of FIS Council meetings and congresses; FIS's Official Bulletins; and the correspondence of Marc Hodler and Sigge Bergmann, who were, respectively, the FIS's president and general secretary when the world cup was created. I combined this data with information contained in the archives of *L'Equipe*, held by France's Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and of the International Olympic

Committee (IOC). Unfortunately, I was not able to gain access to the archives of the International Association of Ski Journalists (AIJS) or those of L'Equipe's current owners, Éditions Philippe Amaury.

The period covered by this study allowed me to examine how the FIS evolved from the time the Alpine Ski World Cup came into being, in 1967, to when the federation appointed its first paid employee, an administrative director, in 1975. This latter event marked the start of major changes in the way the FIS was run and of a rapidly accelerating professionalisation process.

I begin by briefly describing the context surrounding alpine skiing in the 1960s, when the idea of creating a world cup emerged. I then look at the stakes involved in creating the new competition and the FIS's position with respect to the initiative, which had originally been launched by a commercial organisation, not by a sport association. I conclude by examining the world cup's impact on the FIS, both from a structural and economic point of view. We will see that the world cup is part of a process of professionalisation of the FIS.

### **The 1960s: a favourable context?**

Before looking at the context surrounding the creation of the Alpine Ski World Cup, it is worth briefly presenting the situation prior to this period in order to explain how competition skiing and the sport's governing body were organised. After 20 years of discussions, 16 national ski federations finally agreed in 1924 to found an international governing body, the FIS.<sup>10</sup> The only FIS-sanctioned competitions at this time were in ski-jumping, Nordic combined and cross-country skiing; alpine skiing did not become an officially recognised discipline until 1930. Competitions were included in the FIS calendar on the basis of propositions by member national federations. The FIS finally introduced a system for weighting competitions in 1958, under which each of the Alpine nations (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland) had to choose a major event within their borders at which the national teams of the FIS's other member federations had to take part.<sup>11</sup> This change increased the prestige of some of the major races on the calendar.

For the first 36 years of its existence, the FIS did not receive any income from the ski competitions it sanctioned (whether in alpine skiing, ski-jumping, Nordic combined or cross-country skiing), apart from its world championships. In 1961, it increased its income slightly by imposing a registration fee of 150 CHF for competitions included in its calendar, but most of its revenues still came from national federation membership fees and world championships.<sup>12</sup> This situation would change substantially over the next decade.

By the 1960s, much of western Europe was in the middle of a period of sustained economic growth that became known in France as the ‘Trente Glorieuses.’<sup>13</sup> Rising living standards were accompanied by profound changes in Western society’s attitudes toward leisure and the emergence of what some sociologists and historians call the ‘leisure civilisation’ – a term that is now widely debated.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the expansion of air travel<sup>15</sup> and a greater readiness to take holidays was leading to the ‘massification of tourism.’<sup>16</sup> Skiing benefitted greatly from these changes and rapidly increased in popularity. Numerous new ski resorts sprang up in both Europe and North America and sales of skis grew enormously. Rossignol, for example, sold 296,000 pairs of skis in 1970,<sup>17</sup> compared with just 30,000 pairs ten years earlier.<sup>18</sup> Thus, skiing was becoming an important market for many economic actors and the possibility of organising a FIS-approved world cup competition was sure to be welcomed by the sport’s stakeholders, whether in tourism or in the sports sector.<sup>19</sup>

This period also saw the rise of television, accelerated by the introduction of live Eurovision<sup>20</sup> broadcasts in the 1950s and then Mondovision in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup> Television helped increase the popularity of ski racing, which was becoming a true spectator sport, or ‘sport spectacle,’ to use the term coined by Christophe Granger.<sup>22</sup> Television broadcasts not only raised skiing’s profile, they enabled the FIS to increase its income respective to the national federations, which were responsible for organising the competitions. In 1961, for the first time, the FIS Congress debated the issue of broadcasting rights and decided that a proportion of these rights should be redistributed to the federation.<sup>23</sup>

As Montéréal showed, during the 1950s and 1960s, *L’Equipe* played an active role in creating new sport competitions, especially in motorsport (Tour de France Automobile) and athletics (European Nations’ Cup, launched in 1964).<sup>24</sup> The newspaper’s objectives in doing this were both to expand its readership and to help develop the sports concerned. It was in this context that, in 1966, *L’Equipe* decided to launch a European Ski Challenge<sup>25</sup> incorporating the most classic events on the FIS calendar – Kitzbühel, Wengen, Kandahar, etc. Skiers would be ranked on the basis of points won at each event, but only their best three results in each of the alpine skiing disciplines (downhill, giant slalom, slalom) were taken into account. The rules for men and women were identical.<sup>26</sup> *L’Equipe* gave extensive coverage to this first European ski circuit, dedicating several pages to the competition every week. Its efforts were helped by the excellent results obtained by French skiers: Marielle Goitschel won the women’s overall classification<sup>27</sup> and Jean-Claude Killy and Guy Périllat were second and third, respectively, in the men’s classification, behind Austria’s Karl Schranz.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, even Serge Lang, the *L’Equipe* journalist who had conceived the competition, was forced to admit that its first edition ‘only just got by.’<sup>29</sup>

Lang's admission puts the competition's importance in perspective. In fact, the circuit was rarely mentioned by the press outside France and only really seemed to exist in the pages of *L'Equipe*.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of setting up a world cup had been sown and the project's protagonists had compatible interests: Whereas *L'Equipe*'s aim was to increase its circulation during the winter,<sup>31</sup> the FIS wanted to turn skiing into a more global sport ski, an objective that its president, Switzerland's Marc Hodler, stated openly on numerous occasions. Holding the 1966 world championships in the Chilean resort of Portillo was part of this strategy. Hodler reiterated this goal at the FIS Council meeting in Norefjell (Norway) in March 1967, during which he stated his desire to stage competitions in Scandinavia, South America and even Australia.<sup>32</sup>

Another factor behind Hodler's and the entire FIS Council's enthusiasm for creating a world cup was the federation's long-running conflict with the IOC over the issue of amateurism, which had been simmering since the 1930s.<sup>33</sup> Although the situation had improved after World War II, Avery Brundage's election as IOC president in 1952 rekindled the debate.<sup>34</sup> The FIS was keen for skiing to remain an Olympic sport – a position it reaffirmed at its 1965 Congress<sup>35</sup> – but having a world cup would make it less dependent on the Olympic Games for its funding and for media coverage. A successful international circuit would also enhance skiing's media profile and strengthen the sport's claim to be an essential part of the Olympic programme. Avery Brundage broached this very issue during the IOC's negotiations with the FIS in 1969, when he evoked the possibility of removing alpine skiing from the Olympic programme or even purely and simply cancelling the Winter Olympic Games.<sup>36</sup> However, his attempt to browbeat the FIS failed and the IOC's members finally accepted the FIS's position.<sup>37</sup>

Given this combination of factors – the growth of winter tourism, the spread of television, *L'Equipe*'s expansionist aims (which led Montéréal to refer to it as a 'sports promoter'<sup>38</sup>), the FIS Council's desire to internationalise and strengthen skiing and the Council's tense relations with the IOC over amateurism – the 1960s was undoubtedly the perfect moment to launch an international ski circuit. An additional factor, which has not previously attracted scholars' attention, was the launch in the early 1960s of a potential competitor for the FIS's events in the form of an American alpine skiing circuit, organised by the International Professional Ski Racers Association (IPSRA). Even though the FIS was aware of threat posed by the North American circuit, it does not appear to have been a serious concern for its members, as they withdrew a proposed debate on the issue from the agenda for the 1965 FIS Congress in Mamaia (Rumania). Nevertheless, the FIS Council discussed the American circuit and its deliberations were briefly reported in the Congress minutes,<sup>39</sup> which noted that the IPSRA had held a competition at Seefeld, in Austria, during the winter of 1964/

1965 and that it was planning to hold other events in France, Austria, Italy and Switzerland the following winter. On the other hand, J. Stanley Mullin, America's FIS Council member and a FIS vice-president, noted that the American circuit had not been particularly successful and that future events would be confined to Colorado.<sup>40</sup> If a commercial ski circuit could not be successful in North America, a continent that was socioeconomically conducive to professional sport competitions, it was difficult to imagine that such a competition would succeed in Europe, where sport was less commercially oriented<sup>41</sup> and where the FIS was particularly strong.

The development of the Alpine Skiing World Cup is in fact part of a complex but very favourable multifactorial context. On the one hand, global elements such as the growing economic activity of mass tourism and winter sports or the democratisation of television. On the other hand, elements more internal to the discipline, such as the desire for internationalisation of skiing carried by Marc Hodler or the tensions with the IOC. Without forgetting, of course, the desire to develop a private player, L'Equipe, in a context where media players are seeing their influence grow.

### **The structural challenge of the Alpine Ski World Cup for the FIS**

As mentioned above, Marc Hodler announced the launch of the world cup at the Alpine World Ski Championships in Portillo, Chile, in August 1966. The new circuit would follow a similar model to L'Equipe's European Challenge of the previous winter.<sup>42</sup> Hodler told L'Equipe:

It [the Alpine Ski World Cup] symbolises the good relations and collaboration between, on the one hand, racers, organisers and the FIS, and, on the other hand, the press and journalists. The World Cup promotes the Universality of ski racing. Next season, it will include events in Europe and North America. It will gradually be expanded to incorporate competitions held in Japan, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>43</sup>

Although it might appear that Hodler, and therefore the FIS, played a major role in creating the world cup, this was not the case. According to Serge Lang, it was he who put a fully-fledged project to Hodler,<sup>44</sup> who supported Lang's initiative and agreed to preside the organising committee of the first Alpine Ski World Cup.<sup>45</sup> Hodler corroborated Lang's version of events at the FIS Council meeting in March 1967, whose minutes state:

During the WSC at Portillo, Hodler had received the rules for the [World Cup] events, the instigator of which was the journalist Serge Lang of the French sport paper L'Equipe. (...) Hodler had been asked if the FIS could approve of the Rules and had given the answer that the FIS Rules did not support a decision of that kind and that the Congress must decide. Marc Hodler had been asked to become president of the Organizing Committee for the World Cup and had agreed, as he from the FIS point of view found this opportune.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, despite the fact that Hodler was not the instigator of the world cup, he quickly became a key figure in its development, initially through his role as organising committee president, but also because he made sure that the FIS took control over the new circuit. Hence, although the FIS did not officially recognise the first skiing world cup (the Congress recognised it retrospectively in May 1967<sup>47</sup>), from the moment the competition was announced in Portillo, Hodler made sure it was run under the auspices of the FIS. He also refused to validate L'Equipe's original rules, which he considered 'primitive,' until they had been revised by the FIS, which would also be responsible for choosing the events that would make up the world cup calendar.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, Hodler did nothing to accelerate the FIS's recognition of the world cup: Even though the FIS Council was not due to meet again until the end of the coming winter season, in Norefjell in March 1967, he did not try to schedule an earlier meeting. This suggests that the FIS was more concerned about dictating the sequence of events involved in setting up the world cup than they were about controlling its first edition, which Serge Lang believed would 'give a new dimension to ski racing.'<sup>49</sup>

At Norefjell, the Council decided to appoint a commission to prepare a blueprint for the Alpine Ski World Cup, which it would present to the national federations at the Congress in Beirut, a little over two months later. The commission, composed of Marc Hodler (Switzerland), Walter Weizer (Austria), Robert Faure (France), Einar Bergsland (Norway) and Rae Grinnell (Canada), all FIS Council members, put forward an organisational model that was a landmark in the history both of the FIS and of international sport federations in general. Its most innovative feature was for the World Cup Committee to include four media representatives,<sup>50</sup> two from the International Sports Press Association (AIPS) and two from the International Association of Ski Journalists (AIJS).<sup>51</sup> By doing so, the FIS ensured that the press, which had instigated the idea of creating a world cup, remained committed to the project. In fact, appointing people from outside the federation to a key committee and giving them identical decision-making powers to the other committee members was a turning point, as it ensured that commercial organisations, which had different interests to the FIS, became stakeholders in what quickly became the federation's most important competition.

The minutes and reports I had access to do not explicitly state why media representatives were invited to sit on the World Cup Committee, but there were several possible reasons for doing so. First, it may have been seen as a way of increasing the media's interest in skiing and thereby guaranteeing extensive press coverage of world cup events. Second, it was a way of muzzling the press, at least to a certain extent, as it would be harder for journalists to criticise decisions to which they or their colleagues had contributed. For



example, *L'Equipe* had frequently been highly critical of the FIS and had regularly questioned its decisions and competition formats.<sup>52</sup> *L'Equipe's* outspoken stance was not restricted to skiing, as can be seen from Philippe Vonnard's discussion of the positions it took with respect to football.<sup>53</sup> Finally, appointing representatives of press associations, rather than of individual newspapers or broadcasters, allowed the FIS Council to ensure that no single outlet became too powerful. Most importantly, it would limit *L'Equipe's* influence, as it was not represented directly on the World Cup Committee, even though both of the AIPS's representatives, Serge Lang and Serge Clare, wrote for *L'Equipe*.<sup>54</sup> The other two media representatives on the committee were John Frey, from *Ski Magazine*, and Christian Bonardelly, from *Télévision Suisse Romande* (Table 1).<sup>55</sup>

In addition, the FIS retained a majority on the World Cup Committee because the four media representatives were largely outnumbered by the committee's other eight members, who were drawn from the FIS Council (three members), the Downhill/Slalom Committee (four members) and the Women's Downhill/Slalom Committee (one member).<sup>56</sup> These eight members were chosen to ensure the world's biggest skiing nations, except for Italy, had at least one representative on the committee. Italy's exclusion is interesting. Why was a nation that had hosted three stages of the first world cup not represented on the committee? There is no obvious answer to this question given that France, Switzerland and the United States each had more than one representative (if journalists are included) and that Italy's FIS Council member, Piero Oneglio, was highly experienced.

Moreover, at the height of the Cold War, none of the Eastern European countries were represented. Although the geopolitical situation had impacted the FIS's work,<sup>57</sup> it seems that the Cold War had not influenced its decisions in this case. Indeed, the Eastern Bloc's representatives did not oppose the appointments and did not express a desire to be represented

**Table 1.** Composition the FIS Alpine Ski World Cup Committee, 1967/1968.

Surname	First name	Nationality	Position
Hodler	Marc	SUI	FIS President
Bergsland	Einar	NOR	FIS Council
Walzer	Walter	GER	FIS Council
Bonnet	Honoré	FRA	FIS Downhill/Slalom Committee
Sulzberger	Sepp	AUT	FIS Downhill/Slalom Committee
Beattie	Bob	USA	FIS Downhill/Slalom Committee
Nordenskiöld	Bibbo	SWE	FIS Downhill/Slalom Committee
Ramage	Patricia	CAN	Women's Downhill/Slalom Committee
Lang	Serge	FRA	AIPS Representative
Clare	Serge	FRA	AIPS Representative
Frey	John	USA	AJJS Representative
Bonardelly	Christian	SUI	AJJS Representative

Note: *AFIS*, Notes on the session by Sigge Bergmann, FIS general secretary, at the FIS Congress in Beirut, 1967.

on the committee.<sup>58</sup> This was undoubtedly due to alpine skiing's historic roots in western Europe, which meant that it was still less popular than cross-country skiing to the east of the Iron Curtain.

The FIS Congress unanimously approved the composition of the World Cup Committee after just one modification was made to the Council's initial proposal. When the British and East German delegations objected to the committee including only three members of the Downhill/Slalom Committee, a fourth Downhill/Slalom Committee member was added in the shape of Sweden's Bibbo Nordenskiöld.<sup>59</sup>

In this section, we can see the importance of individuals within a structure like the FIS. The action of Marc Hodler in Portillo and the way he manages the situation with the members of the FIS Council has consequences on the future of the Alpine Skiing World Cup and the whole discipline. The integration of actors outside the FIS, in this case the media, is also a particularly relevant element of a structural change of approach within the sports body. It is also a sign of the growing influence of the media on the sports scene.

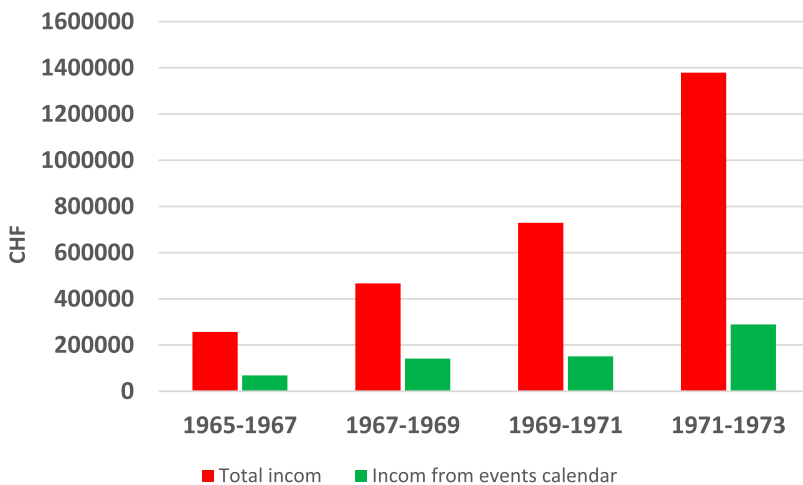
### **The Alpine Ski World Cup: a (moderately) valuable financial asset**

The first consequence for the FIS of launching the Alpine Ski World Cup was structural. As described in the previous section, the FIS immediately set up a special committee,<sup>60</sup> elected by the Congress and including members from outside the federation, to manage the competition. Further structural changes were made when the FIS Congress approved new statutes for the federation in 1969, which resulted in changes to the names and/or responsibilities of some of its committees and the creation of a new sub-committee to oversee world cup ceremonies and public relations. This move towards more specialised committees was probably due to increases in their responsibilities and, therefore, their workload. Indeed, by 1975 the FIS's activities had expanded to such an extent that it decided to recruit a professional administrative director, in the form of Gian-Franco Kasper,<sup>61</sup> who became the federation's first employee. That the FIS was able to take this step shows that it was making enough profit from its activities to pay a full-time employee. Was the Alpine Ski World Cup the source of this new income?

I addressed this question by analysing the FIS's accounts from 1965 to 1973, during which time its income increased more than fivefold, from 257,141.97 CHF in 1967<sup>62</sup> to 466,968.88 CHF in 1969,<sup>63</sup> 729,049.39 CHF in 1971<sup>64</sup> and 1,379,040.95 CHF in 1973.<sup>65</sup> Each of these sums corresponds to two accounting years because the Congress met every two years. Although there was some inflation between 1967 and 1973, these figures seem to suggest that the Alpine Ski World Cup enabled the FIS to greatly improve its financial position.

However, examining the sources of the FIS's income reveals a more complex picture. Although the world cup increased the FIS's income – organisers of competitions in all disciplines and at all levels had to pay the FIS a registration fee in order to be included in its events calendar – the sums involved were not large enough to account for the total increase in the FIS's income between 1967 and 1973. More precisely, the FIS's income from the world cup rose from 68,860.95 CHF in 1967<sup>66</sup> to 289,331.45 CHF in 1973,<sup>67</sup> which was a substantial increase for a federation that had not yet professionalised. However, the extra 200,000 CHF brought in by the world cup was only a fraction of the total growth in the FIS's income, which increased from 257,141.97 CHF to 1,379,040.95 CHF over the same period (Figure 1).

In 1969, the FIS's accounts began including a 'World Cup' entry, but it was uniquely for revenues received from the competition's title sponsor, Evian,<sup>68</sup> which increased from 60,000 CHF in 1969<sup>69</sup> to the substantial sum of 145,000 CHF in 1973.<sup>70</sup> However, the biggest increase between 1967 and 1973 was in the sum the IOC redistributed to the FIS for the Olympic Games, which rose from 19,979.60 CHF for the 1968 Grenoble Olympics (France)<sup>71</sup> to 635,384.05 CHF for the 1972 Sapporo Olympics (Japan).<sup>72</sup> Although the present study does not include data for the period 1975–1977, the FIS undoubtedly received an even larger sum from the IOC for the 1976 Innsbruck Olympics (Austria) because, at a meeting held during the 1974 IOC Session in Vienna, the winter sport federations agreed on a different formula for redistributing their share of Olympic television rights. Since 1968, 50% of these rights had been shared equally



**Figure 1** .#Growth in the FIS's income. Note: *AFIS*, Minutes of the Congress, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1973.

between the different winter sport federations, with the remaining 50% shared according to the number of tickets sold for each event.<sup>73</sup> The new agreement modified this arrangement so that, as of the Innsbruck Games, the three largest winter sport federations (the FIS, International Ice Hockey Federation, International Skating Union) would share 60% of Olympic television rights, whereas the other winter sport federations would share just 30% of these rights. No details were given for what would happen to the remaining 10%.<sup>74</sup>

Hence, although the sums the FIS earned from the world cup rose substantially, the fivefold increase in its income between 1967 and 1973 was mostly due to growth in its revenue from Olympic Games television rights. In fact, this was the period when the IOC began selling broadcasting rights to the Olympic Games for ever larger sums, leading Lord Luke, the chairman of its Finance Commission, to worry about the IOC's and international federations' growing dependence on television rights. He voiced his concerns at the 1972 IOC Session, whose minutes noted:

This might have its backlash as television networks claimed they had to pay exorbitant amounts of money for these rights and would resist in future. It would not only be IOC but also NOCs and International Federations who would suffer from this possible decrease in revenue.<sup>75</sup>

In the early 1970s, television rights were a recurring issue during the IOC's meetings with the international federations, many of which were reliant on this source of revenue. This is still the case today<sup>76</sup> and one of the reasons why federations have tried to diversify their sources of income by holding world cups and world championships. For example, even though the FIS initially did not receive any television rights for its Alpine Ski World Cup, it retained a proportion of the television rights for its world championships. This proportion increased from 10% or at least 10,000 CHF in 1965<sup>77</sup> to 40% in 1969. The FIS also collects a registration fee from organisers who want their event to be included on the FIS calendar. This fee was 25,000 CHF per event in 1969.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the world championships are a more consequential source of income for the FIS than the world cup. However, the world cup is still of great benefit to the FIS because it keeps skiing in the public eye throughout the winter and ensures constant media interest in the sport. This gives both the FIS and event organisers greater leverage when negotiating commercial partnerships with sponsors and broadcasters.

Although some international federations, notably the International Association of Athletics Federations,<sup>79</sup> have managed to reduce their financial dependence on the IOC in this way, others remain reliant on their share of Olympic television rights. On the positive side, this source of income, which grew continuously during the final decades of the twentieth

century as broadcasters paid ever larger sums for television rights, has enabled many federations to professionalise their administration. However, it has also made them more vulnerable<sup>80</sup> to the threat Lord Luke highlighted in 1972, that is, a decrease in television rights or the postponement or cancellation of an edition of the Olympic Games. This latter risk became real for the Summer Olympic International Federations in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic forced the IOC and Tokyo 2020 organising committee to postpone the 2020 Olympic Games. The resulting shortfall in income put many federations in a difficult financial position.

The Alpine Skiing World Cup is in fact one of the parameters that allows the FIS to develop its economic activity and to engage in a process of professionalisation. However, the launch of this competition is part of a more global process of commercialisation of the sport, thanks in particular to the television rights from which the FIS certainly benefits.

## Conclusion

The Alpine Ski World Cup was launched within a particularly favourable context, created by the skiing boom that followed the emergence of a leisure society in Europe and North America, and by the concordance between the FIS's interests and those of the media, most notably France's sports newspaper *L'Equipe*. Nevertheless, the original idea for creating a world cup circuit had come from *L'Equipe*, which saw it as a primarily commercial initiative. Further research is now needed to determine whether other actors, such as race organisers, played a role in creating the new competition. Indeed, race organisers would have been expected to view the competition with enthusiasm, as growth in the circuit's popularity would undoubtedly have a positive effect on the image of its host resorts. However, during the period studied here, and in contrast to its world championships,<sup>81</sup> the FIS did not receive any income from the sale of world cup television rights or from advertising partnerships with individual world cup stages. In fact, the FIS attributes the events on the world cup circuit to its member national federations, which then chose the resorts that will host the stages they have been allocated. Thus, it is the national federations which negotiate television rights to their events and then redistribute a percentage of these rights to the event organisers. This system, which differs from the those used in other sports, provides national federations with a guaranteed source of income and ensures that they, along with the FIS, retain control over international competition skiing within a pyramidal system.

Similarly, it would be interesting to ascertain whether local politicians and members of the tourism sector (principally hoteliers), pressurise event

organisers or the FIS to include their resort in the world cup circuit. Indeed, as well as providing widespread media coverage, hosting world cup competitions is a boon for the tourism sector as it fills hotels for several days.

My research also showed that the FIS's leaders, notably Marc Hodler, were 'caught napping' by outside attempts to create an alpine ski racing circuit. Nevertheless, the FIS quickly took control of the new competition and adroitly neutralised the media's, especially L'Equipe's, influence over the Alpine Ski World Cup. Including media representatives on the World Cup Committee, whose members are elected by the FIS Congress, while ensuring that federation representatives held a substantial majority of the seats, was a masterstroke, as it gave the FIS control over the competition while ensuring it benefitted from extensive and generally positive media coverage. The FIS also strengthened its position by retaining control over the attribution of stages to the national federations, which are all FIS members. These federations receive the television rights to their world cup events and redistribute a proportion of these rights to event organisers. Consequently, the federations have a large amount of decision-making power over organisers.

Finally, launching the Alpine Ski World Cup had repercussions for the FIS's structure and for its financial position. Although my brief analysis of the FIS's accounts does not allow me to draw definitive conclusions, the FIS's income from the world cup does not appear to have been as large as the sums it received from the Olympic Games in the early 1970s. In fact, by deciding not to receive television rights for the world cup,<sup>82</sup> the FIS restricted its potential income from the competition to a combination of the fees event organisers pay to be included on the FIS calendar and advertising revenues. In a sport that is very different from alpine skiing but on a similar hierarchical level, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) takes a proportion of the television rights for the competitions it controls.<sup>83</sup> Given that skiing world cup event organisers often have very close ties with the sport's governing bodies,<sup>84</sup> it would be interesting to determine why the FIS does not take a proportion of world cup television rights, a state of affairs that is highly beneficial to the national federations and organisers.

The present study lays the foundation for further research into the history of skiing world cups. In addition to investigating the dynamics, stakes, and consequences of creating the Alpine Ski World Cup over a longer period, it would also be interesting to examine the situation in other skiing world cups, notably those for Nordic and Freestyle skiing. Were these competitions' regulations and structures based on those of the Alpine Ski World Cup? Do these circuits' organising bodies include commercial stakeholders? Are the financial stakes the same? All of these questions deserve further study.

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