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Changes to the IOC's governance during Thomas Bach's presidency: intense institutional work to achieve balance and compromise

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ABSTRACT

Recent changes in broadcasting, culture, economics, geopolitics, and technology have affected both the way International Olympic Committee (IOC) operates and its systemic, political, and organisational governance. These changes have created a more complex and more challenging world for international sport and led to a crisis of legitimacy for the IOC. The present qualitative study provides a critical analysis of the new governance principles the IOC has adopted in response to this crisis since Thomas Bach was elected president in 2013. Bach's strategy, which combines careful assessment of the forces in play and deft risk management, can be considered a form of realpolitik. The current paper highlights parallels between Bach's realpolitik approach and neo-institutional sociological theories on how change occurs within a sector. Under Bach's presidency, the IOC has carried out intense institutional work to achieve the balance and compromise needed to strengthen its leadership of world sport.

Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games in 1894 as part of a universalist and internationalist project to invent 'an elite of sporting chivalry' (Clastres 2005). Although the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has survived two world wars, the Cold War, and economic globalisation, it has had to adapt constantly to ensure its legitimacy and survival, especially in today's globalized and fragmented world.

The term IOC is generally taken to describe a club of up to 115 individuals drawn from around the world and an administrative office based at the organisation's headquarters in Lausanne. However, world sport's leading institution is more complex than this because, over the last two decades, it has become a group (known as IOC Group) consisting of a non-profit association at the head of several commercial companies and foundations. On a second level, the IOC owns the Olympic Games, which are staged by Olympic Games organisation committees (OCOGs) under contract to the IOC *via* Host City Contracts. On a third level, it oversees the Olympic movement with its partners, which Chappelet (1991, 2016) termed the 'Olympic system' due to the interdependencies between the numerous

bodies that run institutional sport and deliver the Olympic Games. This system's components are NOCs, international sport federations (IFs), national sport federations (NFs) and their athletes, and OCOGs, together with many other stakeholders. On a fourth level, the IOC, in conjunction with its partners, has taken on the mission of promoting Olympism throughout society.

To understand how the Olympic system functions, it is necessary to examine the way the IOC uses organisational, political, and systemic governance (Henry and Lee 2004) to influence and, if possible, control its four main stakeholders (NOCs, IFs, NFs, and OCOGs). Organisational governance describes the decision-making and policy implementation mechanisms (structures, processes, power games) organisations use to pursue their objectives. The IOC's three main objectives are growing sport, meeting financial targets, and using sport to benefit society (Bayle 2016). Political governance determines an organisation's relationship with the world of politics. The IOC's political relationships affect both the way national governments and supranational unions use regulatory, financial, and ethical mechanisms to influence the IOC and Olympic system, and the way the IOC and Olympic system use the cause of sport to influence public policies. Finally, systemic governance involves regulating/coordinating networks *via* consensus/compromise and shared power, rather than by imposing measures to regulate/coordinate actions. Some experts in the field of sport refer to this as 'partnership', 'shared', or collaborative governance (Hoye and Cuskelly 2007). The IOC uses its systemic governance to impose its vision on the Olympic system, a task that is becoming increasingly difficult due to the number and variety of stakeholders involved (public, non-profit, commercial), the uncertain international situation, and the need for both local and global coordination.

To analyse the changes Bach has made to the IOC's governance with respect to NOCs, IFs, NFs, and OCOGs, we combined a review of the academic literature with information obtained during interviews with six experts in the field. These experts were three scholars specializing in the history and geopolitics of Olympic and international sport, integrity in international sport, and Olympic governance, and three sport organisation executives from the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF), the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), and the IOC. In line with Huberman and Miles' (2002) recommendations for inductive qualitative studies, we asked these experts to give their analyses of the IOC's discourse surrounding its governance. For example, we described specific changes to the IOC's governance under Bach and asked the interviewees whether they agreed with our description and, if not, to give their opinion.

We combined these interviews with data collected from the specialist literature on international sport and the Olympics, the IOC's website (IOC reports since 2014; IOC Agenda 2014 and 2021, etc.), expert reports (ASOIF 2020; ASOIF 2017–2022; Transparency International 2016, etc.), international research programs on sport governance (Geeraert 2018; reports/analyses published by Play the Game, e.g. Weinreich 2020), and websites specializing in international sport/Olympic governance (notably *Inside the Games*). We also obtained data from two research programs on the governance and performance management of Olympic IFs, funded by the Swiss National Research Fund (2014–2018 and 2020–2024). The constructivist perspective adopted here and recommended by other authors on this topic (Jedlicka 2018), involves analysing the actors' actions and strategies in context, as these actions and strategies have meaning only in the context in which they are deployed. Therefore, our analyses use economic (origin, types, and quantity of revenues), legal (legal

framework and regulatory tools), sociological (societal changes relating to sport) and political (policies and political manoeuvring) facts and indicators to understand the actors' strategies within their political, legal, economic, and sociological contexts. These interactions may indicate crises of legitimacy (Anastasiadis and Spence 2020) that can give rise to the new forms of compromise needed to ensure an organisation or system's success or survival.

Globalization and major changes in broadcasting, culture, economics, geopolitics, and technology have created new challenges for the Olympic movement over the last few decades. Under Thomas Bach, the IOC has used a combination of systemic, political, and organisational governance tools to try and overcome these challenges and maintain its leadership of international sport. Analysing these three types of governance provides insights into how the IOC modulates its policies and its interactions with stakeholders according to its environment and the internal and external crises it faces (1). Our findings suggest that Bach's strategy since he became IOC president can be considered a form of realpolitik based on careful assessment of the forces in play and deft risk management (2). We discuss possible parallels between Bach's realpolitik approach, aimed at protecting the IOC's legitimacy, and neo-institutional sociological theories on how change occurs within a sector (3).

1. The three interconnected forms of IOC's governance

To understand how the Olympic movement functions, it is necessary to analyse the IOC's role at each of these levels in the light of three interconnected forms of governance: systemic, political, and organisational.

1.1. Systemic governance

The Olympic movement's goal, set out in the Olympic Charter (2021), is 'to contribute to building a more peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport'. Putting on the Olympic Games is not, therefore, an end, but a means for achieving this goal. The IOC has historically called upon a central core of partners to stage the Olympic Games, develop sport, and promote the Olympic values of 'excellence, friendship, and respect'. NFs select elite athletes for the Olympic Games according to criteria set out by the sport's IF and depending on the quota of athletes it has been allocated. NOCs send delegations of athletes to Olympic Games, which are organised by OCOGs co-managed by the host country's sports movement and public bodies (host city, host region, state) but subject to close IOC control *via* its ever-more detailed specification for the Games and its funding allocations.

In terms of funding, ever-growing income from the Olympic Games allows the IOC to claim that it 'redistributes 90% of its revenue to the wider sporting movement' (IOC Annual Report 2019). These sums are redistributed for 4-year cycles, with 50% going to summer and winter OCOGs; 38% to NOCs, Olympic IFs, and Olympic Solidarity; and 12% to the Youth Olympic Games and sporting integrity,[1] notably the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). The IOC redistributed just $37.6 million to the 25 Olympic IFs in 1992, but skyrocketing revenues from TV rights allowed it to increase this sum rapidly over the next two decades. Thus, for the 2016/2020 cycle it redistributed $540 million to Olympic IFs, 14

times more than in 1992. However, the amount each IF receives depends on criteria introduced in 2004 to enable the IOC to allocate more funds to the IFs of sports with the highest profiles and greatest marketing potential (athletics, gymnastics, swimming) (Table 1).

The arrival of new actors (professional leagues, athletes' unions, NGOs, social networks, etc.) has complexified the Olympic system and increased the number of stakeholders the IOC must deal with (Chappelet 2016). For example, it must persuade professional leagues, especially those in North America, to allow their players to compete in Olympic Games and world championships/cups owned by IFs. In addition, the number of international sport events outside Olympic Games and world championships has exploded in the last 30 years, so the calendar now includes innumerable commercial multi-sport events (e.g. X Games, GKA Big Air World Championships, International Festival of Extreme Sports World Series), non-profit multi-sport events (e.g. World University Games, World Masters Games, Gay Games, Asian Games, World Urban Games), and single-sport events (e.g. Ultimate Fighting Championships, Formula 1, World Surf League, Red Bull events, Ironman). Moreover, these international events and North America's major leagues (NFL, NBA, NHL, etc.) have adopted global marketing strategies. To adapt to young people's expectations and ensure the Olympic Games remain attractive, the IOC has added several new sports to the Olympic programme, such as 3×3 basketball (added at Tokyo 2020 + 1) and kayak cross (which will replace a less-spectacular slalom discipline as of Paris 2024). Sport climbing, surfing, and skateboarding will still have additional sport status at the 2024 Olympic Games, but they will become part of the official programme as of 2028. These sports, which long saw themselves as part of a counterculture outside the Olympic movement, have become institutionalised by setting up a new IF (sport climbing[2]) or by joining an existing IF (skateboarding).[3] Breaking, governed by World Dance Sport, will be the fourth additional sport at Paris 2024. However, it will not be present at Los Angeles 2028 because the five sports chosen by the IOC—squash, lacrosse, flag football, baseball-softball, and cricket—are close to powerful closed leagues, notably the National Football League (flag-football), Major League Baseball and Nippon Professional Baseball (baseball is the n°1 sport in Japan), and the Indian Premier League (cricket, which is ultra-dominant in India), which typify the American sport-business model and interest the two most important markets for the IOC, North America and Asia.

To make room for three new sports (Summer Olympic Games may include no more than 10,500 athletes), the IOC has reduced the number of disciplines and athletes in three sports that attract less media attention: rowing, boxing, and weightlifting. Despite the question marks hanging over boxing, weightlifting, and modern pentathlon due to their poor governance and failings in terms of integrity (doping, infighting, financial problems), they

Table 1. Approximate amounts redistributed to NOCs (cash and benefits in kind) and Olympic IFs (Chappelet 2023).

Redistributed after	NOCs	IFs
Beijing 2008	$301 million	$297 million
London 2012	$520 million	$520 million
Rio 2016	$540 million	$540 million
Tokyo 2020	$540 million	$540 million
Turin 2006	$136 million	$128 million
Vancouver 2010	$215 million	$209 million
Sochi 2014	$199 million	$199 million
PyeongChang 2018	$215 million	$215 million

will remain on the programme for 2024 and 2028, but with a reduced quota of athletes (as for rowing). These changes will increase the number of Olympic IFs from 28 to 31, but the new federations will not, for the moment, receive IOC funding. This was the case for the IFs for rugby (rugby 7s) and golf, whose sports became part of the official Olympic programme in 2016. The 2026 Winter Olympics will see the debut of a new federation governing ski mountaineering. Not redistributing Olympic revenues to these new sports was a compromise decision taken to satisfy the oldest Olympic sports, which did not want to see their allocations reduced.

Esports is another new area for the IOC and one in which it is still feeling its way. It took a first step toward integrating esports by lending the Olympic label to a combined gaming festival, exhibition, competition, and conference baptised the Olympic Esport Week. Held in Singapore in June 2023, the event highlighted the IOC's ambivalent position, as it included only games linked to an Olympic IF,[4] even though they are less popular than esports' leading games (League of Legends, Counter-Strike, etc.). Nevertheless, in October 2023 Thomas Bach reminded the IOC Session that three billion people around the world play esports, which was why he had asked the new Esports Commission to look into creating an esports Olympic Games (Burke 2023).[5] However, to comply with Olympic values, players must shoot at targets, not at people.

To maintain its leadership over this complex system, the IOC must build alliances and fight off challenges to its authority. Such challenges may even come from inside its group of core stakeholders, illustrated by its open conflict with the IFs over its decision not to remunerate athletes for competing in Olympic Games and its refusal to meet SportAccord's 2015 demand to increase the amount it redistributes to Ifs.[6] Established in 2009 to represent all IFs, SportAccord became a powerful counterweight to the IOC by staging multisport events (e.g. World Beach Games, World Combat Games) and defending individual sport's interests, but 'Bach finally managed to remove this thorn in the IOC's side in 2017 when he succeeded in replacing SportAccord with the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF)' (interview with a sport executive). At the end of 2022 he obtained the dissolution of the GAISF and passed the important function of representing IFs back to a revamped SportAccord under IOC control, which does no more than hold an annual congress of Ifs (Berkeley 2022).

Over the last 20 years, elite sport and Olympism have become subject to ever-closer scrutiny from the media, NGOs, academics, and the public, especially with respect to integrity, athletes' well-being, human rights, and sustainability. In return, the IOC has tried to avoid or overcome criticism from these sources by introducing new regulatory mechanisms to combat doping, violence, racism, athletes' psychological well-being, match-fixing, and corruption. To achieve this, it has had to adopt a new approach to political governance.

1.2. Political governance

Political governance concerns the IOC's and Olympic movement's relations with (inter) governmental organisations: United Nations, European Union, Council of Europe, BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa),[7] national governments, and cities/regions that support sport and sport events organised by official sports bodies. These relations have often centred round sport's difficult relationship with politics, epitomised by government boycotts of sport events, government meddling in the governance of

national sport bodies, and authoritarian regimes using sport as a tool for soft power, etc. At the same time, staging the Olympic Games and funding for Olympic sport depend greatly on sport's partnerships with public bodies, as most Olympic sports rely heavily on direct and indirect public support to fund sport facilities, NFs, clubs, and elite athletes (subsidies, help with building and renovating facilities, provision of staff, tax exemptions, support with hiring and professionalising staff). This public partnership gives the IOC legitimacy and allows it to negotiate dispensations from national laws for the Olympic Games: tax exemptions, legislation protecting federations and athletes, application of 'Olympic laws' during Olympic Games.

Also in the legal field, the IOC established the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in Lausanne in 1984 to provide a mechanism for resolving sporting disputes without exposing sport to the risks associated with national justice systems (slowness, media coverage, cost, failure to understand the specificities of sport). All IFs, even FIFA, now recognize the CAS, which has discreetly and efficiently resolved numerous internal disputes between athletes and their federations. Most of the cases it hears involve doping (approx. 60% of cases) and football (59% of cases).

Thanks to the CAS, few sporting disputes now go to national or supranational courts (European Court of Justice), unless they involve criminal acts, which automatically fall within the jurisdiction of the criminal courts (Ryall, Cooper, and Ellis 2019). The CAS even holds an ad-hoc tribunal during Olympic Games. Some countries have set-up national sport tribunals, alongside other conciliation and mediation mechanisms for resolving sport-related disputes.

The need to protect sport's credibility and athletes' health from the scourge of doping led the international sport movement to join forces with national governments to establish WADA in 1999 (Chappelet and Van Luijk 2018). WADA refers disputes relating to its World Anti-Doping Code (drawn up in 2003) to the CAS. It also encourages individual countries to set up national anti-doping agencies (62) and regional anti-doping agencies (14), all of which are members of the iNADO network, although the resources these agencies have at their disposal vary greatly. However, these mechanisms have failed to stamp out doping, as shown by the state-sponsored doping of Russian athletes, notably for Sochi 2014 (Ohl et al. 2021). Facing intense pressure to take action against Russia, the IOC suspended Russia's NOC from the 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022 Olympic Games, but then diluted its sanction by allowing Russian athletes who met criteria set by their IF to compete under the Olympic flag (Altukhov and Nauright 2018). It also set up a new regulatory body—the International Testing Agency (ITA)—in 2018, to provide more-independent (from national governments and IFs) anti-doping controls in certain sports, especially those with small IFs that do not have their own well-established anti-doping systems. Crises relating to integrity have also impacted many larger IFs (e.g. athletics, football, tennis, biathlon) and led several of them to set up internal integrity units since the early 2020s (the first being the Tennis Integrity Unit, established in 2008). These units have varying remits and often cover other breaches of sporting integrity, including match fixing, psychological/sexual harassment of athletes, violence, racism, and corruption, as well as doping violations. The IOC's strategy on integrity is more fragmented. For example, in 2022 it established a 'Safe Sport'[8] unit specifically to deal with the harassment of athletes. Australia, Denmark, and Switzerland have created national sport integrity agencies to

oversee all issues relating to integrity, although their modest resources mean they tend to focus primarily on doping.

Nevertheless, numerous cases—the best-known being the 1995 Bosman ruling—have highlighted the difficulties that arise when trying to reconcile sport's specific system of rules and regulations with national legislation and/or European directives. For example, international sport has been unable to free itself from European rules regarding the free movement of workers within the European Union or on sport federations abusing their dominant market position in negotiations with the media (Weatherhill 2003).

However, the IOC believes that sport deserves special consideration and has therefore fought hard to persuade international bodies (United Nations, European Union, Council of Europe) to recognise the specificity of sport in international treaties (Nice Declaration in 2000 and, most importantly, the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon, whose article 165 gives the EU an explicit competence for sport and which provides the basis for a common European sports policy). Its efforts have been quite successful, as numerous international resolutions and European directives now recognise sport's social and educational role (e.g. the European Commission's 2007 white paper on sport; European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2021 on the EU's sports policy).

The main aim of the Olympic movement's political strategy, 'supported by intense lobbying (mostly by the IOC and UEFA towards the European Union) and a legal arsenal, is to protect the European model of sport and its widely recognised positive impacts in areas such as education, health, and social inclusion' (interview with a professional expert). This strategy has given rise to two frameworks for protecting sport's integrity: the Council of Europe's Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions, ratified in 2014, and the IOC's Code on the Prevention of the Manipulation of Competitions, adopted in December 2015. The IOC continued down this path in 2017 when it launched the International Partnership Against Corruption in Sport, whose aim is 'to bring together international sports organisations, governments, inter-governmental organisations, and other relevant stakeholders to strengthen and support efforts to eliminate corruption'. In 2009 the United Nations General Assembly accorded the IOC observer status, which allows it to contribute directly to United Nations programmes and to promote sport to national governments. However, these symbolic and legal international recognitions are more explicitly conditioned by the public authorities which require international and national sport institutions to continually improve their organisational governance (Geeraert and Drieskens 2017). That's why the role of state legislation on governance issues of national federations is gradually becoming much more coercive (De Dedycker 2019).

1.3. Organisational governance

The IOC, a not-for-profit organisation under Swiss law, has a very specific form of organisational governance because it is a closed club with a maximum of 115 members (99 active members in 2023) who are co-opted by existing members. These members meet at the IOC's annual general meeting, known as the Session, whose main powers are to approve annual reports, choose host cities for Olympic Games (summer, winter, and youth), and elect the IOC's president. The IOC is run by its president, who has had an executive role since 1980, in conjunction with a 15-member Executive Board (equivalent to a board of

directors) that includes 4 vice presidents. Thirty-two commissions in 2022 (e.g. Athletes, Public Affairs and Corporate Communications, Olympic Programme), composed of experts and IOC members, advise the Session, Executive Board, and/or president on specific issues.

Day-to-day operations are carried out by the IOC Administration, which has become much more professional since the 2000s and now employs almost 1000 permanent staff (Chappelet 2022). Approximately 100 of these employees work at Olympic Broadcast Services' headquarters in Madrid for the Olympic web TV channel (OCS), which the IOC set up in 2016 to broadcast archive footage of Olympic competitions and pre-Olympic tournaments. Huge increases in the Administration's payroll, and especially its directors' salaries,[9] have raised questions about whether it still offers good value for money. Although the IOC has undertaken to keep the cost of running its head office to below 10% of its revenues, the actual percentage appears to be much higher than this.[10]

The IOC's organisational governance works on the principle that the co-opted members elected to the Executive Board[11] run the institution, its salaried managers implement the board's policies, and the Session controls the results through annual activity and financial reports, which have become more detailed and more transparent since 2014. NOCs, IFs, continental federations, and NFs have similar governance structures.

The scandal that erupted following revelations of corruption in the attribution of the 2002 Olympic Games to Salt Lake City was a turning point in the IOC's organisational governance (Chappelet 2001). Facing intense political and media pressure, the IOC's 'institutional riposte' (Rayner 2007) was to make major changes to its governance, based on recommendations made by a specially convened 'IOC 2000 Commission'. These reforms included reducing the age limit for IOC members from 80 years to 70 years and changing the composition of its membership to include 15 Olympic IF presidents, 15 NOC presidents, and 15 athletes. Athletes may serve for a maximum of eight years; Olympic IF and NOC presidents serve until the end of their terms as presidents. This new rule changed the social make-up of the IOC's membership, which became much younger, more feminine (38 of the 99 members in 2023 were women), and more directly connected to the world of international sport. The greater turnover in members (45 members are elected for just eight years) also made it more difficult for the IOC's president to control the organisation's membership. IOC presidencies are now restricted to one eight-year term followed by a four-year term if a president is re-elected. The reforms also included introducing a code of ethics overseen by an ethics commission. However, this commission has not been very proactive in sanctioning breaches of ethics, including those committed by IOC members, as the best-known IOC members tainted by corruption (J. Blatter and J. Havelange at FIFA, L. Diack at the International Association of Athletics Federations, and H. Verbruggen at the Union Cycliste Internationale) resigned as IOC members to avoid being sanctioned by the commission.[12]

When Thomas Bach took over as IOC president in 2013, the IOC faced numerous contentious issues that threatened to weaken its position and overturn the political balances within sport and the Olympic movement. When responding to these issues, Bach showed himself to be a master of realpolitik, adapting his approach to each set of circumstances.

2. Thomas Bach's realpolitik approach to risk management

During his 21-year tenure as IOC president (from 1980 to 2001), Juan-Antonio Samaranch oversaw a veritable revolution in the Olympic Games that took them far from Coubertin's original ideals and turned them into a global brand (Miller 1993). When Jacques Rogge

took over from Samaranch in 2001, the most pressing issues facing the IOC concerned sport's integrity and ethics, along with the increasing use of sport to project a nation's soft power, especially by the BRICS countries and Gulf States. By the time Rogge made way for Thomas Bach, a lawyer by training and an Olympic gold medallist in fencing, Olympism was facing a crisis of legitimacy. Bach adopted a pragmatic, realpolitik approach to addressing this crisis, which had arisen due to the conjunction of several problematical issues:

- Public scepticism in Western countries about hosting the Olympic Games, especially the Winter Olympics ('no' votes prevailed in 18 of the 31 referendums on whether to bid for the Winter Olympic Games between 1968 and 2022 and in several referendums on the Summer Olympic Games—Chappelet 2021).
- The fight to protect sport's integrity (doping, match fixing, corruption by international sport leaders, physical and psychological well-being of elite athletes) and new issues such as how the Olympic world should embrace LGBTQI+ athletes.
- The instrumentalization of sport by autocratic countries and failures by major international competitions to respect human rights.
- Geopolitical questions such as whether to appoint sport leaders from authoritarian and non-democratic countries to positions of power, how to respond to Putin's Russia and its use of sport (state-sponsored doping, Ukraine war, Putin's announcement that Russia will host the 2024 BRICS Games, which hope to attract at least 70 countries, including members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation -Sankar 2023-).[13]
- Criticisms of major sport events' impact on the climate and lack of environmental sustainability.
- Competition from new forms of sports and from sports outside the Olympic movement (e.g. esports, mixed martial arts, outdoor sports, extreme sports, survival sports).
- Behaviours of generations Z (born between 1997 and 2010) and alpha (born after 2010), characterised by their use of virtual platforms and their less-active lifestyles, which may presage major public health problems (WHO 2021). These younger generations have very different ways of consuming spectator sport: According to a 2023 report by the Capgemini Research Institute ('A Whole New Ball Game' – 2023-), 77% of generation-Z respondents and 75% of generation-Y respondents said they prefer watching sport outside sports venues, compared with 32% of people over the age of 70.

Bach's responses to these issues involved astute risk management based on assessing when and with whom the IOC could take a forceful position and when it needed to adopt a more conciliatory approach. He strenuously defended the IOC's position, using arguments based on two main premises—'responsible autonomy through good governance' and the benefits sport and Olympism bring to society. However, both of these premises are open to question.

2.1. Responsible autonomy through good governance

Bach first used the expression 'responsible autonomy through good governance' in a speech he gave to the United Nations in 2013, shortly after being elected IOC president. The following year, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution supporting sport's independence and autonomy and the IOC's leadership of the Olympic movement. Here,

autonomy signifies the right for sport organisations to be self-governing and self-regulating and free from interference from governments and other external actors, including private financers (sponsors, broadcasters), as set out in Article 5 of the Olympic Charter:

> Organisations within the Olympic movement shall apply political neutrality. They have the rights and obligations of autonomy, which include freely establishing and controlling the rules of sport, determining the structure and governance of their organisations, enjoying the right of elections free from any outside influence and the responsibility for ensuring that principles of good governance be applied.

This definition of autonomy may have meaning and value in democratic states, but it is much more difficult, if not impossible, to apply it in authoritarian countries where freedom of expression is either non-existent or highly restricted. In many cases, sport and the Olympic movement are subject to political control, either directly (leaders are appointed by the state and/or are serving politicians) or indirectly (leaders are under government control), as García and Meier (2022) showed with respect to national sport governance in developing countries in the Global South. Some countries' NOCs are led by the country's president (Azerbaijan, Gulf States) or the minister for sport (some communist countries).

The IOC embodied the concept of 'responsible autonomy' in three new governance and management principles introduced following Bach's election as IOC president: announce clear strategic lines for the IOC and Olympic movement; solidify the business model; and better control and report its actions in a global spirit of greater transparency, efficacity, and social responsibility (Bayle 2016). T. Bach's governance has been 'very centralized around a very strong presidential power' (interview with a professional expert) to restore the 'credibility' (IOC Agenda 2020) sought in the reform announced when he came to power.

Bach set out his vision for the Olympic movement's future development in two strategic road maps—Agenda 2020 (40 strategic recommendations), published in 2014, and Agenda 2020 + 5 (15 recommendations), published in 2021. The IOC claims to have implemented 88% of the 40 recommendations for 2014–2021. However, the IOC relies on IFs and NOCs to implement its recommendations and 'not all IFs and NOCs have the resources to implement them effectively' (interview with a professional expert).

Bach and his teams next focused on consolidating the IOC's business model and ensuring the 'balanced' redistribution of an ever-larger proportion of its revenues to key stakeholders within the Olympic family (OCOGs, NOCs, IFs). Bach's concern was that the IOC still relies on Olympic Games broadcasting rights for 60% of its revenues, a large proportion of which comes from the United States due to the large sums US networks pay for broadcasting rights: NBC paid $7.65 billion for the period 2020–2032). In addition, two-thirds of the IOC's TOP sponsors are Western companies, so it obtains 80% of its revenues from the West, despite the multi-polar nature of today's world and the United States reduced dominance. Media rights from other parts of the world have increased, but they are still modest compared with the IOC's American contract. For example, the Australian media group Nine Entertainment paid just $191 million for 2024–2032, even though this period includes an edition of the Olympic Games in the broadcaster's home territory (Brisbane 2032). Describing this sum as 'staggeringly low', Olympic business expert Patrick Nally urged the IOC to 'reinvent' its 'ageing' business model.[14] Nevertheless, the IOC generates sufficient

revenues to spend almost $200 million on a new headquarters in Lausanne that opened in 2019.

Moves to gradually consolidate its business model, while remaining dependent on American finance and the NBC contract in a context of falling audiences, have been accompanied by attempts to secure the Olympic Games' geopolitical position. Bach's first moves in this respect were aimed to protect the reputation of the Olympic Games, which had been tarnished by the controversy over attributing the event to authoritarian regimes (Beijing 2008—Van Rheenen 2014, Sochi 2014 – Ross et al. 2021) and by political problems and/or sanctions for corruption (Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 + 1), which also affected recent Football World Cups (Brazil 2014, Qatar 2022). Unlike FIFA, which continued to attribute its flagship competition to authoritarian countries (Russia 2018, Qatar 2022, Saoudi Arabia 2034?), the IOC has attributed all forthcoming editions of the Olympic Games to Western countries or democracies. Paradoxically, the paucity of candidates for forthcoming Olympic Games facilitated its task, as, for the first time in its history, in 2017 a single IOC Session was able to attribute two editions of the Summer Games to Paris (2024) and Los Angeles (2028). This move was part of a new 'win-win' rationale (for the IOC and for candidate cities) aimed at avoiding what Andreff (2012) called 'the curse of the winning bid[15].' Similar reasoning, and the opportunity to award the Games to another Western country, led the IOC to attribute the 2032 Summer Olympics (to Brisbane) many years in advance,[16] without inviting other bids. The same procedure seems to be underway for the Winter Olympics with the selection of a single candidature for 2030 (the French Alps) and Salt Lake City (USA) for 2034 after Milano Cortina (2026 – Italia-). This focus on the West is reassuring to the IOC's Western stakeholders (respect for human rights, bid quality, use of existing facilities to reduce the event's environmental impact) but questionable in the light of the economic, political, and demographic rise of China, India, the MINT countries of Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey, and the Gulf States.

New governance principles centred round greater transparency, greater gender equality, and better control mechanisms have emerged alongside these two foundation stones (strategy and business model). Being based in Switzerland, which retains a culture of secrecy, the IOC is not obliged to publish its accounts. Nevertheless, since 2014 it has published *via* its website its annual reports, the sums it redistributes to members of the Olympic movement, and how much its members receive in allowances and per diem payments. These figures show, for example, that the compensation paid to IOC board members and commission chairs remains reasonable and in line with the salaries paid to leaders of large NGOs (which is not the case for FIFA or for the salaries the IOC pays senior managers).[17] Gender is undoubtedly the issue where the greatest progress has been made, as there will be strict gender parity among the athletes competing at Paris 2024 (Women accounted for almost 50% of the athletes at Tokyo 2020 + 1, which included 18 mixed-gender events). Progress in gender parity is also being made with respect to officials (judges/referees) and within the IOC itself, with a 50% increase in women IOC members between 2013 and 2020 and a 100% increase in the number of women on IOC commissions (women made up 48% of commission members in 2020). Progress toward gender parity at IFs, NOCs, and NFs has been more variable and often disappointing. Of the 40 Olympic IFs, only 2 have women presidents and only 10% of NOCs are headed by women (Schoch and Clausen 2019). The IOC's objective (announced back in 2008) is for at least 30% of Olympic IFs and NOCs to have women presidents by 2030, "but this will be difficult to achieve without taking coercive

action against IFs and NOCs and imposing gender quotas, as many NFs have done" (interview with an academic expert).

Moves to achieve 'good' governance have also including adopting new mechanisms. In 2008 the IOC drew up its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance Within the Olympic movement and subsequently included them its code of ethics. Under the terms of the Olympic Charter, all organisations within the Olympic movement are expected to apply these principles, but "few IFs and NOCs have done so" (interview with a sport organisation executive). Moreover, despite setting up an Ethics and Compliance Office in 2014 to ensure organisations follow these principles, the IOC has done little to support their implementation.[18]

Indeed, strictly implementing such universalist governance norms across all contexts is not necessarily practical, so they should be seen more as an 'aspiration than a practical result' (Ghadami and Henry 2015, 997). Based on a study of how Iran's NOC has applied the IOC's governance principles, these authors concluded that such norms should allow national, regional, and local actors to choose, modify, and weight indicators and operational measures of 'good' governance in the light of their values and priorities (Ghadami and Henry 2015). The fact that governance is a normative concept 'relative to the desired ends and founded on values and norms that come from a national culture and which reflect different global ontologies' (Girginov 2019, 91) makes it even more important to take into account the cultural dimension.

In the wake of the 2015 FIFAgate scandal, the IOC began encouraging IFs to use the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' (ASOIF) governance evaluation tool, a self-report governance questionnaire comprising 50 indicators divided into five domains: transparency, integrity, democracy, development of sport and solidarity, and control mechanisms (Chappelet et al. 2020). The Council of Europe's Jensen Report (2018) welcomed this initiative, whose results have been published on four occasions (2017, 2018, 2020, 2022), but it also criticised its lack of independence and argued for creating an ISO standard for good governance in sport. Moreover, the quality of governance within IFs remains very variable and highly problematic for some. For example, on 22 June 2023 the IOC took the unprecedented step of withdrawing its recognition of the International Amateur Boxing Federation (IBA) due to the federation's continuing governance failures. After being suspended in 2019 and discredited by repeated judging scandals, IBA has definitively lost both its right to organise the tournaments at the Paris and Los Angeles Olympic Games (although this sport remains on the programme) and the funding it would have received from the IOC. As a result, it will have to rely on other sources of funding to service its large debts.

2.2. Sport's societal impacts called into question

Given that its aim is to 'build a better world through sport' (IOC Annual Report 2014), the Olympic movement must take concrete steps to do this and demonstrate its positive impacts on societal and environmental issues. The IOC's claims regarding sport and the Olympic Games' societal impacts focus on three areas: sustainability, development through sport, and the positive legacy of the Olympic Games.

In 2015 the United Nations acknowledged sport's contribution to advancing its 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2015–2030, which the IOC subsequently used as a

framework for its environmental policy, introduced in 2016. This policy requires the IOC to take action in three areas—gender equality, human rights, and (environmental) sustainability—and on three levels—at its headquarters, as the owner of the Olympic Games, and as the leader of the Olympic movement. In terms of achieving gender equality, it has made much more progress at its headquarters and at the Olympic Games than it has in the rest of the Olympic movement. Human rights is a complex issue on which the IOC is still constructing its approach, advised by a special unit set up within its Administration in 2021. In addition to using existing facilities and reducing the cost of staging the Olympic Games, the IOC's sustainability objectives for 2021-24 focus on the climate, biodiversity, and the circular economy. In terms of climate action, it has adopted the target for countries set out in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and undertaken to reduce its direct and indirect carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. However, it will achieve most of this reduction by carbon offsetting, with only a relatively small contribution from reducing emissions relating to its headquarters' operations and the Olympic Games. In addition, IOC, together with a small number of IFs and NOCs, has signed the United Nation's Sports for Climate Action initiative, launched in the wake of COP21.

Beyond its environmental initiatives, which the IOC promotes widely but which OCOGs, NOCs, and IFs struggle to put into action (Santini and Henderson 2021), the Olympic movement must also demonstrate sport's positive impacts on education, health, development, and promoting societal change in countries with very young and rapidly growing populations (India, Africa, South-East Asia). Olympism 365, launched in 2021, is a very ambitious strategy aimed at strengthening sport's role in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In the field of peace and international solidarity, in 2015 the IOC created a Refugee Olympic Team to raise awareness of the 20 million people currently living as refugees. The team competed for the first time at the 2016 Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games' short-term impacts and long-term legacy are contentious issues for researchers (Scheu et al. 2021), who frequently challenge the event's purported positive effects on tourism, participation in sport, society (national pride and feeling of belonging, improved social cohesion, etc.), and territorial marketing Wolfe et al. 2021). Nevertheless, one impact is indisputable: hosting the Olympic Games greatly accelerates infrastructure projects in the host territory, as occurred in Seine-Saint-Denis prior to Paris 2024 and in East London prior to London 2012 (Wolfe et al. 2021) even if authors criticize a gentrification effect and a poor social legacy (Watt 2013). In addition, ensuring their Olympic Games' tangible and intangible legacy is of great importance to OCOGs, which now set up special units to plan this aspect. The IOC also has studies and tools to counter detractors (Weed et al. 2015), and in 2021 it published a report (Over 125 Years of Olympic Venues: Post-Games Use) claiming that 92% of permanent venues used for the Olympic Games in the twenty-first century and 85% of all Olympic facilities are still in use today.

The IOC has worked hard to change its image and improve the Olympic movement's governance and management practices, but this has involved accepting sometimes fragile and questionable trade-offs and compromises. In other words, the IOC has had to perform a balancing act between its goals and its main stakeholders' capacities and willingness to accept change.

3. Discussion: an institutional balancing act

It is possible to draw parallels between Bach's realpolitik approach, aimed at protecting the IOC's legitimacy, and neo-institutional sociological theories on how change occurs within a sector. Legitimacy is at the core of institutional approaches. Institutions are accredited legitimacy to the degree to which they conform to norms, beliefs and rules of the system in which they operate. The sociological approach of neo-institutionalism recognizes the multi-institutional environment in which institutions operate and try to achieve their primary goal: survival. This requires the establishment of a certain legitimacy within the institutional environment.

3.1. Institutional work and legitimacy

First, the IOC is the sport and Olympic system's key 'institutional entrepreneur' (as defined by Dimaggio 1988), as it is the IOC which implements institutional change to achieve its objectives. But achieving its strategic objectives is a collective process in which the IOC must involve other actors and create beneficial interactions. Bach's strategies involve carrying out what neo-institutional theory terms 'institutional work' (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006) to create, maintain, or even destabilise institutions, depending on the circumstances. The notion of 'institutional work' throws light on the strategies the IOC uses to ensure public and private commercial organisations that regulate and influence sport (Nite and Edwards 2021) come into line with the IOC's and Olympic movement's interests.

The only way to obtain acceptable arrangements and compromises is *via* this collective process, conducted within the framework of a more partnership-based form of systemic governance and more harmonious and collaborative political relations achieved by promising 'good' or 'better' organisational governance. This framework also enables the IOC to adapt to or win over institutions so it can maintain its policies, obtain resources, and, in the end, ensure its legitimacy. According to neo-institutional theory, organisations acquire legitimacy by showing they conform with standards and rules and with the beliefs, cognitive schemas, and moral models which provide the systems of meaning that guide human action and structure social, political, and economic relations. In other words, rather than resulting from conformity to values and social constructions (Oliver 1991) and to societal norms, legitimacy is mostly based on inter-organisational collusions (Dobry 1986).

Whereas rationality guides actions according to established rules (the 'embedded agency' of Garud et al. 2007), reflexivity refers to an individual's ability to discern, imagine, and change these rules and pursue its interests beyond the limits set by institutions (state, social groups, etc.). The IOC achieves such a tour de force with the Olympic Games by imposing the Olympic Charter on a host country for the duration of the Games and negotiating various legal and fiscal advantages.

Nevertheless, evaluating organisational legitimacy is key. According to Suchman (1995) and Deephouse et al. (2017), this involves analysing three types of criteria: cognitive, socio-political, and moral. When social practices are too different from existing patterns and therefore incomprehensible, there is a great likelihood they will be rejected. For example, if an edition of the Olympic Games is perceived as having an excessively large environmental impact (travel by delegations and tourists, construction of numerous venues, etc.), as was

the case for Sochi 2014 (Muller et al. 2021) and Beijing 2022, this leads to a deficit in cognitive legitimacy, notably for Western audiences.

Socio-political legitimacy arises when an organisation enjoys the support and approval of influential bodies within its environment. The IOC and Olympic movement's socio-political legitimacy comes from the support it receives from national governments (state subsidies for Olympic sport) and from international bodies (e.g. being named by the European Union as the guarantor of the 'European model' of sport and being granted observer status at the United Nations). In turn, this socio-political legitimacy allows the Olympic movement to access tangible and intangible resources (funding, staff, image, status in society, public opinion, etc.).

Moral legitimacy arises when society perceives a practice or organisational form as consistent with existing cultural norms. The Olympic movement draws its moral legitimacy from Olympic values and ideology and the supposed positive effects of sport, although many elite athletes and scientific studies are now challenging these effects. Indeed, competitive sport does not automatically have positive impacts, as whether it produces benefits depends on how and where it is done. For example, producing exceptional performances places huge demands on elite athletes and these demands can have very negative effects on their mental health, both during and after their sporting careers. Other threats to the Olympic movement's moral legitimacy include the failure of many sport organisations to appoint women to senior positions.

Thus, as Maguire and Hardy (2009) showed, legitimacy can be attacked, and these attacks can lead to the de-institutionalisation and disappearance of organisational practices and forms once considered self-evident. Such practices include:

- Sport executives occupying multiple positions and roles (in public administration, business, and sport), which favours insularity, conflicts of interest, and, in some cases, corruption (Bayle and Rayner 2018).
- Staging the Winter Olympic Games in areas with insufficient natural snow and facilities.
- Displacing homeless people to build Olympic facilities.
- Expecting athletes in precarious and vulnerable financial situations to compete in the Olympic Games without receiving financial compensation.

Failure to address these issues and ensure that the IOC responds to the world's major challenges and becomes more in step societal changes could even lead to the demise of Olympic Games.

3.2. Strategic responses to institutional processes

Achieving legitimacy is essential for organisations with social objectives, which is why bodies such as the IOC must "put in place, manipulate, and exploit evocative symbols to gain society's support" (Berland and Pezet 2009, 158)' Oliver (1991) drew up a typology of the strategic responses and associated tactics organisations use to mitigate institutional pressures and overcome crises, but also to maximise the benefits they extract from their environment, notably their political environment. Their responses generally involve quashing conflicts and/or crises by neutralising external pressure (media, legal, political, etc.).

The aim of these five strategies—acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, manipulation—is not to improve performance but to keep up appearances and give the organisation legitimacy. The IOC uses all five strategies at three different levels: the sport/Olympic system level, the inter-organisational level (between the IOC and European Union or Olympic IFs), and the intra-organisational level (IOC's operations). Table 2 shows that the IOC frequently uses compromise and manipulation strategies at the Olympic system level. Other strategies, such as avoidance, can lead to decoupling, that is a disconnect between the IOC's rhetoric and its actions. Some organisations can use these practices as a protection mechanism without being challenged, but this is not the case for the IOC, which is subject to intense media scrutiny and open to attack from NGOs, investigative journalists, and national justice departments.

This neo-institutional theory is interesting because it sheds light on the active and passive resistance strategies the IOC and Olympic movement use, depending on the nature of a crisis and the interests involved, to counter attempts to impose outside regulation (*via* institutional pressures) and avoid deinstitutionalisation due to societal changes. Strategic responses depend on the nature of the institutional pressure, the way this pressure is applied, and when it occurs (crisis or stability), together with the level on which a strategy is deployed (macro-meso-micro). The IOC's message of international legitimacy can be summarised as follows: Political institutions, the business world, and society as a whole need Olympic sport and the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Therefore, they need the IOC and Olympic movement, even if these institutions are imperfect (as are the political and business worlds). Sport is doing its best and trying to improve, even if it is on a small scale. Olympism and sport are essential for society because of their benefits in numerous fields, including education, social insertion, and health. The Olympic movement is founded on democratic, non-profit principles and on volunteerism. Thus, Olympism is a common good for society and humanity.[19] Neither total privatisation of sport nor total state control would be in society's interest. The former would risk excluding many people from sport; the latter would require massive public investment to ensure everyone has access to sport. Everyone, especially national and international political leaders, must keep these threats in mind.

It is this historically constructed system of beliefs and meanings, taken up and promoted by Bach and his communication teams, that the entire world has, so far, generally accepted. IFs and NFs promote this message internationally and nationally, with UEFA lobbying particularly hard to implant it within the European Union. These efforts have enabled the IOC to hold on to its right to self-regulation in many areas.

The IOC has used its discourse (speeches and numerous documents published since 2014), together with decoupling practices on issues such as 'good' governance, sustainability, and integrity, to build a social meaning around a new form of IOC-led regulation for the Olympic system. It has tried to homogenise the Olympic organisational field's practices,[20] even though it has neither the capacity nor the means to impose its will on Olympic IFs and NOCs, which continue to be very varied in their functioning and professionalisation. Moreover, in the name of respecting IFs' and NOCs' autonomy, "the IOC refuses to become involved in their governance and functioning" (interview with a professional expert). Instead, the IOC relies on institutional isomorphism (Dimaggio and Powell 1983) to converge and homogenise the behaviours of IFs, NOCs, and even OCOGs. Dimaggio and Powell (1983) identified three types of institutional isomorphism, all of which can be seen in the IOC's actions towards the Olympic system's core organisations:

Table 2. Strategic responses to institutional processes adapted from Oliver's framework (1991).

Strategies	Tactics	Examples	Applied to the IOC
Acquiescence	Adapt	Adapt to invisible norms, taken as given	Societal changes (gender equality, disabilities, diversity, etc.)
	Imitate	Mimic institutional models	UN's 2030 sustainable development goals
			Ethical conformity practices used by multinational companies
	Submit	Follow rules and accept norms	Bach's slogan: 'Change or be changed'
			Accept European law, but demand recognition for the specificity of sport (mobilising political support)
Compromise	Balance	Balance the expectations of numerous stakeholders	Redistribute Olympic revenues to OCOGs, IFs, NOCs (redistribution scale)
	Appease	Appease institutional stakeholders	Olympic Truce during Olympic and Paralympic Games (armed conflict)
			CAS (resolve legal disputes more quickly, discreetly, and efficiently than national courts)
			Involve governments in the fight against doping (WADA)
	Negotiate	Negotiate with institutional stakeholders	States/governments for organising Olympic Games (application of 'Olympic law')
Avoidance	Hide	Non-conformity	Do not apply the 'universal principles of good governance' (2009) or good governance measures for IFs (ASOIF 2016)
			No real support or coercion from the IOC on this issue
	Cushion	Relax institutional ties	Accept media/financial demands (timing of some events at Olympic Games imposed by NBC, e.g. for swimming events at Tokyo 2020 + 1)
			Refuse to compensate athletes but relax rules on individual image rights
	Flee	Change objectives, activity, or field	National justice systems ('don't wash the dirty laundry in public' by creating a sports justice system and self-regulation – internal ethics commission)
Defiance	Ignore	Ignore norms and explicit values	Public opinion and NGOs (human rights and sustainability, depending on the countries hosting Olympic and Paralympic Games)
	Challenge	Deprecate practices and demands	Denounce some forms of political interference (but accept others) in the name of sport's autonomy and political neutrality
	Attack	Attack sources of institutional pressure	Manoeuvre to dissolve SportAccord (2017) and then the GAISF (2022)—IF umbrella bodies and historic counterweights to the IOC
Manipulation	Co-opt	Incorporate into influential bodies	New IOC members (external lobbying/internal geopolitical balance) and new Olympic sports (attract young people and new markets, especially India, China, and Indonesia)
			International Testing Agency (independent anti-doping body)
	Influence	Influence values and criteria	Myths relating to the Olympic Games' origins and their revival by Coubertin
			Ideology around the universal nature of Olympic values and their effects
	Control	Dominate aspects of society and institutional processes	Olympic Charter (constitutional framework)
			Position the Olympic brand as a socially responsible brand
			-Agendas 2020 and 2020 + 5 (strategic roadmaps for the Olympic movement)

- Normative isomorphism, which can occur via increased professionalisation brought about by the revenues the IOC redistributes and by inter-organisational staff mobility between OCOGs, IFs, NOCs, the IOC and the network of professional Olympic experts (strengthened by associations of professional sport managers).[21] Professionalisation is also fed by training organisations specialising in Olympic sport management and which have received the IOC's 'blessing' (it often recruits senior managers and staff from these programmes). The International Olympic Academy, AISTS,[22] and MEMOS[23] offer/are IOC-approved master's degree programmes in Olympic sport management.[24]
- Mimetic isomorphism (copying good governance, sustainability, and integrity practices). Olympic organisations may imitate other Olympic organisations, international bodies (e.g., UN frameworks on sustainability, refugees, etc.), and the IOC's multinational partners (e.g., ethical conformity practices).
- Coercive isomorphism (formal and informal political pressure by the IOC via the Olympic Charter and Olympic revenue redistribution criteria).

Faced with the great heterogeneity in Olympic organisations' professionalism, the IOC addresses problems, inconsistencies, and crises as they arrive. Its strategy tends to be very flexible, allowing it to bend to political realities, which sometimes involves side-stepping sensitive international issues by leaving IFs to take their own decisions. The IOC has taken this approach with respect to Russia's state-sanctioned doping (allowing each IF to set its own criteria for reintegrating Russian athletes after the Rio Olympics), intersex and transgender athletes, and the war in Ukraine (allowing Russian athletes to compete under certain conditions but giving each IF the power of veto for its sport. World Athletics is the only sport to have used this veto). This results in IFs taking different positions, prevents Olympic sport speaking with a single voice, and leads to inconsistencies. For example, the International Fencing Federation disqualified a Ukrainian competitor from its 2023 world championships because she refused to shake hands with her Russian opponent. The IOC immediately called on the federation to revoke the sanction and allow this athlete to qualify for the 2024 Olympic Games. Even Ukraine adopted a less-rigid stance in the summer of 2023 by no longer asking Ukrainian athletes to boycott all competitions involving Russian athletes.

This is why the IOC's institutional work can be described as a balancing act in which it must manage the paradoxes and contradictions that arise from the numerous ethical dilemmas facing educational and humanist movements such as Olympism: business versus 'purity' of Olympic values; elite sporting performance versus integrity of competitions versus athlete health; exemplarity of leaders versus conflicts of interest and corruption; sport's political neutrality versus geopolitical instrumentalization; United Nation's' universal human rights-Olympic humanism versus authoritarian regimes hosting Olympic Games, etc. Hardy and Maguire (2008) identified three possible states for organisational fields: emerging, stable mature, and mature in crisis. Mature fields in crisis, such as Olympism, are full of contradictions and struggles between actors. Challenges to practices and forms augur a possible decline and a process of de-institutionalisation followed by institutional innovation and re-institutionalisation (Zietsma and Lawrence 2010). Using institutional entrepreneurship to affirm its leadership leaves the IOC open to criticism and increases the pressure it faces to conform with social norms, which restricts its ability

to act freely. This is why it tends to react to changes in society, rather than taking proactive measures to lead societal change.

Other types of social evaluation, notably an organisation's status (position in a hierarchy of organisations), its reputation (an indicator of the quality of its services/products), and whether it is stigmatised or subject to public disapproval (see Roulet 2019), also impact an organisation's legitimacy. This raises the questions of whether these positive and negative social evaluations effect an organisation's performance and whether they are linked to and consistent with its social responsibility (Bayle 2016) and sustainability (Moon et al. 2021) strategies. Adopting a strategic management perspective, Ben Slimane and Leca (2015) drew up a framework combining the resource-based view (key resources/competencies required to build a competitive advantage) and the concept of institutional work. This framework shows how actors in a field use four key institutional competencies (understanding the environment; construction of justifications and rationalisation; mobilisation of political support; mobilisation of material resources) to develop institutional resources and capacities that are vital to steering the organisation's legitimacy. Applying this framework to the IOC shows that its prime reason for defending its legitimacy is to ensure its economic performance.

A more fundamental question is to determine the main objective of the IOC's institutional work. Is it to maintain the IOC's and Olympic movement's current position, and that of its individual actors (leaders, directors, etc.), or is to give institutional and Olympic sport a new place ('vision') in society? This question touches not only on the future of sports policies but also sport's role in society, for which it must involve its network of key partners.

Conclusion

The current study analysed the strategies Bach and his team have used to reduce institutional pressures on the IOC and to overcome the crises it has faced since Bach became IOC president in 2013. Its main contribution is to demonstrate the interest of the neo-institutional approach and the legitimatisation work carried out in fields in crisis such as Olympism.

The IOC has changed profoundly over the last 10 years, notably with respect to its marketing, the Olympic programme, gender equality, professionalisation, and transparency. However, many observers continue to doubt the credibility of these changes. Bach's 2014 mantra, 'change or be changed', still holds true in an uncertain world marked by the war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, rising tensions between China and Taiwan, and the social and economic changes being brought about by digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic. The IOC's decision to recommend IFs allow Russian and Byelorussian athletes (excluded from international competitions at the start of the war in Ukraine) to return to competitions under certain conditions disappointed Western countries and supporters of Ukraine, which wanted the IOC to take a harder line, but it exemplifies the sort of compromises the IOC makes to avoid antagonising powerful actors.[25]

The difficulty for the IOC is to align its discourse, practices, and results and to find (geo) political balances in a system dominated by political games. The 'big Olympic family of sport' still works too often on the 'gift and counter-gift' system described by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1968), in which the obligation to 'give-receive-give' creates dependency between leaders (Bayle and Rayner 2018). The fact is that even though some counterbalances

are emerging (e.g. the Swiss government[26] and NGOs such as Amnesty International, Transparency International,[27] and Global Athlete, whose aim is 'to help athletes to gain a more represented voice in world sport', etc.) there is still no strong, independent counterweight to the IOC president's power, either internally or externally. Accepting the need for independent external evaluations, giving whistleblowers better protection (Verschuuren 2020), and giving greater weight to human rights when awarding Olympic Games and drawing up Host City Contracts (Grell 2018) are key to increasing the legitimacy and credibility of the IOC, Olympic Games, and the Olympic movement.

Notes

1. According to the Council of Europe's 2021 European Sports Charter, sport integrity encompasses personal, competitive, and organisational integrity.
2. International Federation of Sport Climbing, created in 2007.
3. The IOC added skateboarding to the Olympic programme to bring the sport within the Fédération Internationale de Roller Sports (renamed World Skate in 2017), which governs other roller-skate disciplines, including artistic roller skating, speed skating, rink hockey, and inline hockey. However, only skateboarding, which began as a counter-culture sport, will be on the official Olympic programme.
4. *Zwift* (cycling), *Just Dance* (dancing), *Gran Turismo* (motor sport), *Virtual Regatta* (sailing), *Chess*, *WBSC eBaseball: Power Pros* (baseball), *Virtual Taekwondo*, *Tennis Clash*, *Fortnite* (shooting), *Tic Tac Bow* (archery).
5. https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1141738/ioc-to-launch-olympic-esports-games.
6. Berkeley (2022), ASOIF President claims IOC has become "umbrella of sports movement" in backing of GAISF dissolution https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1130988/bitti-ioc-umbrella-sports-movement.
7. In August 2023, the BRICS group invited Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina to join them to form a powerful rival to the United States. This new grouping will come into being on 1 January 2024. Finally, the new Argentine president refused this integration.
8. https://olympics.com/ioc/safe-sport
9. A major NGO has criticised the IOC's senior managers' remuneration: $1.426 million for the director general, $920,000 dollars for the chief operating officer, according to: https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1141368/david-owen-blog-us-document-ioc-finances
10. P. Nally, an expert in the Olympic business, gives an estimate of 30% but without clearly citing any sources. He also questions the failure to consolidate costs linked to the marketing company TMS (a commercial company 100% owned by the IOC and which manages the IOC's sponsorship and marketing contracts), to OBS, owned by the IOC, and to the Olympic Games. https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1141743/patrick-nally-big-read-ioc-financial.
11. Members receive €6500 per year to cover administrative expenses and €418 for every day they work. The IOC's president receives €225,000 per annum (source: IOC Report 2023).
12. For a critical analysis of international sport's codes of ethics and ethics commissions, see: Constandt and Willem (2021).
13. https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1140156/putin-invites-brics-games.
14. https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1141743/patrick-nally-big-read-ioc-financial.
15. The bidding process for hosting an edition of the Olympic Games leads candidate cities to overstate their cases by under-estimating the cost of facilities and of staging the event. For the city that obtains the Games, this under-estimation results in a substantial increase in the actual cost, which may be two more times the amount originally announced. Andreff (2012). halshs-00794056.
16. Eleven years before the event, rather than the usual 7 years.

17. A major NGO has criticised the high salaries of the IOC's senior managers. According to https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1141368/david-owen-blog-us-document-ioc-finances, the IOC's director general receives a salary package worth $1.426 million and the chief operating officer receives $920,000.

18. In 2016 the European Olympic Committees designed a governance learning and assessment tool called SIGGS (Self-evaluation Tool on Good Governance for National Olympic Committees). https://www.siggs.eu/index.html.

19. See J-L. Chappelet on common theories applied to the Olympic Games, chapter 7, 147–163.

20. Dimaggio and Powell (1983) defined an organisation field as a group of organisations that belong to the same 'area' of institutional life. That is, an arena in which organisations recognise each other and share the same sense of reality and the same cognitive schemas and interact around institutionalised practices and forms. Thus, an organisational field comprises all the actors who help build and maintain institutions in that field.

21. For example, the Swiss Association of Sport Managers plays this role in Switzerland.

22. Académie Internationale des sciences et techniques du sport. An academic foundation set up by local universities, the IOC, the city of Lausanne and the Vaud canton.

23. Executive Masters in Sport Organisation Management, which Olympic Solidarity use to train Olympic movement executives and managers.

24. FIFA, in conjunction with the CIES, and the UEFA Academy also offer 'internal' training courses for people involved in football.

25. For more on this subject, see: https://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/economie/-le-cio-est-sous-pression-des-occidentaux-/48619246.

26. On 12 December 2014, the Swiss parliament passed a bill clamping down on money laundering. The bill's title, "Lex FIFA," gives a good idea of its target. According to one of the bill's main supporters, Roland Büchel, who works for the IOC's marketing department, "Switzerland's Parliament and people of are fed up with corruption" (*Le Monde*, 11 December 2014).

27. The NGO Transparency International campaigned within the framework of the FIFAgate, for a control of the integrity of the leaders of the sport, for protection of whistleblowers (as it exists in United States and Great Britain) and for a independent oversight to reform the organisation.

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