INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE OF ACTION SPORTS:

AN ORGANISATIONAL LEGITIMACY PERSPECTIVE

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**Research context**

Action sports are relatively new phenomena in global sport landscape. They have grown from the participatory “alternative” activities in the last three decades and include sports such as snowboarding, surfing and free climbing. It is commonplace to classify sports as “action” or “extreme” if they include high risk levels, unconventional rules or techniques, and are considered counter-cultural (Puchan, 2004; Sun, Ji and Ae, 2010; Breivik, 2010). Some authors (Booth, 1995; Wheaton, 2000; Breivik, 2010) touched upon the topic of the governance of action sports from social perspective and their studies provide an initial understanding of the phenomenon. Most action sports have had a history of self-governance as “loose groups decided on their own how to build identity and values, how to develop techniques and skills” (Breivik, 2010, p.270). Despite general resistance of action sports to institutionalisation (Wheaton, 2000) and wide-spread anti-competitive postmodern ideology at their early ages, “organised competition was essential for public acceptance of their sport” (Booth, 1995, p.193), thus some national and international governing bodies were formed quite early in many action sports. The major reason for the establishment of those governing bodies was a need to regulate and promote specific sports and run basic competitions (Booth, 1995).

However, individualism and non-competitiveness, which have historically been distinctive features of action sports, had an impact on their history of governance. Governing bodies mostly served just as competition organising institutions, but competitions have been somewhat of limited significance: in many sports, such as snowboarding, B.A.S.E jumping, or skateboarding, film and video making has always been as important as competitions (Breivik, 2010, p.270). Also, challenge, excitement, and risk have been integral parts of participation in these sports, so the activities are closely aligned with the precepts of “play” (Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003, p.6) rather than with the routine of training and performance in the standardized environment of mainstream sports. Overall, the previous research indicated that the governance of many action sports has been formalised to a limited extent, mostly concerning competitions of elite athletes.

The process of commercialisation of action sports has also played one of the key roles in shaping initial governance of action sports. Since the arrival of the X-Games in 1995, most popular action sports, such as skateboarding, snowboarding, and BMX, have become very attractive in commercial terms, as they have been promoted by mass media, the global television broadcast of the X-Games and the wide spread of internet video and broadcasting services, such as YouTube, in the 2000s. As these have become fundamental drivers in the further commercialisation and institutionalisation of action sports (Beal, 2013), a change towards a more institutionalised way of governance of action sports that would fit media and sponsors might have been expected. However, due to quite distinctive features of action sports, which have come from their culture and are central to initial understanding of their organisation, the principles of international governance of action sports have not been clear and required investigation. Against this background, the purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how action sports have organizationally evolved and how the Olympic movement affected their international governance.

**Theoretical perspective: organisational legitimacy**

Organisational legitimacy is one of the central concepts of the new institutional theory. Greenwood (2008, p.100) suggests that new institutionalism emphasizes “legitimacy rather than efficiency as an explanation for the success and survival of organisations”. Following an initial introduction and development of the notion of organisational legitimacy by Zucker (1977) and Meyer and Rowan (1977), Meyer and Scott (1983, p.201) defined it as

... the degree of cultural support for an organisation - the extent to which the array of established cultural accounts provides explanations for its existence, functioning, and jurisdiction, and lack or deny alternatives.

Whilst organisational legitimacy in new institutional theory is linked to notion of culture of the organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Prahalad and Bettis, 1986), there is a need for this study to distinguish this “cultural legitimacy” from “regulatory legitimacy”. Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2006, p. 57) state that legitimacy has both “a cognitive dimension that constitutes the object for actors as a valid, objective social feature and a normative, prescriptive dimension that represents the social object as right”. In other words, regulatory legitimacy derives from rulemaking and enforcement activities (Deephouse and Suchman, 2008), whereas cultural legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574). For example, most national and international sport governing bodies possess regulatory legitimacy in sport, as they are empowered to develop their sports by state or Olympic authorities.

The cultural legitimacy is more abstract construction than regulatory legitimacy, as it is often difficult determining who has authority over cultural legitimation in a specific field, measuring cultural legitimacy and teasing it apart from other concepts, such as status and reputation (Washington and Patterson, 2011). This study takes the view of Greenwood (2008) that cultural legitimacy is determined by institutional logics that are “more than strategies or logics of action … and provide a sense of order and ontological security” (Thornton and Ocasio, 2008, p.108). Institutional logics are a fundamental concept of institutional theory and can be described as specific patterns of norms and values emphasized in an institutional environment of a particular organisational field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Hinings, Thibault, Slack, and Kikulis, 1996; Scott, 2001). Conformity to these values and norms is inevitable for organisational actors in order to “receive and maintain legitimacy, and survive and prosper” (Danisman, Hinings and Slack, 2006, p.303). As several studies of different sports demonstrated (Southall and Nagel, 2008; Peachey and Bruening, 2011; Skirstad and Chelladurai, 2011), a field’s dominant institutional logic is usually adopted as taken-for-granted beliefs and values. Essentially, institutional logics of any organisational field are a manifestation of macro-culture of that field. Traditionally, in action sports many grassroots participants have not been institutionalised with governing bodies (Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003) as they were not necessarily dependent on competitions organised by those governing bodies. Instead, they have created more informal alliances, such as Ticket-To-Ride (TTR) Snowboarding, for example. Similarly, in skateboarding cultural legitimacy could be seen even more opposed to regulatory legitimacy:

[Skateboarding‘s] evolution is the product of all of us over the last 40 or so years. In that respect, we all own it by simply doing it, but none of us has the authority to control it… Skateboarding has no governing body, as its direction is forged by the very act of doing it. There can't be a governing body, as it won't govern. It will produce an artificial aspect of skating created around a table and divorced from the very act it seeks to direct… [A] self-elected governing body is about to get rich both monetarily and in influence by claiming they speak for us, when in fact skateboarding's greatest asset is its freedom…

Steve G, skateboarding participant

(Stratford, no date)

Considering this very important role of informality and freedom in action sports, the perspective of cultural legitimacy was extremely relevant when analysing the governance of these sports.

**Method**

A qualitative approach is chosen with case studies of organisational evolution of three international sports: competitive snowboarding, competitive skateboarding and sport climbing. The selection of these particular action sports was based on the following set of criteria, which were elaborated in order to identify rich but not unusual cases that demonstrate different perspectives on the research question:

* Substantial number of international professional athletes;
* Existence of international governing organisation(s) in the sport;
* International relevance of the sport;
* Existence of distinct values of activity;
* Similar time of sport establishment and popularisation;
* Practical considerations / Access to data.

The case studies of these sports were focused on their international organisation, and were not limited to any specific territories or organisations.

The choice of phenomenology as methodological approach and case study as research design of this study implied the use of mixed qualitative methods: open-ended interviews and correspondences, analysis of documents, media, blogs, and social media. Interviews aimed to collect a number of key viewpoints to inform the investigation and interpretation. Key informants in the action sports were interviewed, including current and former international athletes, officials from the key governing bodies and the International Olympic Committee. They were selected based on their role in action sports, their awareness of key issues and willingness to discuss them.

In addition to the interview data, a wide range of documents and materials was studied. These included regulations, guidelines, journal articles, media coverage, online blogs and discussion, post/comments in social networks. A preliminary analysis of these documents supplemented facilitated the choice of interviewees and identification of key themes and questions. These sources were also used in the post-interview period, as they brought the additional perspectives of action sport experts, non-professional participants, and fans. In particular, social media proved to be valuable source of information, as they are heavily used by action sport participants and commentators to share opinions on sports governance, so provide first-hand account with no media interpretation. Synthesizing all the data from various sources and in different formats into themes and patterns was one of the biggest challenges of this research project. However, application of the NVivo software, which was used to manage and group the data, facilitated thematic analysis and creation of the narrative. The system of codes, such as “Traditional values,” “Olympic movement,” and “Umbrella governing body”, was developed.

**Network governance in action sports**

Any modern international sport is an institutionalised activity that requires governing. The term “governance” has been discussed in sport context over the last two decades. According to Ferkins et al (2009, p.245), sport governance is “the responsibility for the functioning and overall direction of the organization”, which applies to all levels of sport from club level and sport teams to national governing bodies and international government agencies. This chapter considers the highest level of governance in sport, which the international governance of whole sports, and focuses on its key aspects: organisation of international competitions, decision over the rules of the sport and overall direction of sport evolution. Using an example of international cricket, Hoye and Cuskelly (2007) suggest that international sport governance operates as an internationally federated network of a complex nature and structure. As highlighted by Chappelet and Kuebler (2008), for over a century international sport has been governed by the “Olympic system”: the network of non-profit governing bodies centered round the Olympic Games and its leading organisation, the International Olympic Committee (IOC). However, recently the Olympic system has become much more complex to manage, as it

…has evolved into a complex network of stakeholders that requires a more global form of governance capable of taking into account each stakeholder’s own interests and the relations between stakeholders, including national and supranational governments, which had until recently been kept at a distance.

Chappelet (2016, p.748).

Even though the IOC, as the leading actor of the Olympic movement, cannot assume a responsibility for the whole international sport, the role of this organisation in the world sport transpires its formal remit. As highlighted by Chappelet (2016), in the view of some complex challenges that modern sports is facing, the managerial doctrine of the Olympic system is now about a more global governance of the whole network rather than a simple administration of stakeholders affairs.

In terms of international governance of specific sports, usually there is a single international governing body in charge of organisation and development of any international “mainstream” sport. Such governing body normally functions as an association of governing bodies, for example, the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) or the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF). Under an umbrella of a single international governing body, there is usually a network of national governing bodies, which in turn operate as federated networks within their own nations with state or provincial associations as members (Hoye and Cuskelly, 2007). Thus, a supposition of this research project was that at some stage of any action sport’s evolution one leading international governing body would emerge and dominate the sport governance. This was the case for sport climbing – this sport has always had one leading international governing body at the top of the hierarchy and effectively in control of everything in international sport climbing: the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) until 2006, and the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) since then. The IFSC is a relatively small organisation, but there are no alternative international governing bodies in sport climbing, which is in line with the typical hierarchical governance of “mainstream” sports.

However, there has been a striking contrast between the governing structure of international sport climbing and the international structures in skateboarding and snowboarding. Neither international competitive skateboarding nor international competitive snowboarding have ever had one leading international organisation, which would be responsible for the governance of the whole sport and which all the other respective sport organisations would relate to. It emerged from the research that historically the development of these action sports has not been primarily driven by governing organisations, but rather commercial organisations, such as event organisers, sponsors, media companies, and equipment producers. International governing bodies still existed in these sports, but they did not directly govern in a conventional sport governance sense, but rather facilitated the development of action sports in an informal way. For example, the International Snowboard Federation was formed by snowboarders in 1989 with an intention to organise and control international competitions and to develop the sport in a way that would ensure its culture would be maintained (Popovic, 2006; Rails, 2011). The International Snowboard Federation described itself as not just a sport governing body but a “lifestyle/peace movement and philosophy” and remained “the kids in baggy pants and backward hats” rather than businessmen in suits (Natives, 2002). It was necessary for the International Snowboarding Federation to be more than a sport federation in order to be culturally accepted in the international snowboarding community as this community had been an anti-establishment to a significant extent. The International Snowboard Federation acted as a “network”: it served as a facilitating organisation for professional snowboarders, event organisers, media, photographers, and producers but did not organise them in any formal sense (Steen-Johnsen, 2008).

Network, which is an unusual organisational design for international sports, was suggested by Mintzberg (1979) and described by Slack (1997, p.82) as having

… low level of formalization, a lack of structured hierarchy of authority, and high levels of horizontal differentiation, with specialists grouped into functional units for organisational purposes, but often deployed to project teams to do their work.

Network was found to be a typical structure in skateboarding and snowboarding that has remained strongly presented in international governance of these sports.Major contemporary international snowboarding and skateboarding organisations, such as the TTR Snowboarding and the International Skateboarding Federation (ISF), are found to be structured as networks. They have been institutionalised to a very limited extent, have remained relatively informal and hardly bureaucratised. In terms of Mintzberg’s (1979) organisational theory, network is an organisational “adhocracy” with “the symbiotic relationship between the extreme athletes and spectators, managers of sport broadcasting, and managers of corporate sponsorships for sporting events” (Mawson 2002, p.257).

Several scholars, such as Steen-Johnsen (2008) and Rails (2011), and interviewees Reto Lamm, the President of the TTR World Snowboarding, and Cecilia Flatum, the World Snowboarding Federation (WSF) Vice-President, used the term “network” to describe the whole modern organisation of the international competitive snowboarding. According to Steen-Johnsen (2008), the governance of international snowboarding has been characterized by informal relations and the absence of formal leadership. Rails (2011) used a stakeholder analysis and the network theory to explain the governance of snowboarding. It was found that international snowboarding was “a complex network of stakeholders, rather than a simple hierarchic or solar structure” consisting of several organisations: the IOC, the FIS, the TTR, Dew Tour, X-Games, WSF, We are Snowboarding (WAS): see relationships between them on Figure 1.

Please insert Figure 1 here.

**“Umbrella” governance of action sports**

Whilst the influence of networks in international governance of action sport emerged from the studies of skateboarding and snowboarding, the existence of “umbrella” governing bodies is the key theme for all three sports considered within this research project. An “umbrella” international governing body can be defined as an international sport organisation that governs more than one sport. In case studies of skateboarding, snowboarding and climbing, the following international governing bodies have served as “umbrella” organisations for several sports at least at some point:

* International Ski Federation (FIS) for skiing and snowboarding,
* International Federation of Roller Sports (FIRS) for roller skating and skateboarding,
* International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation(UIAA) for mountaineering, ice climbing and sport climbing (until 2006).

Whilst international umbrella governing bodies, such as FINA (International Federation of Water Sports) or ISU (International Skating Union) have successfully worked for several different mainstream sports, there has been much more tension and controversy around the umbrella arrangements for the action sports concerned. Therefore, it was necessary to analyse whether this is a relevant governance solution for action sports and what impact umbrella federations have had on them.

Snowboarding

Snowboarding was “fast-tracked” into the Olympic program under the umbrella of the FIS, the international governing body for skiing, and has remained there since. According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) member Gerhard Heiberg (2013, interview), the FIS (that was the IOC recognised international governing body for various ski disciplines) proposed snowboarding for the Olympic program in 1994, shortly after the Winter Olympic Games in Lillehammer. Throughout the last two decades, the FIS has rejected any cooperation with other international snowboarding organisations or governing bodies. It has governed Olympic snowboarding according to its experience in the organisation of skiing and the frameworks that fit the Olympic movement. The FIS rigid and authoritarian governance can be illustrated by the words of American alpine skier Ted Ligety (2014), who publicly expressed his disagreement with some FIS decisions and warned snowboarding athletes:

FIS’s tyranny has gone on long enough. It seems FIS is going out of their way to ruin the sport. FIS runs a dictatorship… This should serve as warning for sports like freeride skiing and snowboarding, don’t let FIS monopolize your sport. FIS will bleed your sport dry of what has made it so cool.

Considering the reasons why the FIS was empowered by the IOC to govern international Olympic snowboarding, the former international snowboarding athlete and the President of the TTR World Snowboarding, Reto Lamm (2013, interview) suggested that delegating governance to the FIS was probably the cheapest and the easiest option for the IOC:

Basically, the IOC doesn’t want more international federations because for them it will be more cost and more work. This is why they give the FIS the mandate to work with snowboarding.

Whilst the financial and practical aspects of this decision are understandable, the broader management and marketing benefits can be challenged:

FIS has five different sports! There is always competition for priority within the FIS. The best skiers have threatened to create their own series several times, and it is not because they are satisfied with the way FIS runs things . . . It irritates the FIS leaders that biathlon crushes their sports in television ratings in Europe. But why is biathlon Europe’s most popular winter sport on TV? Because it has its own association and guides the development of the sport itself. They only have to focus on one thing, one sport. They get up every day and think about how they can make the product better for athletes and fans.

Terje Haakonsen, Norwegian snowboarder, in Austin (2011)

This quote suggests that a failure of the FIS to connect with international snowboarding might be explained by a simple organisational suggestion that it is always preferable to have one governing body responsible for and focused on one sport.

Another reason behind the IOC decision was revealed by the IOC member Gerhard Heiberg (2013, interview):

. . . the mentality of the snowboarders was a little different from the mentality of - let’s call it - traditional sports on the Olympic program. So these young people came with a different attitude, with a different mentality especially in the beginning. So at the IOC we felt that it was good that the FIS takes care of them.

This statement from the IOC official suggests that the IOC considered the FIS, which was a traditional and very hierarchical governing body, as the only organisation able to look after snowboarding athletes. According to Reto Lamm (2013, interview), the FIS and the IOC has not taken specific culture and organisation of snowboarding into consideration:

… it is not just the question of who is managing the sport. It is the question of how is it manageable to manage so many sports into one concept. And for the IOC the problem is to “micro-manage” different sports. So they cluster sports and just call it skiing. This [snowboarding] goes under skiing.

Overall, the data clearly indicated that governmental relationships between the FIS and competitive snowboarding have been far from successful and exemplified strong resistance from the action sport community towards an umbrella governing body. This will be discussed further in the legitimacy section of this chapter.

Skateboarding

Until recently, the IOC prohibited increasing the number of sports in order to make sure the programme of Summer Olympics did not grow any further (Heiberg, 2013, interview). Still the idea of Olympic skateboarding has been increasingly discussed over the past two decades, as there has been an interest of several international governing bodies to skateboarding: the FIRS and the International Cycling Union (UCI) considered including skateboarding under their “umbrellas” specifically for the Olympic bid. It is well documented that the UCI discussed the possibility to become an umbrella governing body for Olympic skateboarding for London 2012 (Williams, 2011) and Rio de Janeiro 2016 Games (Buesing and Glader, 2011). The UCI, the international governing body of all cycling sports, had never dealt with the governance of skateboarding at all until the IOC became interested in this sport and the idea of its Olympic inclusion started to circulate. Neither had the UCI ever mentioned skateboarding in its official communication, let alone stated any authority over it. However, Pat McQuaid, the UCI president at time, declared in 2011 that the “UCI could, without much difficulty but through a lot of work, bring skateboarding into the UCI structure and onwards into the Olympic program” (Bane, 2011). The UCI justified its right to take over the Olympic skateboarding by the arguments of practical consideration. Christoph Hubschmid (2013, interview), Director General of the UCI in 2011-2013, suggested that the Olympic competitions in skateboarding can share the facilities with the BMX competitions, and the practical advantage of the UCI as the current Olympic governing body of the BMX is that it can “bridge” these two sports. This is a very reasonable argument, although not all the disciplines of the BMX and skateboarding can share the facilities as technical criteria for some disciplines vary.

Apart from the practical point of view, it can be expected that the “bridged” sports have at least some similarities in cultures and the ways sports are practiced. For example, as mentioned earlier, the decision to “cluster” snowboarding under the skiing umbrella was likely to be influenced by a common understanding that both activities essentially represent a form of sledging on snow. In case of skateboarding, the UCI preferred to view skateboarding in wider sport perspective - as one of the wheel-based sports:

They [BMX and skateboarding] all related to wheels, they're all related to bikes as such, and from that point of view cycling is the sport that can bring those disciplines in.

Pat McQuaid, the UCI president in 2006-2013 (Williams, 2011)

However, there was an alternative vision: the FIRS, the governing body recognised by the IOC as the international governing body for roller sports, has always consider skateboarding “a roller sport”. Like the UCI, the FIRS has never organised or sanctioned any significant international skateboarding competitions. Nevertheless, the FIRS has been in the unique position as the only IOC-recognized international sport organisation that officially claimed skateboarding, so this organisation will be an umbrella governing body for Olympic skateboarding when it makes its debut in Tokyo 2020 (FIRS, 2017).

However, it is understood (TSC, 2017) that in this case the umbrella governance might work slightly differently in comparison to the case of the FIS and snowboarding. Whereas the FIS has been fully empowered by the IOC to run snowboarding, the FIRS was asked to work on the delivery of skateboarding in partnership with another governing body, the ISF, within the Tokyo 2020 Skateboarding Commission. As the ISF is not the IOC recognised governing body, the rationale behind that decision is likely to lie outside of the regulatory legitimacy to govern the sport, but rather within the broader cultural context of international skateboarding.

This will be also discussed in the legitimacy section of this chapter.

Climbing

First, the term “sport climbing” must not be confused with the term “rock climbing” and “mountaineering.” Sport climbing, which can also be referred as competitive climbing, is a sport, which involves climbers conquering the climbing roots on artificial walls in real-time contests against each other. Rock climbing is about conquering rocks, whereas mountaineering might involve climbing but is a broader term that includes various activities aiming at conquering mountains. Sport climbing was recognized by the UIAA in the late 1980s (Stirling, 2009) based on the proposal of the French Mountain and Climbing Federation. By then, the UIAA had already been involved in rock climbing by agreeing on the climbing difficulty grades but primarily had been dealing with mountaineering, alpinism, and hiking matters (UIAA, 2017). Therefore, it can be pointed out that the UIAA became the first international governing body for sport climbing quite “organically” (in comparison to the FIS in snowboarding case and the FIRS in relations to skateboarding), as sport climbing required international governing body at the time and the UIAA was deemed to be suitable as it run climbing competitions and unite a few similar sports, such as ice climbing, mountaineering and skyrunning, under its umbrella.

Being essentially the mountaineering governing body, the UIAA had to create some specific organisational frameworks dedicated to competitive climbing in order to govern the international sport climbing competition circuit. These frameworks changed as the sport of competitive climbing grew. International Council for Competition Climbing (ICC), the new governing structure within the UIAA, was introduced with more focus on sport functions. However, in the middle of 2000s the UIAA “recognised that it was no longer possible to keep all the sections of the UIAA together as a single federation” (UIAA, 2017). Consequently, the UIAA allowed sport climbing to step out from its umbrella and to create an independent international federation, as it became apparent that:

… Competition Sport Climbing developed very different ethics and style. Competition Sport Climbing is generally practised indoors and has a very urban character. These differences produced a rift within the UIAA between supporters of traditional mountaineering and those driving the development of modern Sport Climbing competitions. When it was recognised that the conflict could no longer be resolved and was blocking the development of both organisations, … [it was] decided to cease governing international sport climbing competitions on artificial surfaces.

UIAA (2009, p.11)

It can be seen the UIAA decision was underpinned by the cultural rift between sport climbing and outdoor mountaineering sports.

It is very unusual for international sport federations to give up a sport, as, for example, the FIS and the FIRS have always wanted to keep different sports together, even though there have been significant cultural differences between the sports under their jurisdiction. In fact, despite that decision, the UIAA

. . . had learnt from this experience … and the concept of unit members was introduced, thus enabling mountain sports’ federations involved in international competition to join the UIAA while maintaining a high degree of autonomy. The intention is to provide a means to keep different mountaineering disciplines under the umbrella of a single mountaineering and climbing organisation. An important argument was that multiple organisations led to higher costs and the loss of important synergies for the national member mountaineering federations.

UIAA (2009, p.11)

Thus, even though it can be assumed that an umbrella federation is normally of benefit to a group of connected sports, cultural differences often do not allow these alliances to exist, so they either split or face resistance issues.

**Cultural legitimacy**

As previously discussed, the cultural legitimacy of governing bodies in international sport is determined by institutional logics, which are a manifestation of macro-culture of sport’s organisational field. The findings of this research on action sports indicated the absence of dominant logics in any of three sports. Ultimately, there is a coexistence of three major logics across these international sports. These different logics have derived from three biggest cultural influences on action sports:

* traditional culture of action sports based on creativity, self-expression, and loose organisational arrangements;
* adopted competitive sport culture that emphasizes winning and Olympic values;
* commercial logics, which have been to a substantial degree accepted across action sports for decades.

For example, in snowboarding the strategies of leading organisations are underpinned by different logics: while the FIS is guided by the Olympic sport values, the TTR Pro Snowboarding is largely built on action sport’s creative culture. There are also the X-Games, which are mainly driven by commercial logics.

However, the findings of cross-case analysis suggest that traditional culture of action sports has remained the main criterion of cultural legitimacy for international sport organisations. Cultural legitimacy for governing bodies of action sports has been visible through the extent by which the organisations are supported by athletes and communities of respective sports. For instance, the FIS has been perceived by snowboarding organisations as just a technical agent of the IOC and has not had any substantial connection to snowboarding athletes and community. This organisation has completely ignored the traditional culture of snowboarding and voice of the athletes, so it has barely got any cultural legitimacy in snowboarding. The FIS has never connected to other international snowboarding competitions, such as the X-Games, the WSF, and TTR World Tour, and has not been able to create a credible structure for snowboarding that would have been accepted by athletes:

. . . the culture difference between snowboarding and skiing is so huge that they [the FIS] will never ever be able to create a snowboard department or the cooperation that will be a success.

Cecilia Flatum, WSF Vice-President (2013, interview)

The FIS has not got any connection to the grassroots of snowboarding either, as grassroots are developed by the WSF and national snowboarding federations without any Olympic funding.

When the cultural legitimacy of organisation is significantly lower than its regulatory legitimacy, then resistance of sport participants towards this organisation is likely to occur. In case of international snowboarding, there has been a strong resistance and heavy criticism of the FIS approach from professional snowboarders. This became apparent in 2011 when the top international snowboarders published an open letter to the IOC raising concern about the way they had been treated by the FIS and the lack of access to decision-making. There have been various examples of resistance over the years, such as a non-profit organisation that is called “F\*\*k FIS: Snowboarders against FIS control,” which is known for spreading anti-FIS messages at many snowboarding events. Various professional snowboarding athletes criticized the FIS in media and social networks.

It would be great for the FIS to be more athlete-driven and focus on safety, financial security, and fairness in their approach. What do the letters of the FIS truly stand for? Fear Instead of Success, Finances Instead of Safety?

Brad Steward, former professional snowboarder,

Marketing Director of Bonfire and Salomon Snowboarding (interview, 2014)

Overall, the FIS governance methods have been totally opposite to the values of snowboarding that are based on individualism, creativity, and flexibility. The FIS approach was in stark contrast with the flexible governance of the TTR and the International Snowboard Federation, which was very much about snowboarders creating the governance of the sport themselves and being open to adjust its structure.

Hence, snowboarding can be acknowledged as, arguably, the first sport within the Olympic movement that highlighted the necessity to take cultural aspects into the account when introducing a sport into the Olympics.

Snowboarding is an emotional sport and not just a sport, which has general values of sport. Snowboarding has much more complex values like lifestyle, music, fashion… all of that. And you can’t put snowboard fashion under ski fashion. You can’t put a cross-country skier and a snowboarder into the same box. These are two different lifestyles and two different cultures.

Reto Lamm, (2013, interview)

Historically, skateboarding and snowboarding communities have always been quite close. The close cultural ties mean that skateboarding athletes and influencers are very aware of how Olympic snowboarding is governed.

Yes, [what happened to snowboarding] is dangerous for sure… I really talked for skateboarding to be able to control its own future. Skateboarding is going to end in the Olympics for sure, but it is going to be really important who is managing it, who is controlling it.

Neal Hendrix, professional skateboarding athlete,

the Athlete Representative at the ISF (2013, interview)

It was reiterated by most professional skateboarders that they want to protect competitive skateboarding from governmental control of non-skateboarding organisations:

These roller skaters trying to claim control of skateboarding was almost as insane as a bunch of volleyball players trying to become the governing body of basketball

Dave Carnie, the ISF Board member, in Bane (2011)

Subsequently, they have taken preventive action in order to make sure skateboarding would enter the Olympic Games only “on skateboarding terms”: the establishment of the ISF in 2002. This was felt to be necessary by key skateboarding organisers, companies, and athletes as “if the world of skateboarding doesn't pull together and enter the Olympics on purpose, someone else will eventually succeed in entering it”, according to the ISF President Gary Ream (Stratford, no date). Similarly to network governing bodies in snowboarding, the founders and board members of the ISF came from skateboarding industry so via their network the ISF has always remained connected to the huge market of skateboarding in an informal way and established relationships with the biggest competition organisers in skateboarding, such as the X-Games, Street League Series.

It should be pointed out that apart from the issue of who should govern skateboarding, there has been a broader debate in skateboarding community on whether skateboarding needs governing at all. Whilst the most elite professional skateboarding athletes indicated that they would welcome skateboarding entering the Olympics on “skateboarding terms”, there was a strong resistance among so called “skateboarding community”: non-professional participants in skateboarding activity, people interested in it and skateboarding experts. This resistance to change both the values and structures of the sport has arguably been the strongest among three sports in focus of this study, as it was directed towards the whole idea of skateboarding joining the Olympic movement and corresponding requirements of governance of the sport by a single international organisation. Here is how this was explained by Klein (2013):

Skateboarders have never let outside sources determine what is good for skateboarding, it has evolved from the streets and the streets continue to dictate the atmosphere for skateboarding… No organisation, contest entity or corporation can control what every day skaters do. Snowboarding is much more easily harnessed and controlled because you have to travel and pay to do it. It's a rich white guy sport, so it's fitting we have a bunch of rich white guys fighting to control how snowboarding is controlled, marketed and presented to the public.

Thus, it might be argued that skateboarding has been more resistant to mainstream sport governance than climbing and snowboarding because skateboarding athletes need less money to practice their sport as they have easier access to facilities and no need to travel significant distances. Therefore, as skateboarding athletes are less dependent on governing bodies and sponsors, they are able to ignore governance. To some extent the voice of skateboarding community was heard when the international governing organisation, the ISF, was established - it is said to exist not to put some structures over skateboarding but only “to protect skateboarding , to make sure that if it enters the international sport scene, which is the Olympics, it will be represented in a proper way” (Gary Ream, 2013, interview).

**Conclusions, implications and future directions**

It emerged from the research that historically the development of action sports has not been primarily driven by governing organisations. The lack of formal organisation meant that regulations were developed by sport communities and managed by some loosely organised governing bodies that were seen as anti-establishment organisations to a significant extent but were culturally legitimate in sport communities. Those governing bodies did not directly govern in a conventional sport governance sense, but rather facilitated the development of action sports in an informal way. Commercial actors, such as the X-Games, have got a strong credibility in action sports and often have got more cultural legitimacy than governing bodies.

One of the key questions, which this research project attempted to address, was how cultural legitimacy in action sports corresponds to regulatory legitimacy within the global sport governance frameworks. It has been critical for the survival of international sport organisations in snowboarding, skateboarding, and climbing to establish cultural legitimacy, because the regulatory legitimacy within their institutional fields has been questioned or has not yet been established. For example, the FIS, the international organisation that governs Olympic snowboarding, has got the regulatory legitimacy but has almost no cultural legitimacy, so there has been much concern and protest from snowboarders over the years. Instead, there are institutions, such as the TTR Snowboarding and the X-Games, which have got substantial cultural support from professional competitive snowboarders but have not got any formal regulatory legitimacy within global sports. This issue echoes a broader question of “who owns the sport,” which many conflicts in modern sports revolve around (Washington and Patterson, 2011, p.10) and which has caused great debate and rifts with regards to three considered action sports. For example, in sport climbing there has always been a single international federation for the entire history of its organised existence. On the other hand, snowboarding and skateboarding case studies do not provide an obvious justification for the necessity of a single authority in the sports as the “ownership” of these fields has not been established over several decades. Therefore, it might be argued that in these sports there has been no need for a single regulatory authority. An alternative explanation might be that a comprehensive regulatory legitimacy in action sports cannot be established without a consideration of cultural legitimacy. The case of international snowboarding provides strong evidence in support of this hypothesis as the FIS has not been able to obtain control over the whole international competitive snowboarding. This skiing organisation has the regulatory legitimacy over Olympic snowboarding, but this has not been underpinned by cultural legitimacy.

This research project revealed serious concerns about the relevance of “umbrella” governance to the action sports. Among three sports examined, there have not been any umbrella organisational relationships that can be considered a success both for the governing body and for the action sport. Examples of “umbrella” governance discussed within this chapter reveal that as a result of introduction of umbrella governance models some wider (and probably unexpected) consequences have arisen, such as a rift between the cultures of different sports (sport climbing and mountaineering), resistance to accept structures in skateboarding, strong protest and boycott by some of the best athletes in snowboarding. Therefore, it can be suggested that legitimization of action sports based only on their technical characteristics and existing conventional regulatory frameworks is a questionable practice.

Consequently, there is an idea, which was discussed by a few interviewees in this research, to “bridge” sports based on cultural similarities rather than technical ones. This idea is innovative, because the IOC decision-making on governance of Olympic sports has never been driven by cultural considerations.

What we have challenged the IOC on is to think differently when it comes to new action sport. You can’t expect to have the same traditional sports model forever. Cause now every time when the new sports is introduced through the old federation, this would kind of kill the sport. And you kill the sport cultural values and everything. So we really would like to see the IOC creating some kind of facility, which makes it possible to have a kind of international action sport body. This should care about all the action sports instead of pushing them through all the traditional sports.

Cecilia Flatum, the WSF Vice-President (2013, interview)

If this idea is even partially realised by the IOC, it would be a completely new practice in governance of international sports. It has a potential to overcome negative issues that have recently surrounded the umbrella governance models. However, this study demonstrates that there is a lack of understanding how cultural-cognitive elements work in sport governance and whether cultural legitimacy of organizations can define the structure of international sport. The idea of international federation of action sports would require further investigation with the use of both organisational and cultural theories.

Overall, the research findings challenge the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as a source of regulatory legitimacy for action sports as the necessity for one ultimate governing body in these sports and for an “umbrella” governance under mainstream sports appears unnecessary. Future studies might examine the IOC decision-making process and criteria for granting a specific international governing body with the right to organise a particular sport internationally, and might even question the belief that all sports strive for the Olympic Games, which is taken for granted as the ultimate goal of evolution of sports in a global context. There is value in investigating this further in the context of the evolution of very recent sports, for example the sports of parkour (freerunning), or the activities that are yet to be recognised as sport, such as e-sports.

There are also a number of other theories that might provide different explanations to the modern governance of international sport. This study revealed the prominence of network arrangements as a unique feature of governance of action sports, but did not discuss these findings in terms of the network theoretical perspective. Using network theory to examine the governance of sports would strengthen academic understanding of the evolutionary process and mechanisms behind the changes. On the other hand, there is also meta-organizational perspective, a relatively new concept, that this study did not specifically refer to, but that is relevant to the topic of governance in sport, as demonstrated by Malcourant, Vas and Zintz (2015). Therefore, it would be worth to consider conducting a study on evolution of international sports that would focus on the role and influence of international sport governing bodies through the lens of meta-organizational theory. In particular, considering the influence of IOC as one the major findings of this research, it can be suggested to examine the role of this ultimate meta-organization in governance of emerging international sports.

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