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Laurence Roy

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Abstract

In the last decades, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been increasingly criticized for its impassive stand towards human rights, despite major abuses being documented in connection to the delivery of Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014. The failure to uphold human rights by Host Cities and other stakeholders of the Olympic Movement was linked to the fact that the International Olympic Committee did not clearly mention the obligation to follow international human rights norms in the Olympic Charter or the Host City Contract. The two documents guide the actors of the Olympic Movement and are binding on them. In February 2017 however, explicit obligations were finally added to the Host City Contract for the 2024 Olympic Games, mentioning among others compliance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. This paper examines the steps that led to this development, with a particular focus on the work of Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs). Using the interactions of the IOC with activists since 2001, we identify the characteristics of the process of socialization that activists and their target went through, eventually leading to the change in the Host City Contract.

Key words: Transnational Advocacy, Networks, Human Rights, International Olympic Committee, Olympic Games, Host City Contract, Beijing 2008, Sochi 2014, Sport and Rights Alliance

Resümee

In den letzten Jahrzehnten ist das Internationale Olympische Komitee (IOK) zunehmend für seinen teilnahmslosen Standpunkt gegenüber Menschenrechten kritisiert worden, obwohl bedeutende Missbrauchsfälle mit der Durchführung von Peking 2008 und Sotschi 2014 dokumentiert wurden. Das Fehlverhalten der Gastgeberstädte und anderer Interessensgruppen der Olympischen Bewegung, Menschenrechte zu unterstützen, stand im Zusammenhang mit der Tatsache, dass das Olympische Komitee nicht eindeutig die Verpflichtung zum Ausdruck brachte, die Normen der internationalen Menschenrechte in der Olympischen Charta oder im Vertrag der Austragungsstadt zu befolgen. Diese zwei Dokumente sind für die Akteure der Olympischen Bewegung bindend. Im Februar 2017 wurden schließlich ausdrückliche Verpflichtungen in dem Vertrag der Austragungsstadt für die Olympischen Spiele 2024 hinzugefügt, diese deuten zum Beispiel auf die Einhaltung der UNO- Leitprinzipien für Wirtschaft und Menschenrechte hin. Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Schritte, die zu dieser Entwicklung führten mit einem speziellen Fokus auf die Arbeit der transnationalen Advokatennetzwerke. Unter Verwendung der Interaktionen von IOK-Aktivisten seit 2001, betrachten wir die Charakteristiken des Sozialisierungsprozesses, den Aktivisten und deren Ziele durchgingen, was möglicherweise zur einer Änderung im Gastgebervertrag des Austragungsortes führen konnte.

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1. Studying the Diffusion of Human Rights Norms

Today, it is widely acknowledged that human rights need to be respected. Following WWII, a universal human rights regime was quickly developed and codified, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) at its heart, supplemented by other international agreements, legally binding on the countries that ratified them. The creation of the regime was triggered mostly by the horrors of WWII and a sense of moral obligation felt by states. The responsibility to respect and protect human rights remains the prime duty of states but it has spread also to other actors. In fact, the last decades have been marked by the “global diffusion of human rights norms and discourse.”¹ Consequently, the field has been increasingly enquired in international relations and law. The diffusion of the human rights discourse has inter alia affected the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the leader of the Olympic Movement.

The IOC was created on the 23rd of June 1894, soon after Baron Pierre de Coubertin had decided to revive the Olympic Games, a tradition originating in ancient Greece.² Two years later, the first modern Games were organized in Athens. Today, the Summer and Winter Games are held every four years. The Olympic Movement is regulated by the Olympic Charter.³ The document codifies the fundamental principles of Olympism; serves as statutes for the IOC; and finally sets forth the roles and responsibilities of the main groups affiliated with the Olympic Movement. The Charter is a technical document and does not explicitly mention any fundamental human rights or human rights conventions, apart from anti-discrimination and the respect for human dignity.⁴ Another crucial document is the Host City Contract. Through the Host City Contract, the IOC delegates the preparation of the Olympic Games to the Host City, the Host National Olympic Committee and the Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG). The IOC, headquartered in Lausanne

¹ Sonia Cardenas, "Mainstreaming Human Rights: Publishing Trends in Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42, no. 1 (2009): 161.

² "The Olympic Games," *History.com*, accessed June 9, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/olympic-games>.

³ "Olympic Charters," *International Olympic Committee*, accessed June 9, 2018, <https://www.olympic.org/olympic-studies-centre/collections/official-publications/olympic-charters>.

⁴ *International Olympic Committee, Olympic Charter* (2017): 15.

(Switzerland), is the leader of the Olympic Movement; it promotes the practice of sport worldwide and oversees the organization of the Olympic Games.⁵

Since its creation, the organization has asserted that it was independent from politics. Nevertheless, the Olympic Games have often been used as a political platform, as witnessed from the instances of “ping pong diplomacy” between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the United States, or the multiple boycotts. Despite this difficulty, the IOC insists that sport should be kept away from politics as much as possible.⁶ In a recent interview, current President Thomas Bach declared that the IOC must be strictly neutral politically. He acknowledged however that the organization cannot conceivably be apolitical, since “everything in life is politics.”⁷ The IOC is eager to act independently from national governments to secure its legitimacy and authority. On the other hand, it strongly emphasizes the power of sport to unify and contribute to society. As stated in the Charter, “the goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”⁸ The Charter, the document of reference for the actors of the Olympic movement consequently champions the advancement of humanity and peace. Despite its seemingly good intentions, the IOC has been largely criticized in the last years for its passivity following human rights abuses carried out in host countries, in connection to the Olympic Games.

In fact, major human rights abuses related to the organization of Olympic Games have been witnessed, in particular for Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014. Many of the abuses fell into the three following categories: violation of labor-related rights; forced expulsions of residents; repression of the freedom of expression and the press.⁹ Resultantly, a crucial milestone was achieved on the 28th of February 2017, when the International Olympic Committee communicated that it would modify the 2024 Host

⁵ “Members,” International Olympic Committee, accessed June 9, 2018, <https://www.olympic.org/ioc-members-list>.

⁶ Macintosh and Hawes, “The IOC and the World of Interdependence,” *Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* 1 (1992): 29-43.

⁷ “Episode 23: Olympic committee chief - EMA, EBA to Amsterdam, Paris –Failed German coalition talks,” SoundCloud, accessed December 17, 2017, <https://soundcloud.com/politicoeuconfidential/episode-23-olympic-committee-chief-ema-eba-to-amsterdam-paris-failed-german-coalition-talks>.

⁸ IOC, *Olympic Charter in Force as from 15 September 2017*, 13.

⁹ Tomas Grell, “The Olympics & Human Rights – Part I: The Host City Contract.”

City Contract to mention the obligation to respect human rights and follow the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights when hosting the Olympic Games. It may appear as a remarkable change since the IOC, which oversees the organization of arguably the most important sporting event in the world, was until recently only concerned with technical matters surrounding the event and wanted to remain as universalist as possible.¹⁰ Until 2017, neither the Charter, nor the Host City Contract directly mentioned ‘human rights,’ or referenced international norms.

I consequently wished to answer the following questions: **how has the IOC come to adopt human rights standards?** In other words, the following thesis examines the diffusion of the human rights’ discourse in the context of the Olympic Movement, with a focus on the role of Transnational Activist Networks (TANs) and the ways in which they were able to influence the conception and application of human rights norms.

Analyzing this subject is important since human rights are basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are legally entitled. Consequently, it is crucial to understand what triggers change, who is actively involved in the shifts witnessed and what are the methods used. The question is also interesting in the field of international relations as it seeks to explain the spread of norms and the relationships between transnational actors. More specifically, the focus on the Olympic Movement is meaningful since the IOC is an organization with a substantial influence globally.¹¹ Keeping the IOC accountable for human rights abuses committed by states and companies could lead to a butterfly effect, encouraging other sports organizations and entities to follow suit.

In the following document, I will give an overview of the literature surrounding networks, focusing especially on advocacy networks; I will then provide a theoretical foundation for my research and an overview of the forecasted methodology. I will subsequently share the findings of my case study at five different points in time, spanning from the year 2001, when the Summer Games were awarded to Beijing, up to 2017.

¹⁰ "Episode 23: Olympic committee chief - EMA, EBA to Amsterdam, Paris –Failed German coalition talks," SoundCloud.

¹¹ Zack Bowersox, « Naming, Shaming, and International Sporting Events: Does the Host Nation Play Fair? », *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no 2 (2016): 258-69.

2. The Research on Activist Networks

2.1. A Survey of Previous Studies

Traditionally, scholars in the international relations field have focused on states and their relationships with one another. States were de facto perceived as the primary actors of the global system, disregarding the potential impact of ‘third actors.’ Since the late 20th century however, the end of the Cold War and globalization have led to the emergence of new actors and the weakening of the status of states, affecting the global balance of power. As a result, the role of networks has been researched in the last decades, becoming a popular concept in global political studies. At first used in sociology, the network theory argues that material and social relationships lead to the creation of structures among various agents. Joshua D. Atkinson highlights the significance of communication, which “is not the by-product of the network, but rather the driving force that gives rise to mobilization and relationships.”¹² Consequently, the network theory is a dynamic approach, which allows an analysis of structures at multiple level, with groups of any size. It is a compelling theory as, unlike the institutional or realist theories, it permits the study of more complex and changing systems.¹³ It focuses on the relationship and association between nodes, which can be “individual or corporate actors, such as organizations and states.” The more connected, or central, nodes are, the more they will wield power and impact the decision of others, shaping the functioning of the network. The number of nodes, the density of interactions between them and the patterns of connection can be analyzed to explain the robustness of a network.¹⁴ Scholars from this school are interested in the description of the mechanisms leading to the creation of new network ties, their effect on one another and communicative actions.

Peter Willetts argues that network theory has become popular recently, but that researchers often fail to recognize that not all networks are similar. In fact, Willetts identifies five categories of networks: international non-governmental

¹² Joshua D. Atkinson, « Activist Networks », in *Journey into Social Activism, Qualitative Approaches* (Fordham University, 2017): 124 51.

¹³ David A. Lake and Wendy Wong, “The Politics of Networks: Interests, Power, and Human Rights Norms,” (2007): 3.

¹⁴ Lake and Wong, 6.

organizations (INGOs); governance networks; transnational advocacy networks; issue caucuses; information networks.¹⁵ The first aforementioned network is relatively institutionalized while the last one has the most elementary form. Caucuses, which arise punctually to solve a single issue, can be classified as advocacy networks when their actions become persistent and communication is permanent between nodes. Willetts contends also that it is essential to differentiate between advocacy and governance networks since the former implies that there is a struggle, while the latter suggests a cooperation with challengers. However, a difficulty in differentiating both concepts arises from the fact that activists may demand participation rights in an international governmental organization (IGO) when they are unable to obtain information otherwise. Moreover, Willetts specifies that INGOs can sometimes act in a similar fashion as transnational advocacy networks. De facto, some perform chores going beyond the simple provision of services for members and engage in campaigns to gain support for their cause. The scholar provided the example of Amnesty International. It is in fact an advocacy network but it is more centralized than many. Resultantly it can be categorized both as an INGO and a transnational advocacy network.¹⁶ The same can be said about Human Rights Watch.

Donnelly explains that transnational human rights activities grew substantially in the 1970s and 1980s. Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) gained particular significance in the late 1990s with the emergence and impact of the anti-globalization movement. The influence of human rights NGOs, lobbying to modify the practices of states and other international actors, increased at the time.¹⁷ Fukuyama highlighted the fact that the increase in transnational activist networks demonstrated the “erosion of the state-centered international order.”¹⁸ The scholar put forth the idea that those groups are not hierarchically organized but are rather bound by common values, such as the promotion of human rights. Through their control over information and their capacity to spread it thanks to modern communications means, they are able to set the agenda of powerful international actors. The importance of activist networks took some time to be acknowledged as

¹⁵ Peter Willetts, “The Voice of Which People? Transnational Advocacy Networks and Governance Networks at the United Nations,” (2013): 5.

¹⁶ Willetts, 10-24.

¹⁷ Jack Donnelly and Daniel J. Whelan, *International Human Rights (Dilemmas in World Politics)*, 5th ed. (United States: Westview Press, 2017), 11-13.

¹⁸ Francis Fukuyama, “Review,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 4 (1998): 123.

scholars struggled to comprehend that organizations were prompted to cooperate thanks to shared values rather than material concerns.¹⁹ In the 1990s, Oliver and Marwell defined activists as “people who care enough about some issue that they are prepared to incur significant costs and act to achieve their goals.”²⁰ Networks are consequently a means to further activists’ missions through cooperation.

Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink published a book in 1998 which was perceived as a pioneering work, examining networks of activists and their modes of operation. The authors define networks as “forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange.”²¹ The notion of advocacy refers to the promotion of values, norms and policy changes, unlike the pursuit of personal interests customarily investigated in international relations. A network is characterized as including a variety of actors such as NGOs, media outlets, social movements, trade unions and foundations, many of them traditionally perceived as “supposedly powerless actors.”²² Activists are interested in producing normative change in their field. To do so, Keck and Sikkink explain that they do what might be termed “persuasion or socialization.”²³ As the authors contend, the latter is not always without turbulence as it does not simply involve negotiating with the target but can involve putting pressure and shaming as well. Keck and Sikkink identified a few crucial elements accounting for the success or failure of the activities of TANs directed at a given state, notably relationships, resources and the opportunity structure, that is the dynamics of the global environment. Resources include material and more intangible ones, such as leadership and information.

It is essential to emphasize more specifically the function of information. For the actors of a network, the “ability to generate information quickly and accurately and deploy it effectively is their most valuable currency; it is also central to their identity.”²⁴ The production of information is important to “gain influence by serving

¹⁹ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁰ Pamela E. Oliver and Gerard Marwell, “Mobilizing Technologies for Collective Action,” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 252.

²¹ Keck and Sikkink, 8.

²² Peter Willetts, “The Voice of Which People? Transnational Advocacy Networks and Governance Networks at the United Nations,” (2013): 12.

²³ Keck and Sikkink, 16.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 10.

as alternate sources of information.”²⁵ The information delivered to the outside will be more or less persuasive based on the frame adopted by the network, meaning the interpretation made by the activists of the given facts and testimonies (a notion also defined as frame resonance). Keck and Sikkink explain that to be effective, a frame must demonstrate that a given situation is “neither natural nor accidental,”²⁶ that there is a liable party and that there are also reasonable solutions. Activists thus seek to use symbols or stories that can affect distant audiences and engage powerful actors. What matters to transnational activist networks is obtaining widespread and strategic support to use as leverage against their target. Nevertheless, despite the need for attention, and consequently the importance of timing and drama in the sharing of an information, the latter has to be thoroughly researched and must be reliable. Although these diverse goals may seem to be at odds, credibility and drama are both necessary.

In terms of partnerships, TANs often rely on domestic organizations to get information, while the latter expect some help from their international counterparts to be heard globally. In that regard, the media is a sought-after ally to affect public opinion. More specifically, the media can play an important role for the “mobilization of shame” orchestrated by a network. The notion implies that a target is “held up to the light of international scrutiny.”²⁷ The hope is that the targeted actor, eager to maintain its legitimacy, will be prompted to change its behavior. The authors contend that governments may attempt to put activists on their side and divert attention by simply publicly making promises, without actually acting on them. As a result, “network activists [...] try to make such statements into opportunities for accountability politics.”²⁸ Issue resonance, the density of a transnational activist networks and the vulnerability of its target were identified as decisive elements to generate change. The density of a transnational activist networks is characterized as “the regularity and diffusion of information exchange within networks and to coverage of key areas.”²⁹ Lastly, the actions of a TAN can only have an impact when their target is vulnerable. As stated by Keck and Sikkink, “vulnerability arises both from the availability of leverage and the target's sensitivity to leverage.”³⁰ The

²⁵ Keck and Sikkink, 19.

²⁶ Ibid, 16.

²⁷ Ibid, 23.

²⁸ Ibid, 24.

²⁹ Ibid, 28.

³⁰ Ibid, 29.

target's sensitivity may arise from a fear of sanctions, material impetus or pressure put on them because of a discrepancy between discursive actions and their application. Vulnerability is heightened in the case when an actor wants to preserve or even enhance its legitimacy in the global system.

Another compelling work, elaborating further on research related to the internalization of norms following TANs' actions, is *The Power of Human Rights*, published one year after *Activists Beyond Borders*. Editors Thomas Risse, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink constructed a five-phase "spiral model" to explain how international human rights norms can actually lead to changes in states' behavior. Like Keck and Sikkink, the authors studied the socialization process through which "principled ideas held by individuals become norms in the sense of common understanding about appropriate behavior which then lead to changes in identities, interests, and behavior."³¹ Risse, Ropp and Sikkink's research clearly illustrates the crucial role of domestic and transnational opposition groups to alert public opinion in Western countries and to pressure repressive states to induce change, leading to the spreading of norms. The authors identified three purposes to TANs: shed light on abuses committed by repressive states, mobilize opposition in targeted countries, challenge governments by pressuring them "from above" and "from below."³²

More recently, Henry, Mohan and Yanacopulos claimed that transnational networks were a "strategic response" to changes in technology and globalization, linked among others to the diversification of means of communication.³³ Since the spread of information is essential to networks, Peter Willetts argues that the internet played an important role in the development of networks. With it, they were able to communicate more effectively and reach a broader audience.³⁴ Later, the development of social media led to the growth of "spreadable media,"³⁵ as defined by Jenkins, Ford, and Green. Through platforms such as YouTube, Twitter or Facebook, individual users are able to spread narratives to their own networks. Despite the importance of those recent means of communication, especially since

³¹ Thomas Risse-Kappen, Steve C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, *The power of human rights: international norms and domestic change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

³² Thomas Risse-Kappen, Stephen Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink, 5.

³³ Henry Leroy, Giles Mohan, and Helen Yanacopulos, "Networks as Transnational Agents of Development," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (2004): 839.

³⁴ Willetts, 12.

³⁵ Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

transnational groups may cover vast distances, Atkinson argues that face-to-face interactions can remain crucial to maintain a strong connection between nodes.³⁶

Interested in demonstrating the potential influence of network activism on human rights, Lake and Wong argue that Amnesty International was able to shape the development of human rights norms in the late 20th century. The authors contend that, in the human rights field, “the network created the norm rather than vice versa.”³⁷ It implies that the internalization of norms is not systematic as networks select and then press their targets to prompt them to behave in accordance with what they believe is right. Murdie and Davis, focusing their research on the impact of NGOs in human rights transnational advocacy, specify that a large part of recent theoretical literature granted a critical role to the concurrent action of multiple various advocacy actors to improve human rights norms and practices.³⁸ In fact, many scholars today contend that advocacy networks have become decisive political actors in domestic and global arenas.³⁹ It is consequently compelling to study further the impact of TANs on the promotion and application of human rights norms by global actors and their *modus operandi*. More specifically, the literature on strategic interactions between networks and their target during the socialization process is scarce, making this an interesting domain to research

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In the following essay, the aim is to assess how international actors are compelled to adopt human right norms. Unlike most research carried out on transnational activist networks however, the subject of study is a non-state entity. As a matter of fact, the dynamics of the global system have evolved and new powerful actors have emerged. As a result, states can feel pressured to align with international human rights norms but corporations as well, as they are increasingly held

³⁶ Atkinson, 126.

³⁷ Lake and Wong, 5.

³⁸ Amanda M. Murdie and David R. Davis, "Shaming and Blaming: Using Events Data to Assess the Impact of Human Rights INGOs," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 2.

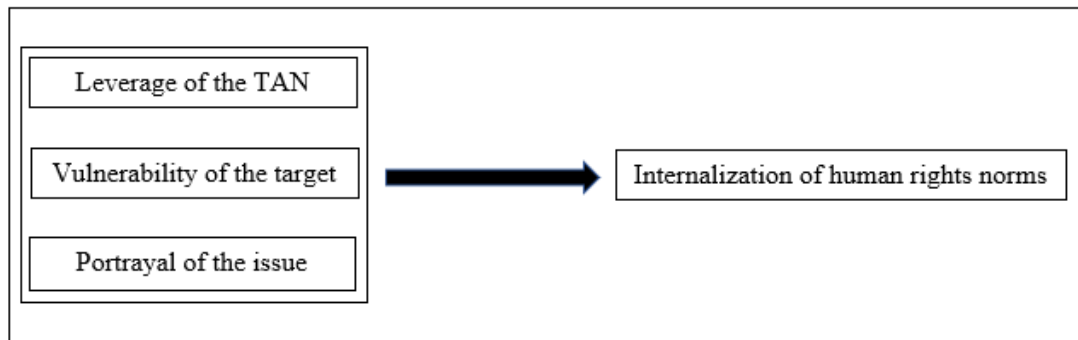
³⁹ Raúl Acosta, "Advocacy Networks Through a Multidisciplinary Lens: Implications for Research Agendas," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 23, no. 1 (2012): 156.

accountable to uphold them. Conscious of this power shift, the UN broadened the scope of its human rights activities in the 21st century. A prime example of the evolution of the responsibility for the safeguard of human rights was the realization of a “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework in 2008, subsequently leading to the drafting of ‘Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights’ (UNGPs). The latter were endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011.⁴⁰ To avoid any opposition from states however, it is clearly noted that the Guiding Principles do not create any new international legal obligations. The document was critical since it officially identified the responsibility of corporations to respect human rights. The two apparatus described above demonstrate the growing importance attributed to non-state entities and the recent realization that they need to be included in human rights efforts.

Based on previous works, especially the research by Keck and Sikkink, and Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, three crucial independent variables were identified for the following study: (1) the character of the transnational activist network, (2) that of the targeted entity and (3) the portrayal of the issue. The character of the TAN can vary based on its level, defined as the layers of interactions between activists (local and more global); its density (the number of actors and the frequency of their interactions); and finally the connective media (the means of communication within the network and to the outside).⁴¹ The main features of the target are its leverage against the TAN and its vulnerability to the global environment (largely influenced by its potential desire to gain legitimacy). Lastly, after focusing on the protagonists, it is necessary to concentrate on the issue at stake and the way it is represented. The message transmitted by a TAN to incriminate a target has more resonance among the public and thus leads to a change in the power balance if it fulfills the following requirements: it is dichotomic, clearly depicting victims and abusers; it presents a short causal chain, concisely linking abuses perpetrated with the actions of the corporation targeted; it arouses emotions among individuals. The attributes of the three variables outlined above are responsible for the degree of change reached in the application of human rights norms by the targeted entity, the dependent variable.

⁴⁰ Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, “UN “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework and Guiding Principles,” accessed June 10, 2018, <https://business-humanrights.org/en/un-secretary-generals-special-representative-on-business-human-rights/un-protect-respect-and-remedy-framework-and-guiding-principles>.

⁴¹ Atkinson, 130.



The diffusion of human rights norms through socialization

I have identified six phases to categorize the degree of change attained in the development and adoption of human rights norms. In the initial phase, human rights abuses are committed and activists start to voice their concerns. If the concerns raised fall into deaf ears, the process of socializations stops here; if activists are successful in garnering support, this leads to the second stage, during which an international issue is conceptualized. An activist network thus starts developing, while the target linked to the abuses may deny its involvement. In the third phase, argumentative discourses are witnessed and a dialogue is initiated between both parties, accompanied by an evaluation of the interests at stake. The target may argue over the definition of the situation and the responsibilities it should bear. If it stands its ground, the TAN may increase pressure by documenting abuses; it may also reach out to other powerful actors, get support from the media and decide to lead a campaign of naming and shaming. Later, if the activists are successful in pressuring the targeted actor, tactical concessions are ergo made and discursive changes can be observed. In the fifth phase, the target adjusts official writings and a prescriptive status is created as the TAN keeps the target accountable. Finally, in the last stage, the behavior of the target is altered, with the internalization of new rules. It is important to note that the length of time of each phase is directly linked to the impact of the independent variables. Moreover, some of the steps may overlap with one another. For example, a TAN may wish to secure new concessions from the targeted actor, leading to more discussions around the responsibilities assumed. The more efficient a TAN and the stronger its leverage over the target for a sustained period of time, the more compelling the issue globally, and the more sensitive the target, the less time it will take to reach the last phase of the process.

2.3 Methodology

The following paper is a case study of the Olympic Movement, focusing on the evolution of the position of the International Olympic Committee with regards to human rights. This research aimed at uncovering the events which prompted the International Olympic Committee to promote more actively human rights norms in connection to the preparation of the Olympic Games. More specifically, the emphasis was on the actions undertaken to overcome the abuse of the labor force working on Olympic venues; the forced removal of citizens from their land; and the repression of the freedom of expression and the media. By using this specific example, I wished to uncover the dynamics surrounding transnational activism, the influence of the latter over the human rights field and the strategic interactions between a TAN and its target.

The dependent variable was changes adopted by the IOC over time with regards to its human rights policy. I used process tracing to determine the changes in a time frame of sixteen years, between 2001 and 2017. The three independent variables outlined in the previous section were evaluated at different point in times: in connection to the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008; for the Copenhagen Congress in 2009, in the lead-up to the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games; during the adoption of Agenda 2020 in 2014; and finally, after the campaign of the Sport and Rights Alliance initiated in 2015. Indeed, the actions of activist networks were the most noticeable and the IOC was the most challenged during these specific occasions. In the different instances, I appraised the following variables: the character of the network campaigning to put an end to human rights abuses during the Olympic preparation; the status of the IOC; the framing of the issue. To assess the position of advocacy networks and that of the IOC, as well as understand the interactions between the main actors, I used many publicly available press releases, reports and letters. Since the examined timeframe is relatively recent, there is a lack of academic articles on the subject. Thus, numerous online newspaper articles discussing the IOC and human rights, encompassing journalists' assessments, were included.

3. 2001-2008: The Impact of the Beijing Olympic Games

3.1 The Olympic Games and Human Rights, Two Unconnected Concepts

On the 13th of July 2001, the International Olympic Committee was going to select the Host City for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. Beijing (China) was running against the cities of Toronto (Canada), Paris (France), Osaka (Japan) and Istanbul (Turkey). A few months before the vote by the IOC, Liu Jingmin, then Vice President of the Bid Committee stated that “by allowing Beijing to host the Games, you will help the development of human rights.”⁴² Jean-Paul Huchon, President of the Ile de France region in France had a contrasting view, declaring that “it is up to the IOC to fulfill its responsibility” after hearing of the human rights records in every candidate country. Beijing’s challengers hoped that the country’s poor performance in this area would be its downfall.⁴³

A few weeks before the vote by the IOC to select the Host City for the 2008 Olympic Games, critics had contrasting viewpoints. Amnesty International, characterized as “*the emblematic transnational human rights NGO*,”⁴⁴ with a network of over 7 million people in more than 150 countries, had a neutral stand.⁴⁵ In an article published by *The Guardian* 13 days before the vote by the IOC, the organization expressed that it “doesn't take on position on whether or not the games go to Beijing.” In fact, Amnesty International viewed its mission as putting an end to human rights abuses in the country in general.⁴⁶

⁴² Father Jonathan, “The Moral Dilemma of Beijing Hosting the Summer Olympic Games,” *Fox News*, February 18, 2008, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/02/18/moral-dilemma-beijing-hosting-summer-olympic-games.html>.

⁴³ CNN World, “CNN.Com - All Eyes on Games Vote,” *CNN*, July 13, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/east/07/13/moscow.olympics/index.html>.

⁴⁴ Jack Donnelly and Daniel J. Whelan, *International Human Rights (Dilemmas in World Politics)*, 5th ed. (United States: Westview Press, 2017), 154.

⁴⁵ “Who We Are,” Amnesty International, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are/>.

⁴⁶ Sunder Katwala, “Should Beijing Get the Games? The Observer Debate,” *The Guardian*, July 1, 2001, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jul/01/china.sunderkatwala>.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) was slightly more critical. In March, HRW claimed that it was not “a priori” opposed to Beijing getting the Games as the focus on the country could be beneficial to improve the situation there.⁴⁷ In a June letter to then IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch, HRW proclaimed that human rights records should be highly thought-through, but that the selection of Beijing was acceptable if the Committee obtained written guarantees from the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The guarantees were to include the assurance of unrestricted access to international journalists; the protection of demonstrators during peaceful protests and the free expression of dissidents; the fair treatment of migrant workers and residents around Olympic sites. Moreover, HRW required that an independent monitoring panel be put in place to oversee the preparation of the sporting event.⁴⁸

On the 11th of July 2001, the Asia Director at Human Rights Watch in New York more was more assertive, describing the “IOC’s pious rhetoric about how politics and sports don’t mix” as “nonsense.” The representant of the NGO voiced the idea that China was not a front-runner because of its infrastructures but due to economic and political reasons mixed with “what is probably the hardest sell in history on the part of the bidder.” The Director added that if China did not take any measures against human rights abuses, not only would the Chinese authorities look bad, but the IOC would be complicit. The article was written for the *International Herald Tribune*, now known as *The International New York Times*, an English-language newspaper printed in more than 160 countries. The text shed light on the responsibilities that HRW wanted the IOC to assume, with the first three paragraphs starting with “The International Olympic Committee.”⁴⁹

John Hoberman, an expert in sport studies, argued however that, as a sport organization, the IOC was very unlikely to ask for arrangements related to human rights and that is was consequently the role of NGOs to publicize issues and persuade the IOC that the Olympic Games could only be successful if China opened up thanks to them. A London based organization lobbying for human rights in China had an

⁴⁷ “Questions & Answers: China and the Olympic Games 2008,” Human Rights Watch, March 1, 2001, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2001/03/01/questions-answers-china-and-olympic-games-2008>

⁴⁸ “Human Rights Watch Letter to IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 1, 2001, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2001/06/08/human-rights-watch-letter-ioc-president-juan-antonio-samaranch>.

⁴⁹ Sidney Jones and International Herald Tribune, “Require Rights Guarantees From Olympic Hosts,” *The New York Times*, July 11, 2001, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/11/opinion/require-rights-guarantees-from-olympic-hosts.html>.

inflexible position, arguing that Beijing 2008 would lead to “direct abuses of people's rights - and the IOC will be responsible for these, because there is no doubt that they know this is going to happen. Indirectly, it would show to China and to regimes around the world that you can be a major abuser of human rights and bodies like the IOC don't give a damn, because human rights don't matter and have got nothing to do with sport.”⁵⁰ From the above statements it can be inferred that there was not a single interpretation as to the implications for the IOC if it selected China to host the Games. It was not clear yet whether the IOC should be directly connected to the promotion of human rights.

When Beijing was finally chosen, the decision was applauded by stakeholders of the Olympic Movement. However, human rights NGOs, whose efforts to foil Beijing's bid had been insufficient, did not share the same enthusiasm. On the day of the vote, on the 13th of July, Human Rights Watch expressed its frustration with the IOC's passivity around human rights and restated that the IOC and corporate sponsors would be complicit if abuses took place around the preparation of the Games.⁵¹ A reply of the new IOC President Jacques Rogge, published on *CBC Sport*, was that the IOC was not political. Resultantly, “Having influence on human rights is the task of political organizations and human-rights organizations. It is not the task of the International Olympic Committee to get involved in monitoring or lobbying or influencing.”⁵²

Some critics asserted that the advocacy of political neutrality connected to human rights contradicted the Olympic ideals championed in the Charter. The IOC also brushed off most of its critics by alleging that the Olympic Games would lead to more openness in the People's Republic of China (PRC).⁵³ As reported in the *New York Times*, Francois Carrard, the IOC's Director General at the time, specified that: “We are totally aware at the IOC that there is one issue which is on the table and that issue is that of human rights. It is not up to the IOC to interfere in these issues, but we are making the bet that seven years from now we sincerely and dearly hope we

⁵⁰ Katwala, “Should Beijing Get the Games? The Observer Debate.”

⁵¹ “China: Now It's Up to the Olympic Sponsors,” Human Rights Watch, July 13, 2001, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/english/docs/2001/07/13/china121_txt.htm.

⁵² CBS Sports, “IOC to focus on sport not politics in Beijing: Rogge,” *CBS*, August 27, 2001, <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/2.722/ioc-to-focus-on-sport-not-politics-in-beijing-rogge-1.266334>.

⁵³ Duncan Mackay and Vivek Chaudhary, “Controversy Rages as China Wins Games.,” *The Guardian*, July 14, 2001, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jul/14/china.sport1>.

will see many changes."⁵⁴ Despite not wanting to interfere with political matters in the country, the Committee promised that it would at least talk with the Chinese government about its human rights policy.⁵⁵

3.2. The Road to Beijing

Between August 2001 and June 2008, the Chinese government was highly decried for human rights violations committed in the country despite the Olympic Games fast approaching. Although the IOC was somewhat criticized for its passive role, it was not highly threatened. In fact, it was not singled-out but was mostly required to help alleviate abuses in the PRC. Resultantly, it was seen more as a potential ally and not an abuser itself. China was the real wrongdoer. Other entities, such as foreign governments and public figures, were also approached in that regard. Many campaigns revolved around the Olympic Games but activists were hoping to take advantage of the focus on China during this event to leverage the international community to promote human rights in the country in general.

Human Rights In China (HRIC) a Chinese Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) founded in 1989 launched in 2003 a five-year campaign titled "Incorporating Responsibility 2008" (IR2008) to engage a wide array of people globally (inter alia scholars, activists, media outlets, international organizations, corporate leaders and officials) to support domestic reforms in light of Beijing's Olympic promises. With offices overseas in Hong-Kong and New-York City, HRIC works with domestic Chinese groups while conducting online and international advocacy. As written on its website "HRIC will promote compliance with both Olympics promises and international human rights obligations undertaken by the Chinese government towards the Olympics and beyond."⁵⁶ In 2007, in its journal *China Rights Forum*, the HRIC strongly criticized the Chinese government for not being faithful to its

⁵⁴ Christopher Clarey and International Herald Tribune, "Despite Worries Over Rights, It Wins on 2d Round of Voting : Beijing Is Awarded 2008 Summer Olympics," *The New York Times*, July 14, 2001, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/14/news/despite-worries-over-rights-it-wins-on-2d-round-of-voting-beijing-is.html>.

⁵⁵ Hoberman, John. "Think Again: The Olympics." *Foreign Policy*, no. 167 (2008): 23.

⁵⁶ "Incorporating Responsibility 2008," HRIC, accessed June 10, 2018, <http://www.ir2008.org/about.php>.

promises. In addition, the journal included an “Open Letter to the IOC President.” The NGO requested that the IOC President makes the Host City Contract between Beijing and the IOC public so that it could hold both the IOC and the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) accountable to fulfill their legal, commercial and financial obligations.⁵⁷

Another international NGO, Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières - RSF), launched an international campaign in 2007 to draw attention to the abuses committed by the Chinese government on the freedom of expression. RSF is based in Paris, has offices in 10 countries and a network of correspondents in 130 countries. RSF more specifically created an advertisement showing handcuffs instead of the symbol of the five Olympic rings and distributed it throughout the world. The image was displayed by members in many countries and the media relayed incidents linked to it. On the 7th of April 2008, giant flags depicting the interlaced handcuffs were hanged on famous monuments in Paris. The matter was shared among others in *The Guardian*, *CBS News*, and *NY Times*. On the 28th of June 2007, Reporters Without Borders addressed a letter to Jacques Rogge, asking him to take firm actions against Chinese organizers to put an end to censorship and repressive laws and “to say clearly to the Chinese authorities that the contempt with which they treat the international community is unacceptable.”⁵⁸

Olympic Watch was another important detractor of Beijing 2008 at the time. The organization was founded in Prague in 2001 after it was decided the Summer Olympic Games would be held in Beijing. Its mission was to monitor the situation in China prior to the Games and garner support from influential individuals and the public for the improvement of human rights in the country. In 2003, Olympic Watch sent a letter to the members of the IOC Executive Board to call attention to the human rights violations committed in China.⁵⁹ The organization also met with domestic

⁵⁷ Stacy Mosher, *2008 and Beyond*, (New York, 2007), 24, https://www.hrichina.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/CRF.3.2007/CRF-2007-3__complete.pdf.

⁵⁸ “Beijing 2008 : Launch of a New Campaign about Beijing Olympics and Letter to IOC President Jacques Rogge on Eve of IOC Meeting | Reporters without Borders,” RSF, June 28, 2007, <https://rsf.org/en/news/beijing-2008-launch-new-campaign-about-beijing-olympics-and-letter-ioc-president-jacques-rogge-eve>.

⁵⁹ “Olympic Watch representatives meet IOC tonight at Prague’s Zofin,” Olympic Watch, July 3, 2003, <http://www.olympicwatch.org/news.php?id=1>.

NGOs⁶⁰ and actively denounced ongoing abuses.⁶¹ In August 2004, Olympic Watch, together with the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR / IGFM) and the Laogai Research Foundation unveiled “Minimum Standards for Beijing 2008,” which they perceived as necessary to have a successful event. In the document, the coalition threatened to “assist the international community in finding alternative solutions” if no progress was made by 2006. The three partners more specifically requested the Chinese government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights signed six years prior.

In February 2006, a bigger international coalition, including the three groups cited above as well as the Wei Jingsheng Foundation, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Solidarité Chine, wrote a letter to IOC’s Rogge. They asked the President to “focus on the continuing human rights abuses” in China before Beijing 2008 because they “threaten to damage the Olympic ideals forever.” They even advanced that maybe Beijing was not a sound choice anymore to host the Olympic Games. The human rights group listed the violations that were being committed by the country in general (such as the practice of torture, the unlawful treatment of Tibet and the persecution of activists), but also in relation to the organization of the Games. They pointed out to the eviction of residents and the violence against protesters. The coalition explained that those occurrences were going against the “harmonious development of man,” “human dignity” and “peace,” as mentioned in the Olympic Charter. The organizations consequently urged the President to assume his responsibilities.⁶²

About six months later, the same coalition (without the Wei Jingsheng Foundation) issued a joint statement, arguing that the IOC had failed to preserve the Olympic ideals. As a consequence, it called for other actors of the Olympic movement (the National Olympic Committees, the athletes and sponsors) to act. Disheartened, the group clarified that it had “made good faith efforts to engage the IOC through correspondence and even personal encounter, but the IOC has refused to face the reality in which Beijing 2008 is to take place [...] If the executive of IOC

⁶⁰ “Jan Ruml to speak at international conference on Tibet,” Olympic Watch, October 18, 2003, <http://www.olympicwatch.org/news.php?id=20>.

⁶¹ “Olympic Watch denounces fresh human rights abuses in China,” Olympic Watch, November 19, 2003, <http://www.olympicwatch.org/news.php?id=34>.

⁶² “After Torino, focus on Beijing’s human rights record,” Olympic Watch, February 28, 2006, <http://www.olympicwatch.org/news.php?id=98>.

President Jacques Rogge continues to hide away from reality and only repeat Beijing leadership's unsubstantiated PR claims of "progress", it will prove that it truly is either too cynical, or too incompetent, or both, to protect the Olympic ideals and take a clear stance on the continuing human rights abuses in China."⁶³

One of the most important actors for this research is Human Rights Watch (HRW). With hundreds of staff members stationed around the world, the nongovernmental human rights organization can be classified as a transnational network. HRW is famous for using the "naming and shaming" approach to ensure compliance with human rights norms from its targets. The group claims that it independently, thoroughly and ethically investigates abuses and "pressures those with powers to respect rights and secure justice." To do so, it partners with many local and international actors, to have the most substantial impact.⁶⁴ HRW issues news releases and reports on a regular basis, conducts public campaigns and engages in political lobbying.

Before the 2008 Games, Human Rights Watch published several documents addressing the critical situation in China. On the 24th of August 2004, HRW launched a "China Olympics Watch" website to report on issues of "censorship, unlawful evictions, and labor rights abuses occurring in the run-up to 2008." Since the Olympic Charter stipulates that the IOC should take all necessary steps to ensure "the fullest coverage by the different media and the widest possible audience in the world for the Olympic Games" (Article 59, 2003 Olympic Charter),⁶⁵ HRW demanded the IOC presses for free expression. Olympic sponsors and partners were asked to urge the PRC to uphold International Labor Organization standards.⁶⁶

In 2006, HRW asked questions directly related to the organization of the Olympic Games: what will happen to the thousands of international journalists coming for the occasion? How are the evictions of residents justified? What impact will the restrictions on labor rights in China have for partnerships with international businesses? Despite these interrogations, HRW was hopeful that the sport event

⁶³ "Two years until Beijing 2008: IOC fails, activists call on athletes, sponsors to act," Olympic Watch, August 7, 2006, <http://www.olympicwatch.org/news.php?id=100>.

⁶⁴ "About," Human Rights Watch, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/about>.

⁶⁵ *Olympic Charter*, July 4, 2003, 90.

⁶⁶ "Olympic Spotlight Shifts to China," Human Rights Watch, August 24, 2004, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/08/24/olympic-spotlight-shifts-china>.

would be a stimulus to “demonstrate greater respect for the human rights guaranteed to all under international law.” In its recommendations, the NGO once again only asked the IOC to act for greater freedom of expression. Human Rights Watch argued that by not being “especially critical of China’s censorship with respect to the 2008 Games,” the IOC was “lending credibility to Chinese authorities’ actions.” The group thus requested the IOC to make public the regulations promulgated for the journalists working on the Games and to ensure these guidelines abode by international standards. HRW did not indict the IOC on labor rights abuses and evictions, calling on the Olympic sponsors, international companies and the Beijing administration to deal with those issues.⁶⁷ In September 2007, HRW reported that the PRC was still violating the freedom of the media despite assurances by the IOC that Beijing 2008 would lead to improvements in human rights and more specifically the rights of journalists.⁶⁸

Looking at the media, a crucial actor to influence international audiences, mentions of wrongdoings by the IOC were not widespread as most of the attention was on the Chinese leadership. *The Guardian* reported in August 2004 that Jacques Rogge had acknowledged that human rights should be fully respected but that it was “not up to the IOC to monitor human rights, we are not inspectors.”⁶⁹ In 2007, *OpenDemocracy* also recorded that international media’s disapproval of China was mounting, but that the International Olympic Committee was “concerned only to have a smoothly run Olympics and make a financial profit, so it has no reason to pick a political fight with the host nation.”⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “BEIJING 2008 - The Olympic Games Come To China: Will Human Rights?” Human Rights Watch, October 6, 2006, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/10/06/beijing-2008-olympic-games-come-china-will-human-rights>.

⁶⁸ “China: Media Freedom Attacks Continue Despite Pledges,” Human Rights Watch, September 7, 2007, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2007/09/07/china-media-freedom-attacks-continue-despite-pledges>.

⁶⁹ Paul Kelso, “Human Rights Shadow over Beijing Games,” *The Guardian*, August 30, 2004, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/aug/30/china.athensolympics2004>.

⁷⁰ Li Datong, “Beijing’s Olympics, China’s Politics,” *openDemocracy*, August 22, 2007, http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/beijing_s_olympics_china_s_politics.

3.3. 2008, a Year of Disillusionment

In March of 2008, the IOC categorically dismissed all appeals to confront the PRC by expressing that "We do not make political choices, because if we do, this is the end of the universality of the Olympic Games."⁷¹ The same month, Olympic Watch, Reporters Without Borders, the International Society for Human Rights, the Overseas Chinese Democracy Coalition, the Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars, Human Rights Without Frontiers, and the Federation for a Democratic China sent together a bitter letter to IOC's Rogge to "speak out now" for Olympic ideals or else, a call for a boycott of the Olympic Games would be made. The seven signatories asked the IOC to "stop hiding behind absurd statements about not mixing sports and politics. Human rights is not politics. Human dignity is not politics. Human life is not politics."⁷² However, neither did the IOC make a public statement against the actions of Beijing, nor were the Games boycotted, demonstrating the power and immunity enjoyed by the International Olympic Committee at the time.

Soon before the Games, Human Rights Watch had lost any hope it might have had in the past. Two days before the opening ceremony, HRW decried the surge in human rights violations directly connected to the preparation of the Olympic Games. The group recalled the "well-documented" abuses of the freedom of expression, the rights of migrant construction workers and the evictions of the capital's residents. It asserted that the trend reflected "both the Chinese government's wholesale failure to honor its Olympics-related human rights promises, as well as the negligence of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in ensuring that China fulfills its commitments." To support its argument, HRW described the abuses in detail and provided testimonies and stories of victims, such as a housing rights activist, a veteran dissident and a Beijing lawyer. The Asia Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch, Sophia Richardson, stated that "The Chinese government and the International Olympic Committee have wasted a historic opportunity to use the Beijing Games to make real progress on human rights in China."

⁷¹ John Hoberman, "Think Again: The Olympics," *Foreign Policy*, no. 167 (2008): 22.

⁷² "Seven rights groups urge IOC's Rogge to speak out at last on human rights in China," Olympic Watch, March 19, 2008, <http://www.olympicwatch.org/news.php?id=114>.

Additionally, Richardson clearly expressed a link between the sharp increase in human rights violations and the preparation of the Olympic Games.⁷³ Two weeks later, in another article, HRW accused the Olympic sponsors of ignoring abuses and of thus being unfaithful to their commitment to corporate social responsibility. Sophia Richardson declared that “The Olympic sponsors claim to be good corporate citizens [...] But as they enjoy the Games from the comfort of their seats at the Olympic stadium, they should reflect on their failure to speak up for the Chinese citizens who built the stadium and their hotels, clean their hotel rooms, serve their meals or, in the case of Chinese journalists, try to bring them their news.” An answer from a corporate executive was that “It is not our comfort zone to criticize countries” while another expressed that it is “the role of human rights organizations.” Resultantly, Human Rights Watch asked the IOC once again to form a committee to monitor human rights abuses for future Olympics.⁷⁴

When the Games started on the 8th of August 2008, it was obvious that the situation in the country had not improved and that the organization of the event had directly led to human rights abuses. John Hoberman contented that despite being founded to promote peace, the Olympic Games regularly disguised human rights violations and the IOC seemed to be indecisive and powerless in the face of the problem.⁷⁵ The scholar, commenting on the political neutrality claims of the IOC, dismissed them as forms of “amoral universalism.”⁷⁶ Critical of the IOC, he asserted that its real genius “is its ability to create and sustain the myth that it promotes peace.”⁷⁷ A spokeswoman for Human Rights Watch shared the same opinion, mentioning the IOC President’s firm stance on not mixing sport and politics but arguing that he liked to take credit for progress when it suited him. On human rights, the spokesperson maintained that the advocacy group had “repeatedly expressed its concerns to the IOC, but officials were unresponsive and hypocritical.”⁷⁸ Jacques Rogge was faulted by rights activists for its reluctance to press the Chinese leadership and for not holding the PRC accountable for the promises made in 2001 to win the

⁷³ “China: Olympics Harm Key Human Rights,” Human Rights Watch, August 6, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/08/06/china-olympics-harm-key-human-rights>.

⁷⁴ “China: Olympic Sponsors Ignore Human Rights Abuses,” Human Rights, Watch, August 19, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/08/19/china-olympic-sponsors-ignore-human-rights-abuses>.

⁷⁵ Hoberman, 22.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 23.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁷⁸ Associated Press, “Did Olympics Improve Human Rights in China?,” *ESPN*, March 13, 2009, <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/wire?section=oly&id=3977744>.

bid. A spokesman for Reporters Without Borders expressed that "It is truly sad to see the IOC fail in this regard."⁷⁹

Right after Jacques Rogge described Beijing 2008 as being “truly exceptional Games”⁸⁰ at the closing ceremony, Amnesty International castigated the IOC for overlooking the abuses on the freedom of expression it had documented. The organization provided examples of Chinese activists persecuted and punished for speaking out about human rights violations. It conveyed that “it is high time for the IOC to put its core values of ‘human dignity’ and ‘universal, fundamental ethical principles’ into practice by making human rights a new pillar of the Olympic Games.” Amnesty International demanded the IOC includes indicators to measure the impact of the Olympic Games in Host City Contracts.⁸¹

3.4. Beijing 2008, Linking the IOC With Human Rights

After studying the incidents and interactions around the organization of Beijing 2008, it appears that there was not yet a transnational activist network strong enough to challenge the power of the IOC. A few coalitions formed between 2011 and 2008 but their main aim was pressuring the Chinese government. At the time, the IOC was criticized but did not seem to be perceived as being fully responsible for abuses committed in connection to the hosting of the Olympic Games. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch did put pressure on the IOC but only as the Olympic Games were very near, as they hoped until 2007 that the IOC would intervene following the documentation of abuses. Activists were not able to take advantage of accountability politics since the IOC, aside from the mention of ‘human dignity’ in the Olympic Charter, had not made any reference to its responsibility towards human rights in the past. Moreover, the press was not so critical of the Olympic leader but was hostile to the PRC. Due to the popularity of the Olympic

⁷⁹ David Batty, “Media Face Web Censorship at Beijing Olympics,” *The Guardian*, July 30, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/30/china.olympicgames2008>.

⁸⁰ “Truly Exceptional Games!,” International Olympic Committee, August 7, 2009, <https://www.olympic.org/news/truly-exceptional-games>.

⁸¹ “Olympics: China and IOC must learn from mistakes and uphold human rights values,” Amnesty International, August 24, 2008, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2008/08/olympics-china-and-ioc-must-learn-mistakes-and-uphold-human-rights-values-200808/>.

Games, the IOC enjoyed a strong reputation globally and a lot of power. As such, its legitimacy was high and the controversy of Beijing 2008 did not shake it too greatly. Consequently, the leverage of the IOC over activists was important.

Moreover, since the implication of the IOC in cases of human rights abuses was not clear yet, problems with the Beijing Olympics were mostly connected to the authoritarian People's Republic of China. As a result, the causal chain linked human rights violations in the runup to the Olympic Games mostly with the actions of the PRC, a notorious abuser, not with the IOC. Following Beijing 2008 however, mentalities began to change and the responsibility of the IOC started to turn up in the minds of the activists. More specifically, Human Rights Watch appeared as a vocal critic of the Olympic leader and asked that a monitoring committee be formed for future Olympics. The organization expressed that the lesson from Beijing was that voluntary pledges could not be enforced. Consequently, permanent rights mechanisms within the Olympic Movement were essential.⁸²

Aware that its role started being questioned post-Beijing 2008, the IOC expressed that “to those who have criticized the IOC on human rights issues, one can argue that the Games have elevated international dialogue on such issues among governments, world leaders, politicians, NGOs and pressure groups.”⁸³ The second stage of the socialization process was thus underway in 2008. In fact, the Summer Games in Beijing were a catalyst in identifying the preparation of the Olympic Games as leading directly to the violation of the rights of some individuals. The lesson was that either oppressive governments should not be selected as hosts, or rules to protect human rights should be added to the main documents regulating the Olympic movement, such as the Host City Contract or the Olympic Charter. The IOC was criticized for its passivity, especially since abuses were committed to organize its event. However, the latter categorically refuted any blame. In that point of time, if activists did not sustain their efforts or did not garner support around the issue of human rights abuses in the preparation of the Olympic Games, the latter could die out and the IOC would remain relatively unshaken.

⁸² “No Medals for the IOC,” Human Rights Watch, August 15, 2008, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/08/15/no-medals-ioc>.

⁸³ International Olympic Committee, *Final Report of the IOC Coordination Commission* (Lausanne: DidWeDo, 2010), 32.

4. The 2009 Copenhagen Olympic Congress

4.1. Human Rights Watch Hopeful Prior to the Congress

In November 2008, three months after the Summer Games, the *New York Times* mentioned Human Rights Watch's request for an internal mechanism to keep human rights in check in the runup to the Olympic Games. At the time, the NGO was in fact lobbying National Olympic Committees to commend the idea but the German Olympic Committee only had expressed some interest. The newspaper recalled the IOC's strict desire to keep the Games away from politics and international conflicts as well. Nevertheless, it was mentioned that HRW's proposal would be discussed at the Committee's Congress held from the 3rd to the 5th of October 2009 in Copenhagen (Denmark).⁸⁴ Minky Worden, Media Director at Human Rights Watch, expressed that "The world watched as China trampled on human rights - including throwing people in jail - in the name of preparing for the Beijing Games [...] That should never happen again, and the Olympic Congress should act now to make sure it doesn't."⁸⁵ In its contribution, Human Rights Watch demanded that human rights be integrated in the Olympic process and that an IOC Committee for human rights be established. In addition, citing findings from the Committee to Protect Journalists on the freedom of expression in Russia, HRW expressed its concerns regarding the Sochi Olympics, which already presented similitudes with Beijing 2008.⁸⁶

On the eve of the 13th Olympic Congress, Human Rights Watch addressed a letter to then US President Barack Obama, asking for his support during the Congress. The organization clarified that "The genesis of our proposal was the fact, extensively documented by Human Rights Watch, that the Beijing Games led to a marked deterioration of human rights in China, and our concern that Russia's hosting of the 2016 Sochi Games⁸⁷ could result in similar abuses unless a mechanism is rapidly

⁸⁴ Katie Thomas, "I.O.C. Issues Glowing Review of Beijing Games," *The New York Times*, November 26, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/27/sports/olympics/27olympics.html>.

⁸⁵ "Olympic Congress: Monitor Host Countries on Rights," Human Rights Watch, October 1, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/01/olympic-congress-monitor-host-countries-rights>.

⁸⁶ "Human Rights Watch Submission to the 2009 Olympic Congress," Human Rights Watch, February 23, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/02/23/human-rights-watch-submission-2009-olympic-congress>.

⁸⁷ *HRW probably meant "2014" Sochi Games*

established to monitor potential rights violations.”⁸⁸ As we can infer, Human Rights Watch was determined to have an impact during the Olympic Congress. Looking at the discursive actions of the TAN following Beijing 2008 and before the Olympic Congress, it was more aggressive in its approach to pressure the IOC, sending out many letters, reaching out to numerous actors to get support and publishing reports to present its findings. Despite its high communication frequency, Human Rights Watch was still using a courteous language.

The Copenhagen Olympic Congress brought together over a thousand stakeholders, including IOC members, representatives of National Olympic Committees and of International Federations, the Organizing Committees for the future Games, athletes, sponsors, referees, coaches, the media, and other actors. The 13th Congress was one-of-a-kind as it was the first to include a public consultation.⁸⁹ One of the aim of the Congress was to discuss the position of the Olympic Movement in society. After the Session accepted the proposed recommendations, the next task for the IOC was to implement them. The Congress is not a regular event and may take place many years apart. Previous Congresses (the one prior having been held in 1994) had been the catalysts for significant developments, justifying HRW’s eagerness to be present.

4.2. Olympism, Human Dignity and Human Rights

Overall, the proceedings of the Congress were technical, for example citing the fight against doping as an absolute priority.⁹⁰ The term ‘doping’ could in fact be found 90 times in the final report, while ‘human rights’ were mentioned 7 times. In his speech for the opening ceremony, Ban Ki-Moon, in his role as Secretary General of the United Nations mentioned the need to “join forces to combat the negative aspects of sports. Doping, human rights abuses, violence and corruption” since they

⁸⁸ “Letter to President Obama on Rights Reform in the Olympic Movement,” Human Rights Watch, October 1, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/01/letter-president-obama-rights-reform-olympic-movement>.

⁸⁹ “2009 Olympic Congress: First-Ever Public Consultation,” International Olympic Committee, July 21, 2016, <https://www.olympic.org/news/2009-olympic-congress-first-ever-public-consultation>.

⁹⁰ International Olympic Committee, *XIII Olympic Congress* (Lausanne: lautrelabo, 2010), 7.

“directly contradict the ideals of the Olympic Movement and the United Nations.”⁹¹ The expression ‘human rights’ was mostly used in a speech by Hein Verbruggen, then a member of the IOC and Chairman of the Coordination Commission for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing in 2008.⁹² Below is an excerpt from his speech:

“The criticism levelled at the IOC prior to the Games in China was unfounded. Neither the IOC nor the Olympic Movement are political bodies with political objectives. Unfortunately, the political discussions around the Beijing Games were allowed to ensue as a result of the confusion between the principles of human rights (as propagated by the human rights movement) with the Olympic principle of universal and ethical virtues. Whereas the human rights movement is based on the idea of achieving human dignity through individual freedoms and the entitlement to certain rights, Olympism instead is based on the ancient Greek virtues of “healthy spirit and healthy body”, concentrating on the development of the human character. Olympism, therefore, has its own right of existence as an alternative to the ideals of the human rights movement and must not allow the ideals of politically-motivated organisations with political objectives to impose on it. It is important for the Olympic Movement to understand this distinction and strongly reject the agendas of such organisations and stand proudly by our own commendable and universal principles. In removing this confusion, it becomes clear that political discussions of this nature should not be directed at the Olympic Games (a view now concurred by Amnesty International), in the future.”

It is interesting to note that the speaker put forth the idea that the IOC was not involved in politics and that the principle of Olympism, promoting a healthy lifestyle was different from the idea of human rights. However, while saying so, Mr. Verbruggen maintained the confusion around ‘human dignity.’ He cited the concept in his speech as an aim of the human rights movement, although it is also present in the Olympic Charter. Hein Verbruggen argued that the Olympic Movement had to

⁹¹ Ibid, 19.

⁹² Ibid, 78.

categorically reject the influence of “politically-motivated” human rights organizations. Meanwhile, it was mentioned in the final report, in Recommendation 30, that the safeguarding of human dignity was crucial to the Olympic Movement and that sport should help promote a “peaceful society based on the most fundamental common principles and values inherent in a civilised society.”⁹³ What certainly comes out of this finding is that there was still confusion with regards to the role of the IOC to contribute to ‘human dignity,’ and some leaders still firmly opposed any responsibility towards human rights.

Human Rights Watch was the only human rights organization having submitted a concern; the content of which was shared already in February.⁹⁴ All other contributions touching on human rights emanated from individuals. For example, Fernando F. Lima Bello, IOC member from 1989 to 2010, asked the Committee to be more socially responsible and include amendments in the Host City Contract to protect workers’ rights. Mr. Bello deplored that Host Cities had many times either forgotten or denied promises made during the bidding phase. He proposed as well to cover other human rights including individual liberties and freedom of speech. The IOC member expressed that “Amendments to the Host City Contract would help to avoid the periodical criticism of the media that are detrimental to the IOC’s image and that are repeated long after the Games have ended.”⁹⁵ This shows that there were some diverging views within the IOC leadership. As can be inferred from the lack of discussion on human rights at the Congress however, it was not a main priority of the IOC and the latter still generally opposed any involvement. Nevertheless, the IOC was also torn due to its desire to bring positive change to society.

⁹³ “The Olympic Movement in Society,” International Olympic Committee, October 5, 2009, 12 https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/IOC/Congresses/XIII-Olympic-Congress-Copenhagen-2009/Overview/EN-XIII-Olympic-Congress-Recommendations.pdf#_ga=2.256963533.753418052.1525337756-1016900643.1516827881.

⁹⁴ International Olympic Committee, *XIII Olympic Congress – Contributions* (Lausanne: lautrelabo, 2009), 612-614.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 172.

4.3. The IOC Seemingly Open for Change

In July 2011, two years after the Copenhagen Congress, the IOC published a follow-up of the recommendations. In 2009, 66 recommendations had been approved and 13 working groups had been set up to study ways to implement them. Then, proposals had been made to the IOC Executive Board to process them. In the follow-up publication, IOC President Rogge asserted that most of the recommendations had already been implemented and the rest would be implemented as soon as possible.⁹⁶ A crucial recommendation for this case study, mentioned previously, was Recommendation 30, conveying that “The preservation of human dignity is a fundamental tenet of the Olympic Movement. All members of the Olympic Movement should work together in pursuit of the harmonious development of men and women in order to promote through sport a peaceful society based on the most fundamental common principles and values inherent in a civilised society.” To be implemented, the Executive Board approved the following actions:

- a) The IOC will intervene at the OCOG level in the event of serious abuse, such as:
 - Mistreatment of people displaced due to Olympic venue construction;
 - Abuse of migrant workers at Olympic venue construction sites;
 - Child labour;
 - Improper restrictions on the media’s freedom to cover the Games, including cultural aspects.
- b) The IOC will establish a system for correctly identifying and dealing with “legitimate complaints” from official sources.
- c) The IOC will not intervene in non-sport human rights issues
- d) The leverage that the IOC has towards the Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs) should be determined. This might lead to amendments to the Host City Contract and documentation for Bid Cities.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ International Olympic Committee, *XIII Olympic Congress – Follow-up* (Lausanne: lautrelabo, 2011), 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 33.

Recommendation 30 was a step forward for the protection from unlawful expropriation, the abuse of workers' rights and media freedom. Nevertheless, it remained to be seen whether the recommendation would in fact be implemented. In fact, the IOC used some ambiguous language, such as intervention at the "OCOG level only," the mention of "serious" abuse, and the non-interference for "non-sport human rights issues." Most importantly, the concessions did not encourage the prevention of human rights abuses, only referring to their alleviation, and did not directly indict the Host City. In addition, the measures were not included in the Charter and the Host City Contract, binding stakeholders of the Olympic Movement.

4.4. The Congress, a Window of Opportunity for Dialogue

At the end of 2009, Human Rights Watch emerged as the principal challenger of the IOC. It was the only organization having submitted a contribution to discuss the issue of human rights in the Olympic Movement. In order to gain leverage, the organization reached out to crucial stakeholders such as National Olympic Committees and important public figures. However, its efforts to obtain support were not too successful yet. The Copenhagen Congress demonstrated that the IOC still wished to maintain a distance with the promotion of human rights but that it was however open to dialogue. In fact, Recommendation 30 was a sign that the IOC acknowledged it could play a role in the protection of some fundamental rights in the context of the Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the leadership of the Committee had not agreed at the time on the role the IOC should assume, with confusion remaining around the signification of 'Olympism,' 'human dignity,' and 'human rights.'

The Olympic Congress was not a very publicized event, which means that it served essentially as a means of communication between stakeholders of the Olympic Movement, rather than as a way to publicly advance one's personal agenda. The IOC was thus not too pressured to make drastic changes. Nevertheless, by being present at the Congress, HRW demonstrated that it had an interest in the actions of the IOC and wanted to have a say in them. As a consequence, after Beijing 2008 led to the conception of an international concern on human rights abuses in the lead-up to Olympic Games, the 2009 Copenhagen Congress was an evidence that a dialogue had

been initiated between HRW and the IOC, with both of them arguing over the responsibilities that the IOC should assume. The follow-up of Recommendation 30 published in 2011 showed as well that the IOC was willing to make some concessions, but the elusive language used and the non-official context casted some doubt regarding the impact of the recommendation.

5. Sochi 2014: Mounting Pressure Against the IOC

5.1. Pre-Olympic Congress

On the 4th of July 2007, Sochi (Russia) was selected as the Host City for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. It had been competing against Salzburg (Austria) and Pyeongchang (South Korea). Soon after the Beijing Games, the *New York Times* expressed that many human rights activists were already concentrating on Sochi, as they believed it would present the same problems as China. At that time, Human Rights Watch really stood out as the main challenger of the IOC, posting reports and letters on a very regular basis. In March 2009, Allison Gill, Director of HRW's Russia office, met with Christophe de Kepper, Chief of Staff in the IOC President's office. Two months later, she published a letter to his attention. She explained that following extensive research by Human Rights Watch, two problems had been uncovered which needed immediate attention: the mismanagement of expropriations and the abuse of workers' rights in connection to the construction of Olympic facilities. The Director subsequently demanded a more transparent expropriation and compensation process; the protection of Olympic workers (a large proportion being migrant workers) accompanied by a public statement by the IOC; the possibility for the community to express grievances freely. To support her claims, Ms. Gill provided numerous testimonies.⁹⁸ Another article by HRW was published in May in the *Wall Street Journal Europe*, reiterating the same concerns as previously and the "need for leadership from the IOC in Sochi."⁹⁹

In August 2009, HRW sent a letter to Christophe de Kepper to express concerns regarding the deteriorating situation in Russia, where multiple leading rights advocates and journalists had been recently killed. HRW highlighted the silence of the IOC, despite the proximity of Sochi with the crime scenes, and asked for a public

⁹⁸ "Letter to the International Olympic Committee in Advance of May Visit to Sochi," Human Rights Watch, May 7, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/05/07/letter-international-olympic-committee-advance-may-visit-sochi>.

⁹⁹ "Don't Trample the Olympic Ideals in Russia," Human Rights Watch, May 25, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/05/25/dont-trample-olympic-ideals-russia>.

statement warning Russian President Dmitry Medvedev that the IOC would not tolerate such offenses. Human Rights Watch “respectfully” reiterated its wish to see an independent monitoring mechanism established to ensure basic human rights standards were met. HRW stipulated that, as expressed many times, it was “not calling on IOC to monitor Russia's criminal justice system, for example. We are asking you to take up specific cases of rights abuses that violate the spirit and letter of the Olympic Charter, and that clearly will affect the climate in which the Games take place.” To support its statement, HRW recalled an article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in which it was noted that the IOC had “proved on several occasions that it is capable of reacting to injustices.” The organization urged the IOC to endorse simple reforms to protect its reputation. Lastly, HRW cited the Honorary President of the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB), Manfred von Richthofen, who insisted “that human rights relevant to the staging of the Games be enforced.”¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note here the friendly tone used by the organization to persuade its target to change its ways.

Only one month later, on the eve of the Copenhagen congress, Allison Gill once again raised her concerns to the IOC in a letter to Mr. De Kepper. The Director of the Russia office explained that she had learned the concerns raised previously had not been addressed during the IOC’s visit to Sochi in May. She recalled the problems of expropriation without adequate compensation and shared the increased health issues due to construction of Olympic venues around Sochi.¹⁰¹ On the same day, HRW released a public statement asserting that despite the description of Beijing 2008 by the IOC as “an indisputable success,” the group had extensively documented that the Summer Olympics had “led to the worsening of human rights in China.”

¹⁰⁰ “Letter to the International Olympic Committee Regarding the Sochi Games and Murders of Russia’s Rights Defenders,” Human Rights Watch, August 28, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/28/letter-international-olympic-committee-regarding-sochi-games-and-murders-russias>.

¹⁰¹ “Letter to the International Olympic Committee: Human Rights Concerns Related to Sochi Games,” Human Rights Watch, October 1, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/10/01/letter-international-olympic-committee-human-rights-concerns-related-sochi-games>.

5.2. Post-Olympic Congress

In the years following the Copenhagen Congress, Human Rights Watch released an important amount of news, letters and commentaries to document the situation in Russia and press the IOC on human rights issues. As the 2010 Winter Olympics opened in Vancouver, the group asserted that reforms were urgently required. HRW mentioned the “ugly legacy of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games,” and its growing concerns ahead of Sochi 2014 and the upcoming Rio 2016. References to letters written to the IOC in May, August and October 2009 were attached.¹⁰²

At the end of the year, in a long message to Mr. de Kepper, Minky Worden, Director of Global Initiatives at Human Rights Watch, and Rachel Denber, Acting Executive Director for the Europe and Central Asia Division, expressed their gratefulness to the IOC. They appreciated the Committee’s efforts to raise some concerns with the Sochi Organizing Committee (SOOC) and the administration, its “openness to examine human rights concerns in the context of these Games” and shared their “conviction that the IOC, more than any other institution, can and should use its stature to ensure that the Olympic Games do not negatively affect the human environment in which they take place,” thanks to the successful solving of one case. They went on to document many issues which had remained unaddressed, including expropriations and abuses of migrant workers. Detailed information was given, mentioning specific people affected and places. Then, recommendations were provided, expressed already in the May 2009 letter. Ms. Worden and Ms. Denber concluded by sharing their willingness to meet with Mr. de Kepper in the coming year. The letter was overall very amicable, despite HRW having to often repeat itself over time due to unaddressed concerns. This letter revealed that a correspondence had been established between the human rights group and the IOC, as the former thanked the IOC for its November 2009 letter.¹⁰³

¹⁰² “Olympics: Don’t Skate Over Rights Violations,” Human Rights Watch, February 12, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/02/12/olympics-dont-skate-over-rights-violations>.

¹⁰³ “Letter to the International Olympic Committee - Update on human rights concerns related to Sochi Games,” Human Rights Watch, December 9, 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/12/09/letter-international-olympic-committee-update-human-rights-concerns-related-sochi>.

In June 2012, Human Rights Watch provided the testimony of a family whose home was going to be demolished by Russian authorities. HRW explained that the treatment of the family violated Russia's international legal human rights obligations and it called on the IOC to intervene with the government.¹⁰⁴ In July of the same year, the group published a news report with a section dedicated to "The Role of the IOC." It stressed that it had raised concerns "repeatedly" with the Committee since 2008. It clarified also that the IOC had in fact taken a few concrete steps with positive results but that it was not enough to put an end to grave rights violations taking place due to the Olympics preparation. From the article, it appears that Human Rights Watch was getting increasingly frustrated with the IOC as it finally started to directly criticize the organization.¹⁰⁵

An article by HRW was published in the *Washington Post* as well. The latter was entitled "Sochi Olympics have an ugly side." The publication clearly highlighted the joint responsibility of the Russian government and of the IOC for the abuses committed.¹⁰⁶ In September 2012 Human Rights Watch asked the IOC again to intervene to help the family.¹⁰⁷ A month later, the group published a very emotional article following the destruction of the family's house, shared by *The Wall Street Journal*. The writer, a researcher based in Russia, explained that she "called Tatiana the afternoon her home was being demolished. I couldn't hear her well as she was sobbing and there was a lot of screaming in the background," followed by "And so ended the long struggle of an ordinary family in Sochi [...] to make way for construction for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games." The article added that "Instead of insisting that the authorities honor requirements of compensation, the IOC watched from the sidelines as Tatiana's family got trounced in a game in which no rules applied." HRW expressed that this case highlighted the need for a system to prevent abuses in the context of the organization of the Games.¹⁰⁸ At the time, pressure was

¹⁰⁴ "Russia: Halt House Demolition for Olympic Construction", Human Rights Watch, June 6, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/06/russia-halt-house-demolition-olympic-construction>.

¹⁰⁵ "Russia: As Olympics Launch, Sochi Abuses Loom," Human Rights Watch, July 17, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/17/russia-olympics-launch-sochi-abuses-loom>.

¹⁰⁶ "Sochi Olympics have an ugly side," Human Rights Watch, August 11, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/08/11/sochi-olympics-have-ugly-side>.

¹⁰⁷ "Russia: Forced Eviction Tramples Olympic Ideals," Human Rights Watch, September 19, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/19/russia-forced-eviction-tramples-olympic-ideals>.

¹⁰⁸ "An Olympic Demolition," Human Rights Watch, October 2, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/02/olympic-demolition>.

mounting against the International Olympic Committee, perceived as too indifferent to the suffering of people affected by Olympics preparations.

During a visit to Sochi in October, the IOC had described the preparation in the city as “impeccable.” Minky Worden maintained that “The IOC’s praise for the Russian government’s Olympics preparations should have been tempered with caution about the deteriorating human rights climate in Russia.”¹⁰⁹ In 2013, Human Rights Watch was getting more and more impatient.

A year before the Olympic Games in Sochi, the activist network published a 67-page report, entitled “Race to the Bottom: Exploitation of Migrant Workers Ahead of Russia’s 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi,” based on interviews with 66 affected migrant workers. It was outlined that the IOC “has not always seen a clear role for itself in human rights protection in the context of the Olympic Games.”¹¹⁰ Moreover, the network said that it had “repeatedly approached” the IOC and that the latter still had to “comprehensively address human rights concerns in Sochi.”¹¹¹ The recommendations to the IOC were the following: state publicly that human dignity and workers’ rights have to be respected; put in place a standing committee on human rights; require bidding cities to provide detailed procedures to safeguard human rights in light of the preparation of the Games; amend the Host City Contract to include policies to protect rights; make future Host City Contracts public; adopt human rights benchmarks to be checked during IOC visits. Human Rights Watch recalled Recommendation 30 adopted during the Copenhagen Congress and the actions decided by the IOC to ensure it.

With regards to the interactions between the two organizations, HRW explained that it had been regularly pressing the IOC since 2006 “through letters, meetings, and official submissions.”¹¹² At the end of the report, some letters were provided. In one of them Mr. de Kepper noted that his organization was taking “all the Games-related cases you raise seriously and address them with Sochi 2014 [organizers] with a strong sense of urgency.”¹¹³ In another letter, Mr. de Kepper asked HRW to be as specific as possible when sharing sensitive cases. HRW regularly asked

¹⁰⁹ “Russia: IOC Should Address Deteriorating Rights Climate,” Human Rights Watch, October 11, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/11/russia-ioc-should-address-deteriorating-rights-climate>.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Race to the Bottom- Exploitation of Migrant Workers Ahead of Russia’s 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi* (United States of America: 2013), 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 59.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

for replies and for opportunities to meet in person and warned the IOC that it was preparing documents chronicling Olympic abuses. Throughout the year, HRW published multiple other articles.

On the 10th of September 2013, Thomas Bach was elected to succeed Jacques Rogge at the head of the IOC. Most news outlets did not mention the impact it would have on human rights and the issues in Sochi, with *BBC* stating for example that the President would have to ensure the good delivery of the upcoming Winter Games, “subject to delays, budget overruns and concerns over the warm weather.”¹¹⁴ However, HRW believed the appointment of the new President would have a strong impact on the implementation of human rights principles.¹¹⁵ In October 2013, in a letter to Christophe De Kepper, Minky Worden, Director of Global Initiatives at HRW, and Jane Buchanan, Associate Director, thanked the Director General for a previous encounter and requested a meeting between Thomas Bach and Human Rights Watch Executive Director Ken Roth due to the “seriousness of the human rights concerns in Sochi.”¹¹⁶

In January 2014, Jane Buchanan explained that she had “repeatedly asked the International Olympic Committee to push the Russian authorities to end the pervasive exploitation of workers on Olympic sites. The IOC pushed back, ignoring the evidence in our report and insisting that it could address the issue only if Human Rights Watch turned over concrete names.” Buchanan recalled that Human Rights Watch had partnered in 2013 with one of Russia’s leading human rights groups, Memorial, to provide a list of 600 workers who claimed they had not received their full wage in Sochi. Both organizations had urged the IOC to mediate with Russian authorities, but a few months after doing so, they had still not gotten any answer.¹¹⁷

A month later, in an article entitled “IOC Acts on Sochi Abuses,” HRW recognized that the IOC had been helpful to prompt the Russian government to pledge

¹¹⁴ “Olympics: Thomas Bach Named New IOC President,” *BBC Sport*, September 10, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/24028786>.

¹¹⁵ “Olympics: Rights Agenda for New IOC President Bach,” Human Rights Watch, September 10, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/10/olympics-rights-agenda-new-ioc-president-bach>.

¹¹⁶ “Letter to the International Olympic Committee, October 2013,” Human Rights Watch, October 20, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/20/letter-international-olympic-committee-october-2013>.

¹¹⁷ “Dispatches: Too Little but Not Yet Too Late for Sochi’s Workers,” Human Rights Watch, January 13, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/13/dispatches-too-little-not-yet-too-late-sochis-workers>.

that US\$8.3 million of wage arrears would be paid.¹¹⁸ When the statement was written however, Memorial claimed that 700 workers (including a large part of the 600 aforementioned) had not been given their wages. Human Rights Watch specified that it had informed the IOC about abuses linked to the Olympic preparation in Sochi because the IOC had made a commitment in Copenhagen to intervene at the OCOG level if serious abuses related to the mistreatment of displaced people and migrant workers were chronicled.

The Committee argued nevertheless that “The IOC took Human Rights Watch’s reports on the abuse of migrant workers seriously from the beginning, but had asked you for more details on the specific cases to be able to follow up properly through the Sochi 2014 Olympic Games Organising Committee. Subsequently, you sent us details in October 2013.”¹¹⁹ At the time, despite the deteriorating context for human rights in Russia, the IOC did not make any public command, its main preoccupation being adherence to the Charter.¹²⁰

Between 2006 and 2014, a shift in HRW’s demands was witnessed. While in 2008 it only asked the IOC to guarantee the freedom of expression, calling on sponsors and the host’s administration to monitor workers’ rights and residents’ expulsions, it required the International Olympic Committee to actively ensure all of those at the end of the Sochi Games. This was a consequence of the IOC’s commitment made at the Copenhagen Congress.

5.3. Uproar During Sochi 2014

During the Sochi Olympics, from the 7th to the 23rd of February 2014, Amnesty International also urged the IOC to uphold human rights. The organization, in partnership with the NGO Environmental Watch of Northern Caucasus in Krasnodar, provided testimonies of harassed environmental activists and asked

¹¹⁸ “Russia: IOC Acts on Sochi Abuses,” Human Rights Watch, February 11, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/11/russia-ioc-acts-sochi-abuses>.

¹¹⁹ “CDK to HRW - reply to letter 24 Jan 2014”, International Olympic Committee, February 9, 2014, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/SOCHI%20-%20Reply%20from%20IOC%209Feb2014.pdf.

¹²⁰ Erik Jennische, *The Olympic Violations - The Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, the Swedish sponsors and human rights* (Viveka Risberg, 2014), 4.

President Thomas Bach to “raise with the Russian authorities the harassment of environmentalists as well as the denial of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly in the context of the Sochi Olympics.” Amnesty International contended that not doing so would be contrary to the Olympic Charter’s ideals.¹²¹

Two days before the end of the Winter Olympics, 33 human rights groups united to address a letter to the IOC President. The coalition consisted of a variety of organizations, domestic and international, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, Women’s Sports Federation, Lesben- und Schwulenverband in Deutschland (LSVD) and Pen America. The trigger were anti-LGBT laws passed by the Russian government before the Games started, causing major uproar throughout the world. The letter, entitled “The Moment for Olympic Reform,” conveyed that “The worldwide wave of outrage spurred by Russia’s discriminatory anti-LGBT laws should be a warning – one that should not need ever to be repeated.” Consequently, “with a united voice”, the network of activists exhorted the IOC to take three steps: make the Olympic Host City Bid process more competitive to ensure that prospective countries abide by international law standards; include human rights pledges in future Host City Contracts; amend Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter to include the rejection of discrimination based on “sexual orientation and gender identity.” The group asserted that there could not be successful Olympic Games when major human rights abuses took place.¹²²

The demands of the coalition were relayed by the *Associated Press*, *Boston Herald*, *Fox News*, *The Japan Times* and *Borgen Magazine*. In most articles, the work of Human Rights Watch on the documentation of human rights abuses was mentioned. Minky Worden was cited saying that “It has taken major global outrage, of the kind we’ve seen with Sochi, to spur changes in the Olympic movement [...]“The IOC had plenty of warning to cope with these abuses in Russia [...] They failed to do that. The moment has arrived when there needs to be institutional reform.”¹²³ It can be inferred that Human Rights Watch had had enough of issuing warnings to the IOC and from

¹²¹ “IOC urged to uphold human rights,” Amnesty International, February 10, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/02/ioc-urged-uphold-human-rights/>.

¹²² “Sochi Highlights Need For Olympic Reforms,” Pen America, February 24, 2014, <https://pen.org/sochi-highlights-need-for-olympic-reforms/>.

¹²³ Associated Press, “Human rights pledge urged for future Olympic hosts,” *The Japan Times*, February 22, 2014, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/02/22/world/human-rights-pledge-urged-for-future-olympic-hosts/#.WxFnoEiFPIU>.

then on demanded concrete actions and institutional guarantees for the protection of fundamental rights. The IOC started getting shamed.

In February 2014, Michael Kourabas, a specialist on corporate social responsibility and business and human right, published an article expressing his belief that the IOC had violated the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) by letting Russia host the Winter Olympics. The writer based his argument on the fact that the IOC, by selecting Sochi and not ensuring that Olympic-related activities did not have an adverse impact on human rights, was guilty of having a business relationship with an entity causing harm. Additionally, Mr. Kourabas noted that the IOC had acted dishonestly since it had been satisfied with Russia's promises, despite HRW's repeated warnings that abuses were taking place. Consequently, the Olympic leader had violated its obligations under international law.¹²⁴

5.4. Human Rights Organizations Losing Patience After the Sochi Games

In the run-up to the Sochi Games, Human Rights Watch documented extensively the abuses connected to the preparation of the event. The organization published numerous articles, a lengthy report and wrote many letters to IOC leaders to instruct them of the abuses taking place. In terms of level, HRW partnered with domestic NGOs to obtain detailed information on the situation in Russia, as required by the IOC. The media often relayed the information of the network. While the IOC stated in 2014 that it had “a good constructive dialogue with Human Rights Watch,”¹²⁵ the later did not seem as pleased as it complained of “repeatedly” asking the International Olympic Committee to stand up against abuses in Russia. The language used in letters by HRW, more critical of the IOC, demonstrated that the organizations was getting more and more disillusioned. In addition, although it had asked the IOC to guarantee the freedom of expression only for the 2008 Games, it asked the Committee to also protect workers and residents' rights for Sochi 2014, a consequence of the commitment of the IOC to implement Recommendation 30 after

¹²⁴ Michael Kourabas, “Why the IOC's Choice of Sochi Violates UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,” *Triple Pundit*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.triplepundit.com/2014/02/sochi-ioc-un-guiding-principles-business-human-rights/>.

¹²⁵ Associated Press, “Human Rights Pledge Urged for Future Olympic Hosts.”

the Copenhagen Congress. Due to the written pledge to protect workers and residents in sport related issues, the IOC was kept accountable. Consequently, the IOC was increasingly held responsible for human rights violations committed in the preparation of the Olympic Games. Overall, the extensive research by Human Rights Watch corroborated the fact that the IOC had a share of responsibility for human rights abuses; a direct link was made clear between human rights violations and the obligations of the IOC, whose authority was progressively discredited.

Finally, the IOC was shaken by an external shock, namely the adoption of an anti-LGBT law by the Russian administration in June 2013. The decision caused global outrage and human rights activists called on the IOC to intervene after the law was passed. Not only did they ask the IOC to take a stand against discrimination, but they also took this opportunity to make more general demands, as witnessed from the letter written by the coalition of 33 organizations and addressed to the IOC President in February 2014. The language in the letter was particularly threatening, as was the warning by HRW relayed in the media. To conclude, the IOC was losing credibility following two Olympic Games related to major human rights abuses in a short amount of time. The Committee was thus losing leverage as activists gained support worldwide to incriminate the IOC. In terms of the degree of change attained following Sochi 2014, the IOC and HRW had a strong dialogue in place. However, the IOC was still arguing over its share of responsibility. At that time, pressure was mounting against the Olympic Movement to make changes, as the tone used by activists was getting bitter and the IOC was being shamed.

6. The Olympic Agenda 2020

6.1. Launching of the Agenda 2020

In March 2014, IOC President Thomas Bach invited the public to contribute to a debate on the future of the Olympic Movement. The call followed a decision in December 2013 to setup a roadmap called “Olympic Agenda 2020.”¹²⁶ The dialogue followed a promise made by Thomas Bach during his electoral campaign in 2013. The main areas of focus were: sustainability, credibility and youth. Bach emphasized that contributions could be made at any time and by any stakeholder until the 15th of April.¹²⁷

Consequently, Human Rights Watch submitted a document, “along with 40 colleague rights groups including the Committee to Protect Journalists, AllOut, Human Rights Campaign, and Athlete Ally.”¹²⁸ The NGO explained that, as a result of “the 2008 Beijing Summer Games and the 2014 Sochi Winter Games, and our submission to the 2009 Copenhagen Congress,” and recognizing the role of the IOC in responding to alleged human rights abuses as detailed in Recommendation 30, it made three recommendations: amend Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter to add sexual orientation; make Host City Contracts public; include human rights benchmarks on media freedom, labor rights, freedom of expression and association, liberty and security, and nondiscrimination, in future Host City Contracts. In the submission, HRW described itself as a “meaningful stakeholder in the Olympic process.”¹²⁹

A few other actors, Swedwatch, the Norwegian Olympic Committee, the Swedish Trade Union, and the Gay Games Federation, presented a contribution

¹²⁶ “Executive Board Meets to Discuss Olympic Agenda 2020,” International Olympic Committee, December 14, 2013, <https://www.olympic.org/news/executive-board-meets-to-discuss-olympic-agenda-2020>.

¹²⁷ Nick Butler, “Bach sets out timetable for Olympic Agenda 2020,” *Inside The Games*, March 30, 2014, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1019179/bach-sets-out-timetable-for-olympic-agenda-2020>.

¹²⁸ “Olympics: Host City Contracts Will Include Rights Protections,” Human Rights Watch, October 22, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/22/olympics-host-city-contracts-will-include-rights-protections>.

¹²⁹ “Human Rights Watch Submission to Olympic Agenda 2020,” Human Rights Watch, April 11, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/11/human-rights-watch-submission-olympic-agenda-2020>.

related to the promotion of fundamental rights in the Olympic Movement.¹³⁰ In its letter, Swedwatch, an NGO reporting on Swedish companies abroad and their compliance with human rights policies, recalled that the global debate on the responsibilities of the IOC concerning human rights violations was not a new one, as it had already been raised during Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014. The recommendations of Swedwatch were among others that the IOC should: adhere to the UN Global Compact and work with the UNGPs; include human rights in the Charter with references to relevant UN and ILO conventions; include requirements and monitor human rights in the bidding process. The letter was not only signed by the Director of the non-profit organization, but also by the leaders of two Swedish organizations engaged in initiatives around sexual rights (RFSU and RFSL) and the Secretariat of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (LO-TCO).¹³¹ The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) also wrote a letter to advocate for the rights of workers, to ensure their protection at all steps of the Olympics operations. It called on the IOC to: “adopt the principles of the eight ILO core conventions, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises” and make them mandatory for the candidate cities.”¹³²

The Gay Games Federation (FGG) suggested that the IOC appraises the human rights situation in candidate cities and dismisses them if any type of discrimination was witnessed. Marc Naimark, vice-President of the FGG, expressed that "If, as stated in Principle 2 of the Olympic Charter, the 'goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity', then basic human rights must be respected by all parties to the Olympic Charter; the IOC, National Olympic Committees, International Federations, and Organising

¹³⁰ Antoine Duval, “Olympic Agenda 2020: Window Dressing or New Beginning?” *Asser International Sports Law Blog*, June 4, 2014, <http://www.asser.nl/SportsLaw/Blog/post/olympic-agenda-2020-window-dressing-or-new-beginning>.

¹³¹ “Contribution Letter to the IOC on the Olympic Agenda 2020,” Swedwatch, April 2014, http://uniontounion.se/pdf/Letter_IOC_140415.pdf.

¹³² “Contribution from LO Sweden to the Olympic Agenda 2020,” Swedish Trade Union Confederation, April 15, 2014, [https://mellansverige.lo.se/home/lo/res.nsf/vRes/lo_1366026587231_ioc_letter_olympic_agenda_2020_pdf/\\$File/IOC_letter_Olympic_Agenda_2020.pdf](https://mellansverige.lo.se/home/lo/res.nsf/vRes/lo_1366026587231_ioc_letter_olympic_agenda_2020_pdf/$File/IOC_letter_Olympic_Agenda_2020.pdf).

Committees.”¹³³ It can be noted that a lot more human rights groups contributed to the debate for the Agenda 2020 than for the Copenhagen Congress six years prior, exhibiting the heightened sense of urgency to include human rights safeguards in the Olympic Movement.

6.2. Concessions by the IOC

Before the adoption of Agenda 2020, in October 2014, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), published an article revealing that their “colleagues from Human Rights Watch (HRW)” had been “engaged in a long-term discussion with the International Olympic Committee (IOC)” to find out ways the Olympic Movement could integrate a human rights mechanism. The CPJ disclosed that HRW had been successful in securing a commitment from the IOC that future Host City Contracts would include a commitment to human rights. On a more personal side, the CPJ explained that its advocacy work had been initiated for the 2008 Games in Beijing. Since then, the Committee had met with IOC officials a couple of times to discuss issues of press freedom. One of the findings of the CPJ was that “Progress was limited and slow, with the IOC willing to quietly intervene to help accredited journalists, but not willing to take public positions or directly challenge governments that failed to live up to press freedom commitments.”¹³⁴ However, the organization had noticed some change since the election of Thomas Bach in 2013, with the new President being more willing to stand up against abuses. The wish to reform the Olympic Movement through the Agenda 2020 was a manifestation of this change. The CPJ was able to meet President Bach in September 2014. Then, two proposals were made: create a mechanism to register complaints from journalists who had experienced abuses, which would then be investigated by the IOC; create an advisory group to judge whether bidding cities are in a position to guarantee press freedom. At the

¹³³ Gary Anderson, “Federation of Gay Games calls on IOC to be “rampart against discrimination” in Agenda 2020 submission,” *Inside The Games*, April 29, 2014, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1019728/federation-of-gay-games-calls-on-ioc-to-be-rampart-against-discrimination-in-agenda-2020-submission>.

¹³⁴ Joel Simon, “Press freedom and the Olympic movement,” *Committee to Protect Journalists*, October 23, 2014, <https://cpj.org/blog/2014/10/press-freedom-and-the-olympic-movement.php>.

meeting, Thomas Bach committed to implementing the first proposal at the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro.¹³⁵

HRW published an article as well to praise the IOC for its decision to include rights protection in Host City Contracts and make them public. Recalling its submission for the Olympic Agenda 2020 outlining the need for reforms, HRW stated that the IOC was making a step forward but that the most important remained the implementation of the decision, especially with China and Kazakhstan being the finalists to host the 2022 Winter Olympics.¹³⁶ In the future Host City Contracts, under section 21 titled “Sustainability and Olympic Legacy,” it would now be required that “The City, the NOC and the OCOG shall take all necessary measures to ensure that development projects and other projects necessary for the organisation of the Games comply with local, regional and national legislation and international agreements and protocols, applicable in the Host Country with regard to planning, construction, protection of the environment, health and safety, labour and anti-corruption laws.”¹³⁷ An interesting point to raise is that HRW described the modification as a sign of changing times in sport, holding the IOC as a frontrunner and therefore calling on other international sports federations such as FIFA to immediately follow suit.¹³⁸ *Reuters* and *Inside the Games* published an article citing the praise of HRW towards the IOC for the new Host City Contract. The second newspaper described it as a contrast “from the huge criticism of the IOC by human rights groups in recent times, particularly ahead of Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014.”¹³⁹

A few days before the IOC Session, eight NGOs with various backgrounds and a different reach (Amnesty International, FIFPro – World Players’ Union, Football Supporters Europe, Human Rights Watch, International Trade Union Confederation, Supporters Direct Europe, Terre des Hommes International Federation, Transparency International Germany) sent a joint letter to the IOC

¹³⁵ Simon, “Press freedom and the Olympic movement.”

¹³⁶ “Olympics: Host City Contracts Will Include Rights Protections,” Human Rights Watch, October 22, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/22/olympics-host-city-contracts-will-include-rights-protections>.

¹³⁷ International Olympic Committee, *Host City Contract*, accessed June 15, 2018, 23 https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/Host_city_elections/Host-City-Contract-XXIV-Olympic-Winter-Games-in-2022--Beijing-Execution-no-signature.pdf.

¹³⁸ “Olympics: Host City Contracts Will Include Rights Protections,” Human Rights Watch.

¹³⁹ Nick Butler, “IOC praised by Human Rights Watch for “gold medal” winning Host City Contract changes,” *Inside The Games*, October 24, 2014, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1023422/ioc-praised-by-human-rights-watch-for-gold-medal-winning-host-city-contract-changes>.

President. The coalition explained that “As leading non-governmental organizations in the area of human rights, including children’s rights, labor rights and anti-corruption as well as official representatives of professional football players and supporters, we are joining forces to cooperate on the issue of “Mega-Sporting- Events” (MSEs).” The network welcomed the 40 (20+20) Recommendations published by the IOC and invited the Committee to take a systemic approach “With regard to strategic partnerships with NGOs (Recommendation 20) and an ongoing dialogue with civil society (Recommendation 39).”¹⁴⁰

6.3. Adoption of Recommendations

In December 2014, the set of 20+20 recommendations first published in November by the IOC was unanimously adopted as part of the Olympic Agenda 2020. It should be noted however that these recommendations were not full-force policies. With regards to human rights, it was confirmed that the 6th Fundamental Principle of Olympism of the Olympic Charter would be modified to mirror Article 2 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights by adding sexual orientation (Recommendation 14). In addition, it was established that future Host City Contracts would be made public, starting with the 2022 Olympic Games (Recommendation 1). Nevertheless, the IOC had not decided upon benchmarks to keep human rights in check during the Olympic preparation, one of the most popular demands of activists.

In his introductory speech for the 127th IOC Session in Monaco on the 7th of December 2014, Thomas Bach pointed out that the IOC needed to initiate change. The IOC President explained that the Olympic Movement was more successful than ever before, that the Olympic Games in 2012 and 2014 had been brilliant, and that “success is the best reason for change.” Thomas Bach also argued that the IOC “enjoys an excellent reputation.” Nevertheless, the Olympic Agenda 2020 was to increase the credibility of the Olympic Movement, reinforce its good governance, transparency and ethics, and demonstrate the willingness of the IOC to live up to its

¹⁴⁰ “IOC: Joint letter to IOC President Bach regarding "Agenda 2020",” Human Rights Watch, December 3, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/03/ioc-joint-letter-ioc-president-bach-regarding-agenda-2020>.

principles. One of the key messages conveyed in the speech was that cooperation was necessary to ensure progress.¹⁴¹

Overall, in the 106 pages of the report on the Olympic Agenda 2020 published following the Session and providing the context and background of the project, ‘human rights’ were mentioned three times. The references were only made to explain that the change in Principle 6 mirrored the European Convention of Human Rights and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It implies that the concept of human rights was not directly discussed.

6.4. The Olympic Agenda 2020, a Ray of Light for Activists

The decision of the recently elected IOC President to debate on a roadmap for the Olympic Movement was warmly welcomed by human rights activists. Unlike the Copenhagen Congress, multiple organizations, spearheaded by Human Rights Watch, reached out to the IOC to express their wishes. Despite the assurance of Thomas Bach that the reputation of the IOC was admirable, the Olympic leader had endured great criticism for its passive management of human rights abuses during Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014. The institution was vulnerable to the global environment due to the wide reporting of the problems in Russia and the backlash of civil society. As a result, the IOC needed to regain the trust of activists, supportive of each other’s efforts.

Following their campaigns initiated for the Summer Games in China, Human Rights Watch and the Committee to Protect Journalists, were able to obtain concessions from President Bach. The latter promised the launching of a mechanism monitoring abuses on the freedom of the press during the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016; Thomas Bach also agreed to modify the 2022 Host City Contract, later made public, to ask the Host City, the Host National Olympic Committee and the Organizing Committee to administer further the construction of infrastructures, the protection of the environment, the safety of workers, the health of residents and anti-corruption. Despite the efforts by the IOC, HRW expressed that the implementation

¹⁴¹ International Olympic Committee, *Olympic Agenda 2020 – Context and Background*, accessed June 14, 2018, 4-7, <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Documents/Olympic-Agenda-2020/Olympic-Agenda-2020-Context-and-Background.pdf>.

of the measures was the most important. In addition, the IOC did not directly cite international human rights standards, did not provide clear benchmarks, and did not agree to the establishment of a monitoring structure to ensure good compliance.

7. Since 2015, The Impact of the Sport and Rights Alliance

7.1. The Newborn Network

In early 2015, the eight NGOs mentioned previously in the context of the Olympic Agenda 2020 (Amnesty International, FIFPro – World Players’ Union, Football Supporters Europe, Human Rights Watch, International Trade Union Confederation, Supporters Direct Europe, Terre des Hommes International Federation, Transparency International Germany), officially coalesced to form the Sport and Rights Alliance. The global coalition described its aim as “working to improve human rights, labour rights, anti-corruption and sustainability in sport, in particular mega-sporting events (MSEs) such as the Olympic Games.”¹⁴²

The development of the SRA followed the international indignation over the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games, notably regarding sexual and reproductive rights, workers’ rights, forced evictions and the freedom of expression. The aim of the SRA is to make sure that decision-makers organize sports events with human rights in mind at every step of the process. The alliance has a website where it references its requirements and the letters addressed to sports organizations. The IOC is the first organization listed, with the most letters indexed.

In February 2015, the SRA addressed a letter to President Bach to clarify its purpose, comment on the Agenda 2020, and most importantly discuss the Host City Contract for the 2024 Summer Olympic Games as it could no longer impact the 2022 Contract. The first requirement made by the Sport and Rights Alliance was to include the standards of the International Labour Organization and concrete human rights indicators accompanied by “robust due diligence procedures” to the 2024 Host City Contract to ensure that the organization of the Games would be free from abuses. Moreover, the network voiced the need for an independent monitoring mechanism to

¹⁴² “Human Rights Concerns Related to the 2015 Baku Games,” Sport and Rights Alliance, March 26, 2015, <http://www.sportandhumanrights.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Sports-and-Rights-Alliance-Letter-to-EOC-26March2015.pdf>.

check that Host Cities kept the promises made during the bidding process, during the preparation of the event, and after the Games.¹⁴³

The SRA sent another letter to Thomas Bach a few months later to warn the IOC about the selection of the Host City for the 2022 Winter Games. At the time, only two candidates remained: Beijing and Almaty. The SRA thus documented the human rights violations occurring in China and Kazakhstan, including restrictions on the freedom of expression, assembly, and association; discriminations against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people; the failure to protect workers' rights and the right to housing. Resultantly, the IOC was asked "to require in all legal documents pertaining to the hosting of the games that Host Cities should uphold human rights throughout all stages of the hosting process and to develop, together with the Host City, a 'human rights risks and mitigation' plan for the event."¹⁴⁴ The latter was not an explicit requirement of Agenda 2020.

In the same month, Human Rights in China (HRIC) wrote an open letter to the IOC President. Since the Host City for the 2022 Games was going to be selected at the 128th IOC Session in Kuala Lumpur from the 30th of July to the 3rd of August, HRIC urged the IOC to delay the election to have more time to review the suitability of the Chinese bid. The NGO explained that, since the visit of the IOC Evaluation Commission to China in March and the publication of the report in June, a national crackdown had been launched on human rights lawyers and activists. Christophe Dubi, the Olympic Games Executive Director, replied to the letter three weeks later and, consequently, after the selection of Beijing as host for the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. The Director explained that the views of NGOs, including HRW, had been considered to evaluate the candidature of Almaty and Beijing in terms of human rights, media freedom and labor rights. Christophe Dubi wished "to underline that the IOC has a systematic and ongoing relationship with a number of external organisations, including Human Rights Watch, Committee to Protect Journalists or Transparency International, to mention a few, in addition to a strong partnership with the United Nations and several of its agencies." An enhanced cooperation with NGOs was a recommendation adopted as part of Agenda 2020. Dubi added that the IOC had

¹⁴³ "Implementation of Olympic Agenda 2020 – Bidding Criteria," Sport and Rights Alliance, February 23, 2015, <http://www.sportandhumanrights.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Letter-SRA-to-IOC-23-February-2015.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ "Sport and Rights Alliance," Sport and Rights Alliance, accessed June 13, 2018, <http://www.sportandhumanrights.org/wordpress/index.php/2015/07/06/sport-and-rights-alliance/>.

received the necessary guarantees that the principles outlined in the Olympic Charter and the Host City Contract would be respected in connection to the Games. Moreover, he assured that the IOC required answers from the Organizing Committees if detailed allegations were raised. The Director concluded his letter by indicating that since the IOC “is not a world government,” it could only ensure the respect for the Olympic Charter in the context of the Olympic Games.¹⁴⁵

7.2. The IOC Named and Shamed

Despite the assurances of the IOC, the Sport and Rights Alliance shamed the organization in September 2015 for not doing enough in light of its 2020 Agenda. Without warning, the coalition published a press release, quickly relayed by multiple media outlets. The publication was titled: “2024 Olympics: ‘Astonishing’ Omission of Human Rights in Host City Contract.” The language used in the document contrasted highly with the previous, more courteous, communication by the SRA.

The alliance explained that the IOC had “failed” to explicitly bind the Host City for the 2024 Games to protect human rights, as had been determined from the contract made public the week before. It was the first contract published since the adoption of the Olympic Agenda 2020 and the SRA had consequently hoped that the IOC would have done more to “promote Olympic values of non-discrimination, friendship, solidarity and fair play.” Despite the additions of the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation, the demand to guarantee media freedom and the required compliance with international labor standards, some reforms which had been promised previously by the IOC, the SRA contended that the changes were not sufficient. The latter, recalling the numerous human rights abuses which had taken place during recent Olympics, demanded that the 2024 Host City Contract clearly requests a commitment to human rights, including “compliance with international human rights obligations, access to remedy, human rights due diligence and risk assessment, Host cities must also have in-house capacity to implement and

¹⁴⁵ “Open Letter to IOC President Thomas Bach,” Human Rights In China, July 28, 2015, <https://www.hrichina.org/en/press-work/statement/open-letter-ioc-president-thomas-bach-and-response>.

monitor compliance with international human rights standards.”¹⁴⁶ The SRA asked also that the requirements for the labor and anti-corruption standards be more detailed, with obligations for the supply chain. Sylvia Schenk, Chair of the Working Group on Sport at Transparency International Germany, one of the members of the network, expressed that “The Organising Committee urgently needs a full compliance management system in place to meet international governance standards.”¹⁴⁷

The content of the press release was conveyed inter alia by *Inside The Games*, *Associated Press*, *USA Today*, *The Guardian*, *ESPN*, *Play the Game*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Die Linke*, *Deutschlandfunk*, the *Institute for Human Rights and Business* and *International Business Times* as well as on the websites of the SRA member organizations.

The Guardian added that the criticism was “likely to come as a surprise to the IOC, which believed it had got the human rights movement onside by including a ban on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the wake of the furore that surrounded Sochi 2014 and provisions that would force contractors building venues and infrastructure to comply with minimum international labour standards.”¹⁴⁸ As can be inferred, the IOC had thought that the changes adopted for the Olympic Agenda 2020 were sufficient to get human rights NGOs off its back. However, such was not the case according to civil society, with the SRA as ringleader. The IOC’s Director of Communications shared that the IOC had been “surprised by these comments since the changes to the host city contract were publicly welcomed by member groups of this Alliance at the time.” He explained that three changes to protect workers’ rights, LGBT rights and media freedom had been adopted for the new Host City Contract, as demanded by the members of the coalition before. The aforementioned statement also demonstrates that the SRA seemingly did not warn the IOC that it would publish the incriminating press release.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ “2024 Olympics: “Astonishing” omission of human rights in Host City Contract,” Amnesty International UK, September 24, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/2024-olympics-astonishing-omission-human-rights-host-city-contract>.

¹⁴⁷ “Sport and Rights Alliance,” Sport and Rights Alliance.

¹⁴⁸ Owen Gibson, “IOC attacked by human rights groups over Olympics host city contract,” *The Guardian*, September 25, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2015/sep/25/ioc-human-rights-host-city-olympic-games>.

¹⁴⁹ Mark Bisson, “IOC Responds to Human Rights Criticisms of 2024 Host City Contract,” *Around The Rings*, September 25, 2015, http://aroundtherings.com/site/A__53203/Title__IOC-Responds-to-Human-Rights-Criticisms-of-2024-Host-City-Contract/292/Articles.

7.3. The Sports World Under Pressure

In addition to the pressures exerted by the SRA, the IOC was threatened further that year due to the deep crisis shaking the sports world. At the time, FIFA, the international governing body for football, was caught in extensive allegations of corruption within its leadership. Issues of corruption and widespread doping were also coming up within the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF). In his new year's message, President Bach recognized that "One just needs to look at the events over the last 12 months to realise that [it] is even more urgent today to safeguard the credibility of sports organisations and to protect clean athletes."¹⁵⁰

The Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB) assessed that the main global sports bodies were facing critical crisis of legitimacy and that they would need to make efforts to restore their "social license." The IHRB explained that the steps taken by the IOC so far to reform and regain public trust had been unsatisfactory. In a January 2016 article, the IHRB wrote that "the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has yet to win back the trust of potential host communities so crucial in ensuring successful games. In October 2014, Oslo withdrew from the race to host the 2022 Winter Olympics after authorities concluded they could not garner public support. Since then both Boston and Hamburg have both withdrawn from their bids to host the Summer 2024 Olympic Games." The IOC was facing serious challenges and the concessions made for the Olympic Agenda 2020, "early signs that reform efforts are finally underway," would have to be extended to recover its legitimacy.¹⁵¹

In May 2016, the SRA addressed a letter to the IOC, with a much more amicable tone than the press release issued a few months prior. This time, the letter was signed not only by the eight organizations, but also by five individuals from various countries and with expertise in different fields. The alliance first acknowledged the improvements made so far by the IOC. It then argued that, "building on the progress achieved to date [...] there is a need and opportunity to go even further." Having attached a document setting out key steps that the IOC could

¹⁵⁰ Dan Palmer, "Bach says Olympic Agenda 2020 reforms are "more urgent than ever"," *Inside The Games*, December 30, 2015, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1032865/bach-says-olympic-agenda-2020-reforms-are-more-urgent-than-ever>.

¹⁵¹ John Morrison, "Restoring the Social Licence of Mega-Sporting," *Institute for Human Rights and Business*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.ihrb.org/focus-areas/mega-sporting-events/restoring-the-social-licence-of-mega-sporting-events>.

follow, the SRA explained that its initiative was “supported by a broad coalition of organizations and experts joining the IOC towards the shared goal of advancing human rights in the harmonious development of humankind, as stated in the Olympic Charter.” The Sport and Rights Alliance offered to discuss its demands with the IOC before publishing them. The network seemed to use ‘push and pull incentives’, first castigating the IOC to confound the organization and then praising its actions to encourage it to follow the SRA’s demands.

The main aim of the SRAs was to impact the preparation of Beijing 2022, but above all to lead to a change in the 2024 Host City Contract. De facto, the IOC had expressed that the contract could still be reviewed after the Summer Games in Rio in August 2016. The requirements made by the SRA were perceived as addressing the unfilled gaps of Agenda 2020. It was asked that the IOC requires Olympic Bidders and the Host City to publicly commit to human rights, to carry out “impact assessments,” to include due diligence in bidding documents with a clear stipulation for business partners, to accept outside monitors and manage the aftermath of the Games. The IOC was urged also to make a clear reference to human rights standards in all materials connected to the bidding and selection procedure; to openly claim its adherence to human rights; to define criteria evaluating possible impacts of the Olympic Games on fundamental rights; to put a compliance system in place; to conduct risk assessments and mitigation plans; to have an internal mechanism to manage human rights and anti-corruption; to require guarantees from the state authorities of bidding cities that human rights will be respected in connection to the Olympic Games.¹⁵²

Ahead of the Rio 2016 Summer Olympics, the SRA did not actively document issues but still characterized the event as a “huge missed opportunity” to enhance the lives of Brazilian people. The Director General of Amnesty Brazil, Atila Pereira Roque, deplored that promises made by the Brazilian government during the 2009 bidding process had not been upheld. The Sport and Rights network argued that although “the Games cannot be a panacea for a city’s problems [...] at the least it should not exacerbate them.” The alliance expressed its concern over poor labor conditions, police brutality over the alleged “war on drugs”, forced evictions and the

¹⁵² Sport and Rights Alliance. “Sport and Rights Alliance.”

removal of street children.¹⁵³ An averred 22,000 families were relocated between 2009 and 2016.¹⁵⁴

The Guardian, sharing the words of the SRA, wrote that “the warm words of the IOC’s hitherto unimpressive Agenda 2020 reform programme need to be converted into contractual clauses in the 2024 host city contracts if they are to have any meaning.” A spokesperson for Transparency International Germany recalled that the IOC was going through a crisis, a good opportunity to induce change.¹⁵⁵ Despite, the violation of some fundamental rights in the lead-up to the Summer Games, a positive point was that the IOC had launched its media freedom tool during Rio 2016, as promised to the Committee to Protect Journalists the year prior. The apparatus let journalists report press violations; the IOC then followed-up with relevant stakeholders when applicable.¹⁵⁶

7.4. The Host City Contract Finally Mentions Human Rights

In February 2017, at last, the IOC made a Substantial change to the Host City Contract for 2024. The long-awaited adjustment was the addition of a section designed to strengthen the protection of human rights and prevent any abuses. IOC President Thomas Bach explained that his organization had worked jointly and laboriously with the Sport and Rights Alliance, taking its input into account to adapt the Host City Contract.¹⁵⁷ The new Section 13, under ‘Core Requirements,’ stipulated thereupon:

¹⁵³ Owen Gibson, “Olympic Games 2016: how Rio missed the gold medal for human rights,” *The Guardian*, August 2, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/aug/02/olympic-games-2016-rio-human-rights>.

¹⁵⁴ Jo Griffin, “One man, one city, three evictions: the human cost of Rio's growth,” *Reuters*, April 24, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-rio-landrights/one-man-one-city-three-evictions-the-human-cost-of-rios-growth-idUSKBN17Q1TT>.

¹⁵⁵ Gibson, “Olympic Games 2016: how Rio missed the gold medal for human rights.”

¹⁵⁶ Ed Jones, “Olympic Committee Launches Media Freedom Tool,” *Agence France Presse*, August 4, 2016, <http://www.peace-sport.org/olympic-committee-launches-media-freedom-tool>.

¹⁵⁷ “IOC Strengthens its Stance in Favour of Human Rights and Against Corruption in New Host City Contract,” International Olympic Committee, February 28, 2017, <https://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-strengthens-its-stance-in-favour-of-human-rights-and-against-corruption-in-new-host-city-contract>.

13.1. The Host City, the Host NOC and the OCOG undertake to abide by the provisions of the Olympic Charter and the IOC Code of Ethics and agree to conduct their activities related to the organisation of the Games in a manner which promotes and enhances the fundamental principles and values of Olympism, as well as the development of the Olympic Movement.

13.2. Pursuant to their obligations under §13.1, the Host City, the Host NOC and the OCOG shall, in their activities related to the organisation of the Games:

- a.** prohibit any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status ;
- b.** protect and respect human rights and ensure any violation of human rights is remedied in a manner consistent with international agreements, laws and regulations applicable in the Host Country and in a manner consistent with all internationally-recognised human rights standards and principles, including the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, applicable in the Host Country; and
- c.** refrain from any act involving fraud or corruption, in a manner consistent with any international agreements, laws and regulations applicable in the Host Country and all internationally recognised anti-corruption standards applicable in the Host Country, including by establishing and maintaining effective reporting and compliance.

13.3. The IOC, through its Coordination Commission referred to in §27, shall establish a reporting mechanism to address the obligations referred to in §13.1 and §13.2 in connection with the activities of the Host City, the Host NOC and the OCOG related to the organisation of the Games.

13.4. The OCOG shall carry out various activities during the period leading up to and throughout the Games in connection with the promotion of peace and human understanding through sport, and of the Olympic truce, as further specified in the “HCC – Operational Requirements – Protocol”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸International Olympic Committee. *Host City Contract – Principles*. Accessed June 14,

For the first time, ‘human rights’ were directly mentioned in one of the binding documents governing the Olympic Movement, as seen in 13.2.b. Moreover, the IOC made a direct reference to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. There are three pillars to the UN Guiding Principles: the state duty to protect human rights from abuses by third parties; the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; the access to effective remedies for victims. As stated in the General Principles, “these Guiding Principles apply to all States and to all business enterprises, both transnational and others, regardless of their size, sector, location, ownership and structure.”¹⁵⁹

The change of the Host City Contract for the 2024 Summer Games was welcomed as a promising step for the future.¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch, one of the members of the Sport and Rights Alliance, expressed that “The amendments mark the latest step in a long campaign by the SRA, which in February 2015 called for ‘rights-respecting Olympic bids’.” Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation explained that “This is an important step by the IOC for the future. Implementing the UN Guiding Principles across all major global sporting events will help break the cycle of human rights abuses, and this example from the IOC should be applied to all such events, starting now.”¹⁶¹

The news was shared online by the members of the SRA and media outlets, including *Inside the Games*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Reuters*, *New Delhi Times*, *FOCUS Online*, *Play the Games*. While in late 2015 some newspapers had titled their article “Human rights groups attack IOC on host city contract,” about a year and a half later the tone was antithetic, with *Reuters* using the title “Olympics-Rights groups praise IOC's revised Games contract.” De facto, the Sport and Rights Alliance did perceive the addition of the principles as a crucial step following the extensive abuses connected to Beijing 2008, Sochi 2014 and Rio 2016, but however remained cautious since those were just “words on paper” and “implementation and monitoring are essential” to change the practices of the Olympic Movement.¹⁶² One of the hope of

2018, 16, <http://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/Documents/Host-City-Elections/XXXIII-Olympiad-2024/Host-City-Contract-2024-Principles.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ OHCHR, *Guiding principles on Business and Human Rights* (New York and Geneva: 2011), 1.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel Etchells, “IOC adds human rights clause to Host City Contract,” *Inside The Games*, February 28, 2017, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1047571/ioc-adds-human-rights-clause-to-host-city-contract>.

¹⁶¹ “Olympics: Host City Contract Requires Human Rights,” Human Rights Watch, February 28, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/28/olympics-host-city-contract-requires-human-rights>.

¹⁶² “Olympics: Host City Contract Requires Human Rights,” Human Rights Watch.

the human rights network was that the reforms undertaken by the IOC would serve as a driving force to witness changes across all Mega-Sporting Events (MSE), such as the World Cup overseen by FIFA.

7.5. 2017, the End of a Lengthy Campaign

In February 2015, the newly formed Sport and Rights Alliance addressed its first letter to the IOC. Exactly two years later, President Bach announced the incorporation of a specific reference to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR) in the binding 2024 Host City Contract. It was the first time that the IOC clearly supported international human rights norms. The decision was praised by human rights organizations and the media. It followed two difficult years for the Olympic Movement, criticized for not doing enough in light of Agenda 2020 and particularly weakened by the global crisis hitting the sports movement. Consequently, the IOC was in need for legitimacy as civil society was losing interest for the Olympic Games and cities' bids were getting scarcer.

Conscious of the power shift taking place and shocked by abuses related to the organization of MSE, eight global organizations coalesced to pressure the IOC to induce change. At first amicable, the SRA surprised the Committee when it publicly accused it of failing to act against abuses. The press release of the sport and rights network, very critical, was widely shared. Although it is not possible to affirm that it was the trigger which led the IOC to explicitly require the Host City and other entities to uphold human rights, the fact that the IOC clearly mentioned its partnership with the SRA when it communicated the change seems to support this assumption. Now that a prescriptive status has been adopted by the IOC, it remains to be seen whether the newly endorsed obligations will in fact be implemented. If this was the case, the last stage of the socialization process, the internalization of norms, would be reached.

8. The IOC, a New Role Model?

With the acceleration of globalization in the 20th century and since the end of the Cold War, states have had to coexist and share their influence with non-state actors. Among them, Transnational Activist Networks (TANs) have been a growing subject of enquiry in international relations. Initially perceived as powerless actors, they have demonstrated in the last decades that they could influence the global discourse on human rights. Some critics argue that transnational networks are not instrumental in leading to change as domestic NGOs have the most impact. However, TANs, by engaging an international public and conducting ‘mobilizations of shame,’ have shown on numerous occasions that they could be influential.

Most of the previous literature on transnational advocacy networks focused on the impact of the latter on the actions of states. In this thesis, I wanted to apply the findings of scholars on cases of campaigns against other entities. Although states initiated the creation of an international human rights regime culminating with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1948, with many of its provisions now incorporated into customary international law, the regime has expanded since then. The endorsement of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in 2011 showed corporations had a responsibility to respect human rights as well. However, the new standards elaborated are applied on a voluntary basis. The question consequently arises to know how entities are compelled to act in accordance with and promote those standards. In addition, although the literature on activist networks has grown significantly, little has been specified still about the process of socialization and the strategic interactions between TANs and their target.

Consequently, to answer the previous interrogation and fill the gap in the literature, I identified three variables based on previous research which, I believe, have a high potential in influencing the diffusion of human rights norms when taken together: (1) the existence of a transnational network advocating for the adoption of norms; (2) the nature of the entity targeted to comply with and support human rights standards; (3) the delivery of the issue by the network. In this thesis, I applied this theoretical framework, focusing on the three variables above, to evaluate its validity

and identify more specifically the characteristics of transnational activism and its significance.

In that regard, I researched the case study of the Olympic Movement. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has recently adjusted the Host City Contract for the 2024 Olympic Games to explicitly mention human rights and require good compliance with the UN Guiding Principles by Olympics stakeholders. I was thus interested in evaluating the connection of TANs with the change observed. To do so, I researched the interactions of NGOs with the IOC from 2001, the year of the selection of Beijing as Host City, up to February 2017, when the Host City Contract was modified. My findings concur in suggesting that TANs impact the diffusion of human rights. In fact, I argue that sustained pressure on the IOC, especially after the Olympic Games in China, compelled it to change its policy. For my research, I focused specifically on the promotion of labor-related rights, the protection from expulsion of residents; the freedom of expression and the press.

I found that, in the leadup to the Summer Beijing Games in 2008 there was not yet a strong, coordinated, network ready to overpower the IOC as the Committee enjoyed a strong reputation. Moreover, during the preparation of Beijing 2008, the final aim of advocates was to influence the human rights policy of the Chinese government. Resultantly, appeals to the IOC and to other world leaders were made, to in turn pressure the PRC. In short, the IOC was generally not directly connected to the violations taking place. It was determined however that Beijing 2008 had been a catalyst for deepened human-rights abuse and thus, the link between the Olympic Games and rights violations led to the conception of an international issue. The lesson from Beijing was that voluntary compliance with Olympic ideals was not sufficient. Consequently, clear benchmarks bindings on stakeholders of the Olympic Movement were necessary. Over a year after the Summer Games in China, the IOC held the first Olympic Congress open to the public. Human Rights Watch (HRW) was the only organization to have submitted a contribution related to human rights, despite the presence of thousands of stakeholders. HRW had participated in the Copenhagen Congress and hoped to influence the IOC's stance on human rights due to the ongoing preparation for the Olympic Games in Russia, exhibiting the same issues as the Beijing Games. The IOC, not yet interested in discussing human rights, still made a small concession to bolster 'human dignity.'

After the end of Beijing 2008, many activists had turned their attention to Russia. Among them, Human Rights Watch was extremely active in documenting issues. As the Winter Games were getting closer, many organizations voiced their concern simultaneously and the responsibility of the IOC in case of abuses connected to Olympic preparation was clearly underlined. Its passivity was decried. Nevertheless, the IOC was reluctant to take a more active stand, still emphasizing its desire to remain politically neutral. Conscious that its role was being challenged and having lost some credibility, President Bach invited the public to contribute to a discussion on the elaboration of a roadmap for the Olympic Movement, Agenda 2020. Unlike the Copenhagen Congress, dozens of organizations submitted a contribution, demonstrating the growing interest for the actions of the IOC with regards to human rights. Consequently, the IOC, pressured by rights activists, made some moderate changes, hoping to curb the criticisms formulated against the Olympic Movement.

Two months after the unanimous adoption of 40 Recommendations for the Agenda 2020, a new actor emerged, the Sports and Rights Alliance (SRA). Made up of eight organizations (including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Football Supporters Europe, International Trade Union Confederation etc.), with different sport-related interests, the SRA viewed its aim as ensuring that Mega-Sport Events (MSE) were organized with human rights in mind at all times. At first cooperative with the IOC, gently demanding that more extensive reforms be undertaken, the SRA, relayed by media outlets, suddenly shamed the IOC at the end of 2015. Finally, the IOC modified the Host City Contract at the beginning of 2017. The Host City Contract for the 2024 Summer Games, which will be held in Paris, now includes a full section for human rights guarantees. It mentions among others, that the Host City, the Host National Olympic Committee and the Organizing Committee must act in a manner consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It also certifies that the IOC will establish a reporting mechanism to address violations of the mentioned obligations. The Sport and Rights Alliance asserted that this change was the result of an arduous campaign against the Olympic movement. The IOC also affirmed that the change emanated from its cooperation with the SRA. Despite the commendation by activists for the reform, the most important remains the implementation of these guidelines, the last step in the process of socialization.

In conclusion, the research conducted for this thesis presents a link between the actions taken by human rights groups and the discourse of the International Olympic Committee. Through their ability to act as an alternate source of information and their ability to effectively use language and define perceived appropriate behavior for others, activist networks can gain leverage over powerful entities. With regards to the strategic interactions between the advocacy network and the target, I determined that Human Rights Watch and the Sport and Rights Alliance both presented evidence of what I describe as “push and pull incentives.” I argue that, in the process of socialization, transnational advocacy networks alternate between shaming (push) and praising (pull) to obtain concessions. In fact, TANs have an interest in maintaining good relations with their target so their opinion is esteemed; on the other hand, it is also important for them to show that they can be unpredictable and critical so the target feels obligated to behave correctly and make concessions for fear of reprisals. The reproaches articulated will have even more weight as they are voiced by a ‘partner.’ In short, advocacy networks may publicly castigate the targeted entity, but they also benefit from getting closer to it.

Another finding is that external factors can play an important role. In this particular case study, the crisis shaking the sports world, not necessarily the IOC but institutions it is usually associated with (FIFA and the IAAF), affected the character of the organization. In fact, it increased its vulnerability as the Committee had to substantiate its legitimacy. Moreover, the research conducted demonstrated the importance of discursive changes by the targeted entity. The more the IOC made informal concessions, the more activists could hold it accountable and press for more changes. It was also found that human rights groups were supportive of each other’s efforts and often coalesced to express their demands with a united voice.

Arguments contradicting this thesis may indubitably be presented. Critics may assert that other actors or factors were more important to lead to institutional changes by the IOC. But in fact, this does not invalidate the conclusions drawn, as it may add to the research on transnational networks. It would also be interesting to analyze whether the changes adopted by the IOC will in fact lead to the internalization of norms in the Olympic Movement, especially since the IOC has recently become a member of a multi-stakeholder coalition, the Mega-Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights (MSE Platform). The aim of the Platform is to ensure that all actors involved in MSE fulfill their human rights responsibilities.

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Pledge of Honesty

"On my honor as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it."

Laurence Roy

15th of June 2018