

What influences organisational evolution of modern sport: the case of skateboarding.

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the processes that influence the evolution of a modern sport. It focuses on the case of international skateboarding: the sport that was recently included into the Olympic Games.

Design /methodology/approach – An inductive research strategy was informed by the notions of evolution of modern sport, prolympism and institutionalism. The primary data was collected through a series of interviews and supplemented by the analysis of documents, press and social media.

Findings – The paper analysed how the organisation of international skateboarding has changed to date and identified three major determinants of its evolution: values of the activity, commercial interests and the Olympic movement. The following recurring discussion themes emerged: the link between commercialism and legitimisation of sport; bureaucratisation under the Olympic movement; and tensions between prolympism and values of skateboarding.

Research limitations/implications – A limitation of the case study method is that any conclusions refer to this particular sport and their applicability to other sports lies within analytical generalisation. Still sport governing bodies and policy makers can learn from the evolution of international skateboarding and analyse potential issues and consequences for other emerging sports. In terms of theoretical implications, the study highlights legitimisation as one the key characteristics of evolution of modern sport, which should be considered along with previously established criteria, such as bureaucratization, commercialisation and professionalization.

Originality/value – The study extends the existing research on evolution of modern sports by examining a very rich contemporary case of skateboarding, the internationally growing sport with unique organisational arrangements. It contributes to knowledge of the evolution towards legitimisation of emerging sports, but also towards sportification of popular culture and society.

Keywords: Skateboarding, organisation, sport evolution, Olympic, prolympism, legitimisation, sportification.

Introduction: the context of the study

The history of organisation of international competitive skateboarding is very much connected to the growth of this activity in the United States and its subsequent commercialisation and professionalization. A significant number of skateboarders became serious about competitions during the eighties and actively participated in contests seeking recognition and sponsorships. Arguably, skateboarding

... became a sport with the arrival of the likes of Tony Hawk [the most successful skateboarder of all time] who started to have a clear-cut image and to push the limits ... He became the first real sportsman, real athlete. And a lot of people followed that... They were planning routines, their tricks, because they realised that more money was flowing in with sponsors.

Neil Danks (2013, interview)

The popularity of skateboarding was boosted by the creation of the ESPN X-Games, or the ESPN Extreme Games, as they were first called. Skateboarding was included in the programme of the inaugural X-Games in 1995 and has remained there since. Skateboarding and the X-Games have formed a mutually beneficial alliance over the last 20 years and, thanks to skateboarding and few other key action sports, the X-Games have become a hugely successful and influential international sport event. Due to the increasing popularity of the X-Games, skateboarding has grown tremendously since the middle of the nineties.

Development of competitive skateboarding has largely coincided with the rise and commercialisation of the Olympic movement. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) organise the Olympic Games and acts as “the supreme authority of the Olympic Movement” (IOC, 2015). While the IOC is not an ultimate sport authority in legal terms, the Olympic Games are the biggest global event platform for sports, so the IOC is arguably the most influential international sport organisation. Over the last two decades, the Olympic movement saw several action sports, such as snowboarding, BMX, and mountain biking, entering the programme of the Olympic Games. Gerhard Heiberg (2013, interview), the IOC member, suggested that this process has been largely influenced by the fact that the Olympic Games were losing their appeal to the younger audience. The IOC acknowledged this negative trend in the late 1990s and has been constantly looking for sports attracting ages between 16 and 24. Due to the booming international popularity and growing coverage of competitive skateboarding in the X-Games era (Beal, 2013), inevitably there have been a lot of reports and debate discussing Olympic perspectives of skateboarding, such as Koraeus (2005), Bane (2011), Buesing and Glader (2011), O’Neil (2012), and Brixey (2012). Finally, the

decision that skateboarding will be included in the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020 was approved by the IOC in August 2016.

Theoretical background: institutionalism and evolution of modern sport

The main postulates of institutional theory were found applicable to the study of the evolution of international skateboarding. Organisational field, which is one of the key concepts of institutional theory, is different from that of an industry and may include organisations, especially regulatory agencies, outside of particular industries (DiMaggio, 1988, 1991). It was essential to identify the influencing parties, even though they might lie outside of the skateboarding industry itself and consider their impact on processes within specific organisational field. Institutional theorists Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and Zucker (1983) argue that organisations in a field modify their features towards increasing compatibility with environmental characteristics, for example, change structures and values to conform to expectations about appropriate organisation. This homogeneity is attributed to external pressures and social expectancies and is known as institutional isomorphism. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) found out that organisations were bound by the logic of the institutional sphere and call this phenomenon “iron cage” whereby “bureaucratisation and other forms of organisational change occur as a process that makes organisations more similar and not necessarily more efficient or successful” (Peachey and Bruening, 2011, p.203). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three mechanisms, by which institutional isomorphism takes place: coercive, mimetic and normative. Over time, these three mechanisms force organisations within the same field, with similar desires and facing similar pressures, to be legitimate, to become isomorphic with each other and the environment (Silk and Amis, 2000).

The notion of organisational field has been successfully employed in studies of organisation of specific sports (Cousens, 1997; O’Brien and Slack, 2003, 2004; Cousens and Slack, 2005; Southall et al, 2008; Southall and Nagel 2008; Skille, 2011). Institutional theory advocates the importance for organisations to obtain stability and legitimacy (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1983; Zucker, 1983) and extends the notion of legitimacy by highlighting its cultural aspect (Zucker, 1977; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer and Scott, 1983). Whereas in institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Prahalad and Bettis, 1986) legitimacy is mostly linked to notion of culture of organisational field, this “cultural legitimacy” must be distinguished from “regulatory legitimacy”. As regulatory legitimacy

originates from rulemaking and enforcement activities (Deephouse and Suchman, 2008), cultural legitimacy is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, p. 574). Therefore, institutional legitimacy can be defined as having both “a cognitive dimension that constitutes the object for actors as a valid, objective social feature and a normative, prescriptive dimension that represents the social object as right” (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2006, p. 57).

Whilst principles of institutional theory can explain the evolution and change in organisational fields, there is also a notion of specificity of sport, which is advocated by Slack (2003) and Chadwick (2009). This concept questions sport as rational economic activity and sees it as a deeply socio-culturally embedded institution. For much of its existence, competitive sport had been recognized as a unique “not-for profit cultural practice that delivers a range of memorable experiences and social benefits” (Smith and Stewart, 2010, p.11). Modern sport is the result of the evolution of various activities over the decades and centuries, so our study was also underpinned by the key studies of the evolution of sports. Guttman (1978) identified some initial distinguishing characteristics of modern sport, such as secularism; equality of opportunity to compete; specialization of roles; rationalization; bureaucratic organisation; quantification and the quest for records. According to Carlsson and Svensson (2015), these criteria form “sportification process” and used to be the foundations of competitive sport. Undoubtedly, the patterns of evolution of sports have changed from the time of Guttman’s study. For example, Sato (2013) described that sportification of judo consisted of four stages: codification; emphasis on competition; shift towards spectators and entertainment; and commercialism. Likewise, Carlsson and Svensson (2015, p.10) highlighted “the huge influence of the media and the market... as an essential characteristic of post-modern sport with its emphasis on event and entertainment”.

To accommodate more recent patterns of evolution of sport that furthered Guttman’s typology, Beech and Chadwick (2013) argued that sports that have become ‘big business’ have followed a sequence of the following phases of change: foundation; codification; stratification; professionalization; post-professionalization; commercialisation; post-commercialisation. Whereas the evolution of sports was very much about “sportification” until the 1970s, in the past fifty years commercialisation and professionalization have driven the development of modern sports in line with the growth of consumer

capitalism and adoption of business approach. Sport has had a commercial component almost since its invention.

As its evolution over the past 250 years has demonstrated, sport as an activity is not primarily a form of play — corrupted or otherwise - but a type of commercial entertainment, analogous to the theatre, the cinema or popular music.

Collins (2013, p.127)

Commercialisation of sport refers to the process of development of business principles and logic of profit maximisation in line with consumer capitalism values (Bourdieu, 1998; Andrews, 2004). As Donnelly (1996) suggested, commercialisation of modern competitive sport has been engendered by two major interfering phenomena: television and sponsorship. Throughout the sixties and the seventies television developed an interest in broadcasting sport (Slack, 2003), which quickly attracted commercial companies that started to sponsor competitions, teams and particular athletes. Consequently, commercialisation has “seeped down to the lowest levels of organised sport” (Donnelly, 1996, p.31).

Professionalization of sport usually refers to two phenomena: evolution of the status of elite players from amateur to full-time professionals; and shift from volunteering to professional management in sport organisations. At present the research into the former is very much based on professionalization of rugby (O'Brien and Slack 2003, 2004; Dunning 1999, 2005; Skinner et al 1999). Throughout the twentieth century this sport had evolved from a player-centred form of amateurism to a more spectator-oriented sport and had become media-centred (Owen and Weatherston, 2002). The processes of commercialisation and professionalization of sport also challenged traditional amateur values and attitudes of sport, as they

... limit the flexibility of sport organisations to respond to changing market demands and increasing competition from other entertainment alternatives. As a result, many sports are attempting to align their cultures with business practices...

Hoye et al (2008, p.507)

The sport ideologies of professionalism and Olympism have been dominant over the past fifty years and “have become the yardstick by which all other forms of sport are judged” (Donnelly, 1996, p.25). Donnelly (1996) suggested that the modern Olympism emerged in the first phase of globalisation, when the first international movements were created (Robertson, 1992; Hoberman, 1993) and has developed into one

of the most known philosophies of sport. On the other hand, professionalism was not associated with any distinct philosophy, but there has been an increasing professionalization of sport throughout the last 30-40 years. Even though in the past Olympism and professionalism represented two different ideologies (amateur and professional sport), they seemed to merge into a global sport monoculture of “prolympism” that is based on the idea of “playing to win”(Donnelly, 1996, p.26).

A similar trend, that has been recently discussed in literature (Collinet et al., 2013; Carlsson and Svensson, 2015; Carlsson, 2018; Heere, 2018) and can arguably provide some explanations for evolution of skateboarding, is “sportification” of already professionalised and commercialised activities that have not been considered sports previously. Heere (2018, p.23) offers the following definition:

Sportification means to either: (a) view, organize or regulate a non-sport activity in such a way that it resembles a sport and allows a fair, pleasurable, and safe environment for individuals to compete and cooperate, and compare their performances to each other, and future and past performances; or (b) add a sport component to an existing activity in order to make it more attractive to its audiences.

This idea of a “modern” sportification might offer a slightly different view of the evolution of some sports in a sense that sportification of activity does not necessarily precedes professionalization and commercialisation as Beech and Chadwick (2013) suggested. A recent example of a “sportified” activity is e-sports, which over the last two decades has evolved from a leisure computer gaming to the big business phenomenon that very much resembles a sport. Furthermore, sportification has become a popular vehicle of commercialisation far outside of the sport. Recent studies discussed the sportification of television shows, such as “MasterChef” (Carlsson and Svensson, 2015), “The Voice” and “You’ve Got Talent” (Heere, 2018), and even sportification of science (Carlsson, 2018). Overall, sportification can be observed in different social activities as it is envisaged as a process of globalisation (Collinet et al, 2013). Evolution of some new practices into more standardised forms and integration of them into the dominant sport culture has been discussed over the past twenty years, for example, in free skiing and snowboarding (Midol, 1993; Midol and Broyer, 1995), climbing (Aubel and Ohl, 2004; Batuev and Robinson, 2018); parkour and street golf (Lebreton et a, 2010) the MMA, break-dancing and speleology (Collinet et al, 2013) and various action sports (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011, 2016). Most of these researchers highlighted tensions and conflicts that revolve around the extent of standardisation and institutional recognition of those practices.

Method

Although institutional theory was identified as potentially applicable to the research problem and structured to some extent, it was not possible to specify hypotheses for this research and express guiding questions with a high degree of formality. Thus, it was reasonable to employ theory-informed research strategy, which meant being aware of the relevant theories rather than testing any specific theories. This meant an iterating cycle of deduction and induction could be followed, where some deductive structuring was possible in the form of articulated research themes and questions, but only as 'a prelude to a more open-ended process of inductive reasoning and pattern recognition' (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 344). This idea implied a consideration of processual analysis as a methodological approach. Also known as «process thinking», processual analysis was advocated by Mintzberg (2005) and developed by Pettigrew (1997, 2012). It is focused on theory building through inductive and deductive forms of pattern and mechanism recognition from case studies. The assumption of processual analysis is that social reality is a dynamic process, so the aim of process analysis is to catch this reality in flight (Pettigrew, 1997). Processes include sequences of events and are embedded in contexts, so can only be studied as such. Essentially, organisational evolution of any sport is a process and can be considered as a sequence of events and actions embedded in context. Since it was necessary to reveal patterns and mechanisms of organisational evolution of skateboarding and relate them to outcomes, the process research perspective guided the project.

Processual analysis is foundational to the within-case qualitative research tradition, so interviews were the primary source of evidence for this project. Insights into the case were provided by key informants in international skateboarding with whom non-structured interviews were conducted. There were two groups of interviewees:

1. Elite international skateboarders

Skateboarding has been always centred around individual athletes, with other actors such as governing bodies or teams emerging more recently and playing a more peripheral/servicing role. This is why it was deliberately chosen to focus on athletes when collecting the data, thus over the half of the interviewees were active skateboarders.

2. Representatives of international sport governing bodies.

Organisational evolution of international skateboarding has been driven by several governing bodies, so it was also necessary to interview officials of these organisations. Selection criteria for this group included seniority of position within organisation and understanding of key issues in relation to skateboarding.

The names of the interviewees, their positions, and backgrounds can be found in the Appendix 1. Most interviews were conducted during the X-Games events in 2013 in Barcelona and Munich. The length of interview varied from 37 to 92 minutes, with an average of 62 minutes.

As noted by Phelps (2006), while interviews reflect the individuals' perspective, the secondary data sources allow researcher to confirm, clarify, or contrast the interview statements. Thus, collection and analysis of secondary data was also conducted. The data sources are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Secondary data sources

Statements, reports and news of international sport organisations	Websites, blogs and news portals	Social media accounts
IOC: 7	Skateboarding specific: 17	Facebook individuals: 48
ISF: 12	Action sport: 11	Facebook groups: 3
FIRS: 7	General sport: 9	Twitter individuals: 61
UCI: 2	Business sources: 2	
ASOIF: 1	General media: 2	
SportAccord: 2		
Other: 4		

Codes	First-order themes	Second-order themes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-competition “free” skateboarding - First competitions - First governing bodies 	Roots of skateboarding	Values of modern competitive skateboarding	“Establishing converging lines of evidence” (Yin, 2012, p.13), or triangulating, was critical for creating theory and providing robust findings. Patterns and themes appear from all sources of evidence –
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-establishment - Opposition to formal sports - Creativity - Play 	Traditional values of skateboarding		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connection to surfing - Connection to snowboarding 	Similarities in values of all “boarding” activities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Importance of winning competitions - Rules of skateboarding - Judging - Joining the Olympic Games - Legitimising skateboarding as sport 	“Mainstream” / Olympic sport values		

interview transcripts, documents, media and social media. Therefore, it was triangulation of data through which the statements got corroborated or contrasted and consistency of emerging patterns and findings was checked.

All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Data coding was realised with the use of the NVivo software, as codes emerged inductively during the first reading of interview transcripts and secondary data. The main advantage of using this software for the purposes of this project was its ability to accommodate and analyse data from different sources. After the initial coding and re-examination of data, the first-order themes were created. Then the emergence of second-order themes allowed to build a narrative around the main influences on evolution of sport and brought the analysis to a more theoretical level. Examples of the codes and themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding sheet example

As already mentioned, our approach was not about testing theories as we aimed to 'avoid theoretical preconceptions in empirical enquiry and ... see theory as a process not a product' (Pettigrew, 2012, p.1319). Processual analysis and theory-testing research approach are not antagonistic though, as Beach and Pedersen (2013) suggest that process-tracing can be differentiated into three variants according to theoretical ambitions beyond the confines of the single case: theory testing, theory building and case-centric approach. To summarise, we aimed beyond a minimally sufficient explanation of an outcome of specific case and hoped to build some theoretical explanation from empirical evidence of the case study. Therefore, in terms of Beach and Pedersen's (2013) view on process tracing, this paper seeks to build a midrange theory describing mechanisms and patterns of evolution of sport that can be generalizable outside of the individual case to a bounded context.

History of organisational evolution of international skateboarding

Given a very limited body of academic literature on organisation and governance of international skateboarding (Beal, 2013; Batuev and Robinson, 2017), it is necessary to start presenting results of the study with a brief historical account of organisational evolution of the sport, which was constructed based on the documentary analysis. The National Skateboard Association (NSA), the first governing body in the sport of skateboarding, was created in the USA, in 1981. The NSA board included the directors of the major commercial entities in skateboarding, such as board producers, magazine editors, skate park designers, shoe and apparel manufacturers (NSA, 1990). Such a heavy involvement of commercial actors

underlined the NSA commitment to organise a corporate and commercialised form of sport through sponsoring amateur and professional events throughout the USA (Beal, 1995). In 2002 the first international governing body of skateboarding - the International Skateboarding Federation (ISF) - was established. A number of skateboarders and representatives of skateboarding companies were behind the establishment and functioning of this organisation, so the ISF has also been very commercially focused.

Gary [Ream, the ISF President] informed us that the IOC and NBC [the American television broadcaster] want it in (eventually) and that if it is going to go that direction, we as an industry should have some control on our sport and therefore get involved. The result was the creation of USA Skateboarding and the International Skateboard Federation.

Don Bostick, cited in Koraeus (2005)

Essentially, an interest of the IOC in skateboarding was the catalyst for formalization of the international sport in a dedicated governing body, the ISF.

Whilst the ISF has been around for years, it has never been formally recognised by the IOC. So an ongoing debate has been whether skateboarding can enter the Olympics as a part of so called roller sports, which include inline-skating, inline hockey, roller derby, inline freestyle, and rink hockey. Since the 1960s, the leading international organisation for roller sports has been the International Federation of Roller Sports (FIRS). According to FIRS (2017), roller sports do include skateboarding in various disciplines. The FIRS have always been the only IOC-recognised international sport organisation that claims skateboarding, despite the fact that the FIRS have never organised or sanctioned any significant international skateboarding competitions of international athletes. The FIRS actions directed at skateboarding have always been quite negatively perceived by athletes and organisers of international skateboarding competitions. Such a backlash can be linked to skateboarding values, which suggests that roller skating has nothing to do with skateboarding and should not interfere in its development (Rinehart, 2013), whilst there has been a significant degree of support towards the ISF.

It is also well documented that the International Cycling Federation (UCI) had a chance to become an international governing organisation for skateboarding. This organisation had not dealt with the organisation of skateboarding at all until the IOC became interested in this sport and the idea of its

Olympic inclusion started to circulate. Unlike the FIRS that considers skateboarding a “roller sport”, the UCI preferred to view skateboarding in wider sport perspective—as one of the “wheel-based sports”:

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

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

The UCI also justified its right to bring skateboarding into the Olympics by the arguments of practical consideration. Christoph Hubschmid (2013, interview) suggested that the Olympic competitions in skateboarding can share the facilities with the BMX competitions, and the practical advantage of the UCI as the current Olympic governing body of the BMX is that it can “bridge” these two sports.

However, as the UCI governance plans never materialised, shortly after the decision to make skateboarding new Olympic sport it was finally announced by the FIRS and the ISF that they will merge into the new international sport governing body called “World Skate”. This new governing body will be responsible for international organisation of skateboarding and roller sports and recognised by the IOC. At the moment of this paper submission, very little else is known about this new organisation, apart from the IOC stating its confidence that “the world's top skateboarders and event organisers will participate at Tokyo 2020, despite the hostility expressed by some in the sport about it being in the Olympics” (Butler, 2017)

Key influences on organisational evolution of skateboarding

This section summarises and evaluates reoccurring themes, which emerged from the study of organisational evolution of skateboarding. Three second-order themes were identified as key influencing forces: values of skateboarding, the Olympic movement and commercialism.

Values of sport

The values of skateboarding have strongly influenced the development of this sport and its organisation. Skateboarding originated from participatory non-competitive activity and have been surrounded by the subculture of young people. The co-existence of two versions of the same type of activity but with

different values emerged as a distinct feature of skateboarding. The first version of the activity can be labelled traditional and is manifested in street non-competitive skateboarding. This activity cannot be considered competitive sports, even though it is often executed by professional athletes and constitute a source of income for them through promotion and sale of video footage and sponsorships. The second version, which is the focus of this study, is professional competitive skateboarding itself. As our analysis revealed, the competitive sport of skateboarding inherited values from the traditional non-competitive activity. For example, that is how skateboarding is seen by a professional competitive athlete:

I like to skate for fun with my friends and go to do my things. Competitions, demonstrations: these are the other things. But in my heart [street] skateboarding is still my love.

Sandro Dias (2013, interview)

Overall, as the competitive version of skateboarding developed in the last three decades and essentially became fully professional sport, still the values of traditional activity influenced the development of this sport to a large degree. This is why the contemporary sport of skateboarding is remarkably different from most mainstream sports, as it is still perceived as the most “anti-competitive” sport amongst professional sports:

It is good to do well, of course. But as long as you are here [at the X-Games contest] . . . whether I am placed the first or the last—it is all the same really. If you do the contest and if you get the first place but you don't have fun skating with anybody up there, then it really doesn't matter. I am skating with my friends, travelling the world, skating one of the sickest¹ parks that are built just for you. How could you not enjoy yourself? So, I don't think it is all about winning. It is just having a good time, promoting your sport and just showing people what you've worked for.

Brad McClain (2013, interview)

Likewise, most interviewees expressed their belief in what can be called alternative skateboarding values. For example, Elliott Sloan points out that inventing new tricks and gaining respect from fellow skateboarders is more important than competing and winning, which he recognizes as the main source of income though:

¹ Sick - slang term often used in skateboarding communities. It means crazy, insane, awesome.

Competing is really only one part of skateboarding. Obviously that is what the most of us make a good part of our living from. But for me I would say the most rewarding part is learning the new tricks, just doing the stuff that has not been done. I have done some tricks that have never been before, and it was really recognized within the skate community. You are curious, and other skaters really have respect for you. It is not really about the TV and hype, but you really have the respect of other people who have done something amazing. Therefore, our data provides significant support to the opinion that traditional sport values of competitiveness and winning are still not seen as the most important ones by modern skateboarding professional athletes, despite the fact they take part in competitions. Nevertheless, there has been an increasing acceptance of and emphasis on competitive skateboarding among the youth:

I don't like to practice for a contest, I like to skate! That is the difference. Kids practice for tricks for the contests [nowadays]. I don't like this.

Sandro Dias (2013, interview)

This is a reflection of the growing popularity of major competitive platforms of skateboarding, such as the X-Games and the Street League Skateboarding, and recent inclusion in the Olympics,

The Olympic movement

The Olympic Games are the biggest sport competition in the world, so the main idea of the Olympics is the best athletes compete against each other in order to identify who the very best is. Stratford (no date) points out that

. . . [the] Olympics gives one man (or woman) a chance to reign victorious over their peers, and bask in the "joy of victory", while every other . . . loser gets to suffer through the "agony of defeat." This is totally contrary to what skateboarding is all about. In skateboarding, you determine your own destiny. You're not measured against other people. You're measured against what you're made of.

This reference to traditional skateboarding values is why most skateboarding participants suggest that essentially the Olympic Games stand for everything that skateboarding stands against. There is a fear in the skateboarding community that skateboarding values can be oppressed by the dominant Olympic culture.

On the other hand, as the interview data indicated, participation in the Olympic Games is viewed by the majority of elite skateboarding athletes as a step forward for the sport. Support of an idea of Olympic skateboarding coming from elite athletes is likely to be down to the potential individual career benefits and overall greater recognition of their sport with the Olympic status. Skateboarding athletes, who have never seen their sport in the Olympic program, indicated that they could hardly anticipate what Olympic inclusion might bring to the sport. However, some of the interviewees saw the benefits for the development of the sport in general, even if Olympic inclusion does not affect them directly:

If you are a skater in Indonesia and your government and sport federation never cared about skateboarding and now all of a sudden, they decided to build ten skate parks that is a good thing even if you are never going to be on the Olympics or ever even watch it.

Neal Hendrix (2013, interview)

This is also why several organisations (the ISF, the FIRS, and the UCI) has been claiming their authority over international skateboarding for years. Bigger commercial opportunities of being within the Olympic movement have been indeed realised by the organisations involved in the sport of skateboarding, and this has been one of the major driving forces behind its evolution.

It was reiterated by most professional skateboarders that they wanted skateboarding to enter the Olympic Games on “skateboarding terms” only. This stance can be linked to the fact that the IOC needed skateboarding not vice versa, because the IOC have been in a search of new youth sports:

... climbing, skateboarding and others—this is important for us [the IOC]. We see that these sports are growing and they should be part of the Olympic programme. And little by little we hope to get more of these sports to our programme.

Gerhard Heiberg (interview, 2013)

However, the idea of entering on “skateboarding terms” is also manifestation of the belief among many skateboarding that the Olympic movement is a threat to skateboarding values. This concern was reinforced by the skateboarding community’s awareness of the issues related to the “fast-tracking” of snowboarding into the 1998 Olympics under the umbrella of the International Federation of Ski (FIS), the global governing body for skiing. Since then the IOC and the FIS have encountered constant resistance from the snowboarding athletes and community, as they have opposed the organisational hegemony and

bureaucratic style of the IOC and the FIS that promoted snowboarding as part of the dominant culture under the discipline of skiing (Heino, 2000). Subsequently, as skateboarding leaders did not want their sport treated in the same way, they have taken preventive action by establishing the ISF in order to “protect” skateboarding when it would enter the Olympic Games.

Commercialism

Even though the values of skateboarding were anti-commercial initially, the evolution of international competitive skateboarding has been largely influenced by the rise of the athletes making professional careers in skateboarding through the opportunities offered by sponsors wishing to market their products. Consequently, skateboarding governing bodies have been commercially driven as they included representatives of board producers, skateboarding facilities, and shoes and apparel companies. Skateboarding was already fairly commercialised before the arrival of the X-Games, but the introduction of sport to the X-Games fostered further commercialisation of this sport. Even though the governing bodies already existed in skateboarding before the X-Games arrival, this event might have been the force for greater formalization and speeded up the organisational evolution of sport. Several different international governing bodies emerged in the X-Games era. However, as none of them were influential enough to control international competitive skateboarding, the X-Games have effectively been the most powerful organisation in this sport for two decades. For instance, Beal (2013) notes that in 2000s the leading professional skateboarders demanded a pay increase and better working conditions from the X-Games, not from any existing skateboarding governing bodies. Overall, competitive skateboarding has always been a corporate and commercialised form of sport.

Over the last three decades, the Olympic movement has also been remarkably commercialised by the IOC, which changed from a small non-commercial organisation to a wealthy and powerful institution (Barney, Wenn and Martyn, 2002). As much as the IOC is the organisation that takes care of the Olympic ideals, it is also a commercial organisation. The case of skateboarding demonstrates that the Olympic movement has also been largely underpinned by commercial thinking. The Olympic sponsors, such as Coca-Cola and McDonalds, and the US broadcaster NBC appreciated snowboarding in the Olympic program and would welcome skateboarding because it is extremely relevant to the mass consumer market:

NBC has been the guiding force in directing the International Olympic Committee (IOC) towards vert skateboarding . . . The fact that skateboarding is even being considered, is because of the huge impact and success of the snowboarding Halfpipe event at the past [2002] Winter Olympics in Park City, Utah. The success of ESPN X Games, the Gravity Games and various Action Sports events around the world have made an impact on the IOC. NBC has a long-term contract with the IOC, so they are trying to get Action Sports into the Olympics.

Don Bostick, cited in Koraeus (2005)

The Olympic Games have been much commercialised as making profits allow the IOC to forward broader sport and social objectives. In the same way as in the study of Morrow and Idle (2008) the UCI strategy for change has emphasized commercial considerations, the IOC strategy of changing the Olympic Games was also underpinned by commercial thinking. Therefore, it can be highlighted that along with the IOC intention to get young people more interested in the Olympics, commercial thinking has driven the introduction of skateboarding to the Olympic Games and evolution of this sport in general.

Discussion

Three key forces influencing the evolution of international skateboarding - commercialism, values and the Olympic movement – can hardly be discussed in isolation to each other, as it is their co-existence that has driven skateboarding to where it is. Apart from identifying and describing these influences, the study sought to build some midrange theory that would have a potential for generalization outside the individual case of skateboarding. We structured this discussion around several broader issues that emerged from the analysis of key influences on skateboarding. In this section, these themes are discussed with the use of theoretical frameworks of evolution of modern sport and institutionalism.

Does commercialisation of sport contribute to its legitimisation?

Previous studies in rock climbing (Donnelly, 1993; Aubel and Ohl, 2004), mountain biking (Gray, 1992), and skateboarding (Beal, 1995) suggested that legitimisation of action sports in general was driven by

commercial interests. Commercialism has been a naturally inherited feature of skateboarding. It was described by Beal (1995, p.256) how commercialisation and legitimisation complemented each other even in the early years of professional skateboarding:

At times of high popularity, various commercial interests have tried to capitalize on the activity [of skateboarding] by promoting it as part of the dominant sport culture, that is, as a legitimate sport, one which promotes competition, win-at-all-costs attitude, and extrinsic rewards.

An increasing popularity of international competitions in skateboarding has facilitated a growing public acceptance of skateboarding as sport. This shift can be described as a change from a participant-centred activity to towards competitions, spectators and entertainment and is what was called sportification in the study of judo (Sato, 2013) and professionalization in studies on international rugby (O'Brien and Slack 2003, 2004,; Dunning 1999, 2005; and Skinner et al, 1999).

The key finding of this study is that sportification and legitimisation of skateboarding has been largely shaped by commercialism and by “eventification” in particular, with the X-Games and the Olympic Games being the major influencing forces. For example, the ISF, the governing body that facilitated the inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympic Games, was established by the leading representatives of commercial skateboarding companies. So essentially, irrespective of what the main reason of the inclusion of the sport into the Olympic Games (which is seen as an achievement of proper legitimacy) has been, such legitimisation has always looked of benefit to commercial interests existing within the sport. Subsequently, those actors possessing commercial interests would always be likely to support legitimisation of sport. The achieved legitimisation of international skateboarding can be seen along the lines of the most recent views on sportification (Carlsson and Svensson, 2015; Heere, 2018) that emphasize increasing focus on competitive element and showcasing the contests of various nature to the TV and online audiences.

There have been other examples of sportification and “eventification” of new activities, such as the Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and e-sports. They have been recently globalised with the shows and contests spread all over the world. Evolution of both of these sports was also boosted by commercialism, but the acceptance of them as legitimate sports has been questioned. Some similarities can be drawn between

the evolution of skateboarding and the MMA, for example, which both were meant to be “free” activities in a sense that regulations have been limited to a bare minimum. Due to the recent commercialisation and media-orientation of the MMA, there has been calls for legitimisation within conventional sport frameworks and a certain standardisation process has taken place with regards to the rules. As Collinet et al. (2013) suggested, there have been some “adjustments” resulted from a compromise between a will to follow an authentic MMA practice and the concerns of public authorities that have seen some of the MMA components as contrary to the values of sport in general and the non-violence ideal promulgated in the Olympic Charter in particular. Likewise, a recognition of e-sports has been hampered by the argument of the lack of physical activity in it. Consequently, the MMA and the e-sports have not been legitimised by the international sports authorities.

Bureaucratisation of international sports and the role of the Olympic movement.

Bureaucratic organisation has been one of the key characteristics of modern sport for decades (Guttman, 1978). In terms of DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) notion of institutional isomorphism, increasing commercialisation of skateboarding over the last three decades has contributed to coercive isomorphic pressures for institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of skateboarding. An organisational change in international skateboarding and to a certain degree a “mainstreaming” of its governance structure happened through the sequence of events and actions, such as the establishment of the ISF as a result of the Olympic interest, then FIRS claiming authority over skateboarding, and the most recent inclusion of skateboarding into the Olympics under the umbrella of a new joint organisation, the World Skate. This sequence suggests that the structural arrangements of emerging sports tend to evolve towards the “Olympic” model of governance with one ultimate organisation at the top, which all other organisations relate to.

This finding echoes the question of the regulatory legitimacy of “umbrella” international federations that aim to govern multiple disciplines, or “adopt” unorganised sports, as it was the case with cycling and roller skating organisations. Currently there are no formal criteria, which would clearly define what sports can go under one organisational umbrella, apart from an assumption that sports must have something in

common. It can be assumed that the thinking behind “bridging” snowboarding and skiing was that both of these sports involved sliding on snow. Likewise, the UCI saw skateboarding as a wheel-based sport and thus considered governing it along cycling. Therefore, in terms of regulatory legitimacy, so far technical characteristics of sports and practical considerations have been the main argument for governing sports under one umbrella. However, apart from the regulatory legitimacy, there is also a notion of cultural legitimacy (Archibald, 2004; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008), which is about who has collective authority in terms of “socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions’ (Suchman, 1995, p.574). The history shows that numerous issues have arisen out of the umbrella arrangements over some sports, such as boycott of the 1998 Winter Olympics by some of the best athletes in snowboarding, sport climbing breaking away from mountaineering organisation in 2006 due to the cultural rift (Batuev, 2016).

Overall, the evolution of skateboarding and other new sports over the last two decades demonstrate that the effects of the IOC recognising a certain governing body as custodian of a new sport go far beyond the Olympic movement, especially for sports of smaller scale. The influence of the IOC in the international sport transpires its formal remit, as it has been recognised by state, society, and media as legitimising authority in international sport, or in so-called “Olympic system” (Chappelet and Kuebler, 2008). Undoubtedly, there are other actors in organisational field of international sport, such as the X-Games in relation to skateboarding, so the IOC is not solely responsible for the whole international sport. However, over the past fifty years the Olympic system

...has evolved into a complex network of stakeholders that requires a more global form of governance capable of taking into account each stakeholder’s own interests and the relations between stakeholders.

Chappelet (2016, p.748).

Therefore, the role of the IOC is now far beyond a simple administration of the Olympic Games, so it should also involve consideration of legitimacy in governance of international sports. International skateboarding has not been legitimised for so long because the organisation accepted by most athletes, the ISF, has not met the IOC criteria to be recognised, but on the other hand, the UCI and the FIRS, which were recognised by the IOC, have no cultural legitimacy in skateboarding.

Tensions between values of sport and prolympism.

“Alternative” values were found to have a major influence on the evolution of skateboarding. The mimetic mechanism of institutional isomorphism was found to be functioning across organisational fields of snowboarding, surfing and skateboarding – sport with similar values. There has always been a historical connection between skateboarding, surfing and snowboarding communities, hence skateboarding organisations learnt from the experience of snowboarding under the skiing umbrella. Overall, the role of information exchange between these communities in their social learning of adaptive responses can be highlighted. From a theoretical perspective, these actions highlight the role of information exchange between organizations facing uncertainty in institutional fields, which was earlier identified by Cousins and Slack (2005) and Southall et al (2008). Speaking in Kraatz’s (1998, p. 625) terms, in their social learning of adaptive responses, skateboarding organisations “vicariously evaluate the outcomes [snowboarding] peers have obtained and benefit from the lessons they have learned.”

Culturally skateboarding is very different from mainstream established sports and hardly fits the ideas of Donnelly’s prolympism, which is about being competitive and being the best rather than taking part and enjoying the activity. For example, an amateur skateboarder, Guus Van der Spek (X-Games, 2014), just did not “... get skateboarding in the Olympics. It doesn't belong there. It's not a sport or discipline, it's bigger than that.” However, whilst winning competitions might still be less important for skateboarders in comparison to athletes from conventional sports, there has been an increasing emphasis on competitive side among the younger generation of skateboarders. It is quite remarkable that this has been happening to skateboarding, an activity which deemed to be the “anti-Olympic” among all the alternative sports. In Carlsson and Svensson’s (2015) terms, global eventification and increasing involvement of sport into the entertainment industry has been as critical mechanism of the recent organisational evolution in skateboarding. Along these lines, prolympism manifested itself in a taken-for-granted belief that it is natural for sport to emphasize its competitive aspect and join the Olympic movement.

As Donnelly (1996) predicted, the loss of cultural diversity in sport has continued as the prolympism doctrine has marginalised indigenous and alternative sport ideologies. In order to remain culturally legitimate within skateboarding community governing bodies have to follow key alternative sports values and expectations, such as creativity and reluctance to over-bureaucratize and formalize the sport.

However, this has led to various tensions and controversies coming from both institutional authorities and the community, as regulations of the sport inevitably need adjustments since it gets more and more “eventified”, media- and spectator-oriented. Tensions in international skateboarding have been somewhat similar to those experienced by the MMA characterized by Collinet et al (2013) as tensions between those who accept organising a practice within sports normality at the cost of distorting the original activity, and those who aspire to organising an authentic practice. In terms of institutionalism, the conflict between isomorphic pressures of prolympism and alternative values of skateboarding appears to be central to understanding of the evolution of skateboarding.

Conclusion

Over the last twenty years, various institutional actors, such as sponsors, event organisers, the IOC, and international sport governing bodies have recognised commercial opportunities associated with legitimisation of skateboarding and, ultimately, its inclusion into the Olympic Games. Legitimation of skateboarding has been supported and facilitated by commercialism, but it does not mean that, in general, commercialisation of sport activities always leads to legitimisation of a sport. Neither must it be assumed that in every emerging sport commercial interests act as a major driver for legitimisation. Indeed, there are other forces that might influence legitimisation of sports, such as culture, political agendas, social and media pressures. Legitimation is seen as a natural way of evolution of any sport activity and is often perceived equal to the recognition of sport by the Olympic movement. Furthermore, in the era of the dominance of prolympism doctrine in international sport, becoming an Olympic sport can be seen as the ultimate goal of sportification.

The story of organisational evolution of skateboarding has been particularly contrasting in terms of the influence of the Olympic movement and how the pressure to join this movement has been applied whilst the cultural legitimacy of the IOC in relation to skateboarding has been particularly weak. In light of the issues that have surrounded the relationships between snowboarding and the Olympic movement, the establishment of a new “World Skate” governing body rather than simply placing skateboarding under the umbrella of one of the recognised sport organisations, such as cycling or roller skating, demonstrates that the IOC have recently become more flexible and cautious about exercising its power over emerging

sports. On the other hand though, two growing sports – stand-up paddling (SUP) and parkour – experience power struggles over who govern them internationally. The Court of Arbitration for Sport has been asked to mediate in the dispute between the International Canoe Federation (ICF) and International Surfing Association (ISA) over the SUP international governance (Palmer, 2018). Institutional recognition and cultural legitimacy are the main issues in parkour's case where several national parkour organisations accused the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) of "encroachment and misappropriation" after the FIG started exploring incorporation of parkour elements in a new "obstacle course" gymnastics discipline (Etchells, 2017). It would be interesting to see whether any tensions would appear in the alliance of skateboarding and roller skating organisations, as it sets an organisational precedent of two culturally different sport organisations merging for the purposes of the Olympic movement.

This paper contributes to the notion of evolution of modern sport, as it critically evaluates the process of organisational evolution of skateboarding and identify the major determinants of this process. The IOC, policy makers and governing bodies can learn from the experience of international skateboarding and consider potential issues and consequences before adding new sports to sport events. It is important to develop an academic perspective on evolution of sports, as the patterns of evolution have been changing over the years. Guttmann's Weberian categorization of evolution of sport from the 1970s is a good starting point for evaluation, however new sports do not necessarily include all of Guttmann's typologies of modern sport but can be influenced by new forces, such as commercialisation and eventification. We agree with Carlsson and Svensson (2015) who suggested that Guttmann's theses have to be revitalised and expanded by a new category, which is about sport's increasing involvement in entertainment industry and which Guttmann actually saw as a threat to the evolution of sport. Whilst Beech and Chadwick's model of evolution of post-modern sport highlighted the business approach to sport, there has been a lack of academic research on the issues of sportification and legitimisation of modern sports, and the role of Olympic movement in these processes. Our study contributes to the knowledge on these topics using an example of skateboarding, whilst previous studies tend to focus on the evolution of "mainstream" sports, such as rugby. Currently some relevant and interesting research is emerging on the evolution of e-sports, so we would encourage bringing more recent and rich cases of sportification to the academic discussion, such as CrossFit or poker, for example.

The case of sportification of skateboarding might not be over, as there is a concern that the IOC underestimates that skateboarding is:

. . . quite unlike any other Olympic sport. And, skateboarders are not really your typical Olympic "athlete", either. Within the world of skateboarding, this is widely known and, typically, carried as a badge of pride. I'm not so sure that the Olympics is ready for "athletes" that are cut from this cloth of outward rebellion that most skaters are cut from.

Stratford (no date)

Overall, some serious concerns have been raised about the culture of "playing to win" invading various social spheres. In some cases, such as the MMA, break-dancing and speleology, described by Collinet et al (2013), sportification cannot be "completed" to protect the original identity of activities. Carlsson and Svensson (2015, p.24) warn that society would "turn into a 'playground' of rationalization versus trivialization, with sportification and eventification as the sovereign 'stars'. As previously discussed, "sportification" is also increasingly happening outside of what is conventionally understood as sport. Therefore, our study on skateboarding (that used to be a borderline activity but has leaned towards sport) can be beneficial in examining evolution of non-sport activities towards sport, and sportification of popular culture and society, in general.

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Appendix 1. Interviews conducted for this study:

1. Christian Baumann, Switzerland, Deputy Director and the IOC Liaison of the International Cycling Union (2007 - 2014);
2. Neil Danns, UK, one of the first professional skateboarders in Europe, British and European Champion;
3. Ryan Decenzo, Canada, professional skateboarding athlete;
4. Sandro Dias, Brazil, professional skateboarding athlete;
5. Rob Dyrdek, USA, former professional skateboarding athlete, founder of the Street League Skateboarding (since 2010);
6. Cecilia Flatum, Norway, Vice-President of the World Snowboarding Federation (since 2012), Board Member of Norwegian Snowboard Federation (2003-2015);
7. Gerhard Heiberg, Norway, the Member of the IOC Executive Board (2003-2011); Chair of the IOC Marketing Commission (2001-2014);
8. Neal Hendrix, USA, professional skateboarding athlete, Athlete Representative and the Chair of the International Events Committee at the International Skateboarding Federation (since 2010), Athlete Representative at Tokyo 2020 Skateboarding Commission (since 2016);
9. Christophe Hubschmid, Switzerland, Director General of the International Cycling Union (2011 – 2013);
10. Brad McClain, USA, professional skateboarding athlete;
11. Gary Ream, USA, the President of the International Skateboarding Federation (since 2004), President and partner in Sports Management Group, Inc., owner of Woodward Camp;
12. Elliot Sloan, USA, professional skateboarding athlete.