

---

## THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PARALYMPIC SPORT GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF THE UNITED STATES OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-142 - (633)

All authors:

Kelsey LeFevour, Becca Leopkey, Scott Tainsky

Date submitted: 2015-03-19

Date accepted: 2015-03-29

Type: Scientific

Keywords: Paralympic Games, governance, institutional theory

Category: 3: Governance of Sport(s) and Sport Organisations

Synopsis:

Abstract:

I. Introduction

Investigating sport governance structures allows researchers the opportunity to examine the intricacies of their organizational makeup and the impact they have on major stakeholders, sponsors, coaches and athletes (e.g., Chappelet, 2008) While this research has facilitated a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the organization of Olympic sport, the same has not been seen with respect to disability sport.

The unique and complex relationship between Paralympic and Olympic sport in the United States serves as the foundation for this research. In 1995, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) became the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) for the United States, transferring the governing responsibility from the existing disability sport organizations to a formalized structure within the USOC. This meant that the rules and regulations governing Olympic sport, as determined by the IOC, began to serve as the benchmark for the regulations that determine Paralympic sport in the country. Interestingly, the US represents one of only a few countries of the 170 who have established NPCs that fall under the jurisdiction of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) (IPC, n.d.). In most cases they remain as distinct organizations. Moreover, little is known about how Paralympic sport actually operates within the country. As such the purpose of this research project is to understand the underlying organizational structure of Paralympic sport in the United States. More specifically, the authors seek to explain how this structure came to be while also examining the unique relationship between Olympic and Paralympic sport structures in the United States.

II. Theoretical Framework

The norms and standards that have emerged over time in relation to the governance of Paralympic sport in the United States are related to the notion of

institutionalization. As such, for the purpose of this research, institutional theory is applied to the US case to better understand how and why the governance of Paralympic and Olympic sport has come to exist under the USOC.

Institutionalization is the process by which a practice or structure becomes an embedded social aspect of an organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1997).

Organizations need to adopt the successful practices of other organizations in order to remain competitive (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), The Olympic Games have served as a benchmark for the best practice of Paralympic organization, evident in their interconnected existence of event organization, sponsorships, growing media attention, and hosting contracts. These changes in structure can occur as a result of pressures from competition and/or powerful actors and the fight for survival within a particular field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

### III. Methods

A case study is currently being built on the US Paralympic governance system. Archival material is the primary source of data for this portion of the research. This includes multiple types of documentation such as policy documents, organizational reports, newspaper clippings, and related websites. Data analysis is occurring in the form of a content analysis using the qualitative data assessment software ATLAS.ti which is facilitating the coding and retrieval of the data by allowing the researchers to highlight findings and emergent themes. Semi-structured interviews with key individuals in Paralympic and Olympic governance will also be used to supplement the findings

### IV. Preliminary Results and Discussion

Preliminary findings suggest the influence of institutional forces on the governing structures of Paralympic sport in the United States. The implementation of the USOC as the formal governing structure has led to increased organization at the various levels of competition, ranging from elite competition to Paralympic development programs. In addition, there have been observed influences from both policy and leadership changes as well as governmental agencies.

### V. Conclusion

The results from this study will be viewed in conjunction with the current state of knowledge about the USOC and IOC to facilitate guidance for future planning and organization of events, thus strengthening the overall governance of NPCs and NOCs. Moreover it will facilitate dialogue surrounding governance structure, partnerships, communication and organization within Paralympic sport including the planning and organization of mega-sporting events, the direct and indirect support of athletes and coaches, the consideration of major stakeholders, and aid in the acquirement of sponsors and other support. Through the examination of the governance structures currently in place and the ways by which this restructuring has furthered the Paralympic movement, we can evaluate the existing structures and provide recommendations to both the USOC and other NOCs. The findings of this study will also be analyzed in conjunction with an ongoing project looking at archival materials from the IOC library in Lausanne, Switzerland.

References:

### VI. References

Berger, P.L., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New

---

York, NY: Anchor.

Chappelet, J.-L. (2008). Olympic environmental concerns as a legacy of the Winter Games. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 25, 1884-1902

DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 147-160.

International Paralympic Committee (2013). *History of the Paralympic movement*.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.