Play the Game 2013
Stepping up for democracy in sport
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Social media usage in Beijing and Sochi
Olympic Games: a delicate balance between
power and communication imperatives

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Production and of broadcasting of global sport events

The process of production and of broadcasting of global sport events has changed rapidly during the last decade. From Beijing 2008 Olympics two major changes are observed:

- A shift in the communication paradigm occurring through the implementations of new platforms of communication, and
- A change in the political relations where new nations enter the global arena as upcoming economic powers claiming a major influence in international policy decisions.
From unimedia to transmedia

Main changes in the media coverage of the Olympics
- In the early 2000s, television is the dominant media around which the broadcast of the Games is organized
- Digital technologies modify the conditions of production of contents, of their broadcast and of their reception by the audience

New devices - new partners: Mobile technology caused a major shift, internet and its’ diverse platforms enlarged the audience and the content production.
- Mass media, sponsors and partners negotiate their participation aiming to be present in a pluri-media and multi-channel communication environment

Olympic organization becomes a global program supplier
- Organizing Committees and IOC set up hubs of communication to broadcast the Games (e.g., Olympic Athletes’ hub)

The Olympic web includes now the whole range of digital devices
The Olympic athlete’s hub
Interaction and hybridization of communication patterns.

“What is historically novel, with considerable consequences for social organization and cultural change, is the articulation of all forms of communication into a composite, interactive, digital hypertext that includes, mixes, and recombines in their diversity the whole range of cultural expressions conveyed by human interaction.” (Castells M. 2009).

“The Internet and social networking both proved to be powerful forces when it came to sharing Olympic events and stories with the world.” (IOC Marketing Report Vancouver 2010).
IOC Guidelines for Social Media, Blogging and Internet at the Sochi 2014 Games

IOC (15.6.2013) welcomes personal posting, blog, tweet or uploading photos, but all posts must be in a first-person, diary-type format and not assume the role of a journalist, reporter or any other media capacity, or disclose any information which is confidential or private in relation to any other person or organization (Rule 2) (www.olympic.org/Documents/social_media/IOC_Social_Media_Blogging_and_Internet_Guidelines-English.pdf).

Social media users do not pay much attention to the IOC guidelines.

This policy illustrates a tension between global communication order based on the free circulation of information and the economy of mega sport events based on the permanence of providing appropriate information and content for commodification purposes.
Contradictions between the Olympic Charter and the national policy of hosting nations

In previous editions of the Games this was a minor problem (control of information flow).

Now information flow has changed. The contradictions between the democratic spirit that permeate the Olympic Movement values sometimes collide with the authoritarian rules adopted by some host countries.

Since Beijing 2008 the global economic crisis, first in the USA and later in many European countries, has causes changes in the international balance of power.

China and Russia two of the BRICS countries with authoritarian state structure, try among others through staging the Olympics, to redefine their status in the global power relationships.
Challenges for the Olympic Movement

Considering the global development of the relationship between Communication and Power it appears that Olympic Movement is challenged both,

- by the need to defend its *logic of exclusiveness* and
- to offer appropriate *answers* to people’s aspirations for *social communication*.

These may, indeed, appear as conflicting imperatives.
Mega events organization in the globalized networked era: Beijing 2008 and Sochi 2014

IOC, Olympic Charter

In the Olympic Charter any form of discrimination against a person is deemed.

“Any form of discrimination with regard to a country or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender or otherwise is incompatible with belonging to the Olympic Movement.” (Fundamental Principle of Olympism, article 2 (6), http://www.olympic.org/Documents/olympic_charter_en.pdf)

IOC’s role is explicitly to act against any form of discrimination affecting the Olympic Movement.
Concerns and controversies in Beijing 2008 Olympic Games

**Security**
- Tightening of visa rules
- Increased surveillance and security measures
- Sophisticated surveillance and tracking capabilities

**Migrant workers - relocation**
- Routinely endured dangerous work environments, unpaid wages
- Forced relocation of 300,000 poor Chinese

**Tibetan independence**
- Protest for Tibetan independence (disruption of the torch relay and foreign condemnation of China)
- Violent crackdown in Tibet
- Demand for release of political prisoners
- Attendance at the Beijing 2008 Games became highly politicised
- International protest for Tibet caused a backlash of nationalism and anti-foreigner sentiment in China
Concerns and controversies in Beijing 2008 Olympic Games II

Minorities’ policy
- Uyghur activists claim that the Chinese fabricated a terror plot to prohibit any protest
- All kind of minority protest actions were suspended

Freedom of the Press
- Open media access during the games was not allow in the MPC and Venue Press Centers
- Internet restrictions (only ‘convenient’ access aloud, blocking sites referring to controversial content, websites critical of the government, or relating to Tibet and Falun Gong)
- Repeated protests by journalists and activists
Concerns and controversies in Sochi 2014 Olympic Games

Human rights violation
— During pre-Games time new laws were adopted:
  — Restricting public assemblies
  — Re-criminalizing libel
  — Criminalizing religious insult
  — Introducing additional restrictions on internet content
  — Expanding the definition of treason
  — Banning “propaganda” for “nontraditional sexual relations”
Russian government has passed a law (13.5.2013) banning “propaganda for nontraditional sexual relations”. (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/russia-law-banning-gay-propaganda)

26.7.2013: After massive national and international protest the IOC announced that it had “received assurances from the highest level of government in Russia that the legislation will not affect those attending or taking part in the Games.”

- “The Russian law clearly violates the Olympic Charter” (Ty Cobb, director, Human Rights Campaign).
- “If this law doesn’t violate the IOC’s charter, then the charter is completely meaningless.” (Chad Griffin, president, Human Rights Campaign).

26.9.2013: Jean-Claude Killy (head of the IOC inspection team) said in French, as translated by the Associated Press. “The IOC doesn’t really have the right to discuss the laws in the country where the Olympic Games are organized. As long as the Olympic Charter is respected, we are satisfied, and that is the case.”

(http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-09-26/world/42404812_1_gay-russians-olympic-charter-sochi-winter-olympics)
Reactions Live and in Twitter

Yob Benami @smokieyob420
#IOC backs off on #Russian anti-gay law
http://wapo.st/184ZzIr via @washingtonpost The #olympics has become an agent to oppression. #NOH8
6:15 PM - 26 Sep 2013

Ben Smith ✔ @BuzzFeedBen
IOC washes its hands on Russia
http://www.buzzfeed.com/joelanderson/the-international-olympic-committee-gives-ok-to-sochi-games ...
via @blackink12 4:34 PM - 26 Sep 2013
Ethnic Minority problems
- Continuous protest actions by North Caucasian separatists, Circasian extreme nationalists and Islamic radicals (in Circassia, Chechnya, Abkhazia)

Workplace abuse (Human Rights Watch)
- Multiple cases of workplace abuse and exploitation (non-payment of promised wages, 12-hour shifts with few or no days off, confiscation of travel and identity documents, breach or withholding of employment contracts, etc.).
- Violation of local’s rights (improper compensated for land, 2,000 homeowners displaced by construction)
- Repeated harassment and intimidation of individuals and organizations by Russian authorities.
Cost overruns: Current price tag for the Games is $51 billion, five times more than original estimates ($12 billion). The overrun is now 500%. Most of the money is coming from the public sector or from state-owned banks. (http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21581764-most-expensive-olympic-games-history-offer-rich-pickings-select-few-castles, 13.7.2013).

Most of the private money comes from large state corporations, which rarely act in corporate interests. The Olympics' general sponsor is state oil giant Rosneft, while Gazprom and Russian Railways are also on board.

The primary economic problem is the lack of transparency. Companies taking part in the Olympic project deliberately raise construction-cost estimates, poorly plan their work, and accept kickbacks.
Security

- Special spectator passes for all visitors (Russian authorities will be able to identify, tag and follow all visitors to the Olympics, both Russian and foreign).
- FSB security service plans to monitor all communication by competitors or spectators during the event ([http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/06/russia-monitor-communications-soc hi-winter-olympics](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/06/russia-monitor-communications-sochi-winter-olympics)).

Environmental problems

- Olympic village, bobsled track, and biathlon facility, are being built on Sochi National Park territory.
Freedom of the Press


Local authorities have harassed numerous activists and journalists. (Criminal charges are being brought against at least two journalists and the general director of a newspaper, apparently in retaliation for their work. (http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/07/russia-silencing-activists-journalists-ahead-sochi-games)

Russian authorities want to make sure that every connection and every move made online in Sochi during the Olympics will be absolutely transparent to the secret services of the country.” (A. Soldatov, journalist, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/06/russia-monitor-communications-sochi-winter-olympics).

Dmitry Chernyshenko (President of the Organizing Committee Sochi 2014) says: “A deliberate strategy by Sochi 2014 is to embrace new media and having defined the youth of today as the target audience for the event, this certainly seems like a good fit.”... “Social media is fantastic for all of this and we would rather hear what people have to say up front than to realize it afterwards”. (http://loyalsticity.com/2011/03/11/sochi-2014-setting-new-standards-for-event-and-fan-engagement-via-social-media/)
Staging the Olympics
What is at stake?

China

Through the Olympics China intended to introduce itself as:

- An emerging global economic super power
- An international partner in investments and commerce that plays the global game
- Improve its international image (not very positive)
- Keep the control over the country and its minorities.
Russia, Sochi is Putin’s “baby”

President Vladimir Putin has invested much personal prestige in the project, and it is so intimately connected to him that the unity behind the Games is difficult to be separated from unity behind the president (Persson 2013).

For Putin the Sochi Olympics are not only about sport and glory but also about presenting a Russia that is modern and open to the world (they become a national project).

He sees Sochi 2014 as a political victory, a sign of his power over people and nature, and of his international legitimacy. It is ensuring Russia’s position on the international stage allowing sustaining its allies (Syria, Libya, Iraq etc.) and give national elites more economic and political influence inside and outside Russia.

A central point in mainstream rhetoric is that it will help unite the Russian people for a common cause and show the world that Russia has returned to the global arena as a strong player (Persson & Petersson, 2013).

While the Games won't heal a negative image overnight, they could do a lot of good by surprising people.
What is at stake?

IOC, his partners and international community:
• IOC is primarily interested to guarantee that the Games will be an international success.
• Due to the economic model of the Games they demand huge infrastructural investments and offer the best media coverage and the maximum possibilities for developing business for sponsors during preparation time and in the future.
• IOC has to insist on the uniqueness of the event embedded in a narrative of humanistic ideals and values. This makes the difference with other international competitions.
• By following the rules of the Olympic Charter, IOC has to convince the sport fans and the broader audience that the Games are always the Games without exceptions. However, this becomes more and more difficult in host nations that have an authoritarian governance system or are struggling for consolidating democratic procedures.
What is at stake?

Olympic fans, audiences and social media users

Olympic spectators do not care about IOC rules and social media restrictions. They like to share their experiences with others, to take photos, videos, send comments, etc. and post them on social media.

They want to express their opinion freely.

The capacity of framing or controlling communication by the IOC is restricted to:
- Accredited persons
- People who are expressing their opinion on the official devices.
Global networking and increasing use of SNS brings a wide range of new issues in the current agenda for citizens and the media. This causes problems to nations while preparing to host mega sport events putting them repeatedly into international spotlights, earning criticism.

Further, it poses restriction to sport international bodies, e.g. FIFA, IOC to choose the next host city. Although the main election criteria are focusing on the ability of the candidates to fulfill a demanding program of investments to cover the necessary infrastructure, a new dimension of democratic legacy is emerging.

Beijing 2008, Sochi 2014 and now Rio de Janeiro 2014 and 2016 are consistently scrutinized by the international public for violating human rights and breaking democratic laws and practices.
Conclusion II

IOC in particular tries to influence the organizers and minimize the critics of the public without interfering in national politics. The problem is where to set the limits of tolerance and the balance between keeping the ideological humanitarian frame and, at the same time, cooperating with authoritarian governments. How long will Olympic fans tolerate inconsistencies in maneuvering a vulnerable basis of consent?

At the political and economic level the reactions of the social media users are up to now constantly critical but not alarming.

At the moral level the decent is much more widespread and critical. The challenge for the IOC is, how to maintain the ideological premises of the Olympic Games (ideals and values) that are constantly violated without losing its image and brand recognition.
Thank you