

Dependence on resources and cooperation networks of the National Olympic Academies

PARASKEVI SALEPI¹ ✉, KONSTANTINOS GEORGIADIS¹, ATHANASIOS KRIEMADIS², ANTONIOS TRAVLOS¹

¹*Department of Sports Organization and Management, Faculty of Human Movement and Quality of Life Sciences, University of Peloponnese, Sparta, Greece*

²*Department of Management Science and Technology, University of Peloponnese, Tripoli, Greece*

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to identify the strategic and operational factors necessary for the effective operation of the International Olympic Academy (IOA), and of the National Olympic Academies (NOAs). It applies Resource Dependence Theory (RDP) and Inter-organizational Relationships Theory (IOR) to the institutional environment of the NOAs. A set of exploratory semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), IOA, NOAs and Academics. A thematic analysis of the interview data provided themes to be incorporated into a questionnaire conducted with NOA directors and NOC officials focusing on relationships of the NOAs with other organisations and the implications for their autonomy. The nature of the field of NOA activity and its environment, is such that, for many NOAs, it is beset by an imbalance of power. This is reflected in the resource dependency of many NOAs on, in particular, NOCs and ultimately the IOC for legitimacy, human, financial and physical resources. The paper highlights a number of ways in which these relationships might be modified for the benefit of all the organisations involved.

Keywords: Olympism; Strategy; Governance; Inter-organisation; Education; Operation.

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✉ **Corresponding author.** *Faculty of Human Movement and Quality of Life Sciences, Department of Sports Organization and Management, University of Peloponnese. Efsthathiou - Stamatikis Valiotti & Plateon, 23100, Sparta, Greece.*

E-mail: evisalepi@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, academic studies concerning the performance of Olympic Games or multi-sport events focus a) on the potential implications of their staging (e.g. Fourie & Spronk, 2011; Kaplanidou, et al. 2016; Tien, Lo, & Lin, 2011), b) on the low interest regarding their hosting (MacAloon, 2016; Solberg, 2018), and c) on legacy issues in the relevant host cities or countries (Preuss, 2007; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Preuss, 2015; Tomlinson, 2014; Zimbalist, 2017; Preuss, 2019; Brittain, et al. 2018). As a result of the increased significance of this legacy, Leopkey and Parent (2012) refer to issues pertaining to the environment, information, education etc., and, at the same time, discuss issues regarding the sustainability of each type of legacy. Pierre de Coubertin, the man who revived the Olympic Games of Antiquity, chose Olympism as the education tool that would help tackle the problems of his times. (Müller, 2000; Kidd, 1996). According to the Olympic Charter (2019), the IOC is the supreme authority and leading organization of the Olympic Movement, with the primary mission of promoting the Olympic Values to the world. Its educational role is specified in points 1.16 and 1.17 of paragraph 2. Among the other bodies that provide education, a series of educational tasks are carried out through the International Olympic Academy (IOA) and the National Olympic Academies (NOAs).

In this article, issues regarding the operation of the NOAs are investigated, including their degree of autonomy and/or dependence in terms of organizational resources. This is done for the purpose of detecting their basic needs and the problems they are currently facing. The networks that have been developed for the completion of their mission and the services inside and outside the countries where each NOA operates are also examined.

INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS

Resource Dependence Theory (RDP)

The resource dependence theory was originally presented by Pfeffer & Salancik (1978). The theory explains that the strategy, structure, and survival of organizations is dependent on their relationship with external organizations. RDP has served as a platform that defines the way in which non-profit organizations can survive and perform: “*The key to survival of the organizations lies in their ability to obtain and maintain resources*” Pfeffer & Salancik (1978, 2). Greening & Gray (1994) state that: a) organizations are restricted by and depend on other organizations that control critical and decisively important resources, and b) in order to retain their autonomy, organizations make an effort to manage their dependence on external organizations. The main view held by researchers is that all organizations depend on other organizations for the procurement of resources. The theory is used to explain the reason why organizations enter into a relationship with other organizations (IOR), including commitments such as outsourcing (Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). It is also used to explain strategic organizational management (see Hillman *et al.* 2009) and clarify the relationship between an organization and its environment in order to explain how dependence and uncertainty among organizations can be reduced in order for managers to be able to reach certain decisions. These decisions are relevant to authority, and as Hillman *et al.* (2009) state organizations seek to strengthen their authority over other organizations and reduce the authority others have over them. To that end, RDP theory investigates the way in which strength can be changed over commitments (in IOR) depending on the organization that controls access to life-significant resources. According to Froelich (1999), the degree of dependence each organization experiences is determined by the significance of resources to the performance and survival of the organization, and the means by which such resources are obtained.

The application of RDP to sports organizations

RDP assumes that organisations are incapable of producing their own resources for their survival and, therefore, need to interact with their environment. In this way, organizations become less financially vulnerable. At the same time, however, their autonomy is reduced, (see Pfeffer & Salancik 1978; Slack 1997; Slack & Hinings 1992; Thibault & Harvey 1997). A survey by Vos *et al.* (2011) examined the extent to which governments use public subsidies to sports associations as a means of achieving political goals. Hoye *et al.* (2009) concluded that community sports associations are influenced by external providers, such as other sports or non-sports institutions, whereas, according to Nichols *et al.* (2005), sports associations that receive public subsidies are mainly influenced by governments. There are of course other resources such as legitimacy. A NGB or IF may be the sole source of recognition or validation of particular activities undertaken by sporting organisations in their particular sport. They can validate qualifications delivered (e.g., coaching certificates), or the qualification of those delivering activities. Studies indicated differences between countries regarding the size of the public subsidy and the dependence on the governments (Enjolras, 2002; Horch, 1992, 1994a, 1994b; Breuer & Pupae, 2008; Caslavova & Berka 2005). The operations of the NOAs have, thus far, not been studied for their dependencies on external organizations and how these affect their work.

Inter-organizational Relationships Theory (IOR)

IOR examines how organizations change over time (Cropper *et al.* 2008, 4). According to Cropper *et al.* (2008), IOR concerns the relationships between two or more organizations whether public, business, or non-profit. These relationships may be dual, between two organizations, or multiple, with an extended network of many organizations. Cropper *et al.* (2008) consider that the application of this theory concerns the understanding of the character, origin, rationale, and the consequences of such relationships. Regarding the governance of non-profit organizations, Cornforth (2003) claims that organizations create relationships with each other in order to acquire the required resources and information for continuous growth. Furthermore, he states that “... *the main function of the Board of Directors ... is to maintain a good relationship with the basic external interested parties in order to ensure the flow of resources*” (Cornforth 2003, 8). According to Scott (2003), in order to ensure the flow of resources and due to the fact that organizations are open systems and do not operate separately, they should adjust to the changing external conditions.

The application of IOR to sports organizations

Research that applies IOR to topics relevant to governing does not associate the relationships of organizations with the strategic capabilities of the Board of Directors (e.g., Brown 2005; Cornforth 2003; Stiles 2001). However, researchers who investigate sports governance refer to the relationships between organizations and the implications on the governing activity (e.g., Mitchell, Crosset, & Barr 1999). Specifically, Hoye & Cuskelly (2007) associate the relationships of organizations with the execution of governing tasks regarding national sports organizations. However, they specify that “*federation non-profit networks in the field of sports have not been studied thoroughly*” (Hoye & Cuskelly 2007, 52). Nevertheless, they argue these studies do not associate national federations with local sports organizations on issues regarding their relationship. An increasing number of surveys explore the reason why sports organizations create business relationships in the non-profit, government, and/or public sector (e.g., Babiak & Thibault 2009; Shaw & Allen 2006). According to Clegg & Hardy (1999), Doz & Hamel (1998), Gray (1989), Harrigan (1995), Hennart & Zeng (2005), and Kanter (1994), the practice of collaboration, coordination, development of business relationships and cooperation between the organizations have become the basic principles in the strategic management of organizations, in order for them to respond to the changing environmental factors. While investigating the relationships between sports organizations, Babiak (2007, 339) gave the following definition: “*A voluntary, close, long-term scheduled strategic action between two or more organizations, aiming to serve mutual beneficial purposes in a problem field*”. In sum, the networks that have been developed for the

completion of their mission and the services inside and outside the countries where each NOA operates have not been thoroughly researched. This study will determine how these networks affect their overall strategy and output.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Interview design, Sample selection and Thematic analysis of data

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data on the basic needs and current problems facing the NOAs and the extent to which NOAs interact with other entities, to determine the ways in which, and the extent to which, NOAs are autonomous and/or dependent in terms of organizational resources (both tangible and intangible). Nineteen interviews were conducted with members of the boards of the IOA, IOC, and the NOAs respectively. Interviews were also given by academics who were familiar with the workings of the NOAs due to their cooperation with the IOA and/or the IOC. Two interviews were carried out in Greek while the rest were conducted in English. Fourteen interviews took place at the IOA facilities in Ancient Olympia, Greece, two in Lausanne, Switzerland, one at the headquarters of the IOA in Athens, and two interviews were conducted via e-mail (see Table 1). The transcripts of the interviews and of the four email conversations were subject to thematic analysis. The method of thematic analysis used was a hybrid approach, incorporating; the inductive (themes emerging from the interviews) approach of Boyatzis and the deductive (answers to questions posed by the assumptions associated with RDP and / or IOR), approach discussed by Crabtree and Miller. This complemented the research objectives by allowing the bias of evidence to be observed through deductive analysis while allowing for themes to emerge directly from the data using inductive coding.

Table 1. Information on the interviews.

Serial Number	Position	Date & Duration of the interview	Method
1	IOC member	19/6/2013 (55 min.)	In person
2	IOA President	18/07/2019	In writing
3	Honorary Dean of the IOA	24/7/2019 (45 min.)	In person
4	IOC Supreme Executive	8/5/2018 (57 min.)	In person
5	Employee of the IOC OSC	13/2/2014 (43 min.)	In person
6	IOC employee	13/2/2014 (75min.)	In person
7	NOA Director / President	07/11/2017	In person
8	NOA president	05/10/2016	In writing
9	NOA president	13/5/2019 (32 min.)	In person
10	NOA president	13/5/2019 (19 min.)	In person
11	NOA president	31/05/2019	In writing
12	NOA president	30/05/2019	In writing
13	NOA president	12/5/2017 (32 min.)	In person
14	NOA president	12/5/2017 (54 min.)	In person
15	Academic	12/5/2019 (2hrs&4min.)	In person
16	Academic	14/5/2019 (11 min.)	In person
17	Academic	21/6/2012 (50 min.)	In person
18	Academic	2/11/2012 (49 min.)	In person
19	Academic	12/5/2019 (17 min.)	In person

The data depicted the 'experts' views on the IOA including the following: a) the relationship the operation of the IOA, and c) the contribution of the IOA to the Olympic Movement (OM). Furthermore, the interviewees related their views on the IOAs, specifically a) the work of the NOAs, b) the relationship between the IOA and the NOAs, and c) the obstacles in the work of the NOAs and their recognition on behalf of the IOC.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire consisted of twenty questions which emerge from themes identified in the thematic analysis of interview data. The questions included seventeen closed-type questions pertaining to: a) the method of organization, management, and operation of the NOAs, b) their work, including normal and/or abnormal functioning, c) information concerning the relationships with the institutions involved, d) the resources needed and the sources of those resources. The three open-ended questions (Nos. 9, 19 and 20) referred to the needs and problems the NOAs are currently facing, the opportunities and limitations provided for the NOAs. The questionnaire was composed in English and translated into French. It was distributed to the participants of the Annual International Session of the IOA held for the NOA Directors/Chairmen and/or NOC officials in the years 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018 respectively. According to the IOA Directory, there are 149 registered NOAs. The questionnaire indicated the presence and work of 99 NOAs out of the 146 that are currently in operation across five continental associations (Table 2).

Table 2. NOAs participation in the survey.

Participation of 99 NOAs			
Continent	NOAs	Participation in survey	Participation percentage
America	31	19	61%
Asia	28	20	71%
Africa	43	27	62%
Europe	42	32	76%
Oceania	2	1	50%

Analysis of the questionnaire

Microsoft Excel software was used for the numerical and statistical analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, presenting the data for the seventeen closed-type questions in a linear structure based on histograms and charts. In the three open-ended questions (Nos. 9, 19, and 20), the answers were classified and codified. Following the analysis of the answers to questions 19 and 20, the responses were encoded as follows: a) standard funding, b) guidelines for clear strategic aims, c) human resources, d) political support (legitimacy), and e) communication.

Additional sources were studied during the interview stage, including the study of the minutes of the IOA Conferences, the biannual IOA magazine, the IOA list regarding the NOAs. The magazine Olympic Review and the Lausanne OSC e-journal were particularly informative.

DISCUSSION

Critical resources and strategic alliances

The first objective of this survey is to investigate the degree of autonomy and/or dependence of the NOAs in terms of organizational resources and detecting their essential needs and problems. The survey has shown that the basic resources in the operation of an NOA includes money, the facilities of the organization, human resources, specialized knowledge required for the planning and development of the appropriate programs, namely trained staff, and, for the general accomplishment of its mission, support towards its work. A

description of the strategic alliances and tactics for the achievement of their autonomy is set out below. NOAs are governed by the first principal of RDP theory, based on which the organizations are restricted by and depend on other organizations that control decisively important resources (see Greening & Gray 1994). The analysis of the questionnaires revealed that the biggest source of funding sources for a NOA are the NOCs by a margin of 90.9%. Special reference must be made to the NOC of each country, firstly, because constitutes the main financial supporter of the NOAs, and secondly, 59% of the NOAs perform their work in compliance with the internal regulations of their respective NOC. Thus, legitimacy is provided for 59% of NOAs by conforming with appropriate regulations of the NOC. Furthermore, NOCs allocate part of their physical facilities for exclusive use by their NOA. In addition, 34% of NOAs do not recruit permanent staff. Instead, NOCs provide them with members of their own paid staff. Above all, NOCs constitute the main link between the NOAs and the IOC. The NOAs cannot not exist without the NOC. These dependencies are clearly reflected in the following statements: *"I do not know of any NOA that is independent, they may have an independent board but again it is part of the NOC. It is tactical because the IOC does not recognize the NOAs. It only recognizes the NOAs through the NOCs."* (IOC member / Serial No.1) *"... they have a major role in the OM since they constitute part of the NOCs. They must act under the support of each NOC since there is a collective (united) movement ... the NOAs are not self-reliant legal entities, they depend on the NOCs."* (IOC Honorary Dean / Serial No.3). Relevant comments made by the experts indicate that only through a harmonious relationship with the NOC, accompanied by continuous, goal – oriented projects, the NOAs can achieve recognition by the IOC as an official educational body. The insights offered by NOA Directors indicate that when the relationship between the NOA and NOC is not working, they encounter serious problems that can affect the day-to-day operation and organizational growth of the NOA. The following statements reflect the situation: *"The NOAs do not have the resources. The NOCs have the resources. The IOC will give the money but it has to come via the NOC"* (IOC Member / Serial No.1). *"I personally know that that IOC gives enough money to NOCs to support the work of the NOA, but when the money goes to the local NOCs who knows what happens. I have heard this from many colleagues, not so often in Europe but in other continents...."* (IOA Director / Serial No.14). *"It is true that it is a difficult situation —finding bridges between the activities of the academies and the other activities of the NOCs."* (IOC's OSC Employee / Serial No.5). *"Many NOCs are failing to support their NOAs. The first problem is the relationship between the NOCs and the NOAs. ... I think the Olympic Charter perfectly describes what an NOA should do. It seems that none at the NOCs read the Olympic Charter."* (Academic / Serial No.18). Relations with sponsors, whether individuals or legal entities, are critically important. They constitute the second largest source of funding for the NOAs (35.4%). From this point on, 18.2% of NOAs are funded by their respective national governments, while 10.1% receive support from other financial supporters, including private donors, cultural institutions, revenues arising from enrolment in courses, city councils, and membership subscriptions. Relations with national sports federations are also considered to be of major strategic importance. Federations are the institutions that the majority of NOAs cooperate with (72.7%). The principal purpose of cooperation concerns the training of young athletes and their future involvement in the educational activities of the NOAs. Cooperation with the Ministries of Education of the countries where each NOA is based is currently 65.7%. Positive cooperation with these ministries can facilitate the work of an NOA on many levels, including the know-how and access to advanced educational programs. Furthermore, 63.6% of the NOAs have established relationships with universities for the promotion of research objectives, while 47.5% have developed collaborations with primary and secondary schools and other educational institutions. Moreover, it is confirmed that the IOA constitutes a point of reference for the NOAs. The academies were developed from the IOA, whereas the NOA executive members pay particular attention to the guidelines and directions they receive from the IOA. In turn, the IOA indirectly guides the action of the NOAs through the Annual Directors' Session and relates the results of their work to the IOC.

Operational autonomy of NOAs

The operation of the NOAs falls under the second basic principle of RDP. In specific, analysis of the questionnaire revealed that NOAs search for financial resources and the necessary know-how in order to retain their autonomy and strengthen their own authority. This is done to avoid being overly-dependent on the NOCs and the governments of their respective countries. To that end, 49% of NOAs have established external partnerships for the purpose of exchange the knowledge and organize common activities, while 51% cooperate with other NOAs. An important initiative for the disengagement of an academy from the complete control of their respective NOC is the creation of a constitution that is different, thus not governed by the same internal operational regulations. This is currently the case for 41% of the NOAs in the study. Moreover, the search for financial supporters is one of the main goals of the NOAs (Serial No.10,11,12). According to Hillman *et al.* (2003), the strengthening of authority over other organizations and the reduction of authority over themselves constitutes the basis of resource dependence and inter-organizational relationships. These efforts have led to the creation of networks for the completion of the NOAs mission, both inside and outside the countries where they perform their activities by implementing projects in common. For example, two NOAs from neighbouring counties can organize a common activity in one of the two countries, where students from both countries can participate.

Creation of networks

The second objective is to investigate the creation of networks for effective governance and operation, and the services inside (national) and outside (international) the countries where each NOA operates. A detailed reference regarding the national networks developed by the NOAs entail the following: a) the national networks within the OM, including their respective NOCs, sports, education and culture ministries, National Sports Federations, Olympic Studies Centres, Olympic museums, and b) external national networks, specifically all other collaborators, including universities, schools, museums, sports associations and institutes, educational and cultural foundations, public utility institutions, and national research foundations. According to the three concepts of governance that Henry and Lee (2004) have employed it is incorporated here a Prescriptive Model of Systemic Governance for the Olympic System (Figure 1) and a Descriptive or Heuristic Model of Systemic Governance in the Olympic System (Figure 2).

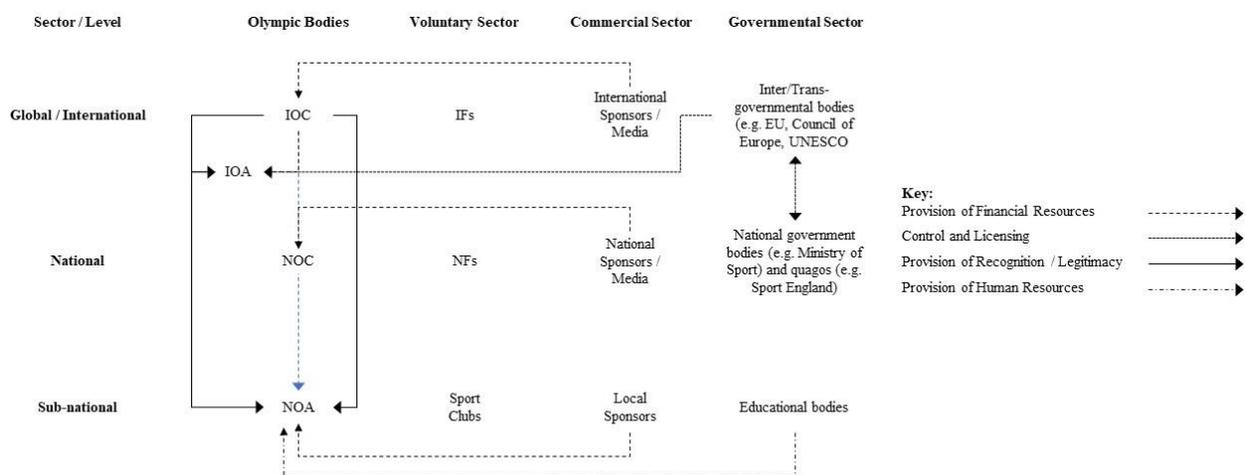


Figure 1. Prescriptive model of systemic governance for Olympic system.

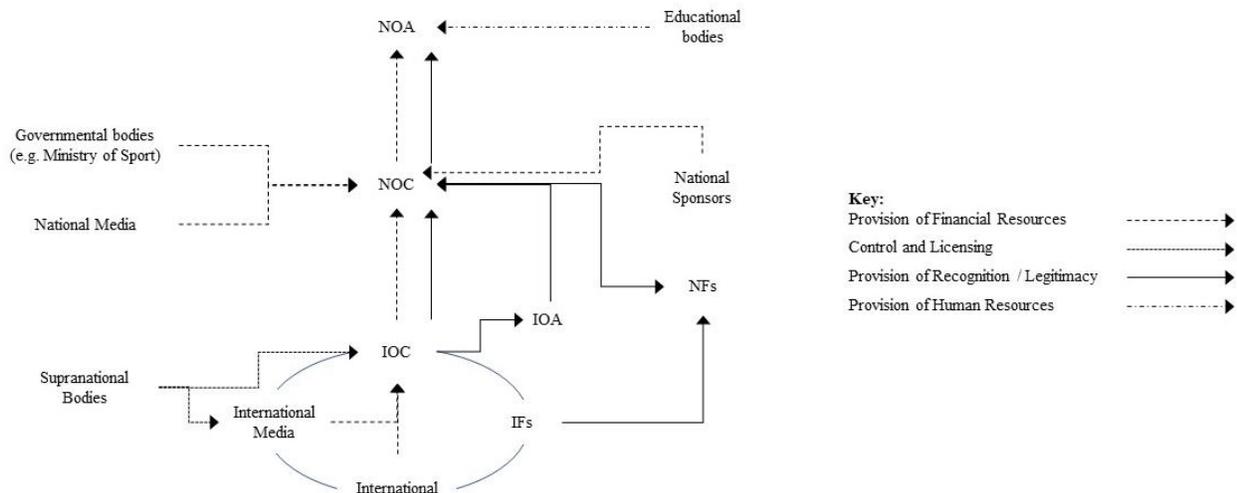


Figure 2. Descriptive or Heuristic Model of systemic governance in the Olympic system.

International networks include the NOAs of neighbouring countries with which they create collaborative relationships and organize common programs. NOA associations have been created on a continental level where common languages and/or common cultural backgrounds exist accordingly. In particular, inter-organizational relationships on the international level and the development of networks concern: a) The creation of partnerships with neighbouring countries b) The integration of continental and intercontinental NOA associations such as i) the African Association of National Olympic Academies (AANO), ii) Iberian-American Association of National Olympic Academies (APAO in Spanish), iii) Francophone Association of National Olympic Academies, iv) European National Olympic Academies Association (ENOA). In the case of a Spanish-speaking NOA in South America, the Director (Serial No. 10) described the support of the Iberian-American NOA Association (APAO) and its Chairman by providing material and organizing meetings that aim to facilitate the work of the academy by updating them with the latest developments in the field. The director of a European NOA (NOA President / Serial No.12) referred to the continental associations, specifying how they unite and facilitate the work of NOAs that are geographically and culturally close and operate in a similar financial environment. It is clear that NOAs develop cooperative relationships with the aim of achieving certain goals. Babiak (2007) explains, that such relationships constitute the basic principles in the strategic management of organizations in response to changing environmental factors. However, the IOA President (Serial No.2) characterized the role of these associations in his interview as “unclear”. He believes their role is constructive since they only operate within the framework of local cooperation. He concluded that: “*If through the operation of these Associations there is an attempt for control and an effort to impose a specific policy (to the NOAs), then we (the IOA) will have to be especially careful and intervene, if the IOC allows us to do so*”. (IOA President / Serial No.2). In sum, the NOAs appear to be involved in both national (external and internal) and international networks. In addition, they are involved in dual partnership relationships (e.g., Hungary and Slovakia, Mauritius and Malaysia, Cyprus and Greece), and partnerships between multiple, usually neighbouring, countries (e.g., across the Caribbean or Baltic states). These partnerships facilitate the exchange of knowledge / material and the implementation of common projects.

Current organizational challenges for the NOAs

Challenges for the NOAs largely stem from the lack of financial resources and a steady source of funding for their activities. The funding that comes from the IOC, through Olympic Solidarity, reaches them through the NOCs. A significant number of NOA representatives state that they constitute part of the NOCs, thus their

presence is not always visible or perceivable. Further analysis of the questionnaires identified other problems faced by the NOAs, including the lack of strategy and a distinct organizational structure, especially in terms of appropriate administration to support the leadership. Many NOA executives consider the absence of a clear strategy to be the most significant problem over and above the lack of financial resources. What is encouraging, however, is the fact that NOA representatives acknowledge the value of clear strategic planning. Problems regarding human resources remain a persistent issue for NOAs, including the lack of permanent staff, the absence of specialized staff in the fields of Olympic Education and physical education, and a shortage of experts to organize and run other educational activities. The dearth of specialized management personnel, especially for the creation of an interactive platform for Olympic Education, was also mentioned in the interviews. Some NOAs rely exclusively on voluntary workers to run their activities, but, in some cases, there is a lack of volunteers. The training of existing personnel is therefore deemed a key necessity. In certain countries, the survey has shown that there is an absence of political support and lack of cooperation with the Ministries of Education and Sports, indifferent towards Olympic Education. As such, there is a lack of 'moral support' on behalf of the NOC and the National Sports Federations, as well as a lack of sympathy by the political world for the importance and potential value of the IOA. Analysis of the questionnaires showed that in certain NOCs, the flow of information between the two statutory institutions is not followed-up. This results in the NOAs not always being able to develop their own programs. Furthermore, not all NOAs receive the attention and support they deserve or expect from their NOCs. The Director of a European NOA (Serial No.14) discussed cases in which the considerable funding by the IOC (through the Olympic Solidarity) to the NOCs for the support of their work is not always granted to the NOAs. A Director of an African NOA (Serial No.13) also talked about the repercussions of not receiving IOC funds because they do not know how to file an application. The evidence shows a lack of awareness about the availability of IOC funding, as well as uncertainty about the processes involved and a general reluctance to apply. Nevertheless, there are a number of NOAs that have made progress and are demanding ever greater autonomy. Administrative autonomy, however, entails financial autonomy. For various programs, there is a lack of essential consultation and coordination, both in the early development stage and in the implementation. The survey revealed that the NOCs control vital resources for the NOAs and it is not always possible to achieve a smooth cooperation between the two. In these cases, the NOAs work is not regarded as profitable for the Olympic Movement. In some NOCs where an 'Olympic Education Committee' operates, there is confusion regarding the role of these committees and the NOAs since both are responsible for the Olympic Education. A group of participants in the Joint Director's Session (2008, 276) proposed "*a balanced distribution of the role and mission of the committees responsible for Olympic Education in relation to the role and mission of the NOAs that have undertaken to apply the programs*".

CONCLUSIONS

Concerning the first objective and according to question 19 and 20 of the questionnaire, limited autonomy is indicated. This stems from financial constraints along with the shortage of qualified staff, capable of running activities in an appropriately professional manner. Lack of financial and human resources accompanied by the absence of political support, hampering the creation of strategic planning and long-term goals for sustainable growth. The survey also indicated that the NOAs who operate under their own statute exhibit greater activity and more resources. This stems from flexibility and effectiveness to operations, obtaining sponsorships, financial supporters and donors etc. However, 34 out of the 58 NOAs that operate with the NOC statute do exhibit notable work with 9 of the 58 NOAs being among the leading NOAs in terms of indicating innovating programs. Problems and restrictions on actions are detected in the NOAs where the relationship with their respective NOCs is not harmonious, as NOAs are accountable to NOCs. Similarly, lack of political support can prove particularly problematic in the work of a NOA since it denies the organization

both legitimacy and resources. Formal recognition of the roles, the resourcing, and the responsibilities of the NOA (and indeed of the NOC) is vital to eliminate communication, and resourcing problems between NOCs and NOAs in order for NOAs to maximize leverage to achieve their goals within the Olympic Movement and the sporting and educational communities.

The improvement of national and international networks

Concerning the second objective, NOAs are involved in national (external and internal), and international networks (dual cooperation among two NOAs and/or between several NOAs). Within national networks, NOAs gain access to schools, universities, and local communities for the completion of their mission. In turn, these institutions benefit from the knowledge, experience, the training of students, and the contribution of NOA volunteers. The relationship of the NOAs with their respective governments is also considered important, as it confirms the acceptance of their work by central governments. Improved political relations would facilitate greater access for NOAs to ministries (e.g., education and culture) and also to relevant public institutions. Regarding international networks NOAs engage in both dual cooperation relationships (among two countries) and multinational networks that usually involve neighbouring countries from the same continent. The establishment of these networks promotes the work of the NOAs and yields significant benefits for the Olympic Movement. Furthermore, NOAs are able to adopt a more complete and coordinated approach to programs, actions, and the discovery of solutions to complex issues. Ideas are mutually exchanged, and new working groups and programs with representatives from the participant countries are created. Solutions to problems are provided that, due to the common language or the close cultural environment of the groups, can be handled more easily. These unions encourage cooperation between the NOAs, the exchange of information, and the adoption of common support actions for the weakest NOAs. The strengthening of educational programs is also promoted. These unions endorse the motto *"power lies in union"* and confirm Babiak's (2007, 6) definition of inter-organizational relationships as: *"voluntary, close, and ... with the objective of serving 'mutually beneficial' purposes in a 'problem' domain"*. They also provide more recognition for the NOAs, establishing them as the main point of reference for the educational work provided by the Olympic Movement. It is interesting to note that the reason for the creation of international networks does not serve materialistic goals but is mainly due to the search for knowledge and new ideas that contribute to the development of better practices. Based on the available evidence, partnerships of strategic importance are formed with four different categories of institutions, illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Partnerships of strategic importance.

NOA partnerships of strategic importance	Indicated examples
Structural Environment institutions.	IOC-NOCs-IOA.
Funding Institutions.	NOCs, sponsors, governments, financial supporters.
Work channelling institutions (where the work of the NOAs is addressed.	NSOs, schools, sport associations, local society institutions-e.g., municipalities and precincts.
Expert Knowledge acquisition institutions.	Universities, other educational and research foundations.

Practical implications

The development and reinforcement of autonomy

A practical way for a NOA to reinforce its autonomy is through the existence of a statute. The statute could establish the presence and principles of a NOA, and not disrupt its operation in the event of a change in the members of the NOA or the NOC Board of Directors. Emphasis should be placed on the training of the existing staff and on the recruitment of specialized staff. Moreover, the establishment of the internationalist

Olympic profile of the NOAs should become a matter clarity. Problems arise due to the lack of strategy. The strategic planning of non-profit organizations includes a number of steps that must be followed in order for the organization to become viable and achieve results. For proper operation, multiple business models for non-profit educational institutions should be put in place, depending on the location and operational environment of the NOA. Table 4 shows three different types of operation to build on.

Table 4: Operation models for NOAs.

Governance Model	Operating Model	Financial structure	Nature of program
<i>Simple.</i> A Board of Directors with voluntary workers and one or two paid assistants.	<i>Ad hoc</i> volunteer staff, one or two paid staff, rental of space for simple programming.	Simple cash flow account.	Simple. Minimum requirement customized to local needs.
<i>Moderate.</i> A Board of Directors and some paid staff. Support from Committees that draw from across the sports network.	Paid staff and a more complex volunteer management program. A small number of dedicated staff, permanent small office and a supply network of secondary venues for more complex programming. Possible expenses for Committee Members.	Full cash flow accounting model.	More complex, with plenty of authentic possibilities for local programming (in addition to delivering the minimum requirement).
<i>Complex.</i> Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Specialized Committees, and a paid staff. Integrated with various university specialists through Partnership Agreements where costs are shared for programming	Fully functional staff structure, permanent larger office capable of hosting events, well-established relations with venues capable of hosting signature events with the IOA, complex programming, research, educational activities at the level of a Ministry of Education.	Complex cash-flow accounting model with revenue generation Financial risk should be diversified in a stock portfolio.	Highly complex at the local, national and international level, e.g., can launch major initiatives with the IOA to spread its work.

Achievement and maintenance of thriving interorganisational relationships

The achievement of resource flow requires the NOA Boards of Directors to maintain good relationships with all the parties involved, a situation that could lead to greater autonomy. This research confirms the fact that an NOC constitutes the link between its NOA and the Olympic Movement, while the NOA does not exist without its respective NOC. The existence of a harmonious relationship between the NOAs and their NOCs is fundamentally important. Similarly, the contribution of potential sponsors is critically vital for the effective completion of NOA activities. Sponsors, in turn, need to advertise, as promotion may be the only credible incentive or reason to support a NOA project. Finally, NSOs constitute the institution with which the majority of NOAs under study create partnerships (72.7%). Joint actions of NOAs with sports federations, according to the results of the research, could have reciprocal benefits. Finding of a point of agreement between the NOAs and the federations may contribute to a common framework where specialist knowledge could facilitate the educational work of both parties and contribute to the promotion of the Olympic values.

Theoretical contribution

In regard to the theoretical contribution this is an original study that empirically connects the resource dependence theory with a comprehensive understanding of the operation of NOAs. RDT indicates that NOAs will be dependent on other organisations, and there is a primary dependence on the NOC because without NOC's approval the NOA literally cannot operate. It offers insights into the ways in which the strength and influence of the NOAs and their respective Boards of Directors determines the nature of the relationships with other organizations. It was found that the development of a particular strategy of the NOAs is imposed for the purpose of establishing resources, while the prevailing financial circumstances determine their activities. In addition, RDP clarifies the relationships between the NOAs and explains sufficiently the reason that contributed to the development of networks between the NOAs. The use of Inter-Organizational Relationships theory (IOR) in this survey explains the existence of cooperation and/or mutual assistance relationships between the NOAs, and other bodies not just the NOAs. IOR illustrates the potential advantages and benefits they are able to gain as a result of such collaborations. The survey findings agree with the findings of previous surveys, which indicate that inter-organizational relationships are a result of limited resources (see Wicker *et al.* 2012; Hall *et al.* 2003; Oliver 1990). In the case of the NOAs, inter-organizational relationships are created mainly to gain access to new knowledge and exchange ideas in relation to the way in which other NOAs operate. For example, some NOAs do not have the knowledge to submit funding proposals or the capability to enforce them respectively. The communication through networks that has been developed can contribute to the resolution of such issues. These networks must not overlook the dominant organizations in their structural environment, namely the IOC, which, through the NOCs, constitutes the main funding institution, and the IOA, from which the NOAs were developed. In any case, inter-organizational relationships between NOAs facilitate consolidation and greater autonomy.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Paraskevi Salepi is the main author of the manuscript. Prof. Georgiadis, Prof. Kriemadis and Prof. Travlos had a general advisory role, Prof Georgiadis as an NOAs expert, Prof Kriemadis and Prof Travlos regarding the theoretical framework, methodology issues and the general structure of the manuscript.

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