

## USING GLOBAL SPORT CEREMONIES TO ACTIVATE HUMAN RIGHTS: AN APPROACH PROMPTED BY THE BEIJING OLYMPIC GAMES

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**Abstract:** *A closer examination of fundamental Olympic values and symbolic meanings—expressed in the Olympic charter and recognized in Olympic protocol—reveals that they correspond to the basic perceptions in the Declaration of Human Rights. The Olympic project seems to be an ideal vehicle to promote the United Nations values and principles. Consequently it is important to examine to what extent Olympic action/communication is actually used to serve such objectives-goals and to discuss its effectiveness and legitimacy within this framework. Olympic ceremonies, for example, provide an international-global platform of mobilization for individuals, social groups, countries and nations who have been unfairly treated or remain disadvantaged, such as the mass demonstrations around the globe during the Olympic relay from ancient Olympia to Beijing in protest of the violations of human rights in China. This paper discusses the role of the IOC in accordance to human rights and examines, on a theoretical level, why the Olympic project in general, including the Olympic symbols and ceremonies generate and activate discussions on human rights. This article, as a side effect or by-product reveals the difficulties inherent to the implementation of the human rights project outside of Olympic space and time. One need point out here, with regard to the methodological perspective, that the use of terms such as universalism, internationalism, globalization, enlightenment, nation and nationalism serve as a heuristic approach, in order to link or connect some of their cognitive contents and elementary meanings to the subject.*

### Introduction

The notion of universal human rights and the notion of a shared humanity has been well documented and amply expressed in many powerful social movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: eg. the anti-slavery movement, the first wave of feminism<sup>1</sup> and the “take-off phase” (Robertson, 1994) of globalization from 1870 to the mid -1920s. During these periods international organizations have emerged with the purpose of serving universal ideals and continue to have great global influence today, eg. the Red Cross. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) developed in this framework, namely as an international organization that

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<sup>1</sup>With regard to gender issues in Olympic sports see: Kamberidou, Irene (2011). “Athlete Activism and Peace Education: Bridging the Social Inequality Gap through Sports”. *NEBULA 8.1, a Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*, vol. 8, issue 1: 168-180.

ensures international athletic competition for the promotion of global peace and universal values.

An extensive presentation of the multiple meanings of Human Rights<sup>2</sup>, as discussed in contemporary social sciences and other disciplines -as well as an examination of their general enforceability or exclusivity (Forsythe 2012, Lum 2011, Donnelly 2002, Steiner and Alston 1996, Davis 1995, Woodiwiss 2002, Beetham 1998, Mills 1998)- is beyond the scope of this article. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is not to examine the participation in sport or in physical education as a **human right in general, as this has already been amply documented** (Panagiotopoulos 2011: 348-359), Kidd and Donnelly 2000, Patsantaras & Kamberidou 2011) but the ways in which the Olympic project could promote and enforce general ideas on Human Rights (Panagiotopoulos 2004: 493-506, *ibid* 2003:30-38) . Specifically to what extent Olympic action/communication is actually used to serve such objectives-goals or universal values such as global peace.

Discussions on human rights are usually realized in a political-legal context, considering that **the foundation of human rights are political rights** (Forsythe 2012, et al.). On the other hand, emphasis is placed on the non-political<sup>3</sup> character of Olympic sports, according to the Olympic charter (rule 51.3) and the members of the Olympic movement. (Patsantaras & Kamberidou 2011) In this perspective, at first glance, a discussion on human rights and the Olympics may seem to be paradoxical in many ways. For instance, open conflict between nations is generally not in the jurisdiction or interest of the IOC. Alternatively, the IOC universalistic and internationalist ideals are inconsistent or conflict with **internal political agendas. Since the Human Rights issue remains a supreme political question**, this paper examines the ways in which the Olympic project could promote and enforce, in general, ideas on Human Rights.<sup>4</sup> The main purpose is to examine certain critical points through which the Olympics

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<sup>2</sup>Another important question is the following What kind of human rights are we talking about? The UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights) included economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, based on the principle that these d rights could only successfully exist in combination. Without civil and political rights the public cannot assert their economic, social and cultural rights. (Forsythe 2012, et al.)

<sup>3</sup>According to Hoberman (1986: 2) the IOC's autonomy and immunity to political pressure have been overrated. In fact, it has preserved a questionable "independence" by collaborating with political powers, only rarely resisting them.

<sup>4</sup>International studies assert that the only major human rights victory with regard to the Olympics, is that of the anti-apartheid movement. (Hartmann 1996, Guelke 1993). Additionally, the influence of the 1988 Seoul Olympics in the democratization of S. Korea. See: USA One Hundred Seventh Congress, second session, Nov. 18,2002, pp. 6-7: <http://www.cecc.gov>. See also Patsantaras (2007) concerning the Olympics and political issues of many African nation states εθνών during various stages of decolonization.

produce ideas and expectations on human rights. In its modern history the Olympic movement has received great criticism with regard to decisions, which according to certain researchers (Hobberman 1986) deviated from the universal ideals of the Olympic Charter. This paper will selectively examine such points of this debate. Additionally, using certain official statements made by IOC members, we will illustrate how they perceive their mission.

To address these issues the following areas will be discussed in this paper:

- A brief and general approach to the meanings of the Olympic symbols
- Disputes/perceptions on cultural imperialism
- IOC limits, boundaries and jurisdiction: the Olympics, as a **means of internationalization** and globalization
- The Olympics as a means for the **internalization of conflicts between social groups and states**
- The IOC's universal character and ethical responsibilities/duties

Specifically, the Olympic project or culture is comprised, not only of Olympic institutions, but also of Olympic symbols, ceremonies and representations that have the power to create a sense of universal-global awareness, responsibility etc. In this spirit, Olympic symbols, such as the Olympic flame, provide a means of declaring or reflecting Olympic values and meanings. However, the universal character of the Olympic project in general has been disputed and challenged in many ways. These disputes are best reflected in the perceptions on *cultural imperialism*. Can we today argue that Olympic action/communication serves as a means to cultural imperialism? The world is rapidly changing and old issues have to be examined in new contexts. The development of Olympic sport is closely linked to globalization. We have to change the ways of approaching *grand narratives*, such as **the project of the Olympics-Olympism**. One need point out here that there are many interesting conceptual questions that lie beneath the Olympic Games and IOC decisions. The concept of the modern Olympics may have a stable meaning socially, but for us what is more significant is the changes with regard to its uses. (Patsantaras 2005).

According to the views of the IOC members, the United Nations and the IOC share the same philosophy, in the framework of which their mission and moral duties are formulated<sup>5</sup>. As follows the Olympic Games provide an international-

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<sup>5</sup>In the International Forum on Sport, Peace and Development in the United Nations (UN) headquarters in Geneva (Switzerland) jointly organised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the UN Office on Sport for Peace and Development, the two-day Forum featured sessions on how to position sport as a catalyst for achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals, how major sport events such as the Olympic Games can deliver on legacy, and how to foster a culture of peace through sport.. Jacques Rogge demonstrates that IOC's "ultimate objective is to be successful and efficient on the ground – to serve humankind". He added : "We have to taken a series of steps with the UN to promote peace and development through sport in proactive, concrete ways,"<http://www.olympic.org/content/Olympism-in-Action/Development-through-sport/IOC-President-meets-with-UN-Secretary-General-Ban-Ki-Moon/> (Accessed on 10-5-2011).

global platform of mobilization for individuals, social groups, countries and nations that have been unfairly treated or remain disadvantaged. Such an example are the anti-Chinese protests organized throughout European cities, following the route of the Olympic torch from Athens to Beijing. This is an important point which allows us to see what it means for the IOC to share the same philosophy with the United Nations. Due to the bid to host the Olympics in Beijing, the government of China was confronted with internal pressures by their population to provide additional freedoms, while facing external pressures from the international community. This reveals that the Olympics as a means of internationalization and globalization may also be used for the internalization of conflicts between social groups and states. For instance, these conflicts can be political issues like those in Tibet. Priory, human rights issues had been discussed as one of the principal reasons that China failed and subsequently lost its bid to host the 2000 Olympics to Australia. My aim is not to criticized China's void as far as human rights are concerned, many studies have already covered this issue. (Ching 2008, Fautré et al. 2009) However some points of this critique/debate will be used selectively in this paper. For example, when Beijing received the bid for the 2008 Olympics, a precondition posed by the IOC was the complete implementation of human rights by the Chinese government. Isn't that so? Does the IOC have jurisdiction over the outrageous persecutions of the Tibetan people by the Chinese dictatorial regime? Does the IOC have any jurisdiction concerning human rights violations across the globe? What are the limits or boundaries of the IOC's duties and responsibilities?

Based on all of the above issues to be presented, this paper examines the IOC's universal character and ethical responsibilities/duties. One need mention here that these duties cannot be determined in a general social framework but only in accordance to Olympic social space and time.

## 1. Seeking the meanings of the Olympic symbols

Symbols, myths, and in particular ethics and symbolic law in general continue to structure human societies, sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. Psychoanalysts agree that there is no one or specific method to analyze symbols (Galimberti 2001, 35-36). In the modern Olympics, symbols such as the Olympic flag, flame and the torch relay become symbols of world peace, and in the past had taken on a religious character. (Patsantaras 2008, Aigne 1998, Alkemeyer 1996, Mac Aloon 1981) Today these symbols represent symbolic communication codes and social values that are accepted by all cultures. (Patsantaras 2007).

The meanings reflected by the Olympic flame, beyond Pierre de Coubertin's

views on the “*religio athletae*”<sup>6</sup>, cannot be characterized as a «revelation» in a religious or theological context, but they can be characterized as «organic» in the sense of being a *tool* or a *means* to achieve concrete goals. In this context the symbol of the Olympic flame is a function that refers to specific social and ethical values that are recognized by the IOC and societies as universal. For example, according to the IOC, “the Olympic flame has brought warm friendship to all the people of the world through sharing and togetherness.”<sup>7</sup>

In this spirit, the torch relay provoked or was an opportunity for mass demonstrations for human rights when the Olympics were held in a country which disrespects them, eg. China. The paradox here is that in modern Olympic history, the IOC -in contrast to other transnational and multinational organizations- has not paid attention to the national-state contexts in which it operates. (Brookes 2002: 72) Does this mean that the IOC does not take into account human rights when it is considering bids for the Olympics? Or does it mean that the Olympic Games provide an opportunity for internationalizing abuses of human rights, the gaps in democracy of a certain political system or state, such as China? A state which receives the bid for the organization of the Olympics is perceived as a *trustee* and *preacher* of Olympic values: world peace, right to the self-determination of peoples, etc. (Olympic Charter, rule 34, par. 3). Could this internationalisation and dissemination of abuses and violations of human rights lead to *Change* in the long-term<sup>8</sup>?

The combination of the symbolic meanings of the Olympic torch relay along with the catalytic presence of the mass media<sup>9</sup> is a powerful tool for the dissemi-

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<sup>6</sup>See Coubertin, P. 1967: 16,126,133,144,153; Herms, 1993. Avery Brundage. the fifth president of the IOC, in his speech at the 62<sup>nd</sup> IOC conference in 1964, stressed the “secular religiosity” of the Olympic movement and its world acceptance, as it incorporates and reflects in practice all religious values. He calls the IOC members “Apostoles” of this religion, of the religion of Olympism, “a religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Moral universalism*) . (Brundage, 1971: 47 -65)

<sup>7</sup>“Olympic Truce”. A publication of the IOC. July 2009, Lausanne, Switzerland . p.1: <http://www.olympic.org>

<sup>8</sup>According to Rogge Olympic principles “are also the principles at the core of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. These are the principles that drive far-reaching social change”. [http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en\\_report\\_1250.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_1250.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>See for example various blogs (<http://www.freetibet.org/newsmedia/tibet-news-details>) and newspapers of the times such as USA TODAY (Tuesday, April 8, 2008, p. 1,2): “Protesters disrupt torch ceremonies. Activists have protested along the torch route since the flame embarked on its 85.000-mile journey from Ancient Olympia in Greece to Beijing [...] Protesters demand that Olympic organizers denounce China’s policies on human rights and Tibet and the communist government’s backing of the Sudanese military regime responsible for the killings in Darfur [...] London (6-4-2008) and particularly Paris (7-4-2008) were the cities in which on the occasion the ‘Olympic flame’ took place intense protests toward the “Tibetan Problem”

According to *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* (Dienstag 8, April 2008, p.1, 3), IOC President Jacques Rogge demanded, Monday 7 April a peaceful resolution of this crisis. In Beijing Rogge said our duty is to

nation and promotion of issues on human rights, eg. Tibet. Consequently, we can theoretically argue that Olympic symbols, such as the Olympic flame, are distinguished by societies as a means for the promotion of universal rights. The reactions concerning the Olympic relay, the Olympic torch from ancient Olympia to Beijing in 2008, reveal that the Olympic symbols stimulated a feeling of universal responsibility.

## 2. IOC: Approaching Universalism through Cultural Imperialism?

Universal principles of democracy and personal liberties are included in the Olympic Charter. For Coubertin the foundation of the Olympic movement, which operates, theoretically, on the basis of Olympic values, was was “**the fundamental principle of universality**” (Coubertin 1931: 47). But in general the perception on universality cultivated by the Olympic movement received massive criticism during the 20th century, primarily due to the paradigm of cultural imperialism. The Olympics can reflect liberal notions of freedom, peace, prosperity and progress, however due to cultural imperialism they did not reflect cultural exchange.

Specifically, the history of the IOC reveals a Eurocentric bias. Modern sport and primarily the Olympics, for many researchers, express and promote a set of values that lead to a form of cultural imperialism. (Eichberg 1973, 1980) The production of an institutional framework of athletic events had created an international sport culture and international identities that could replace regional and sub-national sport cultures, including regional and national identities. Many discussions, including recent research, characterize Olympic sports as a means that serves cultural imperialism or its other face, that of globalization: the western model of cultural-societal globalization processes. (Young 1996)

Indeed, in the beginning the IOC was dominated by European countries but during the process of decolonization, when “newly independent nations” applied for membership to the IOC “as part of the process of nation-building”, the catholic sovereignty of the Europeans in the IOC ended. (Patsantaras 2007: 116-125) During the last four decades of the twentieth century especially, a more complex picture has been emerging, in which the IOC can no longer be seen as simply an instrument of cultural imperialism. (Brookes 2002: 67) Certainly, nowadays Olympic sport, especially with its European, Western Eurocentric character is

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organize good Games. In the congressional debate, according to Kevin Wamsley, sports historian and expert on the Olympic Games and Director of the Internatinal Centre for Olympic Studies “President Jacque Rogge has been fairly silent about the issue of human rights [...] the IOC has a long history of wishing to smooth things over before the show comes to town. <http://www.cecc.gov> (p. 15)

a *common culture good* for all countries around the world. Consequently, such aspects like using Olympic sport as a means of cultural imperialism, *westernization* and to some degree *americanization*<sup>10</sup> and so forth, are significantly different than what they were in the recent past and no longer have any meaning. In the last decades Olympic sport, mainly through the mass media, has become a *common heritage* for varied ethnic groups.<sup>11</sup> Many nation-states have their own history in the Olympics. During the process of decolonization, mainly in the second half of the twentieth century, the IOC has provided “the arena for the expression of ‘Third World’ interests paralleling similar developments in non-governmental organizations such as the UN and UNESCO” (Brookes 2002). It is thus best to avoid tempting/alluring terms like cultural imperialism. (Sparks, 2007: 214) Generally today, the cultural imperialism thesis is problematic in many respects and has been replaced by the notion of globalization.<sup>12</sup>

The IOC has played an important role as agent of internationalism or globalization. (Brookes 2002: 66) **Today, Coubertin’s views on Universalism are realized** as games on a global level. Whether globalization implies internationality, multinationality, transnationality, etc. depends on one’s point of view and may be more a matter of terminology than that of substantial theoretical disagreement. For example Houlihan (1994: 200-201) argues that globalization, as related in general to sport is significant in providing governments with a further medium through which to conduct international politics. However, Maguire (1994: 402) argues that **globalization does not lead to cultural homogeneity, there “is no single global flow”** but it could be seen as a process through which cultural varieties are increased.

The history of the Olympics suggests that there is a symbiotic relationship between certain forms of globalization and universalism, between religious and ethnic nationalism and patriotism and peace. Sport provides a good example of what could be described as a “global culture”. (Brookes 2002: 73) and in the age of globalization it is easier to imagine that you are a citizen of the universe. (Hannerz, 1990) The more optimistic visions of globalization tend to focus on its potential for constructing a global community. The official declarations of IOC

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<sup>10</sup>Researchers argue, for example, that Olympic sport has long been an arm of US foreign policy (Brookes, 2002: 104). In the congressional debate Senator η Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Florida) said: «China is an authoritarian state which continues to systematically violate fundamental human rights [...] If the US does not have a leadership role and send a message to the world, then who will? As the global leader, the US has the responsibility and the moral obligation to carry forth our message of freedom to the oppressed people everywhere» US Congress (2001, p.19) also available: ([http://www.house.gov/international\\_relations](http://www.house.gov/international_relations)).

<sup>11</sup>In the last decades the media has made sport a common heritage—many nation states have their own history in the Olympics— a dominant cultural order for diverse ethnic groups.

<sup>12</sup>See Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture 2003: 57.

represent a vision of a world united through sport. At the same time the IOC demonstrates “just how tricky this is to attain in practice” (Brookes 2002: 72)

### 3. UNO and IOC: sharing the same philosophy

The 30 articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>13</sup> *set out the United Nation’s goal for international cooperation to achieve a common standard of basic freedoms and human rights. The Declaration drew upon the great liberal tradition of individual freedoms in its affirmation of life, liberty and security of persons, equality before the law, freedom of thought, expression and peaceful assembly and association and its prohibition of discrimination, slavery or servitude, arbitrary arrest, torture, and so forth.*

The Olympic Charter, in its **five chapters and 61 articles, outlines in detail several guidelines and rules.**<sup>14</sup> As expressed in its introduction, the Olympic Charter serves, among other purposes, to establish principles and values of Olympism. The goal of the Olympic movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised in accordance with Olympism and its values. Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity<sup>15</sup>.

With regard to the IOC, it declares that the goal of the Olympic movement, which has arisen from modern Olympism, is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world. (Samaranch 1995: 3) According to the Olympic charter 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.<sup>16</sup> The Olympic movement is the concerted, organised, universal and constitutes permanent action.

After a meeting between IOC President Jacques Rogge and United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne (25-1-2011), President Rogge said<sup>17</sup>: “As a global sports organisation, the IOC has the moral duty to place sport at the service of humanity.” Secretary-General Ban

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<sup>13</sup>[www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml)

<sup>14</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic\\_Charter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Charter)

<sup>15</sup><http://worldwiseathlete.com/being-an-olympicathlete.asp> See also: ‘Human dignity constitutes the intellectual center of the entire culture of human Rights’. (Tomuschat 2008: 3)

<sup>16</sup><http://worldwiseathlete.com/being-an-olympicathlete.asp>

<sup>17</sup><http://www.olympic.org/content/Olympism-in-Action/Development-through-sport/IOC-President-meets-with-UN-Secretary-General-Ban-Ki-Moon/25-1-2011>

Ki-Moon commented: “Sport has become a world language, a common denominator that breaks down all the walls, all the barriers. It is a worldwide industry whose practices can have a widespread impact. Most of all, it is a powerful tool for progress<sup>18</sup> and development.”

The IOC Charter and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights are examples of *moral universalism*<sup>19</sup> in practice. The universal nature of human rights and freedoms is beyond question. (2005 World Summit, paragraph 120)<sup>20</sup>. Moral universalism in practice means that the system of sport ethics applies universally,<sup>21</sup> specifically for “all similarly situated individuals” regardless of culture, race, sex, religion, nationality, sexuality, or any other distinguishing feature. (Berlin 1991) A moral universalism in practice means international protection of basic human rights. According to Hoberman (1986:2) the Olympic movement directed by the IOC, must be studied as an international institution which through its history seems to be a very effective one. The Olympic movement has represented, among other things, an impressive victory for internationalist principles during a violently nationalistic century.

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<sup>18</sup>Coubertin (1967a: 40) identifies sport with progress saying: “Oh Sport You are Progress”. However, this meaning of progress examined in the powerful wave of anti-Enlightenment thinking, that appeared in recent decades from exponents of deconstruction and other poststructuralists, who attacked convictions about large explanatory ideas “with their deceptive, ungrounded claims to universality”. In this “metanarrative” framework progress is widely regarded as serving the deceptive purposes of western expansionism (colonization). (Fleishman 2002: 201)

<sup>19</sup>An enormous range of traditions and thinkers have supported one form or another of moral universalism, from the ancient Platonists and Stoics, through Christians and Muslims, to modern Kantians, Objectivists, natural and human rights proponents, and utilitarian thinkers. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an example of moral universalism in practice that received its modern form in the Enlightenment, particularly in the formulations of Immanuel Kant (1785,1956). Based on these formulations, Coubertin developed Olympic ideology and Olympism. (Patsantaras 2008).

<sup>20</sup>Universalism has been described by some as cultural, economic or political imperialism (Bruce Kidd and Donnelly 2000: 134). In particular, the concept of human rights is often claimed to be fundamentally rooted in a politically liberal outlook which, although generally accepted in Europe, Japan and North America, is not necessarily taken as a standard elsewhere. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights) For example, in 1981, the Iranian representative to the United Nations, Said Rajaie-Khorassani, articulated the position of his country regarding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by saying that the UDHR was “a secular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition”, which could not be implemented by Muslims without trespassing the Islamic law. The former Prime Ministers of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, and of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad both claimed in the 1990s that Asian values were significantly different from western values and included a sense of loyalty and foregoing personal freedoms for the sake of social stability and prosperity, and therefore authoritarian government is more appropriate in Asia than democracy. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights).

<sup>21</sup>The question concerning a specific Olympic Ethics is a controversial and complicated one which surpasses the objectives of this article. For further analysis see: Deutsches Olympisches Institut Bundesinstitut fuer Sportwissenschaft 2001.

According to the Olympic movement, the UN and the IOC share the same philosophy and values. For instance Rogge points out that the UN endorsement of the Olympic Truce concept «reflects the universality shared by the United Nations and the Olympic Movement. The presence of the UN as a force for good is felt in more countries than even before.»<sup>22</sup> As far as the IOC and UN share the same philosophy, **it means that the goals of the Olympics and the Olympic movement in general, do not exist in the absence of human rights.** For example the acceptance and tolerance of diversity is located in the structure of the Olympic Charter,<sup>23</sup> which clearly declares respect for universal, fundamental and ethical principles. This is also pointed out by many politicians, such as Senator Tom Landos of California who argues that «universal fundamental ethical principles are part and parcel of the Olympic ideal.»<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand some articles in the Olympic charter -as well as the universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the work of many other international organizations- express a most ambitious dream or rather vision, that of the emergence of a shared humanity as a meaningful collective identification. (Forsythe 2012, et al.) In contrast, Simson and Jennings (1992) argue that all this is a utopia that explicitly negates race, nationality, ethnicity, gender and other differences. On the contrary this ideal may be unattainable, argues, Anita DeFrantz, President, Amateur Athletic Foundation, And Executive Board Member, International Olympic Committee<sup>25</sup>: “The Olympic movement is easily misunderstood from a distance. The main reason is that its philosophy is based on an ideal, which every mature person realizes may be impossible to attain. But then, that is the point. Even though the ideal may be unattainable, the Olympic movement encourages the struggle, believing it is worth pursuing, if only for the hopes<sup>26</sup> and dreams of our children [...] (p. 28) **The IOC’s respon-**

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<sup>22</sup>See: Sport for Peace: The Winning Difference. Remarks of Dr Jacque Rogge, President, International Olympic Committee to the United Nations, 31 October 2007. p.1 [http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en\\_report\\_1250.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_1250.pdf) accessed 10-5-2011

<sup>23</sup>We have to point out here that discussions on tolerance have often concern questions on what type of laws should exist and in particular, laws permitting or forbidding various kinds of social practices. It is certainly not just a question of what laws there should be. (Graham, 1996, 44-59). In Olympic space tolerance is regarded as a virtue. This means that the people involved in Olympic practices need to lose their hatred, their prejudices, or their implacable memories. And this is not a legal question.

<sup>24</sup>Senator Tom Landos (California), regarding the 2008 Olympics: US Congress (2001, p. 20) also available: ([http://www.house.gov/international\\_relations](http://www.house.gov/international_relations)).

<sup>25</sup>US Congress (1995).

<sup>26</sup>Dr Jacque Rogge (2007: 3) said “Sport alone cannot enforce or maintain peace [...] Sport is an important tool for international development [...] promotes tolerance and non discrimination [...] delivers hope to countries ravaged by war, poverty and disease.” In: [http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en\\_report\\_1250.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reports/EN/en_report_1250.pdf)

sibility is look downstream and to make sure that the athletes of the future, the children of today and tomorrow have something to obtain.” (p. 39)

In this spirit Olympic action/communication could eventually express a *collective utopia* in a world that after the end of the cold war, according to Bauman (1992: xxv), lost the ambitions and visions created by the European cultural paradigm in the last two centuries. In other words it remained without a collective utopia. In this framework, the Olympic movement, as it seems, despite the above-mentioned observations, continues to express the need for a collective utopia.<sup>27</sup> (Segrave: 2000)

On the other hand, **statements or declarations like ‘sport is a worldwide industry, a common denominator that breaks down all the walls’**, reveal that the international governance of sport today is inseparable from the global economy<sup>28</sup> and politics<sup>29</sup> on a wider scale. Governments from the so-called “first world” often use the appeal to human rights and the Olympics, as a representative of universal values, for their own political goals or a strategy of international propaganda, promoting the “promise of liberal freedom against the authoritarian regimes they do not like.”<sup>30</sup> (Kidd and Donnelly:134)

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<sup>27</sup>For example Jacques Rogge demonstrates: “Olympic Sport cannot solve all of the world’s ills, but it can contribute to meaningful solutions.” <http://www.olympic.org/content/Olympism-in-Action/Development-through-sport/IOC-President-meets-with-UN-Secretary-General-Ban-Ki-Moon/> Accessed 10-5-2011

<sup>28</sup>The economic transformation of the IOC took place during the presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch (1980-2001). His main target and policy was to achieve “global expansionism through aggressive commercial exploitation”. (Brooks 2002: 67). The role of the IOC in encouraging the growth of sports sponsorship is well documented. (See for example Payne 2005) The rigid commercialization of the Olympics drove to an expansion of the power of the IOC. Lauryn Beer, Director, at the Human Rights And Business Roundtable, The Fund for Peace, Washington, DC in the framework of the debate in Congress said that the Beijing Olympics affords a timely opportunity for creative partnering between the business and human rights communities to improve human rights and the climate for international business investing. (p. 7) <http://www.cecc.gov>

<sup>29</sup>Hoberman (1986:1) confirms, with many examples, the political role of the IOC, stressing that it would be an illusion to expect that the IOC is the moral authority that could dictate norms and ethical values to a sovereign government. Conversely also see “Olympic Truce”: A publication of the IOC. July 2009, Lausanne, Switzerland: “In this third millennium, the IOC [...] decided [...] to contribute to the search for peaceful and diplomatic solutions to the world’s conflicts.”(p.1) [http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reference\\_documents/Factsheets/Olympic\\_Truce.pdf](http://www.olympic.org/Documents/Reference_documents/Factsheets/Olympic_Truce.pdf)

According to Thomas Bach, one of the four IOC vice presidents: “There are two grand delusions in sport [...] The one delusion is that sport has nothing to do with money. And the other one is that it has nothing to do with politics. Both lead to unnecessary and sometimes disastrous debates.” (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/Olympics-Sized-Delusions-A-Look-Back-at-Beijing-2008--By-Ulrich-Fichtner,-Maik-Grossekathöfer-and-Detlef-Hacke>) (Accessed on 08/05/2012 08.05.2012)

<sup>30</sup>Can this initiative be included in Chomsky (2000) positions according to which the western powers do not intervene for the promotion of human rights but they use universalistic principles for their imperialistic interests?

To illustrate this, I will focus on some critical points -from the US Congressional censure of Beijing's 2000 and 2008 bids to host the Olympics- as they appear in a *forgotten* dialogue between IOC Member Anita de Franz President, Amateur Athletic Foundation and Executive Board Member, IOC and U.S. Senators at the United States Senate one hundred third Congress, First session, July 15, 1993<sup>31</sup>:

Senator Bradley Hon. Bill-New Jersey: "China human rights practises have remained repressive, falling far short of internationally accepted norms [...]" Senator De Concini, Hon. Dennis-Arizona: "The human rights record of the Chinese Communist dictatorship remain abysmal. [...] These human rights violations have been documented not only by our own State Department but also by international human rights organizations such as Asia Watch. (p. 8) I would like to say that the Olympic games are intended to demonstrate global good [...] How can these games be hosted by a government which considers its own people its enemies?" (p. 9) Statement of Richard Dicker, Attorney, Human Rights Watch: "[...] By selecting Beijing as the site for the games, the IOC will send a message that China's human rights practices are satisfactory. Statement of Anita DeFrantz: "[...] I want to state emphatically that concern for human rights is, and has been from the beginning, a fundamental tenet of the modern Olympic movement. The IOC charter states, and I quote: 'Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on respect for universal, fundamental ethical principles. In fact, independence is considered so cardinal a duty of IOC membership that each new member takes a solemn oath to remain free of political influence. I am duty bound by my oath. I love my country, and I will continue to sacrifice for it, but these resolutions urge me to break my Olympic oath in order to undertake a task for which my position is simply not well suited. The IOC and the modern Olympic movement can and should be considered an untiring friend in the quest for world peace and recognition of human rights.'" Senator Bryan: "May I also defer to you, Ms. DeFrantz, to make your own observations with respect to the observations in terms of the conditions in China, the repressive government and, indeed, the outrageous violations of basis and fundamental human rights." Ms DeFrantz: "[...] I said in my testimony that human rights are issues that are very important to us, the Olympic movement, and specifically to me. It is something that I care about." (p. 35) Senator Bryan: "Ms DeFrantz let me ask you what in your Judgment is the appropriate criteria to be used in conferring this award upon a city? [...]" Ms DeFrantz: I believe when I make my vote it is to confer responsibility on a city. It is a responsibility to be able to produce the venues and the housing for the athletes to meet their tests with history. (p. 37) The Olympic Games are a sporting event. They do not, in short, define the future of a nation.

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<sup>31</sup>US Congress (1995).

The responsibility is conferred, at least in my Judgment, based on how the athletes will be treated, how the Olympic movement will be treated, and finally how the city hosting the games will be treated.” (p. 38) Senator Bryan: “[...] those factors I think most would recognize are important. But [...] would it be relevant to consider what the human rights conditions are in a given country? Is that a relevant consideration in your own judgment? (p. 38) [...] as former Olympian yourself, give me your sense of how we weigh that on the scale of values with the other considerations, which you have acknowledged at least as one that you would consider, and that is the conditions with respect to human rights in a given country. I mean, give me your sense of where those are weighted on your own scale of values.” (p. 38) Ms. De Frantz : “[...] I worry that each time the government acts to arrest the Olympic movement it endangers this fragile organization based on trust [...]” (p. 39) Senator Bryan: “[...] “In other words, your obligation to the athletes but, in a sense that you have got some countries in the world in which the conditions are so repugnant that to host such an event seems to be antithetical to the Olympic spirit itself, even though it might impose hardship, disappointment, and frustration for athletes.” Ms DeFrantz: “*I guess I am a little confused.*” (p. 39)

**a. «I guess I am a little confused.»**

The above congressional dialogue and debate clearly illustrates the way politicians try to force the orientation of Olympic expectations, giving them a political direction. As a result confusion is created within the Olympic family as well as confusion between the system’s relations with the social environment, clearly expressed in De Frantz’s statement: «I guess I am a little confused». Indeed, the IOC declares that the games are about sport and not a stage for different kinds of political statements. However, as it seems in the congressional dialogue, the IOC in creating a **difference between itself and politics revealing its operative boundaries**. This is one of the main characteristics of social systems that distinguish their self-reference (Olympics) from hetero-reference (politics).

Alternatively, the IOC is one of the most important international organizations and is identified as a main political agent for globalization. (Brookes 2002: 65) In the last three decades the IOC has been responsible for major political decisions which have important economic consequences, **particularly in the selection of host venue for its major event the Olympic Games**, which can confer significant economic benefits on the successful city.<sup>32</sup> It seems -as shown in the

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<sup>32</sup>The benefits for the host city are debatable. The costs are enormous, eg. constructions, renovating stadiums as well as accommodations, media infrastructure etc. It was argued that local business would benefit, but this is debateable, as is the assertion that the local population would benefit. (Patsantaras 2007)

above congressional dialogue- that the IOC is more interested in the host venue of the Olympics (space) and less in promoting universal values and human rights.

Additionally, the IOC evaluates the success of the games in relation to economic terms. (Patsantaras 2007) So, if to earn money is among the yardsticks of value for the IOC then one need ask here, is it used to promote universal values and human rights? What is the IOC's moral duty? The next section examines and attempts to understand the IOC's moral duty by mainly using a system theoretical approach. The meaning of universal moral duty -an interesting question- is a complex and multifaceted one.

#### **4. Seeking the Meaning of the IOC's "Universal Moral Duty"**

Niklas Luhmann (1991: 17) argues that we have to approach questions on ethics, not through reformations and descriptions of the traditional texts, but through cooperation with regard to social theory (-ies) and ethic reflections. This theoretical approach allows for the following reflections.

President Rogge's statements and those of the Olympic movement -such as "the IOC has the moral duty to place sport at the service of humanity"- give Olympic sport activity and communication an ethical mission and character. Accordingly, the IOC perceives the lack of human rights in societies as a question of ethics and less as a question of politics or law! The Olympic charter is understood as a moral code which seeks universal approval. Using Luhmann's (1991: 23) theoretical approach, according to which social systems as function systems are related to their environment through functions and not through morality, we can argue that the Olympic system as a function system (Patsantaras 2008) cannot be related to other social spaces through moral or morality. In this framework of social reality, the IOC and the UN cannot be related simply on moral levels but they can through cooperation on functional levels.

In order to understand the mission of the Olympic movement through Olympism,<sup>33</sup> we need to firstly differentiate the meaning of competitive sport, since competitive/elite sport is the primary mission of the IOC. The social meaning of Olympic sport is reproduced mainly through the code Victory/Defeat (Patsantaras 2005, Schimank 1988). This operational/functional code formulates and reproduces a diversity of expectations and this code, as it appears in Olympic reality, displays extensive amoralism, eg. doping, gender discrimination, women's under-representation in the IOC, in sport governing bodies (SGBs), etc. (Patsantaras 2007, Kamberidou 2011b, 2012) In this perspective, it seems that morality is not a operational/functional or constitutional element of the Olympic system, but only a coordination code for Olympic activity that changes over the

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<sup>33</sup>According to the IOC, Olympism means to organise the Olympic Games, encourage new world records and build a peaceful and better world through sport.

course of time. Nonetheless morality and/or ethics have always constituted the main meanings of the Olympic charter. However, morality as a coordination code changes its functional dynamics in accordance to the prevailing social dynamics, a process of coordination that provides social viability. The functional dynamics of the Olympics are the inevitable consequences caused by *external forces*, eg. primarily the economy and politics in the recent past.<sup>34</sup> Consequently the Olympic social functional dynamics are not “self-directed”, but a response to prevailing norms of practical rationality.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, we need to examine and differentiate the IOC’s other mission, which is that of contributing to the creation of a better and peaceful world through sport. (Kamberidou 2012) Specifically, using sport activity, but not on an elite level. This mission is not under the influence of external forces and agendas (eg. politics, economy), but is an ethical/moral obligation/duty. This mission places sport in the service of ethics, specifically universal ethics. This area has been an arena for debate and discussions which surpass the topic of this paper. Though, I would only like stress here that these ambivalent (double) missions -reflected in the Olympic charter and promoted by the Olympic movement- create misunderstandings because they produce a variety of social expectations, which frequently conflict or are inconsistent with each other in prevailing social conditions, etc.

Using a system theoretical approach we can argue that ethics are embedded in the *structure of expectations*. (Luhmann 1991) Specifically, when social expectations change over time, that means that ethics change as well. Only in this framework can we examine the question related to the achievement or fulfilment of expectations that are related to the IOC’s moral duty. This change causes confusion that leads to doubting or questioning the *ethical identity* of the Olympic

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<sup>34</sup>Before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, Olympic expectations were strongly politicized. In the Cold War, through the differentiation between East and West— political systems or models like capitalism (liberalism) and Communism—politics derived its meaning through these differences and consolidated their power on an international level. This was strongly reflected in the IOC power structure. This strong *politicization* meant interventions in the orientation of expectations that were produced from the Olympics. Namely, a political color was given to these expectations. The most prominent examples here are the two boycotts (1980 Moscow and 1984 Los Angeles). With the end of the Cold War much has changed around the globe. We moved from a strong politicization to a-politicization of social life, specifically to a *de-idealization* of politics. This can have a positive effect on the Olympic movement due to its non-political character, namely its emancipation from politics. Today, to a high degree, we have an *economization* of social life. Communication is determined on economic terms. This means that every kind of action and communication has an important social meaning only if it produces economic expectations. The economy reacts in relation to social facts only if these facts have an importance which is evaluated in economic terms. Using its medium, money, the economy exploits this opportunity to intervene in the orientation of the social meaning of expectations that are produced by Olympic action and communication.

<sup>35</sup>See: Watson 1982, p.14.

movement and system through time and space. This confusion has produced, in accordance to prevailing conditions, social demonstrations, manifestations and conflicts (eg. Tibet). These conflicts have an indirect and positive result. They demonstrate the IOC's wider social-political role.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, could the non-fulfilment of expectations -for example human rights outside of Olympic space and time- mean that the IOC has not fulfilled its universal moral duty? This question has to do with the pragmatological composition of the Olympic movement, namely what it is really about. What is the social meaning of the Olympic movement? What it is about is really reproduced on the edge of a paradox that is created from ethics and rationality. In simple terms, the social meaning changes over time and space. This is confirmed in the arguments and statements of the members of the Olympic movement.<sup>37</sup>

These arguments on ethics have their roots in ideas formulated during the Age of Enlightenment and Modernity, and are connected/related to the ethical organization of societies. (Patsantaras 2007) During this period, enlightened ethical theories, (utilitarian or transendent) -that Coubertin had adopted- the ethical/moral question was an issue of ethical action without further examination of its rational character. In this framework, the Olympic movement was not able to determine with clarity the ethical action (praxis). Ethical praxis in Olympic sport is related to Olympic space and time. Consequently, the meaning of ethical praxis cannot be generalized outside of Olympic space and time. Outside of the Olympic system, ethical praxis is formulated in the frame of other territorial rationalities. In other words, Olympic values apply or are rejected according to general social interests. However, the IOC is perceived as an institution of ethical responsibility and formulates the social contexts in which the individual make his/her choices.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>These demonstrations may activate politics to develop tools for reconciliation. For details see Patsantaras 2007: 149-160.

<sup>37</sup>"Sport cannot solve all of the world's ills, but it can contribute to meaningful solutions." (Jacques Rogge 2011) <http://www.olympic.org/content/Olympism-in-Action/Development-through-sport/IOC-President-meets-with-UN-Secretary-General-Ban-Ki-Moon/> (Accessed on 10-5-2011)  
When Thomas Bach (2008), one of the four IOC vice presidents asked about the IOC's prediction according to which China would change for the better after the games, and that it would "open up" politically, he said: "Let's not kid ourselves. We, as the IOC, cannot change an entire society [...] All of that was done exceedingly well. [...] The organization, the sports complexes, the village, the support, everything was outstanding. [...] first of all, that is the most important aspect."  
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/Olympics-Sized-Delusions-A-Look-Back-at-Beijing-2008-By-Ullrich-Fichtner,Maik-Grossekaethoef,Detlef-Hacke> (Accessed on 08/05/2012 )

<sup>38</sup>There is no doubt that the centre of Olympic sports and Olympism is the individual as well as individual action. (Patsantaras 2008). **In the spirit of Olympic ideology, the athletes do not participate in the Olympic games exclusively for their desire to compete but in order to create a higher social level through collective effort since they are perceived as conveyors of superior ethical and**

Morgan (2002:11) argues that “ethical questions are self-referential in the sense that they concern what is good for us”. In this spirit a pragmatological composition of the Olympic movement establishes the limits/boundaries of its moral duty. As a specific collectivity the IOC through its choices, expresses its preference for what is good for itself, worth striving for and can be acquired or realized through goal-directed action. In this way the moral universality of the IOC is determined by its purposes and goals. Namely, moral universality can be evaluated according to its goals and purposes. When self-interest is observed in the IOC choices and purposes, then it is hypocritical to speak about morality and above all about the universal morality of the IOC and its members.<sup>39</sup>

We need point out here that morality, in accordance to the IOC, means mainly the reproduction of specific meanings based on specific criteria and rules/regulations, as they are defined in the Olympic Charter. Utopia is to believe that these criteria, could be used to reproduce the same social meanings outside of Olympic social space and time. The outside world does not regulate its relations according to the Olympic Charter. The continuously repeated statements by IOC members on peace through sport need to be understood in relation to olympic space and olympic time.<sup>40</sup> Namely, in which frame is the specificity of the Olympic meaning produced and reproduced. Outside or beyond this space and time, for example, the enforcement of human rights can take place only through cooperation with political institutions.<sup>41</sup>

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social values, such as those of the freedom of the individual, democracy, peace and Ecumenism (Aigner 1998:395– 401). In other words, in the spirit of Coubertin, the Olympic games are not perceived exclusively as an international sport competition, but as conveyors of a sport-religious idea, “*religio athletae*” (MacAloon 1981), namely as a conveyor of ethical values.

<sup>39</sup>I will not refer to the deviations of Olympic officials that have already been well documented (Ullrich 1999, Simson and Jennings 1992)

<sup>40</sup>Space and time hold a key position here with regard to misunderstandings or misconceptions about the Olympic phenomenon. In one of my articles I discuss this problematic selectively, focusing on the system theoretical sociology of N. Luhmann This theory seems very relevant in this context for understanding how the Olympics are constituted with regard to time and space.

<sup>41</sup>The implementation of human rights belongs to the nation-state. The IOC members are well informed about this. See also the above dialogue. For example the IOC created expectations on human rights that seldom were fulfilled. Lord Killanin (1978), stated that the Olympic charter can also be construed as a human rights document saying: “It is essential to protect the freedoms of the individual in regard to any form of discrimination, whether racial, political or religious, and the duty of governments to assist” (Lord Killanin in Algiers, *Olympic Review*, No. 131-32 (August –September 1978, p. 491). Jacques Rogge proposes to the UN to include access to sport and physical education as an indicator in its human development indexes; a call for common evaluation tools to monitor the impact of sport on social and economic development; and a call on UN Member States to cooperate with, and abide by, the Olympic Truce. <http://www.olympic.org/content/Olympism-in-Action/Development-through-sport/IOC-President-meets-with-UN-Secretary-General-Ban-Ki-Moon/10-5-2011>

## Concluding remarks

Olympic sports do not exist in a social void but in interrelation with a plethora of other social spaces, such as politics, the economy, technology and so forth. Olympic sports change with new developments in government, the media, technology, with new ideas and theories on masculinity and femininity, as well as cultural beliefs about race and ethnicity that influenced **and continue to influence** the structure and the organization of the Olympic movement. (Kamberidou 2011a, 2011b, Patsadaras & Kamperidou 2007)

Many articles in the Olympic Charter correspond in meaning with articles in the Declaration on Human Rights, leaving room for a diversity of interconnections of Olympic activity and communication with political expectations. The IOC however does not have, and has never had the political power, jurisdiction or authority to fulfil social expectations that are beyond/outside Olympic space and time. Consequently, when we use expressions or terms like the *universality* of certain Olympic values, we have to examine this universality in relation to Olympic sport and in relation to Olympic space and time. It is a conceptual mistake to use the same way of thinking to evaluate how Olympic meaning is used by the social environment in general, given that the meaning, the direction and the orientation of expectations outside of Olympic space and time is beyond the power or jurisdiction of the IOC.

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