

# THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN SPORT AND POLITICS

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## 1. Introduction

The Olympic Movement became famous above all for the Olympic Games, whereby the Games of the Olympiad are better known than the Winter Games. In the following, I will only refer to the Games of the Olympiad, also named Summer Games.

In my report, I will deal with the question, in which frame the Olympic Movement succeeded in following up its aims in the respective circumstances pretending not to act politically.

## 2. The Integration of the Olympic Movement

### 2.1. General Outlines

The Olympic Movement has become a phenomenon by mean of the Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games represent:

- a culmination in the career of an athlete
- a first class media event
- an enormous economic factor relative to
  - the effect for the host city and the host Country
  - the development of the sporting goods industry
  - the broadcasting systems and rights
  - the promotion
  - the sponsoring
  - a.s.o.
- an indicator of the aims and the sense of sport and its development
- a reflection of the general political, economic and social development

revealing

their own history and own development.

- a political factor in the world either in an active or in a passive way through the

decisions of the IOC, the NOC's and its behaviour .

- an important show-piece, which is used by the IOC to promote and spread the spirit

and the philosophy of Olympism and its educational requests.

Because the political, economic and social circumstances change mostly, the Olympic Movement has to face up to the new situations as well as all other acting persons and institutions (e.g. sport federations, NOC's, athletes but also politically, economically and socially acting persons and institutions).

## ***2.2. The Olympic Charter***

Through the Olympic charter, the Olympic Movement establishes an orientation and the degree of integration into the respective circumstances and development ruled by the outer world.

In its regulations the Olympic Movement

- pretends a most possible independence versus influence from outside
- creates the conditions for possible co-operation with political institutions (see e.g.

fundamental principles pt. 3, rule 2 pts 2,3,11; rule 19 pt. 1)

- declares its aims

A few examples show that the Olympic Movement does not only pretend its independence from public and economic influence but also tries to act in fields which normally belong to the state and public authorities. That means that the Olympic Movement plays a political role whether it likes to do it or not and despite the leaders' pretension to separate the Olympic and the political world. Mr. Samaranch was the first who also acted on the political stage consciously. During all his visits in countries with an NOC he actively searched the contact with the political state authorities pleading e.g. for a better understanding and promotion of the Olympic Movement and the Olympic aims.

The Olympic Movement is spreading the fundamental principles of Olympism by a universal and permanent activity . With the alliance of sport, culture and education the Olympic Movement tries to create - alone or in co-operation with other organisations - a better and peaceful world. The elements for achieving these aims should be implanted in the education of the youth through sport activities without discrimination and in the sense of mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity and fairness. The values of the Olympic Education must and can only be realised in addition or in co-operation with the education and the culture of the countries. The IOC recommends in this sense - whether it likes it or not - an influence on the education and educational systems and decisions of these countries. Therefore, it can not hide to exert an influence in respective political decisions. Although the principles of Olympism were described as universal, they can on one side create a co-operation but also enter into a certain competition with the educational system of a country through the provided priorities and the way to realise the aims.

### The IOC

- tries to attain the aims in co-operation with private and public institutions and authorities (charter rule 2, pt. 2)
- is opposed to all political and economic abuse of sports and athletes (charter rule 2, pt. 10)
- declares that every discrimination of a country or a person for racial, religious, political, sexual or other reasons is incompatible with the membership in the Olympic Movement (charter rule 3, pt 2)
- is an international non governmental Organisation NGO (charter rule 19, pt. 1) and pretends in that case not to be put under pressure by the countries' authorities but, as a NGO, to have the right to intervene in fields normally regulated by state and political decisions (e.g. education!). Its members are not allowed to act on behalf of governments, organisations and persons which could create a dependency .
- chooses the host city for the Olympic Games only in case the respective authorities of the country guarantee to respect the Olympic Charter (charter rule 37, pt. 3), the financial needs to organise the games in co-operation with regional or private authorities.
- demands on behalf of the athletes to accept the principle of fairplay, non-violence, a behaviour appropriate to the sports ground.

These examples prove that the IOC and the Olympic Movement can influence the countries political acting on different spheres but does not intervene directly into the politics even it seems having been necessary to outstanding persons. We can refer e.g.

to 1936 (Olympic Games in Germany with his degrading national socialist system), 1956, 1968, 1979 (Occupation of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan by the USSR) or 1962 - 1972 (War in Vietnam, but also real discrimination of black citizen by formal equalisation) for reasons of ignoring the principles of non-violence and non-discrimination. In contrast to this the IOC always has attempted, if necessary, to get support by political authorities if it could further, e.g., the organisation of the Olympic Games or the realisation of the Movements aims.

### ***2.3. Sport and Politics - single statements during the Olympic congress Baden-Baden 1981 and the centennial congress - congress of unity Paris 1994***

The international recognition is an important fact for the Olympic Movement and its possibilities to act without restrictions. IOC President, Mr. Samaranch, obtained the recognition of the IOC by the UNO, UNESCO, and probably of all states' political authorities as a NGO on an international or supranational level. On this basis, the IOC could treat political problems connected with the Olympic Movement more actively than in the past. If we compare only the discussions and resolutions of the Olympic congress' of 1981 and 1994 as a very small basis, we can admit, that there was a little progress in accepting and treating the interdependence between sport and politics. In 1981 sport and politics were no topic under discussions but it figured as a special subtopic in 1994 (Rapport p. 267 - 78). in 1981 Willi Daume referred to the danger that there existed different interpretations of the same texts, e.g. about the contents of political influence on sports' organisations and sport activities and the defence of it, democratisation of the Olympic Movement, banning racism. That could provoke different and also opponent acts and aims (see Kongress p. 22/23). The different interpretations and points of view explain themselves by belonging to different political convictions, cultures and societies. It probably was and is impossible to reach concrete uniformed aims and acts. This might be the reason for Mr Samaranch to require a position of non interference between political authorities and the Olympic Movement (Kongress p. 33). It is the attempt to prevent the danger that the Movement could be stressed by the impossibility to come to unanimous decisions in very important problems. In spite of the occupation of Afghanistan by the USSR - a flagrant disrespect of the principal of non-violence - Moscow remained host city for the Games of 1980. The political fact was not officially mentioned and was prevented from having an influence, because it would have harmed the Movement. As a reaction, Sergei Pawlow, President of the USSR NOC, declared that the boycott of the Moscow Games failed, because only 50 NOC's didn't participate, and it was an attempt to politicise the Games (Kongress p. 76/77). Mr. Helmick too advocated to prevent entering politics and political discussions into the Movement (Kongress p. 53/54) and to induce the countries world-wide to recognise the IOC and not to exert pressure on the election of the host city and the Games themselves, but to further sports' activities as well as the development of the positive effects of sports activities.

Concerning the summaries of reports on the topic sport and politics, in 1994 the centennial congress showed a change of mood in that respect (Rapport p. 273 - 78). It was recognised that sport and politics can not be separated in a strict and simple way

but that an interdependence of sport and politics must be accepted and that this interdependence could be useful and be applied. The Olympic Games and the Olympic Movement had meanwhile become a phenomenon of a political dimension. Through the Games, Mr. S. Akpaev stated, Estonia could further and strengthen its self-confidence as a young nation and find his recognition on international scale (Rapport p. 277). The final document points out that the Olympic Movement has to maintain good communicative relations with the governments. But the governments are requested to respect the Olympic Movement and its independence. Sport (and in my interpretation, especially the Olympic games) shouldn't be abused for political reasons (Rapport p. 436)

### **3. Relations between sport and politics**

If we take politics not only as a decision making process of governments and parliaments for the regulation of public act and aims but, e.g., also as a 'phenomenon which appears with the living together of people and has a creating influence on life in society' ( Rösch p. 8) we can state that sport and politics have many aspects in common. Sport too is a phenomenon of living and acting together of a lot of people with great importance in social and human life. Sport and politics can melt together and have merged into sport politics. We understand sport politics as a process of planning and decision making in fields which belong to sport in a closer or extensive sense . Apart from sport activities we can focus ethics, human behaviour, self-control, social context and so on. Public institutions (such as governments, parliament, administration), private institutions (such as sport federations, -unions), social groups act on this field either separately or together. Politics and political decisions provide the setting for acting in sport and sport movements, -federations and -unions have fought for a framework which makes it worth-while acting in it. This is a simple but important explanation of the interdependence between sport and politics. That one can not be politically neutral under such conditions is a logic conclusion because a neutral position as regards to a phenomenon, a social or political development, a political proceeding, decisions or statements influencing sport and its organisations, events and aims is eo ipso a political statement too! If we agree to this, we can not separate the Olympic Movements and politics even the Olympic Movement tries to achieve its aims in the greatest independence possible. As a universal Movement, it endeavours to realise a peaceful world and it stands for equality and non discrimination. These values are also declared aims of different political and social groups and systems in their own understanding. They can not be separated from the acting persons and organisations. Sport, sport activities, sport results have always got an enlarging influence and importance on spectators and interested people through mass media. Therefore investing in sport is, in the long run, a cheaper possibility to present a nation and a (political) system. To be recognised on the field of sport was and is today synonymous with the recognition on the international level, and it serves to strengthen the national identity.

To use sport events and sport organisation in order to explain or spread political messages or to abuse them as stage for self-performing acts, is well known also in the history of the Olympic Games. The tragedy of Munich 1972 was caused by the politically motivated assassination of the PLO. That assassination was meant to attract the world's attention to the situation and demands of the Palestinian people. That assassination became a major danger for the Games. The violation of the Games and the respect toward the victims would have been reasons enough for a breaking off the Games. IOC-President Brundage's "The Games must go on" concluded all discussions, thoughts and decisions giving the whole a most political dimension. Not to be subject to extortion was one of the major considerations for the responsible persons of the Olympic Movement and also meant as a gesture towards to the host city and country. The Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games were rarely free of questions, problems and influence from the public and the political sphere.

#### **4. Political influence on the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games**

##### ***4.1. Baron Pierre de Coubertin***

With his idea to renovate the Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin had also in mind to introduce a reform of the educational system in France. Great importance should be placed on sport practice. Apart from the body strengthening aspects, sport practice should also be an instrument for furthering the moral and social behaviour of the French youth. Sport should be a germ-cell for the rebirth of democracy, the collective force and the social freedom. Without any doubt the renewal of the Olympic Games should be an encouragement to achieve this aims in and for France. The peaceful Olympic competitions should be a challenge for France and its educational system (Herms p. 60 -65). Combined with that thoughts Coubertin would like to change the position of France in Europe and the world after the defeat of 1870/71 and in the challenge of imperialism (Herms p. 65, Krüger p. 64, Lochmann p. 22/23 and 111). Therefore, we have to recognise that already at the very beginning political reasons also belonged to Coubertin's tasks to renew the Games as well as the wish to further the moral behaviour of mankind by means of experiencing of sport practice, to initiate mutual understanding, internationalism and the progress of mankind. (Herms p. 63)

##### ***4.2. Political facts in Olympic Games***

Without treating the whole political influence and all pressure attempts it can be shown that the Olympic Movement could rarely organise and celebrate the Olympic Games without political problems.

##### ***War and the Olympic truce***

The World War One and Two prevented the Olympic Games of 1916, 1940 and 1944. The Olympic truce of the antiquity - much discussed in its interpretation, and real

effect by many authors - couldn't put to life again, too. The mentioned Games dropped out, other wars continued during the Games.

### Boycotts

The Games of 1936 were well organised but politically exploited by the national socialist regime. An initiative to boycott the Games was discussed in the USA but did not succeed. Mr. Brundage, the later IOC-President, played a very dubious role during the discussions so that the American team didn't boycott the Games.

Boycotts and discussions to boycott the Olympic Games for several mostly political reasons had accompanied the Games for a very long time of their history.

In 1968 the invitation to participate of the south African team was withdrawn by reasons of boycott's threat by African and socialist states. The political pressure forced the opposing IOC-President Brundage to give up his position in order not to mix sport activities and politics, because, otherwise the Games would have been in danger for political reasons.

In 1972 Rhodesia was expelled for the reason of racist politics. African states fought for that expelling with a boycott's menace, too. Brundage had to admit political pressure in sport and Olympic Organisation once more. He spoke in that particular case of "political extortion" (Pfeiffer p. 201)

In 1976 the IOC did not follow the demands of 16 African states that intended to expel New Zealand because of New Zealand's sport organisations contacts with South Africa, the apartheid-state, that was expelled for that reason from the IOC 1970. In reaction to the decision not to expel New Zealand, 29 African teams withdrew.

In 1980, in spite of the occupation of Afghanistan by the USSR IOC-President Lord Killanin considered the Games as an event independent of political contexts. The Games should be held in Moscow or nowhere else. But his trial to separate sport and politics failed. Under the leadership of the USA some states were placed under a boycott for political reasons, mostly by western-capitalist states. Only 81 of about 130 possible teams competed in the Games of Moscow.

As an act of revenge the Games of Los Angeles of 1984 were boycotted by 13 teams, the USSR being on the top, for reasons of discrimination (questions of visa for team accompanying people) and lack of security, especially for Russian citizens. In reality however it was because the USA boycotted the Moscow Games. Despite the boycott, 141 teams joined the Games and led the first commercially organised Games to a large success.

In 1988 the GDR seemed to have prevented a possible boycott of the Games by the socialist states. The GDR wouldn't stand out of the Games two times in succession. They wanted to take the chance to show their own people and the whole world the

superiority of their political and sports system and increase the national prestige. (compare Gross)

The boycott movements are a mirror of the political situation and development of the respective time. The de-colonisation created many new states that wished to strengthen their national identity and exerted influence not only on the pure political level (e.g. in the UNO) but also on other fields. The new states also let the IOC feel their will and influence. The relation of power began to change. Especially the African states tried to fight against racist systems. They thought such systems would stand in contradiction to the Olympic principles of non violation and non-discrimination. By using political pressure to change such contradictions, they endangered the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games in the mind of the insiders. The Olympic Movement had to take note of this change and development at the disadvantage of the industrialised states. The contradictions within the political blocks were the main reason for the boycotts of 1980 and 1984. Political relation of power and incompatible political aims were drags in the Olympic movement. It was obvious that from now on sport and politics could not be separated anymore.

#### ***4.3. Further political influence***

Düching shows that already in the Games of London 1908 there were discussions between American and British officials and also in the media reports with a political background. The very sensible American self consciousness disturbed the relation between the former British colonist's descendants and the former mother country's representatives for several reasons. The missing flag during the opening ceremony, an apparently unjust treatment of a few American athletes and the larger interest in the Games of 1908 opposite to the Games of St. Louis in 1904 by Coubertin were reasons, that American officials complained of being treated unfairly and also the British arrogance.

1912 Hungary and Bohemia (both components of the Austrian empire) and Finland (in a personal union with the empire of the Russian tsar) were acknowledged as participants countries. Austria and Russia demand to strike the three teams out of the participant countries list.

Germany (1920,1924, 1948), Austria (1920), Japan (1948) were not invited to participate in the relevant Olympic Games as a 'punishment' for being responsible for the war, the victims and the damages. In 1948 Germany was still under the 4 power status and not free and without a recognised NOC. 1952 the Federal Republic of Germany RFG could re participate the first time, but not the German Democratic Republic GDR. Their NOC was not yet acknowledged. That decision represents the relation of power between the west and the east in the IOC at the beginning of the cold war. The 'German-problem' was solved step by step according to the change of political relations world wide. Between 1956 and 1964 athletes of the GDR and RFG participated in a united German team. It was in 1968 when GDR could send an

independent team to Games for the first time.

1952 was the first participation of a Soviet team. For political and security reasons the Soviets wouldn't live in the Olympic village. They wanted to separate their athletes from contacts to the class-enemy. There had to be built a separated second Olympic village for athletes and officials of the eastern states!

The solution of the politically important question of the representation of China and Korea lasted till 1980, when the Peoples Republic of China PRC participated for the first time without that Taiwan had to leave the IOC as PRC requested. The Peoples Republic of Korea PRK was recognised by the IOC in 1963 but it hesitated to participate till 1972. The PRK kept away from the Games of 1988 in Seoul for political reasons.

1968 the Mexican authorities fought against students demonstrations a few days before the Games started. Over 300 of the demonstrators were killed by the police that were omnipresent during the Games in Mexico City to guarantee 'peaceful' games. That incident was probably overlooked by the IOC and the Olympic movement without a discussion and an adjusted reaction. Inner political problems of a state should not be treated and commented by the IOC even if they reveal injustice in the host city and host Country!

During the 200m Sprint victory ceremony of 1968, Tommy Smith and John Carlos protested against racism, apartheid and discrimination with a raised fist in a black glove. The Protest had been announced in advance after the failing of a black American athlete's boycott initiative. The situation in the USA with the formal equalisation of black people by lasting discrimination in reality, the murder of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy (both of them carrying hopes of the black Americans to change the bad situation), reinforced a climate of protest in the 68's in the USA (radicalism of black power) and the long discussion among the expulsion of the Republic of South Africa provoked that protest. It is astonishing that Smith and Carlos were immediately expelled from the US-team and the Olympic village immediately without any protest of African teams nor the IOC. The discrimination of black people in the USA was obvious in that time and if we raise the fundamental principle of non-discrimination from the sport ground to a higher level, it can also be seen as an offence against this principle. Although South Africa was expelled - reluctantly - for reason of discrimination through apartheid, the theme of discrimination was not discussed and not sanctioned in the USA. Not the USA were accused but the athletes, namely for having imported political influence into the Games.

## **5. Conclusions**

The persons responsible of the Olympic movement tried to keep political influence

outside of the Movement and the Games. They insisted on a separation of sport and politics as a separation of politics and the Olympic Movement. They also insisted on an independent development of the Olympic Movement free from political influence.

We could show that such a separated development of the Olympic Movement from political influence has probably never existed in practice and can not be pretended.

The Olympic movement has included political thoughts from the very beginning.

We have to accept the existence of political influence and pressure on the Olympic Movement. There is no use to deplore this influence. The Olympic movement has to find the way how to handle the political questions and problems which come will come into the Movement by circumstances, which change political power relations in the world and the IOC's members way of acting itself.

The Olympic movement itself can also be seen as a movement which spreads political influence in a wider sense through the aims it follows up for trying to contribute to a better world is also a goal which needs change of political and social situations and systems in the world.

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