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The role of advocacy organisations for ethical mega sport events

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ABSTRACT

Non-governmental organisations have sought to enshrine progressive and ethical principles, protocols, and practices into governance arrangements for mega sport events. Evidence on whether, and how, they influence awarding bodies and events for the better, however, is scarce. Two research questions guided the present research: What role human rights advocacy organisations play at different stages of the event lifecycle? What is the nature of relationships between advocacy organisations and event awarding bodies to ensure that human rights are effectively embedded into decision-making processes? The authors conducted interviews with representatives from three advocacy organisations campaigning for human rights, two event awarding bodies and two intermediary organisations. A thematic analysis revealed four central themes: accepting responsibility for human rights; considering events as human-rights leveraging opportunity; facilitating within-coalition balance and independence of advocacy organisations; and implementing good governance and structural change. The findings contribute to the understanding of advocacy organisations within the sport event context by identifying relevant roles and relationships (including success factors and burdens on human rights).

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1. Introduction

The protection and promotion of human rights have been improved by the actions of influential international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations that have monitored, published and intervened to address abuses across the world (Næss, 2020). In the context of mega sport events (MSEs), these organisations have sought to hold organisers and host governments accountable for the impact of their activities on affected individuals and groups (Horne, 2018). Building on the work of the Sport and Rights Alliance (SRA) and the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB), coalition organisations like the Centre for Sport and Human Rights (CSHR) have brought together key actors including Amnesty International, Transparency International, Terre des hommes and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to devise and implement policies and procedures within the institutional arrangements of MSEs. They have sought to

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enshrine progressive and ethical principles, protocols and practices into the governance arrangements for these events. In response, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) have each made their own commitments to incorporate explicit human rights policies across the event lifecycle, including the bidding, planning, delivery and legacy phases of their MSEs (Heerd, 2018).

While there has been progress in drawing MSE-awarding bodies and host governments into acknowledging the importance of protecting and promoting human rights, there has been little research exploring how progress has been achieved and what role advocacy organisations (e.g. NGOs, charities and civil society organisations) have played. In particular, we know little about the relationships between these organisations and important MSE stakeholders, which strategic approaches organisations have taken to persuade important others about the protection and promotion of human rights and how effective they have been. There is also little research on the importance of advocacy organisations at different stages in the MSE lifecycle. What evidence exists suggests that, if human rights concerns are considered at the vision and bidding stages, then there is a greater likelihood of the event being leveraged successfully (MSE Platform, 2018). We employ advocacy organisations as an umbrella term to refer to NGOs (e.g. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch), charities (e.g. UNICEF), civil society organisations (e.g. Transparency International) and coalitions (e.g. Centre for Sport and Human Rights) that advocate for human rights to be protected and promoted (here: in the context of MSEs). We recognise there are differences in the constitution, funding arrangement and role of each organisational entity, but each shares a commitment to improve human rights practices of MSEs.

This paper seeks to address this research gap by exploring how advocacy organisations seek to inform, influence and secure change towards the production of ethical MSEs. Ethical events are those that comply fully with human rights principles and practices as proposed by the United Nations (UN) in their *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* published in 2011. These principles outline state responsibilities to protect human rights, corporate responsibilities to respect human rights and access to remedy for those whose rights have been infringed. In the MSE context, host governments and awarding bodies are expected to comply with these guiding principles. The two research questions (RQs) guiding the study are:

RQ1: What role human rights advocacy organisations play at different stages of the MSE lifecycle?

RQ2: What is the nature of relationships between advocacy organisations and MSE awarding bodies to ensure that human rights are effectively embedded into decision-making processes?

2. Literature review

2.1. Human rights issues at mega sport events

Since the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, human rights issues have been increasingly prominent, reflecting a renewed focus from advocacy organisations in MSEs as a vehicle to draw the world's attention to abuses and to propose change (Caudwell & McGee, 2018). One particular human rights issue related to MSEs is the forced eviction of residents and

the resulting gentrification processes. This has been both a historical (e.g. Seoul and Calgary [as the hosts of the 1988 Olympic Games]; Davis, 2010; Olds, 1998) and a more recent concern in the 21st century (e.g. Summer editions of the Olympic Games in Beijing [as the host of the 2008 Olympic Games], London [2012], Rio de Janeiro [2016] and Tokyo [2020]) (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2007). Freeman (2015) comments on the removal of the Metrô favela, a community that was located close to the Maracanã stadium in Rio de Janeiro. Furthermore, Suzuki et al. (2018) report how the Japanese elderly and homeless were denied autonomy when being evicted from their homes in preparation for the event in Tokyo. Kennelly and Watt (2012) evidence gentrification in East London and Zheng and Khan (2011) report price increases for homes close to the Beijing Olympic site, resulting in gentrification. These trends have also been observed in South African and Brazilian World Cup host cities (Newton, 2009; Rolnik, 2013).

Violations of labour rights, particularly concerning migrants, in the construction of event facilities and in the production of merchandise and other services connected to MSEs have been reported for several events (Play Fair, 2008). Shantz (2011) discusses the exploitation of migrant workers from Latin America who were employed to construct event sites for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games. While the “Play Fair” campaign aimed to protect and promote the labour rights of Olympic Games workers (Timms, 2012), major inequality and poverty concerns for transnational labour markets remain. Qatar, as the host of the 2022 World Cup, received attention regarding the violations of labour rights in the construction of event sites but also the potential of the MSE to catalyse labour reforms in the country (Engle, 2014; Renkiewicz, 2015-2016).

MSEs have also been associated with a lack of freedom of opinion, expression and movement in many host countries. Suppressed freedom of speech has often been observed in close connection with the media (Jefferson Lenskyj, 2004). Coaffee (2015) describes how freedom of movement and assembly was restricted during the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games. Important legal and social rights were partly suspended, and people who wanted to express themselves were afraid of negative consequences (e.g. the LGBT community). The issue of media censorship was raised as early as the 1978 World Cup in Argentina (Smith, 2002), but was particularly noted during the Beijing Summer Olympics and the Sochi Winter Olympics. For example, Brownell (2012) shows that human rights issues were poorly covered in Chinese media prior to, and during, Beijing 2008 due to state censorship policies. Burchell (2015) describes the infiltration of the Olympic site in Sochi by single actors (e.g. Pussy Riot members) in an effort to raise awareness for topics that were neglected by accredited media. These actors wanted to raise public awareness of how politicians used the event to rebrand the country and engaged in sportswashing (Chadwick, 2018).

MSEs have also been intentionally used by hosts as contexts for direct political repression. This was the case for the Nazi regime-controlled 1936 Berlin Olympic Games (Mandell, 1971) and can still be observed today. Müller (2017) notes that, “hierarchical and intransparent decision-making, elite capture, a neopatrimonial political system encouraging rent-seeking, weak rule of law, dysfunctional formal institutions, limited civil society activism and citizen participation” (p. 1128) are all factors that cause political repression via facilitating what he describes as “event seizure” where elites that are closely connected to the event take possession of development agendas to impose their own priorities. Furthermore, MSEs can be part of a diplomatic strategy to increase agency in

international affairs (Mason et al., 2006). Furthermore, Grix and Lee (2013) present cases from MSE hosting in Brazil, China and South Africa, while others refer to Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup as a means to regenerate their soft power capabilities (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2014).

Lastly, sex trafficking has been reported in association with several MSEs (Hayes, 2010), including the Olympic Games in Athens (Hayes, 2010), Vancouver (Deering et al., 2012) and London (Ward, 2011). Several negative consequences of sex trafficking can be assumed. For example, Deering et al. (2012) note that hosting can increase police harassment as well as displacement of local sex workers, which results in the loss of safe space and criminalization for these workers. However, programmes such as the soccer bonanza initiative in the context of the South Africa 2010 FIFA World Cup may educate people and serve advocacy purposes. Richter and Massawe (2010) note that this will only be the case if they are actually implemented around host cities, which was not always the case in South Africa.

While previous studies have explored the relationships between MSE hosting and human rights and the related ethical aspects, there is little research and managerial advice that has considered the role of advocacy organisations in leveraging these events to improve human rights outcomes. This is despite the fact that McGillivray et al. (2019) have suggested that NGOs should be integrated into the bidding, planning and delivering MSEs from early on, to ensure "transparency and inclusiveness of the governance structure" (p. 184). In what follows, we explore the role of advocacy organisations in the context of MSEs.

2.2. Advocacy organisations, mega sport events and human rights promotion

Previous studies explored the relationships between MSE hosting and societally relevant outcomes. Most notably, research within the sport for development and peace paradigm provides important insights into whether, how and when MSEs promote social outcomes. The paradigm suggests that, when intentionally leveraged, sport programmes and events can lead to direct social impacts in host communities and for host populations (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). While much of the sport for development and peace-related research has focussed on targeted programs designed for specific individual and social outcomes, MSEs might have the potential to induce broader positive social changes (e.g. Schulenkorf et al., 2016).

Specific to the potential of MSEs to promote progressive human rights agendas, McGillivray et al. (2019) proposed a conceptual framework highlighting a life-cycle approach to embedding human rights in the bidding, planning and delivery of MSEs. This model advocates that MSEs include "good governance, democratic participation of stakeholders, formalisation of human rights agendas and urban development for strengthening human rights" to realise their potential for positive social change (p. 185). Inclusiveness of stakeholders by international sport organisations and hosting committees within the governance structure is critical to the development of human rights-based change through MSEs (McGillivray et al., 2019). However, with respect to MSEs, threats to embedding a human rights agenda have often included a lack of transparency and inclusiveness in governance structures and a resistance to adopt human rights-based governance models. Indeed, inherent tensions in shared governance

and transparency have often been observed and reported in sport contexts that hinder sport's potential to deliver positive social outcomes. For example, Hayhurst and Frisby (2010) explored both Canadian and Swiss sport and identified several tensions that threatened development and peace building via sport in their countries (without a particular focus on events). Specifically, competing values and role perspectives among stakeholders, lack of independence from high-performance sport and resource dependency were identified as creating imbalances between partners in national sport that prevented more fruitful collaboration among NGOs and partners (see also Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Shaw & Allen, 2006). Tensions have also been reported in the event leveraging literature (Chalip, 2014, 2018; Smith, 2014). While MSEs have the potential to create a social leverage (Chalip, 2006), limitations to social leveraging have been reported by several authors. For example, Misener et al. (2015) found that social leverage ambitions were not always fed by programmes and activities for the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games that would lead to long-term effects, and that there was a lack of clarity, resources and monitoring effort.

Without collaboration, sport governing bodies and host committees may face pressure and disruption from stakeholders, preventing the formalisation of human rights agendas. McGillivray et al. (2019) suggest that their human rights-based MSE governance model may be dependent on the work of NGOs seeking to promote human rights issues and specifically change practices of MSEs and sport governing bodies in relation to human rights. In this sense, the role of advocacy organisations may act similarly to what Schulenkorf (2012) calls change agents related to sport for development and peace efforts. According to Schulenkorf, change agents are external organisations that initiate agendas, facilitate communication among stakeholders and promote participation in the development process. Thus, advocacy organisations may be important actors as change agents in the conceptual model for rights-based MSE governance to bridge gaps between sport organisations and other stakeholders in pursuit of human rights outcomes, particularly early in the MSE lifecycle.

In the past, advocacy organisations have acted as change agents in the context of MSEs. Tavella (2007) notes that the prevention of human trafficking associated with MSEs was successful due to NGOs' collaboration efforts with law enforcement agencies and the support they received to run hotlines, shelters and public campaigns in the context of the event. Additionally, Engle (2014) outlines how the European Court of Human Rights helped reduce and prevent the use of slave labour in preparation for the Qatar World Cup. Erfani (2015), however, cautions that Qatar, despite its membership of the International Labour Organization, had not widely incorporated the labour principles into its legislative mandates (in contrast to South Africa and Brazil, where trade unions pressured stakeholders to adhere to labour standards). Without strong partnerships with advocacy organisations, Qatar instead had to respond to pressure from negative media attention and stakeholders and eventually amended its labour laws to better protect migrant workers. Finally, Kirschner (2019) critically assesses FIFA's efforts and demands that there should be a meaningful engagement of stakeholders, the monitoring should be increased and transparency should be higher. The mandate should be given to multiple stakeholders not only to develop a human rights strategy, but also to monitor the human rights performance and make an impact assessment (e.g., via a predetermined human

rights evaluation matrix). This mandate may be better facilitated through the work of advocacy organisations.

In the MSE context, good governance principles and procedures apply to stakeholders from countries around the world but are often culturally and nationally bound as regards the hosting country (and its legal frameworks) (Koenigstorfer et al., 2019; McGillivray et al., 2019; Müller, 2015). Across the stages of MSEs, advocacy organisations can mediate or moderate discussions and influence outcomes via different tools without being directly involved in the production of the event (e.g. exerting indirect political power, increasing awareness in the media). McGillivray et al. (2019) propose pathways to a human rights-based agenda. The pathways can lead to ethical outcomes when host organisations engage with key stakeholders that aim to protect and promote human rights as well as when they include vulnerable populations (advocacy organisations are key stakeholders that might represent these populations). Ideally, their inclusion happens at the initial stage with the aim to strategically and operationally leverage social outcomes (Misener et al., 2018). To date, however, there is a void of research into whether, and how, advocacy organisations influence MSEs in connection with securing and promoting human rights.

3. Methodology

To partly fill this research gap and address our two guiding research questions, we followed an interpretive approach. From an epistemological perspective, interpretivists generate knowledge about research topics that are time-bound, context-dependent and ideographic. This approach is appropriate for our case of MSEs, which follow different requirements for different host years and for different events. They also take place in different national and cultural contexts, where the role of advocacy organisations is often not driven by laws and regulations. The interpretivist approach is also suitable where cause–effect relationships cannot be easily identified (as in our case for MSEs and their often informal relationship with advocacy organisations) and where an interactive, cooperative approach is needed to understand and explore behaviours and relationships between actors (again, as is the case for our research; leading representatives in the domain can be assumed to rarely participate in academic research on sensitive topics) (see Chowdhury, 2014, for the epistemological grounding of our work).

We undertook a rigorous development of a qualitative semi-structured interview guide (Kallio et al., 2016). In agreement with Næss (2020) recommendations, we focussed on advocacy organisations that have been active in the MSE human rights space rather than starting with a theory-based identification of actors. The research team conducted seven elite interviews with top-management representatives from: three organisations campaigning for human rights (one is concerned with all human rights abuses, one is focused on child rights, one is focused on corruption); two MSE awarding bodies; and two intermediary organisations that advise and advocate on the implementation of human rights for businesses and organisations in sport settings. All organisations operate on an international level and most have their headquarters in Switzerland. The number of participants is considered adequate due to the small number of highest-level in-person actors in the domain (i.e. five MSEs; Müller, 2015; and a limited number of advocacy and mediating organisations; see; Sonntag, 2020, who considered five high-level experts in her research on sport diplomacy). While this number is adequate, it is necessary to

acknowledge that time spent building contacts with a larger constituency of organisations and actors in this space would strengthen future work in the area. In presenting the findings of the study, we use acronyms to reflect the type of organisation being represented.¹

As we followed the interpretative approach, we let participants construct the reality as much as possible. The guideline helped us focus on human-rights sensitive topics that would be difficult to address following the positivistic research paradigm. Subjectivity was accepted and considered to be informative towards answering our research questions (Anderson Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The interviews were conducted between March and May 2020 and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

We analysed the interview data using a thematic analysis approach (Braun et al., 2016), combining the data-driven inductive approach and the literature-informed deductive approach. The latter was undertaken by referring to McGillivray et al.'s (2019) model to formalise human rights agendas in MSE governance. Templates were used, which aligned with the model and the semi-structured interview guide (Crabtree & Miller, 1999), relating to the phenomena identified in the model, particularly "promoting good governance" and "formalising human rights agendas" as these were most relevant to the present study. While the templates were developed a priori based on research questions and the conceptual model, inductive procedures were followed to code the data.

Transcripts were initially read by two members of the research team. An open coding framework was developed, whereby a priori and emergent issues were considered (resulting in 25 initial codes). Specifically, we were interested in codes and themes that described the specific roles advocacy organisations played across the life cycle of MSEs and the nature of relationships with other MSE stakeholders in this process. We iteratively went back and forth between the phenomena described in the templates and the interviews to explore the roles of advocacy organisations in the MSE context until no more new codes emerged. All members of the research team engaged in discussions throughout the coding process. As a result, we defined the codes and ended the process when each code had been collated (Braun et al., 2016). In total, 21 codes were defined.

Next, we identified and reviewed central themes. Codes belonging together were clustered in analytic categories and then related to four themes, which were defined and named. These themes, different from the phenomena described by McGillivray et al. (2019) were: accepting responsibility for human rights; considering events as human-rights leveraging opportunity; facilitating within-coalition balance and independence of advocacy organisations; implementing good governance and structural change.

4. Findings

4.1. *Accepting responsibility for human rights*

One of the reasons advocacy organisations have been operating in the MSE space is the growing recognition that these events produce and accentuate human rights

¹Acronyms were used because participants requested their identity to be concealed. This is reasonable, given the limited number of MSEs (Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, EURO, Commonwealth and Asian Games; Müller, 2015) – each of them is hosted every four years only.

infringements in the host city and/or country, especially in the planning and delivery phases. Prominent advocacy organisations including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Transparency International have been actively drawing attention to human rights abuses perpetrated under the banner of MSEs since at least the early 2000s, but particularly since the award of the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing in 2001. While advocacy organisations have historically employed different strategies depending on their specific focus, these can be helpfully defined as *naming* (“human rights are abused”), *shaming* (“FIFA is responsible”), *legal pressure* (“The IOC has to adhere to the UNGP”) and *collaboration* (“let’s work together”).

Although each MSE awarding body has experienced different trajectories in their engagement with human rights issues, in the early 2000s, there was little evidence that any of them accepted responsibility for human rights infringements as an outcome of their events. There was even less evidence that the consideration of human rights was embedded formally in their governance structures. One interview participant from an advocacy organisation mentioned the following with respect to the two most influential awarding bodies, the IOC and FIFA:

There was no language of human rights anywhere in the Olympic Charter, in any of the statutes for the federations, and so what I’ve tried to do really since 2007 [...] is to entrench human rights standards within these major sporting bodies and federations as part of their own systems. [...] So I want to be clear that from that, dating back to the mid-thousands, these bodies have said, ‘This is not our problem’. FIFA didn’t answer letters from Human Rights Watch asking about, for example, North Koreans who were coerced into playing, right. So, the sporting bodies’ position has been to say, ‘not our problem’ (AO1).

This changed, partly through the activities of human rights organisations before and after the Beijing Olympic Games. First, there was a greater acceptance from previously “sport-blind” (AO3) human rights organisations that engaging with the sport sector would help reach new audiences for their work. Second, external pressure in the form of naming and shaming (particularly negative media reporting), detailed evidence of human rights infringements and threats of legal action led to a growing recognition from awarding bodies of their responsibilities for the impact of their events on host city and country populations. As one prominent advocacy organisation highlights, “through [...] hundreds of reports, we have been able to directly tie these abuses to these events and therefore to these organisations” (AO1). Until 2015, both the IOC and FIFA would only act and accept responsibility if advocacy organisations could bring forward detailed evidence to substantiate claims of human rights abuses and infringements directly tied to the respective MSE. In that sense, accepting responsibility was not simply a decision based on ideals, but instead brought about by being named and shamed by prominent advocacy organisations. As one advocacy organisation and an intermediary organisation suggest in relation to FIFA:

FIFA made the change and adopted human rights into the statutes, not because they had always wanted to do that and saw that as the right thing to do, but because there was an existential crisis within football and half of the FIFA expo was arrested (AO1).

If you look at where most progress on human rights has been made, it’s not because good things are happening, it’s because bad things have happened and then there’s a human rights response, right. So, we all know what happened to FIFA in 2015-2016. And so, John

Ruggie is commissioned to write a report, that sets off a chain of events, but they came out of an existential crisis, FIFA did (IO1).

Advocacy organisations were able to exert pressure on MSE awarding bodies to accept responsibility for their actions and effects. Legal pressure also played an important role in this change. The publication of the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights* in 2011 and their growing acceptance and credibility in subsequent years was a watershed moment in the MSE and human rights narrative. These guiding principles enshrined the idea that MSE awarding bodies and organising committees could be constituted as businesses and, therefore, had to prosecute their responsibilities (including their operations or value chains) and recognise the potential harms caused in the furtherance of their work: “They’re enterprises. There’s no question that they’re covered. And they have to do this” (AO1). Furthermore, one of the intermediary organisations involved in working with sport bodies to adhere to the *UN Guiding Principles* suggested:

From the *UN Guiding Principles* perspective, there has to be, a proof of that connection or linkage at least to make, to say, ‘okay you are responsible’ [...] It’s what’s the scope of your responsibility? How are you connected to certain harms? How do we prevent those connections from happening? And then trying to address to prevent those issues (IO2).

Crucially, the *UN Guiding Principles* also outline state duties to protect human rights, which meant that all MSE stakeholders were expected to comply. Acceptance of responsibility was not immediate. For example, FIFA had initially been defensive about its responsibilities for human rights infringements around the FIFA World Cup. From 2011 onwards, it slowly began to engage with the agenda, including inviting the author of the *UN Guiding Principles*, John Ruggie, to write a report on FIFA and human rights. This reflected a recognition that change was occurring in the development of “the broader normative framework internationally” (AB1), which included FIFA as an organisation accepting that human rights were a topic within its sphere of responsibility. Similarly, the CGF also recognised that addressing the human rights agenda was crucial to its very existence, including the viability and attractiveness of the Commonwealth Games:

If you don’t recognise people’s rights or you don’t respect and look to protect people’s human rights, then you need to start from the beginning because you’ve failed before you’ve even begun. You can’t create opportunities and not exercise a duty of care. [...] If you can’t respect, protect or promote human rights [...], then you are never going to be in a position to recognise marginalisation. You’re never going to be in a position if you can’t recognise marginalisation both present or historical, then you’ll never be able to resolve conflict and start this, you know, awfully challenging issues around truth and reconciliation (AB2).

Acceptance of responsibility to recognise the potential harms that hosting MSEs produces, whether by incentive or not, was an important step change in the MSE and human rights landscape. It also illustrates progress towards formalising human rights agendas, as proposed in McGillivray et al.’s (2019) framework, with advocacy organisations playing an important role, because of their influence over relevant stakeholders.

4.2. Mega sport events as a human-rights leveraging opportunity

MSEs represent a powerful means of advancing human rights-related issues and leveraging social change. Yet, the recognition of the opportunity presented by MSEs for the

advocacy organisations was not immediate. In particular, post-Beijing 2008, there was an increase in the activity of advocacy organisations and pressure on awarding bodies to use their power and influence to affect change in their own organisations and the movements they represent. For example, in awarding, planning and delivering the Olympic Games, the IOC has influence over more than 200 sport federations, its National Olympic Committees, a local organising committee and the host government. The CGF has also recognised the power of its movement to address human rights issues. A good example being its alignment with child rights issues as part of Glasgow 2014. The Games were leveraged as an opportunity to raise funds for UNICEF and to “raise the rights of children as an issue in the opening ceremony” (AO2). Moreover, this commitment to child rights was developed further with advocacy organisations contributing to “future host regulations and guidance and bid criteria to make sure that human and child rights are part of the considerations when awarding these events in future” (AO2). This is a further recognition of the formalising of human rights agendas and embedding in good governance systems (McGillivray et al., 2019).

Leveraging MSEs to shine a light on human rights issues is now an accepted strategy for advocacy organisations, with the bidding and planning stages being crucial in this respect. The importance of embedding human rights principles and protocols in MSEs in the requirements of host bidding was made clear by one advocacy organisation:

The leverage that you have is much greater in the bidding process and afterwards. That’s the bottom line. So, on all bidding requirements, the bottom line is the leverage is always only there in the run up to or in the bidding process, and then after that you have to bird dog them to make sure they’re upholding. But if there have been no commitments made as part of the bidding process then good luck to you implementing them. If the pledges haven’t been made in the bidding process then the human rights community has nothing to work with. So that’s why we work so hard to put these bidding requirements in place (AO1).

Since 2015, FIFA and the CGF have both moved to enshrine human rights requirements and standards into their technical documentation, which gives them and the advocacy organisations the opportunity to hold host organisers to account. The IOC has been less proactive at embedding human rights commitments contractually, which advocacy organisations collectively agreed was a problem in respect of leveraging the MSE. One child-rights focused advocacy organisation summarised the concern, stressing that:

I think it’s [the IOC that has; *the authors*] shown a reluctance to use the leverage that it could have over those international federations to demand higher human rights standards from them. [...] Inclusion in the Olympic Games programme is a really big lever that could be pressed (AO2).

While FIFA and the CGF put human rights requirements into bidding requirements and host city contracts, the IOC only did the latter in time for the 2024 Paris and 2028 Los Angeles Olympic and Paralympic Games. While that represents progress from the advocacy organisation’s perspective, it also means that there is much less leveraging potential for Tokyo Games in 2021 and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. In contrast, when FIFA initiated the bidding process for the 2026 World Cup both the United 2026 (US, Canada and Mexico) and Moroccan bids were required to undergo thorough human rights risk appraisals. The presence of this requirement provided leveraging opportunities, opening

up new conversations in the host country about the effects of an MSE on a range of affected groups:

The human rights requirements required stakeholder engagement and an identification of risk and a bunch of things, so we said okay, how is this an opportunity to improve the life of the average person living in one of these communities? And so written in the strategy was then a requirement that host cities, prior to host city selection, acknowledge [...] the risks they have, convene significant meetings with stakeholders on these risks and to then come out of that consultation with a series of commitments that they would be prepared to make to address those risks if they're selected (IO1).

For MSEs that were not required to consider human rights risks at the outset of the bidding process, they are “sort of retroactively shoehorning in requirements” (IO1). There was recognition from advocacy and intermediary organisations that this made it difficult to hold organisers and their state partners accountable, ultimately leading to human rights having a lower-profile status in MSE planning and delivery.

4.3. Facilitating within-coalition balance and independence of advocacy organisations

Until the formation of the Sport and Rights Alliance (SRA) in 2014, there was little formal forum through which advocacy organisations, civil society bodies and labour unions could collaborate to address human rights concerns around MSEs. Preceding this period, advocacy organisations often operated in isolation. High-profile organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were naming and shaming MSE awarding bodies, reporting regularly through the media, with the focus of their efforts being to name human rights infringements and shame host governments and MSE organisers into action. Before the formation of the SRA, the relationship between advocacy organisations and the awarding bodies was largely contentious. There were some exceptions to this, including the way that UNICEF worked closely with state organisations and MSE organisers to develop mutually beneficial programmes and developments (e.g., Commonwealth Games 2014).

The initial work of the SRA led to the establishment of IHRB's Mega Event Platform and, subsequently, the formation of its independent offshoot, the CSHR. The centre brought advocacy organisations, labour unions and other actors together with governments, awarding bodies, sponsors and broadcasters to develop guidelines and good practices in how to respect, protect and promote human rights in the context of MSEs. The CSHR operates as an independent coalition and this was recognised by both awarding bodies and advocacy organisations as being a vital component of its credibility: “I just think the role that the Centre for Sport and Human Rights has played has been absolutely central to, to creating a safe space where these issues can be discussed and to bring people along on this journey” (AO2).

Awarding bodies have valued the more diplomatic approaches built on close relationships formed over the period since 2015 when human rights issues took centre stage in the MSE space. Initially, there had been a feeling that advocacy organisations operated as if awarding bodies were the enemies, with one organisation stating that early interactions were “quite nasty conversations – just the tone of it was not constructive on either side of the call” (AB1). This has led to more constructive dialogue on both sides:

Where we have been able to show to those organisations that we are serious and through the leverage we have made a real difference, and they have also been able to demonstrate that they may change the way they talk about us or they may change the parts of the reports they publish and may be willing to be much more constructive and a bit more objective at times (AB1).

The strengthening of relationships has led to a range of interactions, including project partnerships, consultations, advisory roles, stakeholder engagement and engagement with the sport and human rights environment (e.g. through the CSHR). From the perspective of the awarding bodies, their outward-facing approach, accepting responsibility for their actions and putting in place standards and monitoring processes on the ground has produced progress in their relationships with advocacy organisations, “if you’re just going to be defensive, you can expect, you know, a different posture; if you open up and are actually willing to be a bit vulnerable but also constructive, you get a much better result” (AB2).

This approach has also helped the reputations of MSEs among advocacy organisations, because in the past (legitimate) criticism “would just stick at least in the public realm” (AB1). But now, there are “is a trusted relationship”, where advocacy organisations will “think twice about putting out a press release [...] – they’re usually a bit one-sided (but there’s a level of acceptance or where it’s still intellectually honest to be one sided because that’s their role) – but they will go much less far in that regard” (AB1). This indicates that they not only aim to name and shame event stakeholders but also build up trusted relationships to encourage them to adopt an ethical, human-rights-based agenda. In the context of strategic alliances, Das and Teng (1998) have suggested that trust and control contribute to establishing confidence between organisations that provides the foundation for ongoing success. Participants suggested that relationships between advocacy organisations and MSE awarding bodies are primarily based on informal arrangements, with personal communication between representatives of each organisation being important. While there is some evidence that advocacy organisations are invited to comment on awarding body plans and processes, this is rarely formalised. Personal relationships have strengthened, being fostered successfully through the forum of the SRA and, latterly, the CSHR.

4.4. Implementation of good governance and structural change

Our findings also highlighted the obstacles preventing the full integration of human rights in the MSE landscape that remain. Acceptance that the *UN Guiding Principles* include MSEs in their purview was an important step in awarding bodies taking human rights issues seriously. There is evidence of governance and structural change within MSE awarding bodies – albeit to varying degrees – including the development of policies and protocols for hosting their events. In particular, since 2015, there has been an acceleration and strengthening of provisions. First, in terms of governance, FIFA, IOC and CGF each have published human rights policies. Second, FIFA and CGF have made amendments to their bidding and hosting arrangements to embed human rights requirements, with the IOC undertaking that process now. Third, FIFA has introduced an independent Human Rights Advisory Council to report on the organisation’s progress on human rights. In 2020, the IOC initiated a similar process, which recommended that it too strengthens its human

rights governance arrangements and establishes an independent body to monitor and report on its activities. The CGF was heavily criticised for the problems encountered during the hosting of the Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games and addressed these by adopting a human rights approach for Glasgow 2014, publishing a human rights policy in 2017 and embedding those principles in its host city contract ahead of other awarding bodies. They were also the first awarding body to actively participate in the work of the IHRB and CSHR, chairing the taskforce on governance.

However, concerns remain as to whether these organisations have gone far enough, or that human rights are viewed as a strategic priority. One advocacy organisation expressed concern that both the IOC and FIFA remain only partially committed to the human rights agenda:

But what they [the IOC] didn't do and haven't done to this date is take the responsibility inside the Olympic Charter. Here has to be, I believe, one of the fundamental principles of Olympism needs to be human rights protection in the context of the Olympics and the Olympic movement. It's all about implementation, so I would encourage you not to be fooled by reforms on paper (AO1).

Some of this also applies to the effectiveness of governance arrangements to ensure the commitments made by the awarding bodies have the appropriate systems in place and influence within the organisation to push through when facing resistance internally, or externally. For example, there was a recognition from some participants that the IOC has been overly piecemeal in its approach, reacting rather than having a framework in place to deal with every eventuality. FIFA has “comprehensively adopted and is retrofitting human rights standards”, but there is concern that “they don't have the systems in place or the governance to make it work” (AO1). The responsibility for human rights sits with the Governance Committee, which advises the FIFA Council. Organisationally, a new division that takes care of social responsibility and education, alongside human rights was created in 2020. However, for some advocacy organisations, FIFA has yet to “entrench human rights” (AO1) through its governance structure, evidenced by the fact that recently, “the human rights structure was severed from the governance structure [..]. FIFA did the right thing by hiring people, but the human rights function within FIFA cannot be a free loading thing that has no tie back-up to the president” (AO1). Similar concerns were also expressed in the fourth report of the independent FIFA Human Rights Advisory Board, where they state:

While recognizing what has been achieved operationally, confusing and sometimes contradictory signals have been sent at the political and governance levels of the organization about the importance and implications of FIFA's human rights commitments. It is our view that FIFA's human rights efforts have now come to important cross-roads that require FIFA to deepen its efforts to embed its human rights commitments into the governance of global football or risk losing the ground that has been gained (FIFA Human Rights Advisory Board, 2020).

The concerns expressed by the Board were in response to FIFA awarding the FIFA Club World Cup tournament to China without following appropriate due diligence processes. As a result, the board made a very clear recommendation, highlighting that they perceive

a lack of consideration of the accountability of human rights at the strategic, governance and political level.²

There is, however, evidence of ongoing progress that addresses concerns about the extent of the commitment of awarding bodies to continue to progress the human rights agenda. For example, FIFA has altered the governance arrangements for the World Cup, putting a FIFA-controlled entity in the host country and is responsible for delivery. This should produce greater accountability and ensure that the delivery on the human rights agenda is more effective. As one of the intermediary organisations describes it, “it’s not this dynamic between LOC who, ‘yeah, I hear you but I don’t want to deal with it’, and FIFA, it’s now FIFA controls the LOC that’s actually implementing it” (IO1). Similarly, the CGF has moved from principle-based constructs to specific requirements, indicating that human rights protection and promotion will become obligations. As one awarding body suggests, it has become much more “prescribed [...] so that when you host the Games, you subscribe and you are enrolled as being an awareness builder, an advocate, an action taker in these different areas. That’s part of the deal of hosting the Games” (AB2).

To summarise, [Figure 1](#) provides an overview of the study’s findings. While “accepting responsibility for human rights” and considering “mega sport events as a human-rights leveraging opportunity” are lower-level action tendencies (indicating positive attitudes and intentions), “facilitating within-coalition balance and independence of the advocacy organisations” and “implementing good governance and structural change” require concrete actions by MSE stakeholders. The latter themes indicate advances in the human rights agenda being embraced at a higher level. In what follows, we discuss the theoretical and managerial implications of these findings, referring back to the key themes from the literature review.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Our findings highlight differences in the roles, stakeholder relations and effectiveness of advocacy organisations between different stages of mega sport events. First, at the bidding stage, advocacy organisations have historically been more focused on naming and shaming but with the adoption of human rights models being a requirement in the bid documentation for prospective hosts, they are now more involved in collaborating with stakeholders (including awarding bodies) to ensure the requirements help respect, protect and promote human rights. Advocacy organisations are now brought in (informally) as advisors and the establishment of independent advisory boards within awarding bodies signals greater recognition of the value of human rights throughout the entire MSE life cycle. This role, early in the MSE life cycle, can facilitate more effective communication among diverse stakeholders similar to the changed agent role that Schulenkorf (2012) describes in sport for development and peace projects. Indeed, there is recognition from

²In the report, they write the following: “we are concerned by the continuing lack of clarity about how accountability for human rights will be ensured with regard to political and strategic decision-making within the organization. That requires an entity at the political or governance level that has not only a clear mandate but also the expertise, capacity and incentives to routinely hold FIFA to account against its own human rights commitments in relation to critical decisions [...] in this report we therefore make one single recommendation to FIFA’s leadership: to develop a roadmap for further embedding FIFA’s human rights commitments into decision-making at all levels of the organization with a focus on the political and governance levels, including a mechanism to hold FIFA bodies (as defined in Art 24 of the FIFA Statutes) accountable for progress against that roadmap” (FIFA Human Rights Advisory Board, 2020).

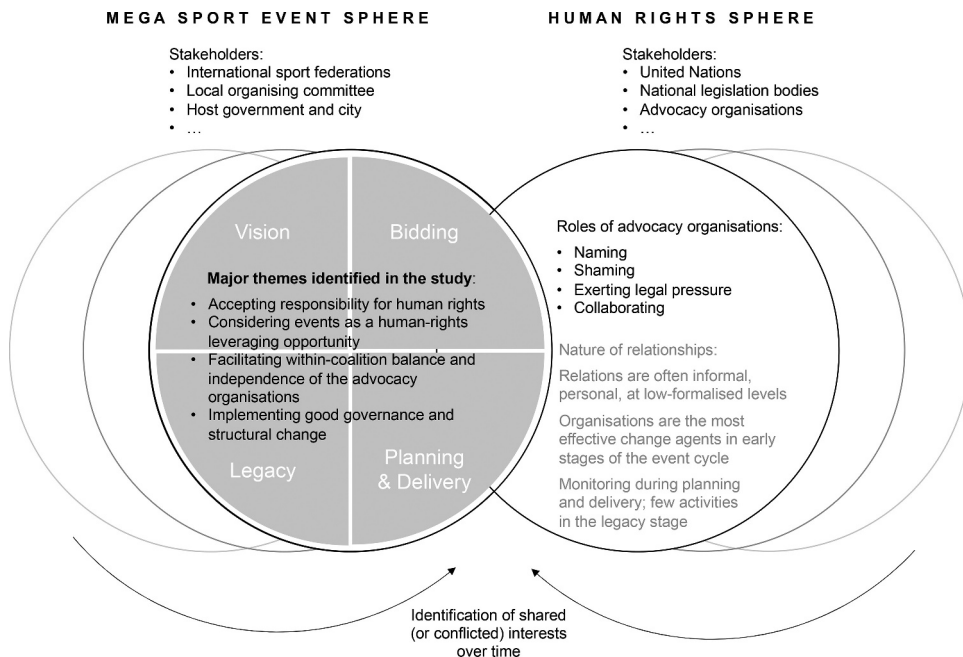


Figure 1. Overview of the findings on the relation between human-rights centred advocacy organisations and mega sport events.

advocacy organisations that this stage provides the greatest leverage for the promotion of human rights. In the planning stage, advocacy organisations continue to play a monitoring role, which can lead to naming and shaming activity in the media, but more often takes the form of exerting legal pressure and collaboration to avoid human rights infringements from taking place. In the delivery stage, advocacy organisations can do little other than to monitor and report human rights infringements to awarding bodies and event organisers, which then forms the basis of debate and discussion in the post-event stage. There is, as yet, no formal mechanism for advocacy organisations to convene after each MSE to ensure lessons are learned, although the annual Sporting Chance conferences organised by the CSHR do provide a forum for stakeholders to come together and share experiences.

Second, referring to conceptual work on event leveraging (Chalip, 2014, 2018; Smith, 2014), our findings reveal that human rights-centred advocacy organisations aim to leverage their agenda using MSEs as a focal point, while MSE stakeholders aim to leverage their events by adopting human rights models. Important stakeholders of the two spheres – the human rights sphere and the MSE sphere – have more recently identified shared interests and increasingly collaborating with each other to secure and promote human rights. The facilitation of within-coalition balance and the independence of advocacy organisations as well as concrete actions to implement good governance and structural change seem crucial to the success of these leveraging activities. Without concrete actions, in particular, these activities might fail, be accused of window dressing (Grell, 2018), or they might even have detrimental effects (Müller, 2017). Such failures should be prevented, according to Ruggie (2014), because “the state by itself cannot do all

the heavy lifting required to meet most pressing societal challenges and [...] it therefore needs to engage other actors to leverage its capacities" (p. 8), further identifying "informal cooperation, public-private partnerships, and multi-stakeholder processes" (p. 9) as key solutions to fully embracing the *UN Guiding Principles*.

Third, our findings extend McGillivray et al.'s (2019) conceptual model. Accepting responsibility for human rights as well as facilitating within-coalition balance and independence of advocacy organisations need to be part of what the authors call "governance arrangements", revealing important connections between these two themes and human-rights centred within-organisation efforts. The consideration of MSEs as human rights leveraging opportunities and the actual implementation of good governance and settings for structural change are needed to formalise human rights agendas. Advocacy organisations are crucial in this context. As revealed in our study, there has been a greater recent emphasis on collaborating with stakeholders and contributing to the formalising of human rights agendas (McGillivray et al., 2019). However, these relationships are primarily informal and personal and for that reason, they remain precarious and overly vulnerable to the vagaries of changing personnel within organisations (see also Welty Peachey et al., 2018 for the importance of strong relationships and networks as well as partner involvement besides personal relationships).

Our findings suggest MSE managers should take a proactive approach to define and implement ethical, human rights-based agendas to protect and promote human rights. The definition must enter mission statements and strategy development as well as operational decision-making, such as human resource management, finances and marketing. Today, advocacy organisations can be considered as partners that can help MSE stakeholders achieve favourable outcomes, acknowledging the management process from goals to controlling (feedback loop). Balanced relationships might help change the mindset of the decision makers towards embracing the *UN Guiding Principles*.

The present study has limitations. Participants were promoting their organisational interests and projecting a view on the role of advocacy organisations for ethical, human rights-based MSEs. While they could easily describe past developments in how human rights entered the MSE landscape in theory and practice, their opinions about the effectiveness of efforts to secure and promoting human rights were diverse and different according to the roles of the stakeholders as well as their personal experiences. However, in a field defined by powerful interests (e.g., MSE owners and partners) it is important to include the voice of those fighting to arrest injustices.

Future research may also use single-case study designs to particularly look at the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games, for example, in order to take a more nuanced perspective on roles and relationships with advocacy organisations. Given differences in stakeholder relationships, important peculiarities might emerge. Partners were also only interviewed once. Repeated interviews before and after MSE hosting – particularly over time spans that cover the event lifecycle (vision, bidding, planning, delivery, post-event) – would also be useful to reveal changes over time regarding roles and nature of relationships. One could find out, for example, whether and when non-binding (vs. legally binding) relationships can still be effective in securing and promoting human rights.

While previous research has highlighted the importance of collaborations between event stakeholders and advocacy organisations in the MSE context in general to secure and promote human rights (Engle, 2014; Tavella, 2007), our study provides evidence for

how such collaborations might be effective. These findings suggest the need for: (1) binding agreements to adhere to the *UN Guiding Principles*; (2) a proactive engagement that is future- and outcome-directed; (3) well-balanced and reciprocal relationships between event stakeholders and advocacy organisations; (4) implementation of good governance principles and practices; and (5) monitoring tools to ensure that changes are assessed and measured over time, including arrangements for remedy. To manage such collaborative approaches, the most appropriate advocacy organisations must be identified. Collaborative actions (mission, strategy, implementation, monitoring) must be agreed upon and strengthened over time in order to increase the likelihood of ethical outcomes and to overcome common barriers to collaboration (e.g. competing values and role perspectives, as identified by Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010). If ethical mega sport events are to become more than an idealised future ambition, it is imperative that advocacy organisations, awarding bodies and host organisers accelerate the progress made in recent years and work collaboratively to respect, protect and promote human rights.

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