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# Norwegian Human Rights Organisations and Olympic Games

## **Anders Hasselgård**

Norwegian School of Sport Sciences  
<anders.hasselgard@nih.no>

## **Andreas Selliaas**

Freelance researcher  
<aselliaas@gmail.com >

## **Abstract**

In this article, an analysis is made of Norwegian Human Rights organisations (HROs), their involvement in the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, and consequences for their involvement in subsequent Games. We attempt to identify the organisations' understanding of the Olympic Games as an arena for human rights activism and how "Olympic activism" provides meaning to the organisations' work. The analysis exposes an interesting paradox. On the one hand, HROs recognise that the Olympic Games and the global human rights engagement did not contribute to an improvement of the human rights situation in China, but possibly led to a deterioration of the situation in certain areas. On the other hand, the conclusion was drawn that the Olympic Games engagement was a success in so far as it drew attention to the organisations and yielded greater legitimacy among the Norwegian population. The question is raised as to whether the experience of the Beijing Olympic Games campaigns could play a role in the Norwegian HROs' activist approach in future Games such as the approaching winter Olympic Games in Russia.

*Key words:* human rights, Olympic Games, transnational activism, international sporting events, China, shaming

## Introduction

In recent years the international human rights movement has increasingly focused on large international sporting events as an arena for activism with a view to promoting political change in the host nation.<sup>1</sup> An important reason for this is that an increasing number of such events are being held in countries where human rights have been breached as well as in developing countries where the various human rights organisations (HROs) already have a strong engagement, for example China (Olympic Games 2008), Indian (Commonwealth games 2010), South Africa (Football World Championship 2010), Russia (Winter Olympic Games 2014 and Football World Championship 2018), Brazil (Football World Championship 2014 and Olympic Games 2016), and Qatar (Football World Championship 2022).

Large international sporting events present an arena for political confrontation, protests and dialogue, not only for states but also for transnational actors such as HROs. Transnational activism in connection with sporting events such as the Olympic Games has received relatively little attention. Consequently, we know little about the engagement of HROs. Prior to, and during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, the international human rights movement utilised the event as an arena for human rights activism. The Beijing Games therefore provides us with an excellent opportunity to examine activism by HROs in connection with a major international sporting event.

In this article we examine Norwegian HROs' engagement prior to, during, and following the Olympic Games in Beijing. The aim was to identify the organisations' understanding of the Olympic Games as an arena for human rights activism and how this was reflected in their engagement. This is interesting for a number of reasons. First, no similar analysis of Norwegian HROs has been undertaken previously. A study of the HROs' comprehension of their own engagement thus provides us with a new understanding of the success criteria adopted by the various organisations in the Beijing Olympics. Second, the experience of the Beijing Games will probably have a bearing on HROs' campaigns in connection with future Games and other international sporting events. Third, the experience of the HROs will provide sports politicians (and

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1 The Olympic Games is awarded to host cities. However, we use the term "host nation" to indicate that human rights issues are national concerns and that political pressure is usually directed towards the national authority.

others interested in sport politics) with an indication on how much “noise” may be assumed when making preparations for future Games and other sporting events. Moreover, we will get an indication on what may be expected from actions and counter-actions in future Games.

The purpose of this article is three-fold. First, we want to fill a gap in the literature of HROs activism. Second, we want to establish a theoretical framework in the study of HROs activism in relation to Olympic Games. Third, we want to contribute to an understanding of the mechanisms of activism in relation to Olympic Games and other international sporting events with special reference to Norwegian HROs. The article commences with a review of the literature on protest and activism in connection with the Olympic Games. We also provide an account of the circumstances whereby the Beijing Games was a political landmark for the Olympics. Following a discussion of methods we introduce two success objectives for the Norwegian HROs’ Olympic efforts, and place this within a theoretical framework. The analysis identifies the characteristics of the HROs’ activism and how the Olympic activities came to distinguish the organisations’ work. Based on this analysis, two dilemmas confronting the HROs when selecting the strategies to be employed at major sporting events are described. In conclusion, the experience gained from the Beijing Games is discussed with a view to involvement in future Olympic Games with special reference to the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

## Olympic protests

The history of the Olympic Games shows that the event has always been an arena for political contention and protest. The literature on the Olympics and political activism can be divided into four broad categories: (a) *boycotts of host nation by IOC member states*, (b) *terrorist attacks by individuals or groups*, (c) *symbolic protests by athletes* and (d) *protests by domestic or transnational network organisations*. The boycott literature has typically focused on states’ use of the games to promote political and ideological views. The Olympic Games in Berlin 1936 and Games during the Cold War, particularly Montreal 1976, Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984, were characterised by boycott discussions and actual boycotts (Houlihan, 1994; Hulme, 1990; Kruger, 2005; Mason, 2007). Political protests by athletes and their contributions to the human rights or civil rights

struggle are also well documented. Smith's and Carlos' black power salute during the medal ceremony at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico is an example (Bass, 2002; Hartmann, 2003). They did this to support the black athletic protest movement *Olympic Project for Human Rights* which had grown out of the black civil rights struggle in the US in the 1960s (Hartmann, 1996; Edwards, 1979; Henderson 2009). There is also a growing body of literature on the interplay between the Olympics and terrorism. The academic interest for this topic often relates back to the 1972 Munich summer Olympics and the *Palestinian Black September group's* terror attack against Israeli athletes and coaches (Selliaas, 2012). Later research on Olympic terror has become preoccupied with Olympic host nations' security approaches, surveillance and control during the event (Bennett & Haggerty, 2011; Richards et al., 2011).

The last category, protests by domestic or transnational organised groups or network organisations, has also been subjected to academic analysis. Lenskyj (2000), for instance, looks at community-based movements' anti-Olympic campaigns and resistance in connection with the Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000 Olympic bids, and protests prior to and during the Games. Thus, the research focuses on domestic protests *against* the Olympics and the negative economic and social impacts hosting such an event (see also Zervas, 2012). Other studies have concentrated on how *domestic protest groups* within the host nation used the games as a showcase for their domestic political struggle to the international audience. One example is Neilson's (2002) study of indigenous Aboriginal groups' activism surrounding the Sydney Olympic Games (see also Bruce & Wensing, 2012 and O'Bonsawin, 2012). There are, however, few studies on transnational activism by international or national organisations in connection with international sporting events, and the Olympics in particular. Reinan and Davidi (2009) studied how exile Argentines in Israel formed protest groups before the 1978 Football World Cup to protest against human rights violation by the military junta. However, the literature on Olympic protests has failed to discuss *how* and *why* transnational actors, such as human rights organisations, make use of the games as an arena for activism and political change. Although political activism and protests are also discussed in recent literature on the Olympic Games and politics (Bairner & Molnar, 2010; Sugden & Tomlinson, 2011; Lenskyj & Wagg, 2012), no such analysis is made. The present empirical study of the Norwegian HRO's Olympic activism is thus a contribution to filling this gap.

Studies of the interplay between Olympic Games and transnational activism seem to be more important than ever. The international human rights engagement during the Beijing Olympics is an indication that the Olympics, as a political tool, has entered a new era. Cottrell and Nelson's (2010) empirical study of protests in connection with the Olympics from 1896 until 2008 shows that "protest has grown substantially over time and evolved from a tendency toward state-based boycotts and domestic demonstration to a tendency toward protest over an increasingly broad range of issues [such as human rights, poverty, environment] by transnational networks and social movements" (p. 745). The international human rights engagement and protests prior to and during the Beijing Olympics are an extension of this pattern. Rather than encouraging a boycott restricting dialogue between China and the rest of the world, the human rights movement took advantage of the opportunity to focus the limelight on a broad spectrum of human rights violations for which the Chinese regime was accountable. China was accused of the persecution of minority groups and political opponents, breaches of human rights and for supporting non-democratic regimes (Economy & Segal, 2008; Hwang, 2010).

## Beijing Games – One world, one dream?

The Chinese authorities had as their objective that of showing the world the major economic and political power status of their nation, to promote its international reputation and to develop national identity and pride at home (Brownell, 2008; Martinez, 2010; Xu, 2006). The increasing level of protest, particularly in connection with the torch relay, was thus regarded as a threat by the Chinese authorities, not only to China's reputation but also to its internal stability (Hutzler, 2007; Selliaas, 2012). The Communist leadership therefore introduced special security measures to prevent the Chinese opposition taking advantage of the external pressure. This has been referred to as *the Olympic stress syndrome* (Selliaas, 2012). This contributed to a deterioration of freedom of expression and speech (individual human rights), something that was also documented by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (Amnesty, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2008). On the other hand, we saw some counteractions against the "Western" global human rights protests. Many Chinese, also those in exile, were offended by the protests and considered

that the international society had harmed the festivities which they were looking forward to in anticipation for a long time and which they deserved (Hwang, 2010; Jacobs & Wang, 2008; Mahbubani, 2008).

The Beijing Olympic Games was also a crossroads for the Olympic movement. The IOC had to react in accordance with the human rights situation in the host nation in a different manner than was done at previous Olympic Games. Both the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Bid Committee and the IOC promised improvements in the human rights situation when China was awarded the games in 2001. As the Beijing Games approached, however, references to China's many infringements of human rights became increasingly vague. IOC president, Jacques Rogge, argued that the IOC was not a political body, neither was it an NGO, and consequently not in a position to become involved or criticise the internal circumstances of a host nation (Kidd, 2010). The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) followed the IOC guidelines. Even though the NIF entered into dialogue with the HROs, they were nevertheless clear that it was not the function of sport to change the political situation in China (ABC News, 2007).

The slogan of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games was "One World, One Dream". However, there were two different perceptions of this slogan. China saw itself as part of the developed world and HROs wanted China to adapt to international Human Rights standards. The IOC, who had commenced offensively and guaranteed improvements in Chinese human rights practice, disclaimed all responsibility by avoiding political confrontation with both sides.

## Method

The study is based on interviews with eight Norwegian HROs in 2009. They were chosen because (1) all organisations were engaged in Human Rights questions in China, (2) the organisations under study represent a broad spectre of human rights issues in China, and (3) the organisations have different approaches to Human Right standards in China. Their approaches can be split into three different categories: (a) a group of *generalists* engaging in Human Rights questions in China along with their engagements in other parts of the world (Amnesty International Norway, The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, The Rafto Foundation); (b) *issue*

*oriented organisations* which focus on certain issues in China as in other parts of the world (Norwegian PEN and The Norwegian Union of Journalists); (c) a group of *regional organisations* with direct or close relations to China focusing on Human Rights questions in China and their neighbour country, Burma) (The Norwegian Tibet Committee, The Network for Human Rights in China, The Norwegian Burma Committee). This categorisation was used for two reasons. Firstly, we could easily identify the different Human Rights issues of each organisation, and secondly, we could identify relevant organisations for future studies of Olympic engagement more easily.

Our analysis is limited to each organisation's own understanding of its involvement in the Olympic Games and its evaluation of the human rights situation in China prior to, during and following the Games. Our main concern has not been to investigate what they actually achieved in China. The informants were leaders or Olympic campaign managers of their respective organisations. It was taken for granted that these individuals represented the views of the entire organisation concerning its involvement in the Beijing Olympics.

The selected interview technique was structured interviews based on specific questions to be presented in a given order (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This was done in order to identify the HRO's involvement prior to the Olympic Games, how they evaluated their involvement subsequent to the Games, and their views on future major sporting events. Structured interviews also enabled us to conduct follow-up interviews four years later and to compare the responses. Four of five organisations in the "generalist" and the "issue oriented" group were selected for follow-up interviews in 2013, and the respondents were reminded of their replies given in 2009. The regional organisations were excluded from the follow-up interviews because they have no interest in future Games outside China. We have no special competence in Chinese politics or foreign relations. Furthermore, in this study we have not made a detailed control of the HRO's statements regarding the factual situation in China. To check certain statements and factual claims, we nevertheless undertook a number of interviews with experts and researchers who were specialists in Chinese politics. We also undertook a brief study of media statements to cross-check claims made by the organisations in the study.

The study focuses solely on the Norwegian HROs' Olympic Games involvement, and it is difficult to know whether the findings are relevant for other countries and organisations. They may nevertheless be relevant

to HROs outside Norway since the majority of such organisations are linked to an international network of HROs, or are a division of a larger global organisation.

## HROs and goal achievement

We have looked at the human rights organisation's own evaluation of their Olympic Games involvement (strategies employed) and their own evaluation of the results of this involvement (goal achievement). The objective of the work done by NGOs such as HROs is structured on a value-based and moral framework also defined as "Advocacy for social benefits" or "Advocacy for social change" (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2012). Based on this we can expect that Norwegian HROs measure their success of the Olympic engagement by the specific improvement in the human rights situation and the improvement of the life of the Chinese population.

The same organisations also have another institutional logic, defined as "advocacy for organisational benefits" (Garrow & Hasenfeld, 2012). This suggests that in addition to taking into consideration those who they are assisting, they must also make a strategic choice so as to ensure the organisation's legitimacy and continued existence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Ensuring the legitimacy of the organisation and resources through publicity campaigns, attracting new members and applying for state grants can, as such, be a goal in itself. The organisation's original values and goals can thus be changed or complemented with values and goals which are essential to the organisation's ability to survive but which do not necessarily contribute to improving the human rights situation. Based on the HROs' strategic philosophy, we can expect success to be measured on the basis of attention, income and legitimacy acquired during the period of the Beijing Games. There is no clear distinction between these two success criteria. They can occur simultaneously, independently or sequentially. It is most natural to believe that the HROs attempt to achieve both objectives simultaneously.

## HRO activism and shaming

Normally, the human rights debate is concerned with states and the state's response to external pressure from the international community, including HROs. An HRO's strategy for exerting such influence is often called "Naming and Shaming" (hereafter "shaming"). Since states are concerned with their international reputation, HROs work actively with directing global attention towards states in breach of human rights. In this manner, they hope to realize a global moral debate which focusses on the national authorities in a negative light. Shaming is therefore used to persuade states to change their attitudes so as to reflect their identity as part of the world community (Risse & Sikkink, 1999). In our analysis it is the HROs which apply pressure on China to introduce changes to human rights practice by using the world's largest sport and media event. Shaming can thus be associated with our study of the Norwegian HROs Beijing involvement.

How external pressure affects – or fails to affect – individual states is one of the main questions within the study of international relations. There are two initial positions, which may be taken when this is to be discussed, *social constructivism* and *realism*. The social constructivist perspective (Adler, 2003; Finnemore, 1996) suggests that HROs can influence human rights in practice within the state by encouraging state leaders to introduce reforms through a socialisation process. The argument is that one is excluded from the international community and loses the ability to negotiate within this arena if one does not conform. Risse and Sikkink (1999) use a *spiral model* as an explanation as to why states change human rights practice through three processes of change and which frequently overlap.<sup>2</sup> First, this model describes how states adapt to human rights norms and introduce reforms as a result of that which they consider to be rational and strategic choices arising from international or national pressure (the process of instrumental adaptation and strategic bargaining). The process is initiated with a moral discussion and dialogue on the international stage between the repressive state and its critics (processes of moral consciousness-raising, argumentation, dialogue and persuasion). A state is dependent on a good international reputation in order to main-

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2 The Spiral model is an expansion of the "boomerang effect" by Keck & Sikkink (1998) which explains how "non-state actors faced with repression and blockage at home seek out state and non-state allies in the international arena, and in some cases are able to bring pressure to bear from above on their government to carry out domestic political change." (Sikkink, 2005, p.154).

tain its international status and is therefore sensitive to moral pressure from the international society (Risse & Ropp, 1999). This provides an opening for a discussion of fundamental human rights. Risse and Sikkink (1999) suggest that this socialisation process might result in a state, which originally adapted norms as a tactical move, gradually accepting the premises of a change in policy and therefore starts to yield to external pressure. The last process (processes on institutionalisation and habituation) results in a change in attitude whereby external demands are embraced and “rule-consistent behaviour” is internalised (Risse & Sikkink, 1999, p. 259). The HRO’s shaming strategy must be understood on the basis of the *process of norm socialisation* described in the spiral model (Hafner-Burton & Tsutsui, 2005; Murdie & Davis, 2012; Risse & Sikkink, 1999). Thus, this position maintains that “countries placed in the global spotlight for human rights abuses adopt better practices and legislation afterwards” (Hafner-Burton, 2008, p. 694). From this point of view we could expect that Norwegian HROs use the Olympic Games as the appropriate arena in which to exert pressure on the Chinese authorities to introduce changes in the course of time.

Some claim that shaming of oppressive states by the international human rights community is simply not enough. The shaming strategy should also seek to raise the “moral consciousness” of *third-party actors* (states, intergovernmental organisations, individuals) and support *HROs within the target state*, thereby increasing the pressure on oppressive regimes (Murdie & Davis, 2012; Risse & Ropp 1999). In a qualitative study, Murdie and Davis (2012) show that third-party actors can amplify the shaming effect. They maintain that the results of this strategy are dependent on which third-party actors HROs manage to organise when exerting pressure on a target-state *from above*. Similarly, Risse and Ropp (1999) maintain that the shaming strategy can intensify the presence of HROs within the country that is shamed through pressure *from below* by mobilising local opposition. With this as the point of departure we can expect Norwegian HROs to use the Olympic Games as a practical arena by cooperating with a sister organisation, external organisation or internal opposition.

The standpoint of realism, however, maintains that states always act in their own best interests, based on rational calculations. Thus, international human rights conventions, laws or activism are not able to affect the attitude of a state to any noticeable extent. Human rights activists are therefore something which some states choose to overlook or approach

depending on whether this ensures the national interest, such as survival (Waltz, 1979), or maximises its power position in the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001), or not. Thus, the HROs and the media have the ability to place injustice on the agenda, but states can choose to ignore these since the actors do not have authority or a formal position in the international arena which necessitates that these demands shall be met. From this position HROs shaming strategy may be considered as “cheap talk” because regimes “do not change their human rights practice or legislation after they are shamed” (Hafner-Burton, 2008, p. 691). From this viewpoint we should expect that the Norwegian HROs do not wish to use the Olympic Games as an arena for fighting for human rights since “shaming” will not change the host nation’s human rights practice.

Following the realist perspective it is possible to include into the calculations the unintended negative effects of the HRO’s shaming strategy whereby more human rights abuses follow when the country is shamed (Hafner-Burton, 2008). National authorities can interpret international publicity as a threat to stability and their own power position in so far as it will stimulate opposition in the local population. Such a situation can provide regime leaders with new incentives to commit human rights violations through, for example, conducting a more aggressive national policy and to react more severely towards citizens and the opposition’s possibilities for expressing their opinion before they are able to mobilise further (Hafner-Burton, 2008). Based on this we should expect that the Norwegian HROs would not use the Olympics as an arena since they fear that the host nation would make the human rights situation worse as a consequence of shaming.

The HROs we interviewed had little or no experience with major sporting events as an arena for human rights activism. It is therefore interesting to identify the organisations’ comprehension of the Olympic Games as an arena and how this reflects the different viewpoints of HROs shaming of oppressive states presented in this paper. Did any regard shaming in connection with the Olympic Games as cheap talk or did they hold the opinion that “Olympic shaming” would result in a change in China’s human rights practice? Did the HROs operate through a third party or the local opposition? Did they include unintended consequences of shaming in their calculations?

## The Norwegian HROs' involvement

### *Conflict cases*

A number of human rights questions were raised prior to the Beijing Olympic Games. These included the situation of the China opposition, freedom of expression, particularly on the internet and in terms of journalists' working conditions, employees' rights, arrests without charge or trial, death sentences for journalists, authors and dissenters, the Tibetan conflict, injustice against the Uighur minority group (Xinjiang region) and persecution of Falun Gong practitioners. All these themes were touched upon by the Norwegian HROs.

Journalists and athletes comprised the main target group for the Norwegian human rights community. A much-discussed initiative was the handbook *Arven etter OL i 2008. Håndbok for journalister* (The 2008 Olympic Games heritage. Handbook for journalists), prepared by Amnesty International Norway in association with the Norwegian Union of Journalists and Norwegian PEN. The mobilisation of journalists was a part of HRO's shaming strategy, according to one informant. The aim was to arouse the interest of Norwegian journalists to criticise Chinese infringements of human rights and thus expose other matters than just sports. In connection with the publication of the handbook, the general secretary in Amnesty International Norway, John Peder Egenæs, stated the following:

The media have power: both the sports organisations and the Chinese authorities know this. What the media choose to take up – or not to take up – can be decisive in determining whether the Olympic Games inheritance is human rights reform (Amnesty International Norway 2007).

Norwegian HROs also looked to the NIF and sports president Tove Paule in order to attract the attention of the sporting community on a broad spectrum of matters. Some athletes became involved in various Amnesty campaigns. Others gave their support to the work being done by the organisation Human Rights in China on behalf of Falun Gong. The Norwegian Tibet Committee also worked actively to enter into dialogue with NIF.

The HROs handed out fliers from stands and participated actively in the Norwegian debate on the situation in China. Several organisations

organised protest demonstrations, which in a number of instances were coordinated from outside the country. For example, the Norwegian Tibet Committee and Human Rights in China held alternative torch relays in Oslo while Norwegian PEN arranged a “poetry relay” on the internet. Several HROs contacted members of parliament and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to encourage them to exert greater pressure on China. A number of meetings and seminars were also arranged prior to the Games. One example is The Rafto Foundation who invited the Uighur and previous Rafto award winner, Rebiya Kadeer, to the human rights seminar “China, human rights and the Beijing Olympics” in order to draw attention to the infringement of human rights concerning the Uighur people. None of the Norwegian HROs were themselves present in China before or during the Games.

### *Self-confident HROs*

Only two of the eight HROs we interviewed were opposed to the Olympic Games being held in China when the Games was awarded in 2001. The other organisations either had no opinion on this, or saw the Games as an opportunity to put China under the spotlight. As the Games approached, all eight HROs saw this as a possibility and a platform for human rights activism. Most organisations considered that the Chinese population deserved the Olympic sporting event and that a boycott was not an alternative. Additionally, the majority of HROs regarded it as an obligation to contribute to applying joint pressure to prevent China from using the Olympic Games for propaganda purposes.

Prior to the Olympic Games, all the Norwegian HROs had considerable belief that the Olympic Games could be used as a leverage to enforce changes in Chinese human rights practice. Their work was part of a global campaign which had as its objective that of forcing the Chinese authorities to introduce human rights reforms in conjunction with the Olympic Games. The view of one informant provides an example of the train of thought:

The considerable international attention and spotlight provided unique possibilities to exert pressure and to improve the human rights situation in China, particularly because this was a propaganda measure, an advertisement (...) It was obvious that we had to make it quite clear to the Chinese authorities that something had to be done about the human rights situation. Otherwise, the advertising effect would be dam-

aged, and we had to say to the authorities that they could no longer avoid the responsibilities of human rights. (Our translation)

These viewpoints were expressed by all eight HROs, and the Olympic Games provided them with an unrivalled opportunity to use the shaming strategy to encourage a global moral debate on the human rights situation in China. Employing the concept of shaming during Olympics would encourage the Chinese authorities to obligate themselves to changing human rights practice since they would lose face and emerge in a poor light internationally. Statements released by the organisations to the Norwegian media confirm this. This understanding of the Olympic Games as an arena for human rights activism is in accordance with the “process of norm socialisation” in the spiral model. Thus, the Norwegian HROs regard the Olympics as a useful arena for exerting pressure on the Chinese authorities to introduce reforms which can result in changes in the long term.

Most organisations emphasised that the campaigns had contributed to make the Norwegian population and Norwegian politicians aware of the human rights situation in China. Further, they thought that they had achieved considerable understanding for their cause among the Norwegian population. This had given the organisations and the causes they were working for greater legitimacy. One informant stated:

We have seen a greater understanding by the majority of persons for the objectives towards which we are working. Further, we have noticed – something encountered on the street after the Olympic Games – that the public impression of China is less favourable. Many we encounter have a much clearer impression of what the objectives of this totalitarian regime are and are less impressed by the fact that they have become so affluent. (Our translation)

In addition, several organisations pointed to the fact that the Olympics was a successful mobilisation theme internally within the organisation. For example, Amnesty International had never engaged so many people as during the Olympic campaign. They maintained that membership increased, and knowledge of the organisation and its objectives increased. Amnesty’s own opinion polls showed that for the first time there was a majority of men, more so than women, who were aware of the organisation. Other organisations also pointed to increased awareness among both new and old members. A spokesman for one of the organisations said, for example, that:

For us as an organisation, it was a successful campaign. In Norway, we had achieved increased awareness and membership. I believe that it was important for our organisation since we were clearly able to show what the organisation stood for, for example, that we were opposed to a boycott. Through debate, we were able to make known what we stood for regarding human rights and what we considered should be given priority. That which I am more uncertain about, and which the future will show, is how much all this meant to the Chinese people. (Our translation)

All the organisations stated that they were pleased with their own campaign. They were also clear about the fact that it was an important and correct decision for the organisation to engage itself in the Beijing Games. We can conclude that the Norwegian HROs considered the Olympic Games investment a success.

What about the situation in China? All the organisations we interviewed stated that the situation had deteriorated prior to and during the Olympic Games in spite of all the attention resulting from a united international human rights movement, and especially for the Uigur people, imprisoned authors, members of Falun Gong and the Tibetans. One informant reports:

It is more problematic to say that we achieved something on the situation in China concerning the human rights situation we are working towards. Right from when China was awarded the Olympic Games and up to today, it has gone from bad to worse. Seen in this light, we have to say that we have scarcely reached any goals at all. But we must recognise that human rights demand a long-term effort. (Our translation)

All the HROs acknowledged that the global human rights engagement could have contributed to creating the Olympic stress syndrome. Thus, they admitted that the “stress” created by shaming before the Games had led to increased surveillance and control of Chinese citizens rather than pushing Chinese authorities in the direction of new Human Rights reforms. It is important to emphasise that even though the HROs admitted that the Beijing Olympics also had some negative consequences in the short term, most maintained that in the long-term the effects could be positive. However, this argument stands in contrast to the logic of the norm-socialisation process as argued prior to the Games. The long-term process of change assumes that new reforms are first introduced in the short term as a result of the shaming strategy, something which the

HROs deny having occurred before, during or after the Olympic Games. As such, they contradict themselves. In addition, some organisations mentioned that it was difficult to get support for their campaign among Chinese people both in Norway and China. This was explained in so far as for most Chinese the Olympics had become a prestige project fostering feelings of national pride. Thus, it was difficult to reach the ordinary Chinese with their message and, for some, the HROs' endeavours were regarded as an attempt to tarnish the Chinese image.

The analysis above rather supports the assumption that the human rights situation becomes worse after the "target state" has been shamed. This view was still held when we undertook follow-up interviews in 2013. In the interviews, the HROs stated that they continue to regard the Olympic Games engagement as a success. At the same time they continue to hold the opinion that the human rights situation in China has deteriorated. In addition they see no sign of a long-term effect of the Olympic pressure applied more than four years previously, that they had expressed optimistically in the 2009 interviews.

In spite of the fact that the HROs have not observed any noticeable effects in the human rights situation following massive and direct global campaigns against China, of which they were a part, the Olympic endeavours whetted the appetite. In response to the question whether they thought that they could become similarly involved in future events, the response was affirmative. All the organisations considered that similar sporting events should be used as an arena for activism in the future. For some, only the Olympic Games was of current interest; others preferred to consider each arrangement individually while yet others were only interested in becoming engaged in events held in countries where they had a specific interest. While organisations with direct or strong links with China were only interested in engaging themselves with the event in China, the generalist and niche organisations mentioned that they wanted to use the Sochi Olympic Games in order to focus attention on Russia and the Caucasus. This was expressed by one informant:

When the Olympic Games comes to Russia, then it is clear that we will be strongly engaged in acquiring information and disseminating information about the situation in Russia, and not least in the Caucasus region. (Our translation)

One of the organisations interviewed in 2009 had already commenced preparing for the Sochi Olympics. A special group had been established

which was to work objectively to put the human rights situation in Russia on the agenda.

### *New Shaming*

Even though they were satisfied with their own campaigns during the Beijing Olympic Games, the organisations acknowledged that the counter-actions by the Chinese authorities were more extensive than they had previously expected. This has resulted in several HROs considering other means for future Games or other international sporting events. One of the lessons learnt was that rather than targeting the host nation, greater pressure should be exerted on the Olympic movement which, some expressed, had failed the Olympic charter. They recognised that excessive pressure on the host nation created a counter reaction and appeared counter-productive. Several HROs argued that the IOC and national Olympic committees were in a better position to exert pressure on the host nation than the organisations themselves, since they had a written agreement that had to be upheld and in time can be part of the host nation's human rights practice. In addition, it was emphasized that the IOC has direct contact with the host nation's leaders and organisers in advance as well as during the event, and that this should be used as an opportunity for political pressure. Furthermore, some organisations emphasised the importance of mobilising and cooperating with associate organisations in the host country, something which the HROs reported as difficult to achieve in connection with the Beijing Games. These reflections satisfy the perspective which maintains that shaming can have an effect on "target states" when this is supported by pressure from strategic third-part actors (from above), and through the mobilisation of the local opposition (from below). The interviews in 2013 showed that the HROs continue to want further pressure to be applied through third parties and local opposition in the future. The Sochi Olympic Games were seen as a possible arena to realise this (see Table 1, overleaf).

## HROs Olympic dilemmas

The above discussion shows a development occurring in three phases: optimism, changing the goal, and a new strategy. In the first phase – the period before the Games – the HROs were optimistic and had seen the

Table I: Summary of the Norwegian HROs' assessment of the Beijing Olympic Games and their own involvement

	Amnesty International Norway	The Norwegian Tibet Committee	The Norwegian Helsinki Committee	Norwegian P.E.N.	The Ratfio Foundation for Human Rights	Network for Human Rights in China	The Norwegian Burma Committee	Norwegian Union of Journalists
Negative to Beijing Games	NO	YES (but changed to NO as the Games approached)	NO	NO	NO	YES (but changed to NO as the Games approached)	NO	NO
Took advantage of Games	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Games worsened HR situation	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES (but extend rights for journalists during the Games)
Happy with own campaign	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Important and correct decision for the organization to use the Games as an arena	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Present in Beijing	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Want to use future Games	YES	YES (only in China)	YES	YES	YES	YES (only in China)	YES (only in China)	YES

Olympic Games as an attractive arena for human rights activism. They believed that the Olympic Games would have a positive influence on the human rights situation in China in both the short and long terms. This led to an internal mobilisation and large and smaller campaigns. In the second phase – the period after the Olympic Games – the HROs realised that their campaigns only served to strengthen the Chinese (Olympic) stress syndrome and contributed to a worsening of the human rights situation. In this phase the HROs changed their understanding of goal achievement and success from value-based to organisational objectives. The HROs can therefore conclude that the Olympic Games input was a success in that it provided the organisation and their banner greater legitimacy within the Norwegian population. In the third phase, the HROs look to future major sporting events and have realised that approval of value-based goals indicates that they must change the shaming tactics by applying less pressure on the host nation and more on third party actors such as the IOC.

Our findings from the original interviews and the follow-up interviews show that the HROs consider the Olympic initiative as a success regardless of the deterioration of the human rights situation in China. This is even more paradoxical in so far as future events are considered a potential platform for action. Even though there is no clear boundary indicating where the HROs' original moral objectives finish and self-interest starts, the HROs' Olympic paradox raises an important question concerning their understanding of success when they become engaged in major sporting events.

One claim that can be made from these findings is that the main goal for Norwegian HROs would be to make the Norwegian population aware of the Human Rights situation in China, which was reported by the HROs to be a success. Further, that broader engagement by Norwegian population and the Norwegian Government (together with similar pressure from other countries) would help to improve the situation in China in the longer perspective. Based on this claim, this cannot be called a paradox, but rather a natural development. Our findings – based on interviews of four HROs with an interval of four years – counter such a claim because we cannot see that such a development has occurred. After four years, all organisations under study remain satisfied with their campaign, but they continue to accept that the Olympics resulted in a worsened Human Rights situation in China. Neither do they see any signs of future positive effects. This shows the HROs' paradoxical un-

derstanding of success criteria and their virtually naïve understanding of Olympic Games as an arena for action. It is, however, important to remember that the Olympic Games in authoritarian states is a new arena for HROs.

Another paradox is that HROs' "successful games" may have contributed to weakening the legitimacy of the human rights struggle among the Chinese population. The majority of Norwegian HROs reported that many Chinese regarded the campaigns as provocations – a desire to spoil the party. To be negatively associated with an event which many Chinese were proud of may well have resulted in many – who potentially could have contributed to advancing the HROs' values – turning their back on them. At the extreme, it may possibly have resulted in many supporting the regime's leaders and boosting their legitimacy.

The Norwegian HROs' experience from the Beijing Games indicates that they are facing two difficult dilemmas when they are to select a strategy for future engagement. On the one hand, the HROs regard it as their duty to shame in order to prevent the host nation using a major sports event to acquire more national and international legitimacy. On the other hand, the shaming strategy can amplify the Olympic stress syndrome and establish insensitivity towards new assaults on the very people they wish to assist. The second dilemma is that on the one hand the shaming strategy can provide the human rights case and the organisation with legitimacy. On the other hand, the HROs' unilateral negative focus might damage their own case and reputation in as much as the host nation's population turns against them. These dilemmas challenge the way in which HROs evaluate the short and long term gains compared to the costs when they engage in major sporting events and the extent to which major sporting events are an appropriate arena for human rights activism, irrespective of whether they are arranged by totalitarian or authoritarian regimes.

## Concluding remarks

In this article we have presented different perspectives on shaming by HROs seen from the theoretical approaches of social constructivism and realism in order to understand the organisations' comprehension of the Olympic Games as an arena for human rights activism and how this was reflected in their work. The literature on shaming shows that this can

have a positive effect on human rights reform and practice, but also results in further assaults (Hafner-Burton 2008). In our study, we show that the HROs exaggerated the significance of the Beijing Olympics and underestimated the negative consequences of shaming China. Further studies on the international HROs' Olympic activism should build on this theoretical debate to empirically study host nations' responses to HROs' "Olympic shaming".

We have also shown that it is important to discuss whether these Games have contributed to a change in the international human rights movement's approach to the Olympics as an arena for activism. We see that Norwegian HROs have learnt from their experience with the Beijing Games and have recognised that the negative consequences also have to be put into the equation of strategic shaming of host nations of a major sporting events. If we are to believe the responses of the HROs, we can expect that they will engage less in direct confrontation with host nations and rather focus their activities on third-party actors (especially raising the "moral consciousness" of the IOC) and local opposition. This view was also emphasised by the Amnesty International's British project manager for sport and Human Rights, Brian Dooley, during the international conference "Play the Game" in 2009. Dooley admitted that Amnesty International focused too much on the Chinese authorities and too little on IOC's role as the proprietor of the Games and IOC's criteria for assigning the Games to a certain host nation. In future, according to Dooley, the HROs would have to target the IOC and apply pressure on this body to introduce a fourth pillar in the assignment criteria – human rights (in addition to sport, culture and the environment). Dooley pointed out that the official sponsors of the arrangement must also be held responsible. Sponsors could therefore be understood as important third-party actors which the HROs could influence (Play the Game, 2009). The participant nations' Olympic committees (NOCs) may also be considered as third-party actors of strategic interest. They represent the athletes who, on account of their celebrity status and direct contact with the host nation's athletes and leaders, can contribute to the overall pressure. Before and during the Beijing Games, we saw that the IOC, NOCs and athletes were particularly reserved in making comments regarding questions of human rights. But if we are to believe the Norwegian HROs, then the Olympic movement should expect more pressure from the human rights movement at future events. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that increased pressure through third parties and

local mobilisation, to the advantage of massive shaming of the host nation, can give the HROs and their core interest less attention and press coverage. In that situation their PR-value would be lost.

Another point is that increased pressure from the international HRO movements on the IOC could result in fewer Olympic events in states with repressive governments. First, assignment criteria heavily based on human rights would strongly favour those nations with the best human rights records, thus determining the premises by which countries can be assigned the Olympics. Second, it could result in fewer applications from non-democratic countries since the negative consequences of hosting the Olympics would out-weigh the positive results. In this manner, the Olympics could lose its significance as an arena for global human rights activism.

The next major international sporting event is the winter Olympics in Russia in February 2014. The host city, Sochi, is located near the Caucasus region and Georgia – a political minefield. Further, Russia has introduced laws which conflict with international human rights conventions (for example, laws relating to homosexuals). Thus, the Games provides HROs with the opportunity to apply pressure on the Russian authorities. This is interesting seen through the eyes of Norway and other Nordic countries. Compared to the Beijing Games, Norway's position in the sports arena during the Sochi Games will be different. Norway is a "super power" in the winter Olympics and a neighbouring country to Russia. Based on the *Olympic dilemmas* presented in this article it will be of considerable interest to analyse the Norwegian HRO's engagement before, during and after these Games.

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