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Thesis summary
The Globalisation of the Olympic Games
From Seoul (1988) to Sydney (2000)

Doctorate in Geography - Thesis
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The Summer Olympic Games have a size and scope that know no equal. From 1896, the date of the first revived Games in Athens, Greece, where 14 countries were present, to 2000 - the last edition of the Games in Sydney, Australia, where 199 nations took part - the Summer Olympic Games have conquered the planet (the Winter Olympic Games have a smaller audience as they brought together only 78 countries in 2002 in Salt Lake City). The Summer Games are now **an essential event** on the international scene. Every four years, every nation expresses itself during this event, with its rich and varied programme of competitions. Only Olympism has succeeded in bringing together so many people around sport, in one single event. Beyond the image of universality that characterises the Olympic Games and the movement that they have generated (the Olympic Movement), we believe it pertinent to study the real scope of the system, and try to answer the following question: *To what extent are the Summer Olympic Games globalised?*

In the face of the complexity of the Olympic system, we have tried to identify and analyse the behaviour of the people involved through two axes. The first theme of our reflection dealt with **the structural aspects of the Olympic Movement**, through the roles and links that unite the three pillars, which are the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Federations (IFs) and the National Olympic Committees (NOCs).

The objective of the second part of our investigation was to **show the strategies expressed during the course of the Summer Games from 1988 to 2000**. To do this, we took into account the participation conditions defined by the Olympic programme (jointly issued from the IOC and the IFs) and the significance of the delegations (amount of participants, inscriptions and success). We established a method of analysis to measure the conditions and evolution of NOC access to Olympic competitions. We concentrated on the performance of national teams, in order to evaluate the NOCs' ability (an NOC is the Olympic organ representing a country) to succeed in the competition. We then juxtaposed our hypotheses with extra-sporting factors via the intermediary of a statistical method: Correspondence Factor Analysis. This enabled us to validate some of our reasoning and explain the global strategies of countries participating in the Olympic Games. Finally, we shed light on a specific theme: women's sport. We chose this theme not only because it was strongly promoted during the period under study, but also because political upheavals have had profound repercussions on this issue.

Globally, we have been able to show that political, cultural and economic spheres play a major role in the levels of development of the Olympic Movement.

1. The IOC – The responsible organisation

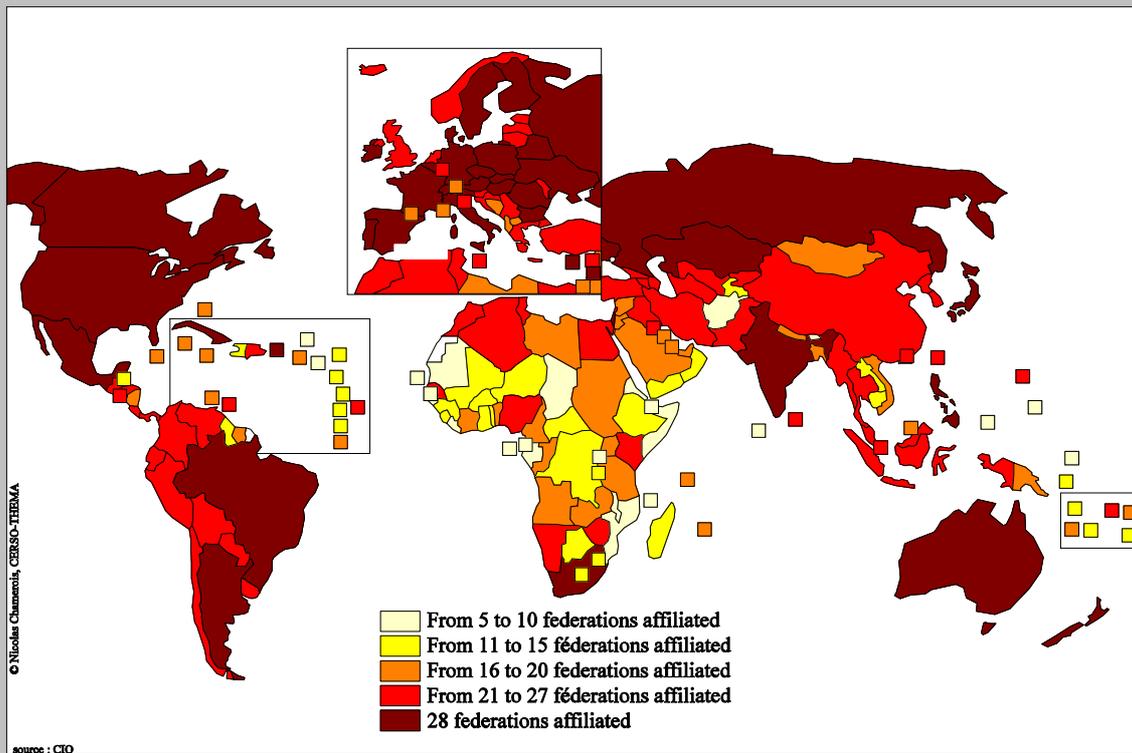
The IOC is the organisation responsible for the development of the Olympic Games. From an internal point of view, it turned its operations upside down in 1999, by including more people from the world of sport (NOCs, IFs, athletes). It thus had the opportunity to become a little more international (through the role and nationality of its members) and to modernise its image. The International Olympic Committee has the power to introduce new sporting practices, elect host cities and develop (in collaboration with the IFs) qualification criteria for the competitors, and thus holds the key to globalisation. Notwithstanding, one is forced to note that the IOC uses its power parsimoniously. Its strategy vis-à-vis the Olympic event prevents it from doing so. Indeed, hosting the Games is something that only a few rich countries can do. Africa and South America have never had this honour, and it would be difficult for the IOC to bestow it (if it so wished) on every continent. The size of the Games and their cost reduce the number of viable candidatures. Similarly, this event has reached a threshold as far as the number of sports is concerned. So as not to give in to gigantism, entry criteria for sports, and qualification criteria for athletes, have become draconian. The weight and success of the Games bestow on the IOC a certain authority over the decisions made. Conversely, relations with the NOCs fluctuate more. In the face of national claims by some entities (who have tried, among other things, to use the IOC to make their appearance on the world stage), the IOC has found itself obliged to modify its Charter and to better define the notion of a “country”. To avoid giving legitimacy to political acts, the IOC now abides by the resolutions of the international community (notably the UN). Since 1894, Olympism has progressively spread across the whole planet. It is here that the phenomenon of globalisation finds its real meaning, as there are now 199 recognised NOCs.

2. The IFs – The plurality of sports at the service of globalisation

Sports are managed by the International Federations, which seek to develop and emerge onto the international scene. The IOC has made its mark on almost all sporting practices by giving them the label “Olympic”. However, not all IFs are present at the Olympic Games. Although many of them are candidates for admission, few are chosen. At the 2000 Games, 28 sports (and as many IFs) had this privilege. The Olympic Games are a real opportunity for these organisations, who profit both from public awareness and from the financial repercussions of this event. Few IFs are able to overlook this event (football, tennis and perhaps athletics have the means to exist outside the Olympic Games). Therefore, they all look to increase their impact by demanding more events or allotted places.

It is the plurality of the sports that confers the global character on the event, because every sporting culture is represented. However, these practices do not all have the same weight on the international scale. They vary from confidential to universal, according to the nature of the sport in question, their length of existence and the cost of their practice. We have noted that, already at this stage, there was opposition between rich countries (which are affiliated to a large number of IFs) and disfavoured nations (which prioritise basic sports, such as athletics or team sports, to the detriment of *a priori* costly practices such as equestrian sports, sailing or rowing.)

Extract 1. Map 1: The number of affiliated federations per NOC, a variable figure



*Various factors account for this uneven distribution. The first is undoubtedly **economic development**: rich countries as opposed to poor ones. There is also the North / South divide. Then, there is the question of size. Micro-states, whether they are rich or not, in Asia, America or Europe carry less weight in terms of sport. That said, NOCs of very densely-populated countries do not necessarily have a strong affiliation policy. Thus, demographic weight is not a determining factor.*

*The existence of strong NOCs in weaker areas can also be explained by tradition, e.g. the **historical influence of colonisation and its sporting heritage**.*

*Economic instability also differentiates between NOCs. The recently-created republics of the former Yugoslavia or USSR show very uneven affiliation levels. This criterion is linked to **political commitment**, which is a determining element in the development and structuring of sport practice (areas of the ex-USSR, China, etc.).*

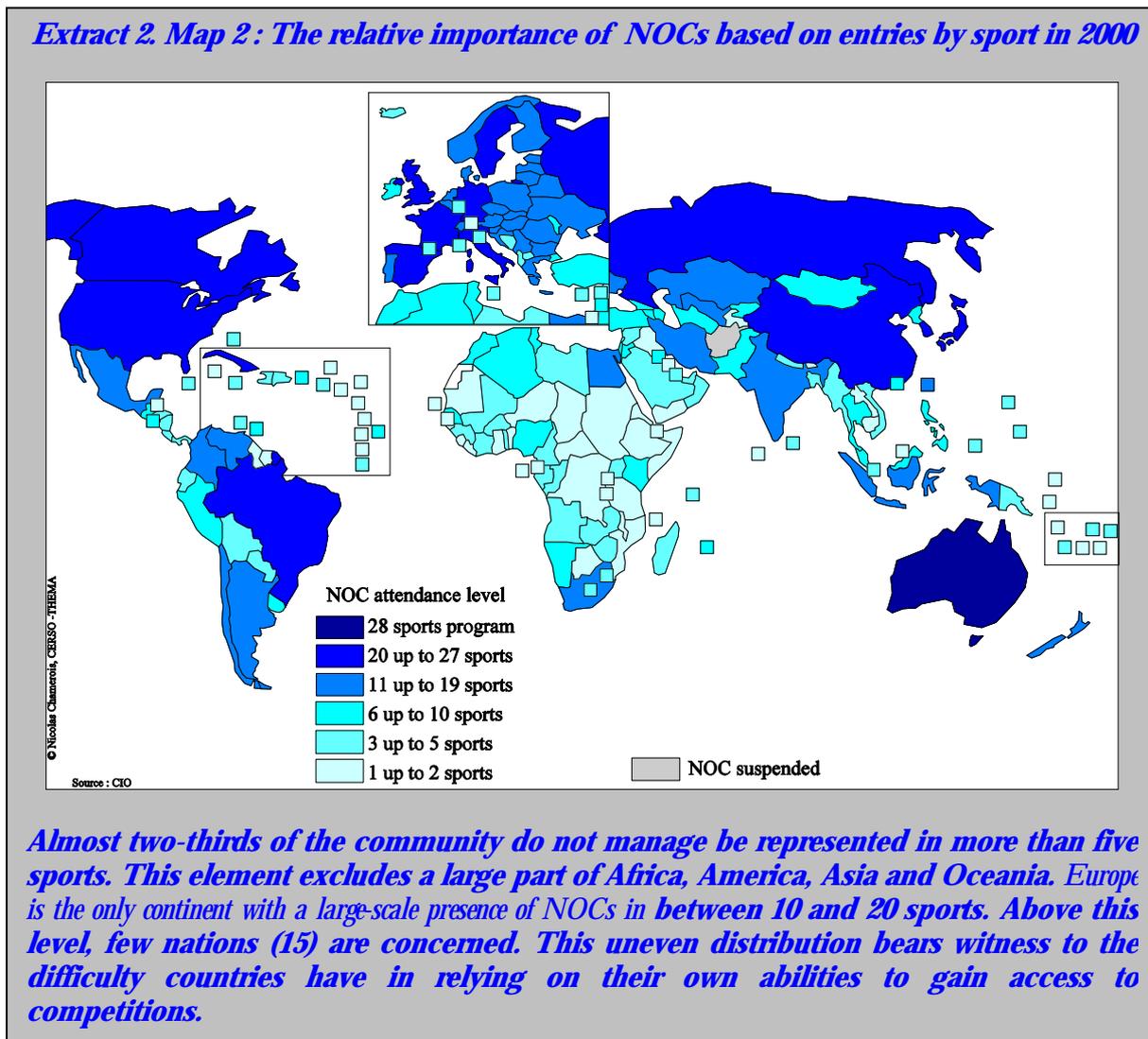
*Lastly, this very uneven distribution is also because the level of **interest** in different sports varies between countries.*

In the course of this study, we also came across the existence of 28 different conceptions of a “territory”. Indeed, every IF has the power to recognise national federations according to various criteria. This may appear to be anecdotal, but the affiliation to IFs is an initial recognition of the country on the international stage. It is also one of the conditions that needs to be fulfilled when a country requests the creation of an NOC, thus bringing it onto the Olympic stage.

3. The NOCs- between globalisation of participation and confiscation of success

Under the impulse of President Samaranch, the Olympic Movement found once again the unity that had long suffered from successive boycotts (from 1976 to 1984). After a century of existence, the IOC had succeeded in bringing together the whole planet. NOC recognition turns out to be an essential factor in the political recognition of nations, on the same level as UN recognition. Furthermore, all countries now make an effort to participate, notably to benefit from the media coverage generated by the Olympic event. On this level, therefore, the phenomenon of globalisation is appropriate as long as the process of expansion seems to have come to an end. However, the behaviour of the delegations incites us to put our words into perspective. Studying participation and success showed profound contrasts between the NOCs. Access to competitions is too difficult for a majority of countries, which can only become involved in the most basic sporting practices where athlete quotas are high and qualification conditions fairly easy (athletics, swimming, boxing and judo). Looking at success rates (which we determined from the eight first places in each event) amplified these contrasts. Having powerful teams (in terms of athletes and success) is only the prerogative of some countries.

Extract 2. Map 2: The relative importance of NOCs based on entries by sport in 2000



The spatial spread of these different elements is reflected globally in a contrast between the rich nations and developing countries. However, the factor of economic development does not explain everything. The demographic size of the country is also a factor, but it has a threshold effect. Countries with small populations, however rich they are, struggle to make their mark. The country's sporting tradition is also a determining factor. It originates in the history of the country. This element is the fruit of the culture of people and/or the effect of the country's politics. This often brings about a phenomenon of sporting specialisation, which is the first indicator of the NOCs' strategy.

4. The Olympic Games- prospects for the future

The period between 1988 and 2000 was a watershed era for the Olympic Games. The collapse of the communist bloc lessened the influence of politics in the organisation of the competitions. East-West relations are almost normal for the time being. However, the behaviour of China and Cuba shows that some entities still use sport to essentially political ends. Identical behaviour can be found among the host countries, which establish strategies for sporting development and preparation (Greece for 2004). Similarly, the scandal in the ice skating competition of the Salt Lake City Winter Games (following the judging in the pairs' event where the Canadians felt they had been unfairly treated, to the advantage of the Russian winners) temporarily reawakened old resentments between the USA and Russia. **The political dimension is therefore always present, even if it is now subjacent.**

It would not seem as if the Olympic Games are threatened by boycotts as in the past. The stabilisation of world politics has enabled the IOC to further develop the Olympic event by introducing new competitions. However, the arrival of new countries and the regular increase in competitions have put the Olympics in a dangerous situation. **The IOC, anxious to protect the Games, seems to want to re-orientate its policy**, by fixing a limited number of athletes and a more flexible programme as far as competition format is concerned.

The necessity to restrain the cost of organisation and to conform to media requirements (notably those of television companies, which are among the most important economic partners of the Olympic Movement) prevents the geographical expansion, in terms of participation and success, of the Olympic event.

Taking a geo-political approach, we are progressively slipping towards a geo-marketing approach. This strategy cannot promote an increase in participation and successes. On the contrary, as the number of athletes cannot increase, it is the elite who will be strengthened. In summary, we can conclude that the Olympic world is a paradoxical world which, at the same time as being proud to bring together the nations at the same festival, wants to favour the elite for "visibility" reasons. Apparently, the future of the Games does not lie in real globalisation, unless sporting bodies help the least well-off countries to develop.

This thesis is available from the Library of the Olympic Museum Lausanne. For any further information regarding this work, please contact the External Relations Service of the Olympic Studies Centre at: studies_centre.museum@olympic.org or by fax: +41 21 621 65 12.