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Meta-organization design applied to international sport organizations: the case of World Anti-Doping Agency

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Summary

The concept of meta-organization has attracted great interest from research perspectives since 2005. It is seen as a way to reflect the current organizational reality characterized by associations of independent organizations working together to achieve a common goal. Meta-organization allows understanding globalization and internationalization of our world. However, little has been done on meta-organization. Its understanding remains still poorly developed. This paper focuses on an international sport organization, namely World Anti-doping Agency, which aims at harmonizing the fight against doping in sport. We argue that sport field highlights relevant attributes of meta-organization which help to establish a better understanding of sport organizations’ management and meta-organization’s concept. Their attributes (e.g. openness of boundaries, internal stratification, and consensus decision-making) help to establish a better understanding of international sport associations. This paper contributes to a better knowledge of meta-organization and serves as a starting point for future research in the management of sport organizations.

Keywords: meta-organization, World Anti-Doping Agency, consensus

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The concept of meta-organization has attracted great interest from research perspectives since 2005. It is seen as a way to reflect the current organizational reality characterized by associations of independent organizations working together to achieve a common goal. Meta-organization allows understanding globalization and internationalization of our world. However, little has been done on meta-organization. Its understanding remains still poorly developed. This paper focuses on an international sport organization, namely World Anti-Doping Agency, which aims at harmonizing the fight against doping in sport. We argue that sport field highlights relevant attributes of meta-organization which help to establish a better understanding of sport organizations’ management and meta-organization’s concept. Their attributes (e.g. openness of boundaries, internal stratification, and consensus decision-making) help to establish a better understanding of international sport associations. This paper contributes to a better knowledge of meta-organization and serves as a starting point for future research in the management of sport organizations.

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Introduction

The world of organizations has considerably changed over the last 30 years. Scholars have pointed out that collaborative relationships between firms have increased (Gulati, 1995, 1998, 2007; Gulati, Puranam & Tushman, 2012; Reuer, 2004; Tushman, Lakhani & Lifshitz-Assaf, 2012). Due to technological evolution, such as internet, knowledge production and dissemination have become easier even outside the traditional boundaries of the firm (Gulati & al., 2012; Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010; Tushman & al., 2012; von Hippel, 2005). Therefore, more actors outside the firm’s boundaries have access to knowledge applicable to firm in general (Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010; Tushman & al., 2012). Furthermore, this gives rise to the awareness that actors outside firm boundaries are relevant and can be taken into account for firm solutions (Gulati & al., 2012; Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010; von Hippel, 2005).

Boundaries openness and firms collaborations make scholars rethink the organizational world. Whereas formerly, the core of the firms was inside the boundaries, it is now displaced outside (Baldwin & von Hippel, 2011). The world of practice places now a greater importance on coordination outside the boundaries but organizational theories still emphasize characteristics that do not exist within open communities (Gulati & Singh, 1998; Gulati, Lawrence & Puranam, 2005; Gulati & al., 2012; Reuer, 2004). Indeed, pecuniary incentives (salary increase, promotion opportunities), hierarchy or collocation of individuals performing independent activities are not relevant anymore in new organizational design (De Noni, Ganzaroli & Orsi, 2012; Gulati & al., 2012). Those open communities operate as a unique actor and challenge the classical organizational theories by the fact they are characterized by intrinsic and pro-social motives (Tushman & al., 2012), diffused hierarchy and members organizations rather than individuals (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Gulati & al., 2012).

Scholars argued it was necessary to develop an organizational design reporting the reality of the field where autonomous actors collaborate legally (Tushman & al., 2012). In order to do so, authors introduced the concept of meta-organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Gulati & al., 2012) defined as an organization “whose agents are themselves legally autonomous and not link through employment relationships. An agent in this definition could itself be an organization (within which there may well be employment relationships), but which can be treated as a unitary actor for purpose analysis” (Gulati & al., 2012, p.573).

Much of the research on meta-organizations has been done during the last five years. However, few of them have attempted to deeper understand the concept of meta-
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organization as such (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; De Noni & al., 2012; Gulati & al., 2012; König, Schulte & Enders, 2012; Vifell & Thedvall, 2012). Yet, this concept is relevant to understand the current society since scholars have estimated a number of 10,200 international meta-organizations in 2003 (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). Meta-organizations participate at, and are the consequences of, internationalization and globalization of our organizational world.

As widely and internationally spread, the field of sport is of great interest as it exemplifies perfectly the concept of meta-organization. The field studied also allows a deeper understanding of a new emerging discipline of management studies, namely management of sport organizations. Sport has been recognized as a distinctive field (Brownell, 1995; Pfister & Reese, 1995) and acquires higher importance, as many governments seem to show greater interest in management of sport, since it reflects not only societal dynamics but also the ability it has to play on it (Henne, 2010).

Due to the lack of studies on meta-organization, little is known about their characteristics. Scholars highlight different attributes such as motivation to join, openness of boundaries, degree of internal stratification, consensus decision-making process (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Gulati & al., 2012). However, researches on those features within meta-organization are rare. Although a few studies have pointed out some characteristics, none of them have paid attention to the complexity of the latter despite the crucial role they play in meta-organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; De Noni & al., 2012; Gulati & al., 2012; König & al., 2012).

In this paper, we focus on a specific type of meta-organization, international sport meta-organization and more specifically, the World Anti-doping Agency (WADA). We assume this international sport association is an ideal case study to analyze and understand the concept of meta-organization due to its specificities highlighting the way meta-organization is apprehended and defined and giving some concrete illustration of consensus decision-making process. Furthermore, sport field is an innovative issue of interest in so far as it is a particular type of nonprofit organizations studied only recently in the management field. Then, no studies on meta-organization have examined sport organizations although Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008) considered FIFA as an example of meta-organization.

Meta-organization’s interest is still rare (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; De Noni & al., 2012; Gulati & al., 2012; König & al., 2012; Vifell & Thedvall, 2012) and consensus decision-making process research does not yet exist in the sport meta-organization context. Therefore, a conceptual paper is needed to define the concept of meta-organization in the specific context of sport associations and to give orientation for future research. To this end, the purpose of this paper is to clarify the concept of meta-organization and its consensus decision-making process in the sport context such as in WADA.
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The first section presents the concept of meta-organization according to different studies over the last ten years. Meta-organization in the sport context is highlighted according to the specific characteristics of these organizations. A second section provides a literature review on consensus decision-making process. A third section will then give illustrations in sport meta-organizations in order to better understand this process. A final section discusses the meta-organization concept applied to sport context, its decision-making process and give further directions to study (sport) meta-organization and its consensus decision-making process.

Meta-organization

Meta-organizations have been paid little attention by scholars even if it has been existed for years. Many of the studies that have taken interest of this concept have been published in 2012 (De Noni & al., 2012; Gulati & al., 2012; König & al., 2012; Vifell & Thedvall, 2012), which emphasizes the relevancy and the salience of the topic.

According to Ahrne & Brunsson (2005), meta-organization is unlike organization with individual-based membership because it is characterized by members who are themselves organizations. They include in their definition examples such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Fédération Internationale de Football (FIFA). In line with these authors, Gulati & al. (2012) define the concept of meta-organization as “an organization whose agents are themselves legally autonomous and not linked through employment relationships. An agent in this definition could itself be an organization (within which there may well be employment relationships), but which can be treated as a unitary actor for purpose of analysis” (573).

Furthermore, meta-organization members stay autonomous and independent and are both free to adhere and free to leave the meta-organization whenever they want (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008). They choose to adhere to the meta-organization in view with the goal and activities the latter defends. In contrast to individuals that become members of an organization because of salary incentives or extrinsic motivation, organizations choose to join meta-organization because they share both the purpose and interests of it, and “because they value the activities undertaken and the results achieved” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 433). The most important feature of meta-organization, shown by Gulati & al. (2012), is the lack of formal authority due to the independence of members.

According to these definitions, we argue in this paper that meta-organization is an association of independent organizations, aiming at developing a common project where members keep their autonomy and identity, and develop, at the same time, a common identity of the meta-organization.

Motives for establishing meta-organization are multiple. Ahrne & Brunsson (2008) point out five of them: (1) a need of interaction to increase the total knowledge of organizations through joint capabilities and technologies for instance; (2) a need of a more complex form of interaction, namely collaboration between members; (3)
establishing a meta-organization may create a new actor that allow members a greater power to change their environment and joined forces to reach a common purpose; (4) “meta-organizations are often formed in order to create, reinforce, or at least confirm a certain identity among their members, and that objectives is accomplished by limiting memberships to organizations that are similar in some respect” (70); (5) the demand for creation of a meta-organization originates from other organizations that want to change their environments by creating a new meta-organization within a specific field.

As an illustration, we can underline the creation of the World Anti-doping Agency 1999 (to be effective in 2000 for the Olympic Games in Sydney) after the doping scandal of the Tour de France 1998 (Henne, 2010; Kamber, 2011). This scandal highlighted the need for an independent international agency, with the aim to set unified standards for the fight against doping as well as the coordination between anti-doping actors such as sport organizations, public authorities, and existing national anti-doping agencies. According to Mottram (2011, p.28), “the main reasons for WADA being created were that different international sport federations and national anti-doping organizations were operating different rules, leading to doping cases being contested in courts. There was a lack of a coordinated research policy, particularly with respect to a new analytical method; little has been done to promote anti-doping”.

The initiative was taken by the International Olympic Committee and WADA was created after the first World Conference on Doping in Sport held in Lausanne in February 1999. WADA acts as a facilitator for sport and governance acceptance of the World anti-doping Code and ensures a harmonized approach to anti-doping in all sports and all countries. It has the status of a Foundation with an unlimited duration and eight main objectives:

“(1) to promote and coordinate at international level the fight against doping in sport in all its forms including through in and out-of-competition; to this end, the Foundation will cooperate with intergovernmental organizations, governments, public authorities and other public and private bodies fighting against doping in sport, inter alia the International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Sports Federations (IF), National Olympic Committees (NOC) and the athletes; it will seek and obtain from all of the above the moral and political commitment to follow its recommendations; (2) to reinforce at international level ethical principles for the practice of doping-free sport and to help protect the health of the athletes; (3) to establish, adapt, modify and update for all the public and private bodies concerned, inter alia the IOC, IFs and NOCs, the list of substances and methods prohibited in the practice of sport; the Agency will publish such list at least once a year, to come into force on 1st January of each year, or at any other date fixed by the Agency if the list is modified during the course of the year, (4) to encourage, support, coordinate and, when necessary, undertake, in full cooperation with the public and private bodies concerned, in particular the IOC, IFs and NOCs, the organization of unannounced out-of-competition testing; (5) to develop, harmonize and unify scientific, sampling and technical standards and procedures with regard to analyses and equipment, including the homologation of laboratories, and to create a
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reference laboratory, (6) to promote harmonized rules, disciplinary procedures, sanctions and other means of combating doping in sport, and contribute to the unification thereof, taking into account the rights of the athletes, (7) to devise and develop anti-doping education and prevention programs at international level, in view of promoting the practice of doping-free sport in accordance with ethical principles; (8) to promote and coordinate research in the fight against doping in sport”.

Constitutive instrument of foundation of the Agence Mondiale Antidopage – World Anti-doping Agency, p1

Based on those objectives, we assume WADA was created following a need for a new actor in the sport environment, a need for collaboration between a lot of sport actors to join their forces and knowledge to fight together for the same purpose, avoiding doping in sport. Consequently, the creation of WADA reflects the conditions of meta-organization’s establishment.

Once the decision of establishing a meta-organization has been taken, membership criteria had to be discussed. Several incentives to join meta-organization were highlighted by the authors (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Gulati & al., 2012) and were linked with the criteria of its creation. First of all, members have the possibilities to develop cooperation in order to reach a common purpose or to achieve external influence. Indeed, by concentrating resources, meta-organization can develop and support actions that are in line with members’ interests and will give benefits to them. Meta-organization can also sometimes protect its members from external pressures and may be attractive for them because they affect their social status (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Gulati & al., 2012). Members do not have to provide a great contribution to join a meta-organization but on the counterpart, they will see their autonomy reduce. (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005).

The core of meta-organization’s definition highlighted the fact that members are not individuals but organizations that keep their independence and relative autonomy. As far as WADA’s members are concerned, independent agencies on national basis (NADOs) and on regional basis (RADOs) were founded or reorganized to assure their independence (Kamber, 2011). Kamber (2011) identifies, for instance, the creation or restructuration of the Anti-Doping Norway in 2003, the Finnish Anti-Doping Agency in 2001, the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority in 2006, Drug Free Sport New Zealand in 2006 and Anti-doping Switzerland Foundation in 2008. Nonetheless it is emphasized that countries still lack national or regional organizations. As a consequence efforts are made to help increase the creation of such independent organizations because of their key role in the harmonization of fight against doping.
Taxonomy of meta-organizations

Members’ independence, inexistence of employment relationships and relative power of each member don’t allow meta-organization to establish strong hierarchy and formal authority (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008; Gulati & al., 2012; König & al., 2012; Vifell & Thedvall, 2012). Consequently, Gulati & al. (2012, p.573) assume meta-organizations may possess informal authority, “which is based on their expertise, reputation, status, gatekeeping privileges and a control over key resources”. According to Gulati & al. (2012), meta-organization develop substitutes for formal authority, what exhibits variations both in the way they are generated and exercised. To understand those variations, two dimensions of meta-organizations have to be considered (Gulati & al., 2012). First, the degree of boundaries’ openness, which is characterized according to three different aspects: (1) who chooses the members of the meta-organization, (2) what the criteria for membership are, and (3) what the criteria of duration and exclusivity of membership are.

The first aspect - the choice to join the meta-organization - may assume two scenarios: On one hand, membership may be closed and decided by the designers of meta-organization. It can also results from collective approval of existing members (Gulati & al., 2012). On the other hand, the decision of taking on membership’s decision can be more open and based on self-selection, leaving new members to decide which contribution they want to provide to the meta-organization they join. Then, designers of meta-organizations, even if there is no employment relationship, will develop criteria to define members’ attributes. They can choose either to left a low openness of boundaries, in order to select only members with specific criteria, or inversely, to open their boundaries. In the definition of Ahrne & Brunsson (2005), members of a meta-organization join the latter because of their similarities and willingness to collaborate. Gulati & al. (2012) assume that one criterion for boundary arrangement is the degree of redundancy of members’ resources and capabilities. Redundancy is defined by the degree to which members possess identical relevant resources or capabilities. Authors argue meta-organization looking for high redundancy between its members will maintain a low level of interdependence so that, even if membership fluctuates, there will be few disrupting operations. However, a high degree of redundancy increases the likelihood of conflicts between members that will be more likely to struggle to become irreplaceable. Conversely, low redundancy meta-organization is characterized by strong members’ interdependencies.

Finally, last criteria linked to openness of boundaries are linked to the nature of relationships between members, namely exclusivity and duration of their membership. Exclusivity of membership refers to the focus of contributions made by members. Indeed, meta-organizations may require exclusive membership so that members cannot join another type of meta-organization. In contrast, some can accept members to be part of other meta-organization because they do not compete. Duration of membership defines the length of time an organization remains a meta-organization’s member (Gulati & al., 2012).
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Summarizing the key ideas surrounding boundaries’ openness, we argue, in line with Gulati & al. (2012), that meta-organization’s dynamics is altered depending on who are its members, which attributes they possess and which degree of redundancy is allowed. Openness of boundaries should then be considered when studying meta-organization since closed boundaries is associated with early negotiation about specific role of each member, duration and exclusivity of membership. Also, closed membership associates few members and an effort to facilitate coordination between members thanks to their diversity. On the other hand, open membership creates difficulty to control entry and exit of members and as a consequence, results in losses of collaboration process.

Based on the openness of boundaries criterion, we state that World Anti-doping Agency can be defined as a closed boundaries meta-organization. Indeed, criteria of who will become member of WADA are well defined since members are International Federations (IF’s), National Anti-doping Agencies (NADO’s), Regional Anti-doping Agencies (RADO’s), International Olympic Committee (IOC), National Olympic Committees (NOC’s), governments and Anti-doping Laboratories.

““The following entities shall be Signatories accepting the Code: WADA, The International Olympic Committee, International Federations, The International Paralympic Committee, National Olympic Committees, National Paralympic Committees, Major Event Organizations, and National Anti-Doping Organizations. These entities shall accept the Code by signing a declaration of acceptance upon approval by each of their respective governing bodies.””


Furthermore, criteria of membership are defined in the World Anti-Doping Code. For instance, article 20 of the World Anti-doping Code 2009 defines that IOC has the roles and responsibilities “to adopt and implement anti-doping policies and rules for the Olympic Games which conform with the Code; to require as a condition of recognition by the IOC, that If’s within the Olympic Movement are in compliance with the Code; to cooperate with relevant national organizations and agencies and other Anti-doping Organizations” (p.104).

A majority of members existed before the establishment of WADA. They decided to join WADA to create a monopoly and to harmonize the fight against doping. In order to respect criteria of WADA, some of the NADO’s had to develop restructuration (Kamber, 2011). Some countries still do not have created an independent National Anti-doping Organization. Therefore WADA works actively at helping those countries to create new national members.
Furthermore, members have to be compliant to several rules or standards to keep their legitimacy within WADA. Concretely, in order to achieve harmonization in the fight against doping, members adhere to the World Anti-doping Program which is divided in three levels: (1) the World Anti-doping Code, (2) the International Standards and (3) Models of best practices. The first two levels are mandatory for members of WADA while models of best practice facilitate members’ implementation of the Code. Model rules and guidelines are solutions that allow members taking into account their own rules and regulations. Two types of model rules have been developed: one addressed to International Federations and the other one to National Anti-doping Organizations. They give information on what is mandatory or not in the Code and helps members to amend or reword the non-mandatory articles in order to fit with their needs. WADA also provides guidelines that are non-mandatory but help members’ activities such as whereabouts or blood sample. Finally, WADA develops forms that are used by members as already filled-in-tools.

![Figure 1: Levels of World Anti-doping Program](image)

**Level 1: World Anti-Doping Code (Mandatory for all signatories)**

- Therapeutic Use Exemptions
- Laboratories
- Prohibited List
- Testing
- Protection of Privacy and Personal Information

**Level 2: International Standards (Mandatory for all signatories)**

- Model Rules
  - Model Rules for International Federations
  - Model Rules for National Anti-doping Organizations
- Guidelines
- Forms

Adapted from Play True (2005, p6)

The other way to differentiate meta-organizations is to identify their degree of internal stratification (Gulati & al., 2012). According to the authors, many of them exhibit a high hierarchical differentiation of member’s roles but some do not. According to Boudreau & Lakhani (2009), high stratification characterizes meta-organization where a single actor aggregate efforts of multiple members. In meta-organization characterized by high degree of stratification, the upper tiers exercise more responsibility both to coordinate activities and to participate in the decision-making process. Also, upper tiers
reduce coordinative complexity because they create subgroups within the collective (Gulati & al., 2012) and help developing motivation (Fjeldstad & al., 2012). In line with traditional organizations, hierarchical levels allow to specify spans of control within the meta-organization. As stated above, stratification can also help motivation because benefits associated with higher level of hierarchy can become incentives for members and make them contribute to the collective.

High degree of stratification allows creating a social structure to guide task identification and assignment, decision-making and conflict resolution while low degree of stratification supports the emergence of equality between members, making actors both principals and agents of the meta-organization. Meta-organization with low degree of stratification will be more likely to adopt a peer-based approach to reach coordination and will involve negotiation and consensus-building efforts due to the fact members have similar rights and responsibilities to achieve an agreement for the collective. According to Gulati & al. (2012), a context of low stratification enhances the sense of ownership and the commitment to the meta-organization. However, this could be time consuming because it makes it more difficult to take common decisions and to resolve conflicts.

In line with the definition of internal stratification, we argue that WADA would be a meta-organization with low degree of stratification since only two levels exist. The first level is the World Anti-doping Agency itself, composed of half representatives from the Olympic Movement and half from governments. The same parity is respected concerning its funding. Second level is represented by all National Anti-doping Organizations and Regional Anti-doping Organizations. Each member has the similar rights and responsibilities in its country.

Based on both the degree of boundaries’ openness and the degree of internal stratification, Gulati & al. (2012) develop taxonomy of meta-organizations, proposing four types of the latter. Firstly, extended-enterprises are characterized by significant degree of stratification and closed boundaries so that they resemble traditional enterprise models. Indeed, in this type of meta-organization, a firm develops partnerships with other organizations that possess complementary characteristics to enhance its own capacities.

Secondly, they propose a closed-community model, characterized by a low degree of stratification and closed boundaries. This type of meta-organization distributed more decision-making and responsibilities even if there is still lead actors. Furthermore, action in this type of meta-organization is multilateral rather than unilateral (Gulati & al., 2012; Evans & Wolf, 2005). Members are expected to be proactive in directing the meta-organization and to invest in its future. Then, closed-community meta-organization seeks to build member consensus on regulatory initiatives, governance and standards (Gulati & al., 2012; Rosenkopf, Metiu & George, 2001).

Thirdly, flexible boundaries and a less defined authority characterize open-communities. Therefore, this type of meta-organization is constantly experiencing flux. Due to less defined authority, linkages between members are emergent and not directed
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(O’Mahony & Ferraro, 2007). Simple agreement upon rules and/or mutual ad hoc policing of member activity creates order in this type of meta-organization.

Finally, the managed ecosystem model is defined by Gulati & al. (2012) as a contribution to the system’s input of the large majority of members and also by a group of editors that takes the responsibility of policing, or selection and retention process.

Based on this taxonomy and according to our development about WADA’s boundaries and internal stratification, World Anti-doping Agency would be characterized as a closed-community meta-organization.

In the following section we will analyze the consensus decision-making process and multilateral decision-making experimented by this type of meta-organization.

Meta-organization’s decision-making process

Conflicts are common in meta-organization because of the loss of autonomy and identity members face (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). Due to its diffused hierarchy, to the fact that members have more resources than meta-organization itself, and that the latter needs to retain its members, meta-organization cannot impose a decision to its members. Therefore, in order to avoid a loss of members and to preserve its monopoly, meta-organization develops a process of consensus decision-making based on standards’ enactment (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008). As noticed by Gulati et al. (2012), closed-community meta-organization is specifically used to develop this type of decision-making as well as standards. Furthermore, Kellermanns et al. (2011) pointed out that a higher degree of consensus was associated with an improved coordination and cooperation in the implementation of strategy and with organizational performance.

Considering that meta-organization are inclined not to use formal authority and hierarchical decision-making process, and also that it needs collaboration between its members to implement decisions or practices within all its members, we claim consensus would be helpful to regulate this type of organization.

Consensus has been largely studies in the 80’s and 90’s and is defined by scholars as an agreement of all parties to a group decision (Dess & Origer, 1987). Floyd and Wooldridge (1992), more precisely considered consensus as an agreement among top, middle and operating levels managers on the fundamental priorities of the organization. In line with those authors, Knight & al. (1999) defined consensus as “the share cognitions among team members. This term mainly refers to agreement or overlap among individual team members’ mental models of strategy, but does not necessarily imply a deliberative consensus seeking process” (Knight & al., 1999, 42). Innes and Booher (1999) considered that consensus refers to an “array of practices in which stakeholders, selected to represent different interests, come together for face-to-face, long term dialogue to address a policy issue of common concern” (PAGE). Finally, Kellermanns et al. (2005) defined strategic consensus as the “shared understanding of strategic priorities among managers at the top, middle and/operating levels of the
According to Hartenett (2010, p.2), a “consensus oriented process is one in which people work together to reach as much agreement as possible”. As pointed out by those definitions, consensus if often considered as a process but may also be considered as an outcome as well (Dess & Origer, 1987). Finally, according to scholars, consensus has importance both in the strategic decision-making process as well as in the implementation process (Markoczy, 2001).

Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) pointed out four levels of consensus: (1) strong consensus where actors share both a common understanding and a common commitment to the strategy, (2) blind adoption where they are highly committed but do not share an understanding about what that “something” is, (3) informed skepticism in which actors share an understanding but are not committed to it and (4) weak consensus where actors neither shared highly understanding neither committed highly to the priorities of the organization. Furthermore, they consider two characteristics of consensus, namely its content and its scope. They define content as “what managers agree about” and the scope as “who the consensus is among”. In line with Floyd and Wooldridge (1992), Marckoczy (2001) shows four facets of consensus. First, the locus of consensus, which reflects which members of organization participate in the consensus. Then the scope of consensus that represents the number of members who participate in it. The degree of consensus defines how strongly the consensus is held and finally, the content of consensus refers to what the actual beliefs are.

According to Mackoczy (2001), most studies about consensus focuses on its degree. (Bourgeois, 1980; DeWoot & al., 1977; Dess, 1987; Grinyer & Norburn, 1977). Studies focused on the link between degree of consensus and organizational performance, considering this relation as positive. Even if the degree of consensus may be low at the early stage of the process, this low degree may be effective because it triggers the different viewpoints. The author show that this low level may be positive if two conditions are met: this viewpoint conflict leads to reconsideration of the different viewpoints and after that, a level of consensus is still reached. Indeed, some studies showed that teams that first met conflict about decisions but still reached a consensus where those who met the most efficient decision outcomes (Priem & al., 1995).

Considering consensus as a decision-making process, Ahrne & Brunsson (2008) claim that meta-organization’s specific decision-making process also affects decisions’ formulation. Indeed, optional rules are favored, namely standards (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000). Standards are easier to decide and implement than directives because the latter leave no choice to members that have to comply with it. Implementation of standards is a members’ decision so that it become easier than implementing directives (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). Indeed, leaving a relative ambiguity to decisions allows members to interpret and reformulate them in line with their own goals, values or norms.

Main purpose of establishing a meta-organization is the harmonization of its context. In order to do so it aims at implementing standards within all its members. Due to standards’ specificities, members can implement standards following different ways according to their own interpretation of them. On the one hand, this helps members to
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comply with standards but on the other hand, meta-organization may face complexity to manage all these interpretations and consequently, implementation (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008).

As we define WADA to be a closed-community meta-organization, and because the main purpose of establishing a meta-organization is to share common interests and to collaborate, we argue WADA would develop a consensus decision-making process, multilateral decision-making process as well as it will enact standards.

Indeed, J.A. Samaranch, IOC President addressed a letter to Mister Schwimmer, General Secretary of Council of Europe in 1999 to explain that they aim at developing a new partnership between public authorities and IOC. To this end, they wanted to establish an agency in which decision will be taken by consensus between members (Council of Europe, Ministry Committee, CM (99) 154, 27th October 1999).

Then, as an example, we noticed that the Chairman of the Executive Committee of WADA thought Wada has to impose itself about tests for detecting EPO and about the verdict of the IOC Medical Commission. He claims that WADA “had to try to build a consensus. This was one of the reasons why WADA had had to negotiate case-by-case with each individual IF, which were all entirely autonomous within their own sphere of activities, to try to persuade them to participate in WADA’s program. It was one of the reasons why it had to reach an agreement with any organization, including the IOC, regarding the role of the independent observer” (Minutes of the Conference Call of the Executive Committee of the World anti-doping agency, 2 August 2000, Lausanne, p7).

Consensus is also highlighted when developing rules of the Anti-doping Code: “When reviewing the facts and the lax of a given case, all courts, arbitral hearing panels and other adjudicating bodies should be aware and respect the distinct nature of the anti-doping rules in the Code and the fact that those rules represent the consensus of a broad spectrum of stakeholders around the world with an interest in fair sport” (World Anti-doping Code, 2009, p18).

As noticed by Gulati et al. (2012), closed-community meta-organization develops multilateral decision-making process. As shown in the Annual Report 2011 of WADA, “Wada created and regularly updates the World Anti-doping Code (Code) through a collaborative global process”. Another evidence of multilateral process is seen in the message of the Chairman, John Fahey claiming that “Consultation and coordination are fundamental to the Code’s continued development and WADA will be encouraging and collating the input of global sport, government and law enforcement stakeholders as we continue to ensure that sports’ guiding anti-doping document continues to represent and serve the entire anti-doping community. All WADA signatories, as well as athletes and even members of the general public, are encouraged to contribute to the Code Review Process. An online tool, “WADA Connect”, has been created to make the process simpler and more efficient than ever before”. (p4).
As results of consensus and multilateral approach, WADA developed international standards. “Working groups developed the mandatory level-two International Standards within the following areas: laboratories, testing, therapeutic use exemptions and the prohibited list. The International Standards were circulated for comments in mid-November” (Annual Report WADA, 2002, p8).

As far as WADA is concerned, and as we developed in the section about criteria to become a member, standards are compulsory for all signatories. However, a process of consultation allows them to give their feedback about standards before their implementation.

In order to develop the Code, more than “90 stakeholders submitted comments in response to the second draft of the Code […]”. The drafting of the Code represented an unprecedented and extensive consultation process involving all categories of stakeholders and experts. All stakeholders were informed about important milestones and activities and all had the opportunity to provide feedback, which was incorporated into each succeeding focused on progress and achievements according to agreed objectives, milestones and timelines. Once the Code has been accepted at the World Conference stakeholders will individually adopt and implement the Code according to their organizational or governmental regulations” (Annul Report WADA, 2002, p8).

The most current process of multilateral decision-making is the revision of the World Anti-doping Code and the International Standards which has to be finalized for November 2013 for the World Anti-doping Conference hold in Johannesburg. This revision process offers all members to contribute to an improvement of the Code and the Standards by taking into account their comments. This process is available on-line and is monthly updated. In order to highlight the multilateral decision-making process we summarize the most relevant steps planned for the revision.

The process of review has started in November 2011 and all members were informed they can provide suggestions for amendments to the World Anti-doping Code. In February 2012, a first draft of the Code 2015 is presented to the WADA Executive Committee and Foundation Board. They finalize the draft in order to send it to all members. Members can give feedback on the first draft from June 2013. At the same time the revision of International Standards has started. The deadline to submit the second revision of the Code and the first revision of International Standards is October 2012. On November 2012, finalization of the second draft of the Code started and WADA launched the third Code and second International Standards consultations. It has been planned to make the third draft of the Code and the second draft of International Standards in May 2013 in order to present the final projects at the Executive Committee and the Foundation Board in November 2013 for the World Anti-doping Conference.

Given our development, this article supports that WADA decision-making process is multilateral and aims at reaching consensus. The consultation process that is carried out allows standards to be admitted by all WADA’s members so that they become mandatory.
Discussion and conclusion

The analysis we have developed throughout this paper helps to demonstrate that international sport associations such as WADA fit with the theoretical concept of meta-organization. In the first step, we have highlighted theoretical features that reflect specificities of WADA. In particular, we have shown that motives that have created WADA were in line with those developed by meta-organizational theories. Specifically, members of WADA are independent organizations which decide to join their efforts in order to develop collaboration and harmonization between existing or new national anti-doping agencies. Furthermore, WADA aims at developing a monopoly in the fight against doping and members join WADA for its intrinsic purpose and not for pecuniary incentives.

In the second step, we have identified WADA as a closed-community meta-organization as defined in the taxonomy of Gulati et al. (2012). Firstly, we have shown WADA was characterized by closed boundaries insofar members were well defined in the World Anti-doping Code and have to be compliant with rules or standards. Secondly, because of its two hierarchical levels, we have considered WADA was a meta-organization with low degree of stratification. Consequently, we assume this paper allows a deeper understanding of one type within this taxonomy.

We have also developed the way WADA regulates and identify compelling evidence that consensus decision-making a salient process as well as what Gulati & al. (2012) call multilateral decision-making. According to our analyzes we observe that reaching consensus is a never ending process within WADA since the doping matter is constantly evolving with regard to scientific, medical and ethical purposes. Therefore, it could be understood as a process facing different levels of consensus in order to reach the strong consensus defined as a level consensus in which actors share both a common understanding and a common commitment of the decision (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992).

Then, we have highlighted that WADA’s international standards were not voluntary rules as defined by Ahrne & Brunsson (2005) since all signatories of the World Anti-doping Program have to comply with the latter. However, due to the huge consultation process that is proposed to all WADA’s members, we argue consensus decision-making process has been mobilized so that all actors give their agreement on it before it becomes mandatory. Moreover, we show that, even if WADA’s members had to comply with mandatory rules (e.g. World Anti-doping Code or International Standards), they were also provided with non-mandatory best practices (e.g. forms, model of best practices) that help them implementing rules within their own national and organizational contexts. Therefore, we assume WADA, even as a closed-community meta-organization encompasses both mandatory and voluntary practices.

Further research should analyze other international sport associations, as the International Olympic Committee, to identify whether they are also meta-organizations and if they could be defined as closed-community meta-organizations. Furthermore, it could be interesting to assess the consensus decision-making process in other types of
meta-organizations as open-community, extended-enterprise or managed ecosystem since consensus was defined by Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) to be the salient decision-making process of meta-organization in order to avoid conflict.

We assume this paper theoretical implications would be a deeper understanding of the new meta-organization theoretical concept by giving highlights from the field and concrete justification. Then, the implication to the management of sport organizations would be the parallel we identified between organizational theory and concept developed in the management field so that we show evidence that management of sport organizations is an integral part of management sciences.

Despite the conceptual focus of this paper, managerial implications could be highlighted. Indeed, we developed an understanding of what meta-organizational concept in international sport refers to. Consequently, managers and members of international sport associations might benefit when they aim to develop new rules intended to be implemented by all members. They need to consider their meta-organization specificities as their need to decide by consensus in order to get the agreement of all. In particular, they should take into account the fact that a reviewing process of constitutive rules needs to be developed within all members and that, because of the international spread of members, it is likely that consensus will not be strong at the very beginning.

This paper has some limitations to consider. Indeed, we studied one international sport organization. However, international sport organizations are multiple (e.g. IOC, SportAccord) and do not collaborate to the same purpose with all the same members. Thus our analyses of them would surely be different. However, their main characteristics are those highlighted in this paper and suggested by Ahrne and Brunsson (2005) and Gulati and al. (2012): need to collaborate to develop a same purpose, willingness to create a monopoly in a field, members that are organizations rather than individuals, international members that stay independent and keep their own autonomy and identity. Furthermore, this paper calls for further research in order to develop and validate a consistent model of meta-organizations in the sport sector.
References