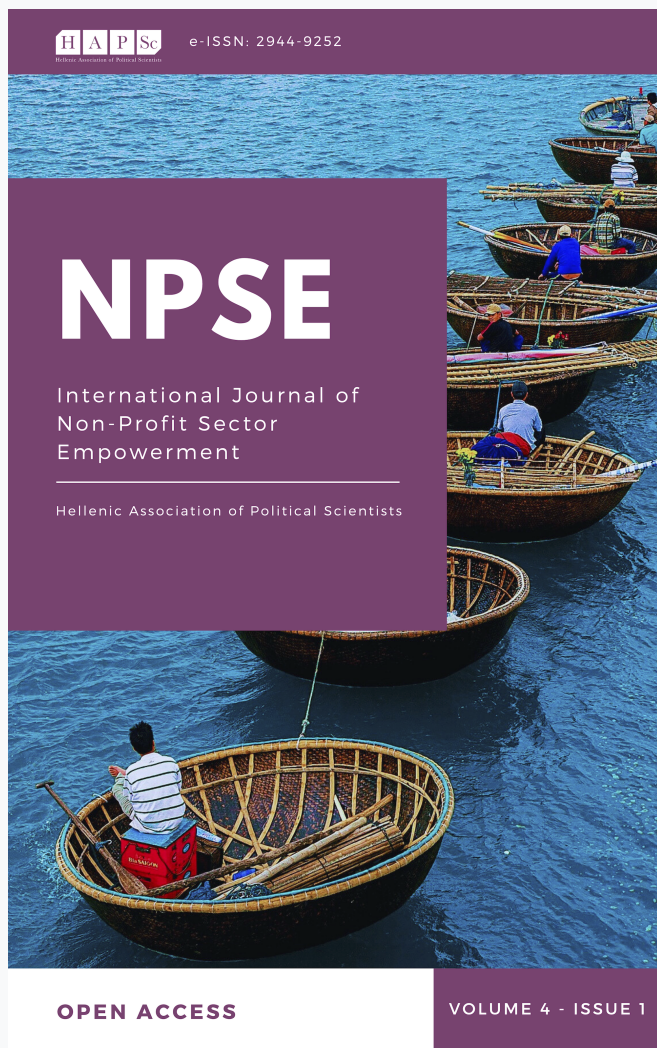


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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) Practices within the International Olympic Committee: An Electronic Archival Research

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Abstract

This study explores the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) engagement in Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA) and offers insights into how the organization communicates its advocacy practices. Using a qualitative approach, the study conducted an electronic archival analysis of the IOC News website via the Wayback Machine. Out of 1,421 initially identified documents, 119 met the final selection criteria for analysis. Findings show that the IOC engages in CSA by addressing topics such as environmental sustainability (especially climate change) and human rights, with a focus on gender equality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and refugee support. The IOC promotes environmental protection through partnerships, particularly with the United Nations, and encourages female leadership and refugee participation in sport. These findings expand CSA theory by showing that CSA is not always profit-driven but can also aim to influence global awareness and cultural change. The study also calls for a rethinking of what is considered "controversial" in CSA, especially in diverse sport governance settings.

Keywords: Strategic communication; Sustainability; Human rights; Refugees; Gender equity

Introduction

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is arguably the most influential global sport organization, and as an independent non-profit, allocates 90% of its annual revenue to support athletes and sports organizations, showcasing its ability to drive meaningful change (Paris 2024, n/a). The IOC's responsibilities include governance and ensuring safe and inclusive sports practices (Chappelet, 2009; IOC, n/aa). Its core values (excellence, friendship, and respect) are central to its philosophy of Olympism, which seeks to unite sport, culture, and education to foster socially responsible and peaceful communities (Kinoshita et al., 2021; IOC, n/ab). Thus, the IOC stands as a cornerstone of global sports governance, leveraging its resources and values to promote safe and socially responsible sports practices while fostering a harmonious connection between sport, culture, and education.

Beyond organizing the Olympic Games, the IOC holds an important influence in shaping global sport and social movements. More specifically, given its vast international reach, the IOC has the potential to advocate for pressing social issues, making CSA a relevant concept in its operations. CSA refers to the practice of organizations using their platform and resources to take a stance on political or social issues, often to advance broader societal progress (Dodd & Supa, 2014). In the context of sport, CSA is particularly important because sport is deeply connected with culture, identity, and human rights. More particularly, sport organizations find themselves at the center of discussions on racial justice, gender equality, sustainability, and human rights (Smith & McCarthy, 2020).

Arguably, given its global audience, the IOC has a unique opportunity to shape public discourse and influence policies. Investigating how the IOC engages in corporate social advocacy (CSA) is essential to understanding how major sport organizations contribute to social change on a global level. Therefore, this study aims to examine the IOC's CSA efforts and address the following question: What CSA practices, if any, does the IOC implement?

Understanding the Origin of Corporate Social Advocacy

CSA has emerged as a significant strategy for organizations to engage with social and political issues that resonate with stakeholders, often extending beyond traditional Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Dodd & Supa, 2015). CSA falls under the umbrella of CSR and Strategic Issue Management (SIM) and is characterized by corporate engagement in controversial sociopolitical topics (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Unlike CSR, which typically addresses broader social or environmental concerns to enhance corporate image, CSA represents a more direct and proactive stance. Companies use CSA to publicly align themselves with contentious social issues, influencing public discourse and stakeholder perceptions (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020).

Initially explored within public relations, CSA has since expanded to other fields, including marketing communication (Park, 2022), public interest communication (Austin et al., 2019), and management communication (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). Scholars emphasize that CSA serves as a tool for organizations to raise profits, boost social reputation, and enhance stakeholder relationships, particularly with media and activist groups (Chen et al., 2015). Companies like Nike and Gillette exemplify this trend, having taken bold stances on racial justice and gender equality, respectively (Park & Jiang, 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2021). These cases illustrate how CSA enables brands to express values, deepen consumer connections, and actively participate in societal debates (Parcha & Westerman, 2020).

Despite its potential, CSA is not without risk. Organizations must carefully consider the impact of CSA strategies on their goals and reputation (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Research shows that the perceived authenticity of a company's stance is critical; actions must align with stated values to foster trust and loyalty (Yim, 2021; Zhou & Dong, 2021). In contrast, advocacy perceived as insincere can lead to backlash and damage a company's reputation (Heffron, 2019). Thus, consistency between values and actions is crucial to maintaining the credibility of advocacy efforts (Zhou & Dong, 2021).

CSA strategies often involve various communication channels, including formal corporate statements, publicized executive interviews, cause-related advertising, and corporate donations to advocacy organizations (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Nalick et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2021). Social media further amplifies these efforts, allowing companies to engage broader audiences quickly but also exposing them to rapid public reactions (Hill, 2023; Weber et al., 2022). When used effectively, CSA can demonstrate organizational authenticity and legitimacy (Sone & Lan, 2022).

The internal impact of CSA is equally significant. Employees who perceive their organization as genuinely committed to social causes are more likely to exhibit organizational commitment and advocacy behaviors (Walden & Westerman, 2018). This alignment fosters a culture of advocacy, enhancing both internal cohesion and external stakeholder engagement (Ng et al., 2018).

Given its growing influence, CSA is increasingly relevant in fields such as public policy, where organizations play a role in shaping democratic societies (Parcha et al., 2020; Emmanouil-Kalos & Vozikis, 2025). By approaching sports as a microcosm of society, organizations like the IOC can integrate CSA into their agenda to raise awareness on controversial issues, drive internal and external positive social change, and support the development of more democratic and inclusive societies.

Materials and Methods

This current study is grounded in the epistemological framework of social constructionism, which posits that reality is shaped by human actions and is influenced by social factors rather than natural or biological ones (Crotty, 2015; Diaz-Leon, 2013). Social constructionism emphasizes that society is continually formed through human interactions and interpretations, presenting the social world as a web of meanings created by individuals and groups (Crotty, 2015). All knowledge is created by people, is shared through communication, and influenced by social interactions. Knowledge, whether between individuals or organizations, shapes how we understand and interpret reality. (e.g., Burr, 1995; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Gergen, 1999). This is also done through what is communicated outwardly to the world such as through websites. Within this framework, this study considers the CSA of the IOC

and focuses on how the organization constructs and communicates its potential CSA practices. By exploring the IOC's public-facing materials (such as digital content) this research examines how the organization discursively positions itself with the CSA. Through the lens of social constructionism, this study seeks to explore how the IOC's CSA practices that contributions to social and political outcomes.

Methodology

This case study is based on archival extraction to explore the IOC CSA practices. According to Yin (2014), a case study has four applications: 1) to explain, 2) to describe, 3) to evaluate, and 4) to explore situations that their outcomes have not yet been evaluated. Thus, this descriptive case study describes the CSA phenomenon related to the IOC practices.

In the current research, six steps were followed as provided by Skinner et al. (2014). More specifically, (1) determine and define research question(s), (2), select the case and determine data gathering and analysis techniques, (3) prepare to collect the data, (4), collect data from within the field, (5), evaluate and analyze the data, and finally, (6) understand what the organization's current advocacy practices are. These steps are described further in the following sections.

Data Gathering

An electronic archival search was performed with a focus on the IOC website.¹ The choice to extract news from the IOC's website was purposeful and aligns with CSA theory, which emphasizes that practices must be publicly communicated (Dodd & Supa, 2014). The IOC communicates its initiatives primarily through its website, particularly via the "News" section. More specifically, media serves as a key tool for organizations to connect with their audiences, helping to build trust and foster stronger ties (Belai et al., 2019). In today's landscape, audience engagement is central to how news outlets relate to the public and develop sustainable strategies. This increasingly involves tracking and analyzing audience behaviors through metrics that have become essential in the media world (Steensen et al., 2020).

The IOC website from the year 2016 until the year 2022 was searched using the Wayback Machine (WM).² This timeframe was selected strategically, as it encompasses a period marked by significant global and sociopolitical developments. Within this six-year frame, four Olympic Games were held (Rio 2016, PyeongChang 2018, Tokyo 2020 (held in 2021), and Beijing 2022), each of which included

¹ <https://olympics.com/ioc>

² <https://achieve.org/web/>

issues of social justice and institutional accountability. The Rio 2016 Games brought to public attention the widely reported cases of harassment, abuse, and misconduct in sport. PyeongChang 2018 marked the IOC's early steps toward proactive safeguarding measures and the promotion of gender equity. The postponement of the Tokyo 2020 Games due to the pandemic intensified public debate on athlete welfare, governance, and transparency. Finally, the Beijing 2022 Games reignited global discussions surrounding human rights, freedom of expression, and political representation. Arguably, this period illustrates the IOC's gradual evolution from reactive crisis management to more proactive, policy-based engagement (particularly evident in its safeguarding initiatives equity frameworks, and the development of the IOC Human Rights Report).

While the search was limited from 2016 until the end of 2022, the extracted data may have also highlighted earlier milestones where the IOC had already communicated CSA practices as an important aspect of its (ongoing) initiatives. For instance, historical patterns in the IOC's advocacy efforts such as the 2012 London Games were noted specifically regarding inclusivity and diversity.

The WM is an instrument for digital research; a tool that is an initiative of internet archive and is recognized as the largest web archive in the world (Ogden et al., 2023). Through the WM, researchers can view the original version of each website, as well as the dates and content of subsequent updates (Murphy et al., 2007). To search content within a website, users type the URL of the site are interested in, into the address box on the WM homepage. Then the WM returns the date of original site creation, number and date of site updates, and links to archived sites (Murphy et al., 2007). Thus, through this process, people can track the evolution of a website and its context.

The WM allows tracking website evolution and context. While it has limitations, such as not indexing all content, studies confirm its validity in assessing website content, age, and updates (Murphy et al., 2007). It also demonstrates predictive, nomological, and convergent validity for website age and updates. As a validated research tool (Quarles & Crudo, 2014), researchers can confidently integrate its data into their studies. Beyond website changes, the WM aids in understanding organizational evolution and shifting positions on various topics.

Data: IOC Website

Within this website there is a section called "Topics". Within this section there were 10 topics including Press Releases (IOC, n/da), IOC statement (IOC, n/db), Olympic highlights (IOC, n/dc), Paris 2024, (IOC, n/dd) Milano Cortina 2026 (IOC n/de), Gender equality (IOC, n/df), Sustainability (IOC, n/dg), Refugee Olympic Team (IOC n/dh), Olympic Games Legacy (IOC n/di), and Fight Against Doping

(IOC n/dj). While summing up all the data from all the 10 Topics published from 2016 to 2022, 1,421 documents were available for extraction.

To answer the study purpose, further criteria were applied to help narrow the documents available. For instance, since CSA represents corporate engagement/public stance on issues that have relevance to other individuals and lack direct relevance to the objectives and goals of different companies/organizations (Dodd & Supa, 2014), the study focused on news that contained words such as *sustainability* or words relevant to social or political stances (e.g., *planet, environmental sustainability, reusage, planet, environmental legacy, nature, atmosphere, climate, carbon free*). Also, titles that contained a combination of *human rights* or words relevant to social or political stances were retained (e.g., *equality, women, inclusion, female, gender*). These criteria resulted in 119 sources. More specifically, 21 out of 556 data points were from the Topics “Press Releases”, 1 out of 48 data from IOC “Statements”, 0 out of 138 data from “Olympic Highlights”, 0 out of 74 data from “Paris 2024”, 0 out of 24 data from “Milano Cortina”, 29 out of 122 data from “Gender Equality”, 41 out of 114 sources from “Sustainability”, 24 out of 66 data from “Refugee Olympic team”, 8 out of 163 data from “Olympic Game Legacy”, and 0 out of 116 sources from the Topic “Fight Against Anti-Doping”. From this process, 5 articles were duplicated. More specifically two news were seen both in the Topic “Sustainability and “Press Release”, and three news were also observed within “Sustainability and “Olympic Legacy”.

Data Analysis

A total of 119 sources were extracted for the data analysis. The data analysis followed the six-step thematic analysis framework outlined by Braun & Clarke (2022): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial code generation, (3) uncovering themes, (4) potential theme review, (5) theme definition and naming, and (6) results reporting.

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data

All headlines and content were read to understand the important messages being conveyed in the articles.

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

Initial codes were generated through creating a word file that helped organize the data around potential categories. Example of these codes are the importance of climate, importance of helping athletes from war torn countries, supporting female representation, supporting diversity.

Step 3: Constructing Initial Themes

Recurring patterns in the IOC's communications began to crystallize around three repetitive areas: 1) IOC and Environmental Sustainability, 2) IOC and Gender Equality, and 3) IOC and Refugee Support.

Step 4: Review and Develop Themes.

The frequency and clarity of the IOC's references to their advocacy efforts were assessed and discussed to ensure that the themes were grounded in consistent evidence without crossing over each other. All sources were organized in a Word document to allow for the tracking of the IOC's CSA practices over the study time framing.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

The final themes were refined and then defined: A) IOC and Environmental Sustainability: This theme incorporated news articles under the "Sustainability" section of the IOC's website, highlighting the organization's advocacy for environmental sustainability and climate action.³ B) IOC and Gender Equality: This theme examined the IOC's public statements and initiatives advocating for gender equity in sports, including leadership representation and athlete participation.⁴ Finally, C) IOC and Refugee Support: This theme focused on the IOC's efforts to support displaced athletes and promote refugee inclusion through the Refugee Olympic Team and other related programs.⁵

Step 6: Write Up the Analysis

In writing up the analysis, the themes were presented in an order that reflects how they emerged in the data, starting with the one that appeared most consistently and with the most depth across sources. Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) guidance, this ordering was not meant to suggest that the IOC necessarily emphasizes environmental sustainability more than other issues like gender equality or refugee support. Rather, the decision was made to begin with environmental sustainability because it was the most developed theme in terms of content and clarity during the analysis.

Results

The results are organized around the study's purpose and research question with tables summarizing key themes. Each table focuses on a specific theme and highlights key categories and their details: Environmental sustainability (Table 1), gender equality (Table 2), and refugee support (Table 3) further revealing the IOC's advocacy practices.

³ <https://www.olympics.com/ioc/theme-sustainability>

⁴ <https://www.olympics.com/ioc/theme-gender-equality>

⁵ <https://www.olympics.com/ioc/theme-refugee-olympic-team>

Table 1. IOC & Environmental Sustainability

Category	Action
Venue Design and Construction	The IOC promotes sustainable venue development through energy-efficient designs, water conservation, and green spaces, exemplified by Tokyo 2020's use of recycled materials for podiums and the Olympic torch.
Renewable Energy and Carbon Reduction	The IOC aims to achieve climate-positive Games by 2030, as demonstrated by the PyeongChang Winter Games' use of renewable energy and waste reduction efforts, alongside a targeted 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
Sustainability Initiatives	Tokyo 2020 advanced sustainability initiatives by implementing waste reduction and recycling strategies, including producing medals from donated electronic devices.
Collaborations and Advocacy	The IOC collaborates with the UN and other stakeholders through the UN Sports for Climate Action initiative to promote global environmental sustainability and collective climate action.
Athlete Advocacy	Olympic athletes, such as Hannah Mills, actively advocate for ocean conservation and sustainable practices, with Olympians and Paralympians participating in campaigns that promote climate action within the sports community and broader society.
Sustainability Programs and Guides	The IOC has developed sustainability programs and guides, including resources for eco-friendly event branding in collaboration with UEFA, and launched the "Olympism 365" initiative to advance environmental and social progress in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
Innovative Practices at Games	Beijing 2022 showcased innovative sustainability practices by reusing and modernizing venues, integrating energy-efficient technologies, and renting equipment to reduce waste, with official reports also emphasizing carbon compensation and ecosystem protection efforts.
Community and Global Impact	Through initiatives like "Game Connect" in Uganda, which supports young refugees' mental health through sport, and the Olympic Forest project that fosters afforestation, biodiversity, and local community development, the IOC emphasizes sustainability's broader community and global impact.
Recognition and Awards	The IOC has recognized climate leadership in sport through initiatives like the 2022 Earth Day celebrations and the Climate Action Awards, while committing to reduce its emissions by 45% by 2030, achieve carbon neutrality, and leave a lasting positive environmental legacy for future Olympic Games.

Note. The table highlights the IOC's environmental protection initiatives, including sustainable practices, renewable energy use, athlete-led environmental advocacy, global collaborations, and future commitments to climate-positive goals and biodiversity promotion.

The IOC has actively engaged in CSA strategies with a focus on environmental sustainability that involves initiatives related to venue design, energy and water conservation, transportation, biodiversity, and environmental restoration. More specifically, the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games exemplified the Olympic Movement's commitment to sustainability, implementing renewable energy use, carbon emission reductions, and waste management measures (IOC, 2021f; IOC, 2022a). Similarly, Tokyo 2020 prioritized sustainability through initiatives like using renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting recycling (IOC, 2021d). Similarly, Beijing 2022 adopted

practices, focusing on resource optimization, modernizing venues, and renting equipment to minimize waste (IOC, 2022b).

In the extracted data it was evident that in 2018, the IOC took a leadership role in the UN Sports for Climate Action initiative, mobilizing the global sports community to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy, and adopt sustainable practices (IOC, 2021e). This commitment was reinforced in 2020 when the IOC announced its goal of hosting climate-positive Games starting in 2030 (IOC, 2021a), while at the same time the organization was planning to bring together sport organizations to discuss environmental protection actions (IOC, 2022p). Also, Paris 2024 aligned with these efforts, and was the first climate-positive Olympic Games reducing carbon emissions and integrating sustainability strategies (IOC, 2021t).

Moreover, athletes play a vital role in the IOC's environmental sustainability. Olympians, including Hannah Mills, have championed sustainability in their respective sports, advocating for ocean conservation and reducing plastic pollution (IOC, 2021c; IOC, 2022j). Many athletes have also participated in IOC-led initiatives, raising awareness about climate change and promoting sustainable practices (IOC, 2021n; IOC, 2021q). The IOC's leadership extends to calling on sports organizations to commit to climate action, encouraging collective efforts to reduce carbon emissions and prioritize sustainability (IOC, 2021l).

The IOC's commitment is further demonstrated through its involvement in the Race to Zero campaign, aiming for net-zero carbon emissions (IOC, 2021q) and by its collaborative efforts with corporate partners like Procter & Gamble (P&G) emphasize shared sustainability goals and initiatives (IOC, 2021z). Also, the IOC introduced Climate Action Awards to recognize efforts in sustainability within the sports sector (IOC, 2022h).

Key environmental sustainability initiatives at the Olympic Games include resource-efficient construction and innovative recycling projects. More specifically, Tokyo 2020's podiums were made from recycled plastic waste, while its medals were produced using metals extracted from donated electronic devices (IOC, 2022i; IOC, 2021b; IOC, 2021i). Paris 2024 aimed to integrate renewable energy and sustainable transportation to minimize its carbon footprint (IOC, 2021p). While Beijing 2022 also emphasized sustainability by repurposing existing venues, reducing waste, and enhancing energy efficiency (IOC, 2022b).

Beyond the Games, the IOC promotes environmental sustainability through projects like the Olympic Forest, an initiative to offset carbon emissions and promote biodiversity (IOC, 2021o; 2021g). The

IOC's #OnePlanetEarth campaign focuses on designing Olympic venues with minimal environmental impact, including carbon reduction, waste management, and biodiversity conservation (IOC, 2021i; IOC, 2022f; IOC, 2022m). Additionally, it was evident that the IOC collaborates with global initiatives (such as the UN Clean Seas campaign) to promote marine conservation and sustainable ocean practices. By joining the UN Clean Seas campaign, the IOC has demonstrated its commitment to reducing plastic pollution and promoting sustainable ocean practices. This initiative, supported by several International Federations and National Olympic Committees, reflects the IOC's broader efforts to mobilize the global sports community in support of marine conservation and ocean protection (IOC, 2022n). In recognition of innovative efforts across the Olympic Movement, the IOC also launched the Climate Action Awards, which celebrate outstanding initiatives by sports organizations that contribute to climate and environmental sustainability (IOC, 2022q).

In addition, the IOC has launched several advocacy initiatives to educate and inspire environmental responsibility. The Olympism 365 initiative aligns sports with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizing sports' role in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges (IOC, 2021s). The Sport Positive Summit convenes sports organizations to discuss sustainability efforts and climate change strategies (IOC, 2022r). Moreover, the IOC's Climate Action Awards celebrate sports organizations that have made significant contributions to climate action (IOC, 2022h).

Further sustainability measures include the IOC's plan to cut direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and create an Olympic Forest to offset unavoidable emissions (IOC, 2021m). Also, the Tokyo 2020 organizers opted to rent equipment rather than purchase, reducing waste and conserving resources (IOC, 2021g). Likewise, Beijing 2022 saved energy by renting 12,000 technological devices instead of buying them (IOC, 2022k).

Educational and community engagement initiatives have also played a crucial role in the IOC's environmental advocacy as part of the CSA practices. More specifically, Tokyo 2020 engaged Japanese schoolchildren in a banner recycling project to promote sustainability awareness among youth (IOC, 2021h; IOC 2022d; IOC 2022e; IOC 2022g). In addition, the IOC recognized 20 sports organizations for their sustainability efforts as part of Earth Day 2022 celebrations (IOC, 2022c). The introduction of a biodiversity conservation framework in 2022 reinforced the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into sports operations and infrastructure (IOC, 2022s).

Reports such as the IOC Sustainability Report highlight the organization's achievements in climate action. From 2017 to 2020, the IOC met 15 of its 18 sustainability objectives, emphasizing biodiversity

promotion, carbon reduction, and sustainable sourcing (IOC, 2021r). Pre-Games Sustainability Reports for Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 outlined their measures for reducing carbon emissions, conserving ecosystems, and benefiting local communities (IOC, 2022k).

To conclude with, the IOC’s sustainability leadership has established the organization as a model for environmental advocacy within the sports system. By promoting best practices while advocating, influencing stakeholders, and engaging athletes and organizations in environmental advocacy practices, the IOC continues to drive positive change within and beyond the Olympic Movement.

Table 2. IOC and Gender Equality

Category	Actions
Milestones	The IOC has progressively advanced gender equality, from promoting inclusivity at the 2012 London Games to launching targeted initiatives in 2017, achieving athlete gender parity at Tokyo 2020, and reaching equal representation in IOC commissions by 2022.
Key Initiatives and Programs	Key IOC initiatives promoting gender equality include the 2017 Host City Contract's inclusion of human rights and labor protections, collaborations with UN Women and UNESCO to empower women, the introduction of 18 mixed-gender events at Tokyo 2020, and the 2022 launch of the WISH program to support female coaches.
Youth and Leadership Advocacy	The IOC’s Youth and Leadership Advocacy efforts include the Young Leaders initiative, which empowers girls and challenges gender bias, while promoting female leadership and representation across global sports initiatives.
Olympic Agenda 2020+5 Goals	The Olympic Agenda 2020+5 outlines goals to achieve gender-balanced representation in decision-making bodies, promote equitable media portrayal during the Games, and enhance the visibility and participation of women in sports governance.
Collaborations and Partnerships	The IOC advances gender equality through collaborations with partners like Airbnb, Alibaba, and International Federations to promote female leadership, alongside Olympic Solidarity programs that support high-performance female coaches.
Awards and Recognition	The IOC recognizes contributions to gender equality through its annual Women and Sport Trophies, with notable recipients such as Hashimoto Seiko, who received the World Trophy in 2021 for her advocacy efforts.
Cultural and Media Representation	The IOC promotes cultural and media representation through its Portrayal Guidelines, which ensure fair and inclusive gender representation in sports media, alongside efforts to balance competition schedules and media coverage for women’s events.
LGBTQ+ Inclusion	The IOC has advanced LGBTQ+ inclusion by incorporating non-discrimination based on sexual orientation into the Olympic Charter in 2014 and continuously supporting LGBTQ+ athletes and initiatives that foster inclusivity within the Olympic Movement.
Celebrations and Advocacy Days	The IOC celebrates and advocates for gender equality through initiatives like International Women’s Day, which highlights female contributions to the Olympic Movement, and by supporting the establishment of the International Day of Women in Diplomacy in 2022.
Commitment Statements	IOC President Thomas Bach has consistently emphasized gender equality as essential for both organizations and society, underscoring the IOC’s commitment to fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination on a global scale.

Note. The table summarizes the IOC’s gender equality initiatives, milestones, and collaborations, highlighting achievements such as gender parity, empowerment programs, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and efforts to promote inclusivity and fair representation in sport.

The IOC has actively engaged in CSA practices, focusing also on gender equality. More specifically, the London 2012 Olympics emphasized inclusivity, providing equal opportunities to athletes regardless of gender or nationality (IOC, 2022an). In addition, in 2017, the IOC updated its Host City Contract to reinforce human rights and anti-corruption measures, ensuring ethical standards in hosting the Games, as also been stated within the IOC strategic Framework on Human Rights (IOC, 2017e; IOC, 2022t)). That same year, the IOC launched a gender equality initiative aimed at increasing female participation, leadership, and representation in sports (IOC, 2017f). Tokyo 2020 furthered these efforts by incorporating more gender-balanced sports and events, showcasing the IOC's commitment to diversity (IOC, 2017a).

The organization also in 2017 recognized gender equality advocates and coaches awarding individuals and organizations for their contributions to women's empowerment in sports (IOC, 2017b). On the International Women's Day 2018, the IOC reaffirmed its commitment to gender diversity through increased representation in leadership and athlete participation (IOC, 2018a). Collaborations with UN Women, UNESCO, P&G, and NBC Sports sought to change perceptions of women in sports through advocacy as well as storytelling (IOC, 2018b).

Moreover, in 2019, the IOC honoured gender equality advocates with Women and Sport Trophies, and further reinforced its commitment to inclusivity (IOC, 2019a). The 2021 IOC statement reiterated its dedication to gender equality (IOC, 2021al). In addition, partner organizations such as Airbnb and Alibaba Cloud emphasized their commitment to supporting female empowerment through leadership opportunities and STEM education (IOC, 2021am; IOC, 2021ao).

Furthermore, IOC Young Leaders have played a crucial role in gender advocacy, including launching initiatives like Just Play India, which promotes girls' participation in sports (IOC, 2022ag; IOC, 2022ah; IOC, 2022ai; IOC, 2022ak; IOC, 2021an). In particular, Pauline Msungu and Jemima Montag have worked to empower women in sports and improve media representation (IOC, 2022af). Also, the IOC Executive Board has reinforced gender equity in Olympic leadership, ensuring equal representation in decision-making roles (IOC, 2021ap). Notable, at the 2021 Generation Equality Forum, the IOC committed to achieving gender parity in athlete participation and leadership by 2024 (IOC, 2021aq).

At Tokyo 2020, the IOC also took important steps related to gender equality and representation, where 89% of National Olympic Committees selected both male and female flagbearers, and 49% of athletes were women, making these Games the most gender-balanced Games in history (IOC, 2021ae). Also, changes in scheduling ensured equal prime-time coverage for women's sports, and mixed-gender

events further promoted inclusivity (IOC, 2021at; IOC, 2021ar). The IOC also updated its media portrayal guidelines to ensure fair representation of female athletes (IOC, 2021as).

Interestingly, in 2021, the IOC introduced a framework for fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination based on gender identity and sex variations, further reinforcing its commitment to advocacy related to inclusivity (IOC, 2021aw). The organization has since approved a human rights strategic framework addressing non-discrimination, labour rights, as well as transparency (IOC, 2021u).

Furthermore, in 2022, the IOC honoured six advocates with Women and Sport Awards, including Hashimoto Seiko, reinforcing its gender equity advocacy (IOC, 2022aa). The Beijing 2022 Games saw record-breaking female participation, reflecting the IOC's progress toward gender parity (IOC, 2022ab), and the same year the International Women's Day was marked by IOC initiatives celebrating women's contributions to sports (IOC, 2022ad). The IOC also welcomed an EU report on that year outlining an action plan for gender equality in sports governance (IOC, 2022ae).

In 2022, the United Nations General Assembly established the International Day of Women in Diplomacy, recognizing the vital contributions of women in international relations (IOC, 2022an). That same year, in September, the IOC reinforced its commitment to gender balance by appointing an equal number of men and women to its commissions, further advocating for equality in leadership (IOC, 2022ap).

Initiatives such as the 'WISH' program support female coaches by promoting professional advancement in Olympic-level coaching (IOC, 2022aq). The IOC President has also advocated for gender equality, emphasizing that it is essential for all organizations and societies, and reinforcing the IOC's commitment to advocacy (IOC, 2022ar). The IOC actively promotes mentorship programs for underprivileged girls, increases the presence of female referees at the Games, and advocates for equal media coverage of women's sports (IOC, 2021w; IOC, 2021av; IOC, 2022ao; IOC, 2022ac). Joint programs with International Federations also provide support for high-performance female coaches, with initiatives such as the 'WISH' program training women for elite coaching roles (IOC, 2022al; IOC, 2022aq).

It is also important to mention that since 2014, the IOC has also advocated for LGBTQ+ inclusion, amending the Olympic Charter to include non-discrimination based on sexual orientation (IOC, 2022am). The Olympic Agenda 2020 and 2020+5 ensured that Tokyo 2020 became the first gender-equal Olympic Games (IOC, 2021ap).

The IOC honours gender equality advocates annually, with awards recognizing individuals advancing women’s sports (IOC, 2017c; IOC, 2022aa). The organization also continues to mark International Women’s Day and support the inclusion of young female leaders (IOC, 2022aj). To conclude with, by setting inclusive policies and promoting gender balance, the IOC exemplifies leadership in gender equality. Its commitment to strengthening these efforts ensures continued progress, making the Olympic Movement a global leader in gender equity advocacy (IOC, 2021au).

Table 3. IOC & Refugee Support

Category	Actions
Creation of Refugee Olympic Team (ROT)	The IOC established the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) in 2016 to provide displaced athletes the opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games, serving as a powerful symbol of hope, resilience, and inclusion while drawing global attention to the refugee crisis and the unifying power of sport.
Key Initiatives and Milestones	Key IOC initiatives supporting refugees include the 2017 celebration of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace recognizing the ROT’s role in promoting solidarity, the 2019 launch of the Refugee Athlete Scholarship program for Tokyo 2020 preparation, and the 2021 establishment of the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF), aiming to support one million displaced youth through sport by 2024.
Partnerships and Collaborations	The IOC collaborates with partners such as UNHCR and Discovery to advocate for refugee rights and inclusion through sport, including initiatives like the “Game Connect” project in Uganda, which focuses on enhancing refugees’ mental health and well-being through sporting activities.
Recognition and Awards	In 2022, the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) and the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) were honored with the Princess of Asturias Award in recognition of their efforts to promote inclusion and solidarity through sport.
Athlete Stories and Impact	Refugee athletes share powerful stories of resilience and achievement, inspiring communities and advocating for greater access to sport, with notable examples like Yusra Mardini (featured in the film <i>The Swimmers</i>) who champions peace and education through her athletic journey.
Educational and Advocacy Programs	The IOC supports refugee athletes through programs like the <i>Olympic Scholarships for Refugee Athletes</i> , which assist National Olympic Committees in training and preparation, and the <i>In Conversation</i> documentary series, which highlights the personal journeys and challenges faced by refugee athletes.
Legacy and Future Goals	The Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) has supported sports programs benefiting over 200,000 displaced youth across eight countries, with ongoing plans to expand these initiatives and ensure safe, inclusive access to sport for refugees by 2024.
Commitment Statements	IOC President Thomas Bach and the organization continue to reaffirm their commitment to solidarity, inclusion, and the promotion of human rights through the unifying power of sport.

Note. The table outlines the IOC’s initiatives supporting refugees, including the Refugee Olympic Team, scholarship programs, strategic partnerships, and advocacy efforts, with an emphasis on inclusion, resilience, and the transformative power of sport.

In 2016, IOC created the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) to provide displaced athletes with the opportunity to compete in the Olympic Games. This initiative aimed to support refugee athletes forced to flee their home countries due to conflict or persecution. Through ROT, the IOC advocated and

demonstrated its commitment to inclusion and solidarity while giving refugee athletes a platform to showcase their talent and represent millions of displaced individuals worldwide (IOC, 2021af; IOC, 2016a). It can be supported that the ROT symbolizes resilience, courage, and hope, inspiring millions of people globally. Comprising athletes from diverse backgrounds, it highlights the challenges refugees face and underscores the importance of solidarity, support, and inclusion (IOC, 2021af; IOC, 2021ad). Their participation raises awareness about the refugee crisis and fosters greater empathy and action on a global scale (IOC, 2016b).

On the 2017, International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, the ROT was recognized as a powerful symbol of unity in sports. Composed of refugee athletes from different backgrounds, the team exemplified resilience and the unifying potential of sports. Through their participation, refugee athletes inspire people worldwide and contribute to fostering peace and social development through sports (IOC, 2017d).

In 2019, the IOC announced the list of refugee athlete scholarship holders striving to be part of the ROT for Tokyo 2020. This initiative provided scholarships, training, and coaching to support refugee athletes. Despite their hardships, these athletes demonstrated remarkable talent and determination, and the program empowered refugee athletes, encouraged participation, and raised international awareness about the refugee crisis (IOC, 2019c).

Ahead of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019, the IOC pledged support for refugees, reinforcing its dedication to using sports to provide opportunities for displaced individuals. The IOC collaborated with governments, Non-Governmental Organization, and sports organizations to ensure refugee access to sports activities and inclusion (IOC, 2019b).

In 2020, refugee athletes shared online experiences in resilience, cooking, and self-defence. More specifically, Syrian swimmer Yusra Mardini led workshops on overcoming challenges, Kenyan athlete Tegla Loroupe provided virtual training tours, Afghan cyclist Masomah Ali Zada showcased traditional cooking, and other refugee athletes conducted fitness and meditative training sessions (IOC, 2020a). Also, the IOC website features refugee athlete stories to promote their right to sports access. Iranian taekwondo athlete Ali Noghandoost shared his journey from Iran to Europe, emphasizing sport's role in resilience. Supported by the IOC's Refugee Athlete Scholarship, he now mentor's young refugees and advocates for refugee athletes (IOC, 2021c). Moreover, refugee athletes such as Asif Sultani and Chajen Dang Yien shared their personal journeys of fleeing war and discovering their talents in refugee camps. Their stories underscored sport's transformative power in overcoming

hardship (IOC, 2021i; IOC, 2021v; IOC, 2022x; iOC, 2022u). The 2021 Refugee Olympic Team journal documented the resilience of 26 athletes, 16 coaches, and 10 officials (IOC, 2021i, 2021v). What is impressive is that one of the most well-known refugee athletes, Yusra Mardini, was featured in the film “The Swimmers”, premiering at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival (IOC, 2022o) and launched the documentary series “In Conversation” with UNHCR, featuring refugee athlete interviews to raise awareness about their journeys (IOC, 2021ai).

In 2021, the IOC Executive Board reviewed the progress of the Refugee Olympic Team (ROT) initiative for Tokyo 2020 and the support provided through Olympic Solidarity (IOC, 2021ab; IOC, 2021ac). A total of 55 refugee athletes from 13 countries were trained for the Games, with the backing of 21 National Olympic Committees. Notably, since the establishment of the ROT, more than 200,000 individuals have been engaged through sport-based programs and is supported that the Olympic Refugee Foundation (ORF) set a goal to reach one million displaced youth through sport programs by 2024 (IOC, 2021ak).

In addition, in 2021, the IOC announced that 29 refugee athletes from 12 sports would compete in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics under the Refugee Olympic Team banner. These athletes were selected based on their performance and refugee status, sending a message of solidarity and resilience (IOC, 2021v). The IOC President Thomas Bach supported the team, attending events and advocating for athlete accessibility in sports as a human right (IOC, 2021v). The IOC also partnered with the United Nation High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR) and Discovery – subscription based streaming service owned by Warner Bros- to spotlight refugee experiences through media initiatives (IOC, 2021v). The same year, the IOC President Thomas Bach met with the Refugee Olympic Team at the Tokyo Olympic Village, accompanied by UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi. The athletes signed the Olympic Truce Mural, symbolizing peace and solidarity (IOC, 2021x). Also, flagbearers Yusra Mardini and Tachlowini Gabriyesos represented the resilience of displaced athletes (IOC, 2021ae) and the team remained a symbol of unity and hope for refugees worldwide (IOC, 2022ai).

Apart from the success of the ROT, the IOC established the ORF in 2017 to support displaced youth through sports. ORF collaborates with UN agencies, NGOs, and private sector partners to ensure access to safe sports for young refugees by 2024. The foundation has supported programs in eight countries, benefiting 200,000 young people (IOC, 2021ak). In 2021, the ORF and the French Sports Ministry signed a EUR 1 million agreement to implement sports programs for refugees in Île-de-France (IOC, 2021ag). The IOC also supports projects such as “Game Connect” in Uganda, aimed at strengthening refugee youth mental health and well-being (IOC, 2021ag).

The ORF in 2021 launched a program in France to provide refugee youth with sports opportunities, enhancing integration and well-being (IOC, 2021ah). Athletes such as Aram Mahmoud emphasized the team's unity and the power of sports in raising awareness about the refugee crisis (IOC, 2021aj). By the end of 2021, the Sport for Refugees Coalition reaffirmed its commitment to providing sports opportunities for refugees through collaborative efforts with the IOC as well as the UNHCR (IOC, 2021ak). The IOC co-leads the Sport for Refugees Coalition with UNHCR and SCORT Foundation, uniting 80 partners to use sports for refugee inclusion (IOC, 2021ak). The organization also highlights refugee athlete stories on its website to inspire and promote refugee sports access (IOC, 2021aa; IOC, 2021ae; IOC, 2021ag; IOC, June 2022w; IOC, 2022y).

In 2022, the ORF and the ROT received the Princess of Asturias Award for Sports, recognizing their efforts in promoting inclusion and solidarity through sports (IOC, 2022m; IOC, 2022v). The IOC also announced new Refugee Athlete Scholarship recipients training for Paris 2024, ensuring continued support for refugee athletes (IOC, 2022g, 2022n).

The IOC has supported refugees through sports since 1994, partnering with UNHCR. The success of the Refugee Olympic Team at Rio 2016 led to the creation of Olympic Solidarity's "Olympic Scholarships for Refugee Athletes" program, enabling National Olympic Committees to support refugee athletes' training and participation (IOC, 2022n). For Paris 2024, the IOC continues to fund refugee athletes through this program (IOC, 2022g).

Despite the postponement of Tokyo 2020 due to COVID-19, the Olympic Solidarity program extended refugee athlete scholarships. The ORF acted as an NOC for refugee athletes, continuing to provide support beyond Olympic participation (IOC, 2022z). In 2022, the ORF and the Refugee Olympic Team received the Prince of Asturias Award for their dedication to refugee athletes (IOC, 2022z).

The IOC continues to provide educational resources for refugee athletes through Athlete365, covering topics like anti-doping, safe sport, and integrity in sports (IOC, 2021y). These initiatives reinforce the IOC's dedication to advocacy and social development through CSA practices, particularly in supporting refugee and displaced populations (IOC, 2022n).

Discussion

The archival data collected and analyzed demonstrated that the IOC's CSA practices center around three themes: environmental sustainability, gender equality, and refugee support. These three areas are further discussed below and related to CSA theory and practice.

Environmental Sustainability

The IOC has actively engaged in CSA strategies, particularly focusing on environmental sustainability. CSA has emerged as a significant strategy for organizations to engage with social and political issues often extending beyond traditional CSR initiatives. Unlike CSR, CSA represents a more direct and proactive stance, often involving contentious social issues to influence public discourse and stakeholder perceptions (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020). The IOC's environmental sustainability initiatives align with CSA principles by publicly committing to significant environmental causes. The IOC's efforts in sustainable venue design, energy and water conservation, transportation, biodiversity, and environmental restoration highlight its proactive approach. For example, the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Games implemented renewable energy use, carbon emission reductions, and waste management measures, underscoring the IOC's advocacy for environmental sustainability (Kim & Grix, 2021). Similarly, Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 adopted sustainability practices, including resource optimization, modernizing venues, and renting equipment to minimize waste (TAKEMI, 2019; IOC, 2022b).

In addition, in 2018, the IOC took a leadership role in the UN Sports for Climate Action initiative, mobilizing the global sports community to reduce carbon emissions and promote renewable energy, (IOC, 2018). This move exemplifies CSA by aligning the organization with a globally contentious issue (climate change) and influencing stakeholder perceptions. The IOC reinforced this commitment in 2020 by announcing its goal of hosting climate-positive Games starting in 2030, action that further demonstrates its proactive stance on environmental advocacy (IOC, 2020c).

All the above are significant for the theory of Corporate Social Advocacy (CSA), as they offer new dimensions to its understanding. Specifically, these findings expand the scope of CSA to include environmental sustainability practices. While existing CSA theory has primarily focused on issues such as human rights, racial justice, and political movements (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020), this study demonstrates that advocacy for environmental protection can also be contentious and political (e.g., debates around carbon neutrality and climate policies).

Moreover, the IOC's CSA strategies extend beyond the Olympic Games. The construction of the Olympic House, completed in 2019, exemplifies the IOC's dedication to sustainability, earning LEED Platinum and Swiss Sustainable Construction Standard certifications (Mork, 2019). Partnerships with organizations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2020 further highlight the IOC's role in guiding cities to integrate biodiversity and conservation into sports facilities (IOC, 2020b). All these initiatives demonstrate CSA practices in action through organizational structures.

Specifically, the IOC's sustainable venue design, use of renewable energy, construction of the Olympic House, and partnership with the IUCN embed advocacy into physical spaces and mega-events. This shows that CSA is not limited to public statements (Dodd & Supa, 2015) but can also be tangible, strategic, and operationalized. Thus, there is empirical evidence supporting CSA theory's claim that advocacy can shape and strengthen an organization's identity (Dodd & Supa, 2014).

It was also evident that athletes play an important role in the IOC's environmental advocacy, a key component of CSA. Olympians like Hannah Mills have championed sustainability in their sports, advocating for ocean conservation and reducing plastic pollution (Dempsey, 2021). Hence, it can be supported that these initiatives align with CSA's emphasis on using influential people to deepen stakeholder connections and actively participate in societal debates (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). In addition to that it should be mentioned that CSA is not only top-down (organization to public) (Dodd & Supa, 2015) but also can be distributed through individuals that can have a great influence within the organization.

Reports such as the IOC Sustainability Report highlight the organization's achievements in climate action, meeting 15 of its 18 sustainability objectives from 2017 to 2020, emphasizing biodiversity promotion, carbon reduction, and sustainable sourcing (IOC, December 2021). These efforts establish the IOC as a model for environmental advocacy within the sports sector, demonstrating the potential of CSA to drive positive change and support the development of more democratic and inclusive societies (Griffiths, 2021; Parcha et al., 2020). Hence, by aligning sustainability practices with democratic ideals (Griffiths, 2021; Parcha et al., 2020), this study positions CSA as a driver of societal transformation, not just a corporate PR move. CSA cannot only be seen as a strategic branding tool (Dodd & Supa, 2015), but also as a normative force for fostering broader societal good, advancing CSA's ethical and political dimensions.

Gender Equality

To begin with, the IOC's gender equality initiatives exemplify CSA positioning the organization as a proactive advocate for social change within the global sports system. CSA involves taking direct and public stances on sociopolitical issues (Dodd & Supa, 2014). The IOC's efforts toward gender equality, including policy reforms, symbolic actions, and partnerships, illustrate how organizational advocacy can be effectively leveraged within the sports industry to influence public discourse and simultaneously foster societal transformation.

It is evident that the IOC's gender equality advocacy aligns with CSA principles by addressing historically controversial issues related to gender equality in sport leadership and participation (Dodd & Supa, 2015). Initiatives such as the 2017 Gender Equality Strategy, the introduction of mixed-gender events at Tokyo 2020, and efforts to achieve gender parity in athlete participation and leadership roles by 2024 reflect a direct and public commitment to advancing gender equity (IOC, 2017, March PR; IOC, 2021, July). Similar to how Nike and Gillette engaged CSA to address racial justice and gender norms (Park & Jiang, 2020; Zhou & Dong, 2021), the IOC uses its global platform to promote gender equality, thereby shaping stakeholder perceptions and contributing to broader societal debates. This positioning is also consistent with SIM principles, highlighting how the organization navigates complex sociopolitical environments (Austin et al., 2019; Park, 2022).

Moreover, a critical factor in the success of CSA initiatives is the element of authenticity (Yim, 2021; Zhou & Dong, 2021). The IOC's long-standing commitment to gender equality (evident through the organization's continuous policy updates, the public recognition of gender equality advocates within its website, and partnerships with organizations such as UN Women, UNESCO, and P&G), demonstrates a sustained alignment between its human rights principles and its actions (IOC, 2018, March PR). These efforts enhance the IOC's credibility and foster trust among stakeholders, including athletes, sponsors, and the broader public. Furthermore, the IOC's ability to embed gender equality into its internal governance structures, such as appointing an equal number of men and women to its commissions in 2022, reinforces the authenticity of its advocacy efforts (IOC, 2022, September). By institutionalizing gender parity, the IOC reduces the risk of its initiatives being perceived as performative or opportunistic, a challenge often associated with CSA efforts that lack genuine organizational commitment (Heffron, 2019).

In addition, the IOC's gender equality advocacy exemplifies how CSA can operate not only externally but also internally. Beyond public statements, the IOC fosters a culture of diversity and inclusivity within its organizational framework, strengthening employee commitment and encouraging internal advocacy behaviors (Walden & Westerman, 2018). The integration of female leadership within its executive structures not only promotes gender parity but also signals that advocacy for gender equality is embedded into the organization's core identity (IOC, 2021, May). This internalization of CSA practices highlights that true advocacy demands transformation at both symbolic and structural levels. The IOC's strategic communication approach further amplifies its gender equality advocacy. Through a multi-channel strategy (including formal statements, publicized events, and guidelines for media portrayal) the IOC ensures global reach and consistent reinforcement of its stance on gender equity

(Bhagwat et al., 2020; IOC, 2018, March PR; IOC, 2021, July). Notably, the IOC's website plays a critical role in this strategy, serving as a central hub for stakeholder engagement and advocacy messaging (Hill, 2023; Weber et al., 2022). Initiatives such as highlighting gender equality advocates' stories and celebrating International Women's Day demonstrate the IOC's commitment to visible, sustained advocacy efforts (IOC, 2022, March).

In addition, the IOC's gender equality initiatives expand CSA theory by demonstrating that advocacy can drive both internal cultural shifts and external societal influence. The organization sets a precedent for other sports institutions, showcasing how embedding CSA into operational and governance frameworks can drive meaningful change across the broader sports industry. This expands the traditional view of CSA beyond marketing strategies toward fostering authentic, measurable social transformation across industries.

Furthermore, the IOC's participation in global platforms such as the Generation Equality Forum illustrates how CSA can extend beyond organizational boundaries aiming to contribute to the development of more democratic and inclusive societies. In doing so, the IOC's approach shows that CSA can operate at a transnational level, promoting normative social change by using sport as a powerful tool for societal democratization and the advancement of human rights.

Refugee Support

The IOC has actively demonstrated CSA through the creation of the ROA in 2016, providing displaced athletes with the opportunity to compete on a global competition. This initiative exemplifies CSA by addressing the contentious sociopolitical issue related with refugee inclusion. Through the ROA, the IOC showcased its commitment to inclusion and solidarity by offering a platform for refugee athletes to represent millions of displaced individuals worldwide (IOC, 2016, March PR). Hence, it can be supported that by focusing on refugee right and inclusion, CSA can also address humanitarian crises and advocacy for marginalized population, and its accessibility to sports as a human right.

Moreover, the Refugee Olympic Team symbolizes resilience, courage, and hope, aligning with CSA's emphasis on using corporate platforms to highlight pressing social issues. By featuring athletes from diverse backgrounds, the organization through the Refugee Olympic Team not only raises awareness about the refugee crisis, but also fosters global empathy and action, reinforcing the IOC's proactive stance in social advocacy (IOC, 2016 PR; Park & Jiang, 2020).

Ahead of the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019, the IOC's pledge to support refugees underscored its CSA strategy, collaborating with governments, NGOs, and sports organizations to ensure refugee

inclusion in sports (IOC, 2019, December PR). The IOC's initiatives, such as online workshops led by refugee athletes and the investment of over USD 2 million in refugee athlete support since Rio 2016, illustrate how CSA fosters both internal cohesion and external stakeholder engagement (IOC, 2020a; IOC, 2021j; Walden & Westerman, 2018). Thus, it is evident that financial support is critical for authentic and credible CSA, not just public messaging.

Also, the IOC's promotion of refugee athlete stories through its website and partnerships with organizations like UNHCR and Discovery exemplify CSA's use of various communication channels to influence public perception and advocate for social justice (IOC, 2021c; IOC, 2021a; Bhagwat et al., 2020). By selecting 29 refugee athletes for Tokyo 2020 and highlighting their journeys, the IOC reinforces its commitment to advocacy and the human right of sport accessibility (IOC, 2021a; IOC, 2021i). Hence, it can be supported that strategic storytelling is an important part of CSA for influencing public discourse and at the same time advance social causes. Needless to say, that also through the aforementioned results, CSA can serve as a platform for advancing universal human right and not only organizational or brand values (Dodd & Supa, 2015).

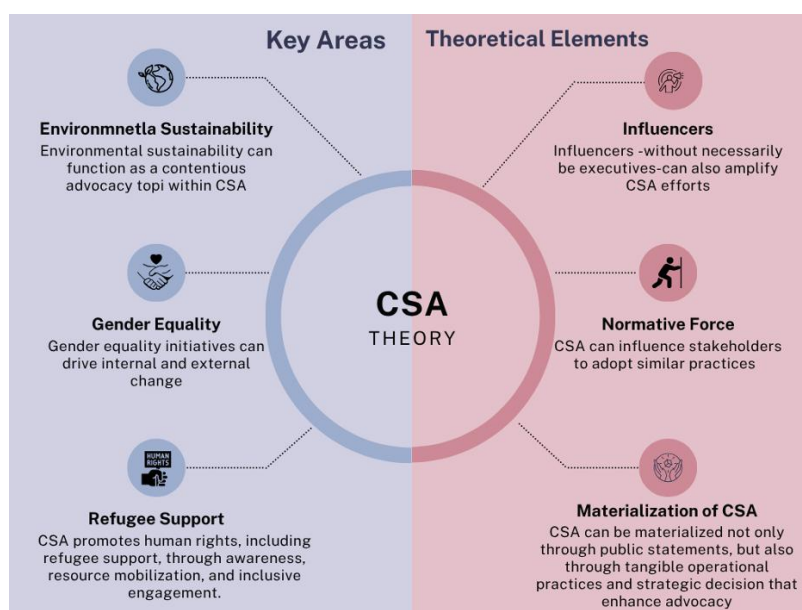
Theory Contribution

This study advances the theory of CSA by demonstrating its applicability beyond traditionally examined sociopolitical issues, such as racial justice and political activism (Austin et al., 2019; Park & Jiang, 2020), expanding it to include environmental sustainability, gender equality, and refugee support within the context of international sport governance. More specifically, by analyzing the IOC's environmental initiatives, this research illustrates that environmental sustainability can function as an important advocacy topic under the CSA framework, broadening the scope of CSA to include climate action, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable urban development. It shows that CSA can be materialized not only through public statements, but also through tangible operational practices, such as venue design and partnerships (Kim & Grix, 2021; IOC, 2022b), advancing CSA as a strategic and operational force.

In addition, the study enriches CSA theory by evidencing that gender equality initiatives can drive authentic internal organizational transformations while simultaneously influencing external societal norms. The IOC's integration of gender parity into governance structures demonstrates that CSA can promote substantive change both symbolically and structurally, reinforcing CSA's potential for fostering long-term cultural shifts within organizations and industries (Zhou & Dong, 2021; Yim, 2021).

Moreover, the analysis of refugee advocacy initiatives positions CSA as a tool not only for corporate branding but for promoting universal human rights and humanitarian causes. The IOC's proactive support for displaced athletes highlights that CSA can foster inclusivity and accessibility in global institutions, aligning advocacy with broader democratic ideals (Bhagwat et al., 2020; Griffiths, 2021). Also, this study empirically supports the notion that CSA is not exclusively a top-down organizational practice, or just a message communicated directly for high level executives (Dodd & Supa, 2015). The communication of the CSA can also emerge through influential individual actors within the organization, such as athletes, who amplify advocacy efforts (Parcha & Westerman, 2020). For example, Pauline Msungu and Jemima Montag have worked to empower women in sports and improve media representation (IOC, 2022af), while also the IOC Executive Board has reinforced gender equity in Olympic leadership, ensuring equal representation in decision-making roles (IOC, 2021ap). These initiatives come from the organization, as well as from athlete advocates helped elevate the organization's advocacy messaging on gender equality. Finally, by examining the IOC's sustained, multi-channel communication strategies (including storytelling, stakeholder partnerships, and event-based advocacy) the study demonstrates that CSA is most effective when is materialised/embedded into an organization's identity and operations, rather than being limited to episodic public statements (Dodd & Supa, 2015; Walden & Westerman, 2018). Overall, this study positions CSA not merely as a strategic branding tool, but as a normative force capable of driving societal transformation across global industries.

Figure 1. CSA in Sport: Key Advocacy Areas and Theoretical Developments



Study Limitations

The current study utilized the WM as a method that has limitations regarding the completeness of website updated and changes. There may have been information or news updates missed by this tool, impacting the research results. Additionally, it is noted that the IOC updated its website to include topics like gender equality and human rights in 2022. However, it is not clear how the organization communicated these themes online before November 2022. Prior to this update, CSA practices may have been stored in a different web environment within the IOC's digital platforms, meaning some earlier advocacy efforts may not have been captured or incorporated into this study. This gap presents a limitation to the study and suggests a potential area for future research on CSA and the IOC.

Additionally, it is important to note that this study was conducted three years ago. If someone were to use the Wayback Machine (WM) today to retrieve data from the IOC News website, the results might differ from those originally obtained. This represents a limitation of the study, as the software may no longer retain all archived content from previous years, potentially leading to discrepancies between past and current search results.

Also, another limitation of this study is the lack of research related to what constitutes “controversial” for the organization or the sport system in general. Additionally, there is no evidence regarding the financial implications of the IOC's CSA practices, which limits understanding of how these advocacy efforts may impact the organization economically.

Moreover, the current study provides an understanding of the IOC involvement in CSA practices with a focus on environmental sustainability and human rights in relation to gender equality and refugee support. The fact that plenty of evidence was available on-line facilitated the research, and the understanding of the IOC and its engagement to CSA practices. However, because the concept of CSA has not yet been explored within the field of sport management, there were challenges related to the CSA theory and how it can be applied to sport. Also, the academic research on CSA within the Sport Management is extremely limited, and this is a matter that also challenged the implementation of the current research.

Conclusions

This study highlights the IOC's evolving role in CSA, focusing on environmental protection, gender equality, and refugee support. The findings reveal that while the IOC has made notable strides in promoting these causes, its advocacy efforts often balance between symbolic gestures and substantive action. In addition, the current study reveals that the IOC's initiatives demonstrate a growing

recognition of its social advocacy, yet challenges remain in ensuring consistent, transparent, and impactful advocacy. In conclusion, this research emphasizes the need for the IOC to utilize its influential platform to advocate for a wide range of social issues, ensuring its contributions are both meaningful and sustained in addressing global challenges.

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