

# **Translating the Global Special Olympics Movement Into Local Community Change**

*Promising Practices in Community Development across  
Namibia, Paraguay, Thailand and Uzbekistan*

TECHNICAL REPORT

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*"Nothing is, by itself, either knowable or  
unknowable, sayable or unsayable, near or far.  
Everything is translated."*

**--Latour, 1988**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Objectives of the Project.....	6
Actor Networks: Which Elements Sustain Social Relations? .....	6
Anthropology of Philanthropy?.....	8
Not an Evaluation, but Rather a Study: Laying out The Mechanisms.....	8
A Critical Study of Philanthropy.....	8
Disability, Sports, Community: The Camp .....	8
Beyond the Preservation of the Elite and Bio-Politics .....	9
Intersectionality: Disability and Gender.....	9
Special Olympics: Transnational and Local Issues .....	9
Searching for Exemplary Practices and Structural Explanations.....	10
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Network Analysis and Identification of Promising Practices .....	10
Two-Phased Approach .....	10
Identification of Research Participants.....	11
Identification of Athletes.....	12
Research Instruments .....	12
<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Namibia.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Interessement, Leadership, and the Nature of Involvement.....	13
Generalized Symmetry: Human and Non-Human Actors .....	15
Networks .....	15
Critical Events: Markers of History.....	16
Local and Transnational Factors.....	16
Individual Accomplishments .....	16
Structural Accomplishments.....	17
<b>Paraguay .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Interessement and Leadership .....	19
Human and Non-Human Actors .....	23
Human Actors.....	23
Non-Human Actors .....	25

Networks .....	26
Critical Events .....	27
Local and Transnational Factors.....	28
Individual Accomplishments .....	28
Structural Accomplishments.....	29
Translation.....	29
<b>Thailand .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Interessement and Leadership .....	30
Human and Non-Human Actors .....	33
Human Actors.....	33
Non-Human Actors .....	34
Networks .....	34
Critical Events .....	34
<b>Uzbekistan .....</b>	<b>35</b>
Interessement and Leadership .....	36
Human and Non-Human Actors .....	40
Human Actors.....	41
Non-Human Actors .....	41
Networks .....	42
Individual Accomplishments.....	42
Structural Accomplishments.....	42
Translation.....	43
<b>A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: COMMONALITIES VS. DIFFERENCES.....</b>	<b>43</b>
Impeding and Promoting Factors .....	43
Historical Factors: A History with Sports for People with Disabilities (Uzbekistan and Thailand) vs. one Without (Paraguay and Namibia).....	43
The impact of Colonialism: Close Histories of Colonialism (Uzbekistan, Namibia) vs. Distant Relations (Thailand, Paraguay).....	44
The (Un)importance of Parents: Parent-Centered (Paraguay and Uzbekistan) vs. Event-Centered (Thailand, Namibia).....	44
The (Un)importance of Volunteers: Volunteer-Centered (Paraguay, Namibia) vs. Professional-Centered (Uzbekistan, Thailand).....	45
Special Olympics Potential for Community Development.....	45
Schools (Namibia).....	45
Government (Paraguay) .....	45
Funding (Thailand).....	46
Culture (Uzbekistan) .....	46

Building a Culture of Special Olympics Across Countries .....	46
The Culture of the Sports Camp: Friendly Competition .....	46
The Brand of Special Olympics .....	46
Clash of Cultures? .....	46
<b>EXEMPLARY ACTOR NETWORKS .....</b>	<b>46</b>
Namibia: Working with Educational Institutions (Special Education Schools, Windhoek International School, University of Namibia) .....	47
Paraguay: Working with Government (Ministry, Individual Senators, Military) .....	47
Thailand: Alumni Networks (Fundraising).....	47
Uzbekistan: Working with Families in Cultural and Historical Contexts.....	47
<b>EXEMPLARY PRACTICES OF TRANSLATION .....</b>	<b>48</b>
Namibia: Leadership (In Colonial and Postcolonial Context) .....	48
Paraguay: Sabados Deportivos .....	48
Thailand: Fundraising, Volunteer Recruitment .....	48
Uzbekistan: Linking Sport to Culture to Nation-Building.....	48
<b>EXEMPLARY PRACTICES OF GENERALIZED SYMMETRY.....</b>	<b>49</b>
Namibia: The Meeting of Technological, Community-charity, Health, and Administrative Skills .....	49
Paraguay: Mothers and Professionals, Private and Public Concerns .....	49
Thailand: Incorporating the West Into Thai Society.....	49
Uzbekistan: Family, Community and Nation Building .....	50
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>50</b>
Local and Transnational Networks .....	50
Human and Non-Human Actors .....	50
The Specific Niche of Special Olympics: A Theoretical Framework.....	51
Bridges Between the Elite and the Community .....	51
The Gift of Participation .....	51
Bio-politics and Beyond.....	51
Crossing Boundaries .....	51
<b>LITERATURE CITED.....</b>	<b>52</b>

# INTRODUCTION

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

### ACTOR NETWORKS: WHICH ELEMENTS SUSTAIN SOCIAL RELATIONS?

The University of Leuven executed this study in response to the request for proposals (RFP) entitled ‘Influence of Special Olympics on Community Health and Development: A Preliminary Study of Promising Practices,’ which requested a community development-oriented analysis of the social impact of Special Olympics. The RFP requested an exploration of best practices in exemplary communities to prepare for the development of a robust set of assessment tools. The RFP suggested that Special Olympics’ programming and the community connectedness it represents may contain important explanatory elements. In this report, we wish to clarify both theoretical and methodological elements that capture the specific nature of Special Olympics as it is implemented in communities across four different countries. We use ‘Actor-Network Theory’ as an orienting theoretical and methodological approach to address the requirements specified in the RFP.

Using Actor-Network Theory, Special Olympics can be understood as involving people, artifacts, devices, and entities. In other words, in Special Olympics, people take the initiative to interact, and thereby use their bodies, infrastructure, and technological devices. From a philosophical point of view, Special Olympics can be understood as simultaneously constructive of culture, society and nature, because it interacts and shapes culture and society, and it does not stand outside of nature (Latour, 1992, p. 281). Within this view, the network consists of human and non-human elements that have an impact on outcomes. In other words, they act. This view helps provide a dynamic perspective about how the different elements in a network such as Special Olympics act upon each other in ‘practices.’ The objectives of this study are to examine these practices, in particular those that are promising, i.e., those that impact community health and development. We sought to document how Special Olympics influences connectedness, community impact on specific entities, and social and political contexts that may explain the level of connectedness in various communities throughout the world. Essentially, how does Special Olympics function as an agent of community change?

A number of concepts are central in Actor-Network Theory and informative for advancing the objectives of this project. The most important of these concepts is ‘translation.’ In other words, promising practices of Special Olympics may be seen as those that successfully translate Special Olympics to specific communities. Michel Callon, one of the founders of Actor-Network Theory, defined four moments of translation: (1) problematization, (2) interessement, (3) enrollment, and (3) mobilization of allies.

A second concept that is useful in developing the objectives of this project is ‘generalized symmetry,’ which means that the elements in a network, both human and non-human, should be described in the way they ‘act’ and explain how the network is functioning. By ‘generalized symmetry,’ not all can be attributed to people (people with intellectual disabilities, parents, community members) nor to things (programs, stadiums, finances), but rather to dynamic, complementary interactions among various actors.

A third concept that is useful is that of ‘routines’ (that may become rituals), which means that there are ‘network packages’ that are more or less taken for granted, and that come in a variety of forms, e.g., agents, devices, texts, relatively standardized sets of organizational relations, social technologies, boundary protocols, and organizational forms (Law, 1992). Such routines in Special Olympics exist in socializing, training, and medal-awarding practices.

The above theoretical concepts from Actor-Network Theory underpin the definition of precise objectives for the study. In generalized terms, the objectives of this study are as follows: 1) to build an understanding of the network that represents Special Olympics; 2) to identify promising practices that explain how Special Olympics operates in exemplary communities; and 3) to profile practices among individual athletes (Objective 5).

#### Objective 1: Charting the Network

In this objective, we seek to identify the different nodes in the network and the strength of these nodes. We wish to qualify the network of human and non-human elements that constitute the Special Olympics network. We also wish to develop quantitative measures of the network.

#### Objective 2: Identifying practices of translation

How does each community translate Special Olympics to the local cultural context? This practice may be broken down according to four moments of translation:

*Problematization.* How does Special Olympics represent a solution to a community problem that needs to be solved? Who are the relevant actors? Which delegates are identified to represent groups of actors? To what extent does problematization lead to primary actors that see themselves as ‘obligatory passage points?’ In other words, how is Special Olympics positioned toward this primary actor?

*Interessement.* The actors become interested and negotiate the terms of their involvement. The primary actor works to convince the other actors that the roles it has defined for them are acceptable.

*Enrollment.* Actors accept the roles that have been defined for them during interessement. For the functioning of Special Olympics in a specific community, enrolment would require documentation of how an actor is handling an assigned role.

*Mobilization of allies.* Delegate actors adequately represent the masses, and enrolment becomes active support.

#### Objective 3: Identifying practices of generalized symmetry

Within the local context of particular communities, it becomes important to see how the network that Special Olympics represents is the outcome of human and non-human elements that ‘act’ together.

For Special Olympics, generalized symmetry means that people (local and international), infrastructure (school buildings, sports infrastructure), and technological devices (training schedules, sporting tools and equipment,

clothing, and food supplements) ‘act’ and can be seen as facilitating or hampering community impact and/or development.

#### Objective 4: Identifying practices of ‘routine’

In exemplary communities, routines exist in how Special Olympics Programs are implemented. Some of these routines may even have become ritualized. The third objective is to study these routines, as evidenced in Special Olympics events. How are these events organized (organizational forms) and supported (legal, financial, social)? What are the values and how are these values performed and reinforced in routines and rituals?

#### Objective 5: Individual practices

To study the outcomes of Special Olympics, it is necessary to focus on individual athletes. A description of the network and practices become meaningful when expressed in terms of individual athletes’ experiences. In profiling individuals, it is important to focus on the specific practices that relate to the individual and those practices that relate to the broader community.

### ANTHROPOLOGY OF PHILANTHROPY?

#### NOT AN EVALUATION, BUT RATHER A STUDY: LAYING OUT MECHANISMS

The context of this work is not an external evaluation. Organizations conduct external evaluations to examine their objectives and performance with the assistance of an external expert. Rather, the context of this work is explorative and action-oriented. It is explorative in that it seeks to understand and explain what is happening on the ground. It is action-oriented in that it examines how Special Olympics works in several countries, thereby identifying how the concept and practice of Special Olympics translates in different contexts, how particular characteristics are developed, and how one might anticipate its future. In other words, the result of this study cannot be a criticism of Special Olympics, nor of the ways in which it is implemented in various communities. Rather, the goal in this study is to produce good ethnography.

#### A CRITICAL STUDY OF PHILANTHROPY

#### DISABILITY, SPORTS, COMMUNITY: THE CAMP

In the United States, Special Olympics’ roots are in the organization of sports camps for young people with disabilities. The sports summer camp was the laboratory from which ideas and practices could grow. The summer camp in the United States is a cultural phenomenon that may also exist in other countries, albeit structured differently and in a different historical and ideological context. The ‘camp’ in its different forms is an important setting where a child with intellectual disability is separated from parents and family to join a larger community of peers. Participation in regional or international competitions or events constitutes a significant life experience for Special Olympics athletes. The experience of the camp reconfigures relations among athletes, families, and communities (or even nations). In the camp experience, the athlete is exposed to other regimes of authority and discipline. In the



history of Special Olympics, and particularly in the global context, the camp has evolved into the ‘event.’ The event has helped create a more routinized organization, in which the relationships of athletes with government, sponsors, and volunteers become predictable and consistent across settings and has become expected in the Special Olympics brand.

#### BEYOND THE PRESERVATION OF THE ELITE AND BIO-POLITICS

In an actor-network study of Special Olympics, it is crucial to identify and describe the various partners involved in the network. Special Olympics makes it possible to share experiences across many boundaries of society as intellectual disability spans all social and economic groups. Additionally, Special Olympics is often implemented by parents. Special Olympics is strongly engaged in promoting health, through health fairs offered in conjunction with sports events and competitions. ‘Healthy Athletes’ is the brand for this engagement. It is through health promotion activities that professionals are recruited to participate in health screenings and services outside of the existing health structure, mostly in the context of sports events, but occasionally as volunteer activities in the community. Special Olympics thus assures the health of its athletes, minimizes risks that accompany engagement in sports, and complements existing health infrastructure at the local community level. Moreover, Special Olympics promotes athlete leadership through training and discipline within the sports field and in society informally and formally through the Athlete Leadership Programs (ALPS). Such bio-politics does not have a large structural impact nor does it significantly impact the situation of a medically underserved population. What is gained should be understood symbolically: medical attention as a means to boost the confidence and leadership capabilities of athletes and professionals.

#### INTERSECTIONALITY: DISABILITY AND GENDER

Special Olympics is an organization in which not only intellectual disability, but also gender, plays a prominent role. Meeting and working with individuals with intellectual disabilities expands the horizon for any person who becomes involved with Special Olympics. Furthermore, this involvement often challenges gender roles, which are strongly expressed by volunteers as well as parents. For volunteers, working with people with intellectual disabilities sharpens their interpersonal skills, such as understanding individual attributes and developing leadership skills. For parents, the challenge of participating in Special Olympics is one of integration into society and often constitutes a process of coming out publically with a child with an intellectual disability. In the cultural and social context of many countries, this coming out is a difficult process. Additionally, both male and female leadership exists within Special Olympics. Female leadership, however, is more prominent in certain countries.

#### SPECIAL OLYMPICS: TRANSNATIONAL AND LOCAL ISSUES

Special Olympics includes two primary elements: namely a disability component, more precisely ‘intellectual disability’ and ‘Olympics.’ Disability refers to a real or imagined ‘normativity.’ Olympics refers to games in a spirit of connectedness and spectacle, that may be able to generate a sense of *communitas* (where people can genuinely meet beyond the day-to-day structures of their lives), yet which is not free from political contexts. The combined use in ‘Special Olympics,’ however, transcends both components, providing a critique of both ‘disability’ and

‘Olympics,’ leading to particular individual and social experiences, and indeed to community health and development. In this report, we wish to explore the dialectical dynamic between ‘special’ and ‘Olympics’ in four countries, thus offering a particular critique. We can ask the question that if ‘disability’ and ‘sports’ are two contradictory terms, whether they might also complement each other.

Indeed, the term disability as expressed here in ‘special’ and in a context of ‘Olympics’ becomes saturated with ideas of achievement, discipline, and success. It refers to an ethos of modern life, with its connotations of progress from historical eras in which disability connoted stigma, prejudice, and loss. Another question is whether Special Olympics raises the level of social equity in a community and helps guide its distribution in a way that empowers people with intellectual disabilities and their families. One can ask to what extent such moves are realized in particular countries in view of their history of commitment to sports for people with disabilities. To what extent is the move suggested by Special Olympics acceptable?

The other term, ‘Olympics,’ is a protected term that refers uniquely to the Olympic Games (which already includes a disability component, i.e., Paralympics). Special Olympics has developed a relationship with the term Olympic that is both connected to and disconnected from the Olympic Games. The organization has acquired permission to use the term ‘Olympic,’ and thus secured a connection to an international social justice movement. Disconnection, however, exists as well because of the fact that Special Olympics is an entirely separate organization. One can ask how this movement that suggests both a connection and a disconnection, is translated in each country. How are the tools of this translation used, namely through volunteerism and more generally through philanthropy? How do these translation tools work with local elements that reflect cultural authenticity as well as cosmopolitanism? We believe we can address these questions using Actor-Network Theory and methodologies.

## SEARCHING FOR EXEMPLARY PRACTICES AND STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS

In each of the four countries studied, we sought exemplary practices, which we defined as practices of translation that show the uniqueness in how each country implements Special Olympics, as well as commonalities across all four countries. We also sought structural explanations grounded in contextual factors in each country.

## METHODOLOGY

### NETWORK ANALYSIS AND IDENTIFICATION OF PROMISING PRACTICES

#### TWO-PHASED APPROACH

The empirical study took place in two phases. Phase One included the collection of two types of data from approximately 30 people identified as playing a role in Special Olympics in each of the four countries, as well as visits to relevant Special Olympic events. Phase Two included a systematic analysis of events that occurred in 2009 through a remote collaboration. This report provides an overview of findings from Phase One. In conjunction with the fieldwork that took place in Phase One, footage was collected for the production of a documentary film.

The organizational set up of the research project was facilitated through conference calls that were initiated by staff in Washington, DC. The conference call included a staff member from Washington, a staff member from the regional Special Olympics offices (in South America, Africa, and Europe/Eurasia), the director of the Special Olympics office in the targeted country, and the researcher. For the conference call with Thailand, the regional office was not included. This project's structure mirrors the organizational structure of Special Olympics. Through conference calls, it was possible to clarify the objectives of the project as well as to make concrete agreements on the period of the fieldwork.

The fieldwork in each of the countries took place over a period of two weeks. The researcher met with the director and members of the board, and focused on conducting approximately 30 interviews and field visits. In each of the countries, we worked with the national director and a translator. Although we planned to collaborate with a colleague from a local university in each country, this collaboration only occurred in Thailand, where we worked with a university staff member as well as with two students. The starting point in each country was the capital city. In Namibia, which was the first country we visited, we decided to focus solely on Windhoek. In Paraguay, we focused on Asuncion. In Uzbekistan, we focused primarily on Tashkent but also traveled to Samarkand. In Thailand, we focused on Bangkok, but also traveled extensively to participate in a fundraising event, a day-long sports event, and also met with people from across the region.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

In each of the countries, the National Director of the Special Olympics Program was asked to identify 30 key informants, representing people that range from being central to peripheral in the Special Olympics network, including board members, coaches, parents, business people, government representatives, and people from the media. The researcher asked for additional recommendations if the initial list of potential interviewees was not sufficiently diverse.

Nevertheless, the diversity of interviewees differed from country to country. This is certainly a reflection of the reality on the ground in each country. For example, in Thailand, there were no people in the media interviewed as well as almost no parents. They were not included because the participation of these groups in Special Olympics Thailand is limited. The network consists of well-connected individuals who know each other, such as people connected through university alumni networks, business people, government, and administrators and educators in orphanages and schools.

Similarly, the number of parents interviewed in Namibia was rather limited. The people interviewed in Namibia represented Special Olympics' strong presence in schools and universities and its connection with other charitable organizations.

The composition of the people selected for interviewing in Uzbekistan included several partner organizations, such as the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with whom Special Olympics had a limited working relationship. Additionally, some family members, people in the university, the government and

local NGOs with whom Special Olympics had a partnership were also interviewed. Some important gaps remained, however. The lead local funder of Special Olympics Uzbekistan, Karaman Holding, was not interviewed. Also, no one from the media was interviewed.

#### IDENTIFICATION OF ATHLETES

In each of the countries, the researcher interviewed five athletes. There was a range of communication limitations represented in the athlete sample. Some interviews were not useful for further analysis because of athletes' communication challenges. In some cases, athletes were interviewed with a parent or coach present. The researcher and program staff sought to create a comfortable interview context for participating athletes. Most of the athletes that we spoke with were clearly selected because of their successes.

#### RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The research team created two separate instruments for key informants and athletes. The purpose of each of these instruments was to build knowledge about personalized entries into the network (asking questions about how they had been recruited in the Special Olympics network and how the involvement had progressed over time) as well as to document memorable events.

## FINDINGS

### NAMIBIA

Some understanding of scale and history is important to contextualize Special Olympics in Namibia. It is a large country with a small population (approximately 2 million, of which 500,000 live in Windhoek). There are vast stretches of land that are sparsely populated, and, as one interviewee remarked, "a lot of wildlife." The geography of the country helps explain why transportation can be a barrier to participation at events. It also helps explain the importance of schools in enabling involvement in Special Olympics. The special education schools in Windhoek serve as the foundation for Special Olympics. At the time of the fieldwork in 2009, Special Olympics Namibia had registered 1,272 athletes. It had its second National Director, Stay-C Namases (after the first National Director, Mr. Charles Nyambe, assumed an international position within the organization). At the time of the fieldwork, the first Director of the Board, Ms. Jutta Rohwer, had recently passed away. Her contributions to several charities were remembered, especially in the township Katatura, where she was known as the 'white angel of Katatura.' The second Director of the Board, Dr. Kagiso Moloji (a practicing dentist in Windhoek, originally from South Africa) had already started his tenure.

The history of Namibia is marked by colonization. It was twice colonized, first by Germany and later by South Africa. Sports in Namibia are linked to this history and to the country's struggle for independence. Namibia became quite difficult for South Africa during the liberation struggle, as it borders Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, and Angola. Its guerrilla fighters stationed themselves in these countries and organized their attacks from these locations. Sports in Namibia make reference to this history of para-military activities.

The street names in Windhoek are also an expression of the country's history. They reflect different periods in the city's history, including German names (e.g., Körper Strasse), and a section of streets in town with German music composers such as Beethoven Strasse. Other sections of town have street names in Afrikaans (e.g., Vissersstraat, Ooievaarstraat), and some streets bear the names of African nationalists (e.g., Sam Nujoma Avenue, Robert Mugabe Avenue). Street names that reflect African languages do not yet exist, perhaps because the independence achieved in 1990 is still too young.

Since Namibia was the first country we explored to understand the nature of Special Olympics, we restricted the study to one community, Windhoek. The researcher was concerned about how to define the term 'community,' i.e., whether community meant a single city, a region within a country, or an entire country. It became clear, however, that in Namibia the difference between the capital city and other towns and villages is a matter of scale and resources. Namibia's capital, Windhoek, is also the country's capital of schools; all educated people typically spend a few years in the city, and many will later return to their homes. In the rural areas, a community includes about 4,000 people. While the structure of Special Olympics is not very different between rural and urban areas, the size of the populations in the urban areas allows for team sports (e.g., football and basketball), while in the rural areas the emphasis is on individual sports (e.g., athletics).

## INTERESSEMENT, LEADERSHIP, AND THE NATURE OF INVOLVEMENT

The network of people involved in creating Special Olympics Namibia reflects both local and post-colonial international contacts. A Kenyan professor established Special Olympics Namibia in 1998, after spending a sabbatical year in Botswana. Interviewees reported that he drove in his car from Botswana to Namibia and contacted the Moreson Special School. The success of his intervention was that he did not stop after introducing Special Olympics, but also offered training to teachers. The Principal of the school, Ms. Celie Strauss, is considered the first contact, a founder and life-long supporter of Special Olympics Namibia. Although she was not persuaded at first of the importance of sports for students with disabilities, she was later convinced and has remained a board member.

Two leadership recruits became crucial for the first years of Special Olympics Namibia's development. The first was Ms. Jutta Rohwer, a German-Namibian whose leadership elevated Special Olympics; her background with the Red Cross, as well as soup kitchens and kindergartens in different communities, afforded her extensive charitable connections. She became the first National Director of Special Olympics Namibia, and in 1999, Special Olympics Namibia was accredited. Ms. Rohwer and Ms. Strauss worked closely together with the Principal of the Dagbreek Special School, Mr. Cluster Levert. The two schools most involved in Special Olympics Namibia, Moreson and Dagbreek, also started collaborating with a vocational school and then with Onyose (formerly called Jürgen Wähn), which referred older athletes to the program and also has a vocational orientation. Both Efaho and Onyose cater to adults with intellectual disabilities who are not in school, while Dagbreek and Moreson cater to school-aged athletes (i.e., those between 6 and 18 years of age).

In 1999-2000, Ms. Rohwer recruited Mr. Charles Nyambe, a sports teacher at the Windhoek international school to join Special Olympics Namibia. When Nyambe became National Director in 2001, Ms. Rohwer became Chairperson

of the Board; Dr. Kagiso Moloji replaced her in 2008. During this time, many Special Olympics activities were organized. Later, Mr. Nyambe joined Special Olympics Africa and a new National Director, Ms. Stay-C Namases, was selected to be the National Director for Namibia. Ms. Namases was also an alumnus of the Windhoek International School and a volunteer with Special Olympics. Namibia's first international success was at the 1999 World Summer Games in North Carolina, where Mr. Nyambe served as a coach. Four Namibian athletes earned medals, including gold, silver and bronze.

Finally, two other critical links were established in the process of interestment. The first was with First National Bank, whose Chairperson along with Ms. Rohwer selected recipients for charitable donations from the bank. From the perspective of the bank's marketing interests, it was important to look for 'a good brand to be associated with.' The Chairperson has gladly volunteered ongoing charitable support for Special Olympics Namibia.

Special Olympics also linked with the Olympic movement in Namibia, specifically with the Namibian Olympic athlete Franky Fredericks. Fredericks is the first and only Namibian to win an Olympic medal. He established a foundation that works to develop young athletes. Jessica Fredericks, his wife, is an active Special Olympics board member. The Fredericks family has invited Special Olympics athletes to their farm for training sessions.

Special Olympics Namibia does not restrict participation based on age. It is harder, however, to retain older athletes (who mostly come from Ehafo and Onyose, since the other schools Dagbreek and Moreson refer only younger athletes). Nevertheless, older athletes are occasionally selected to go to the World Games.

Special Olympics Namibia has developed a systematic method of recruitment and preparation of athletes. Outreach to families for recruitment purposes requires diplomacy and sensitivity, *"because if I have a child with intellectual disabilities and the coach comes from nowhere to me and says I want your child to play football in my team, I would ask more questions unlike if my child did not have any disabilities."* The implication is that the recruitment and preparation of athletes, parents, and volunteers or caregivers is 'systematic,' and involves education of parents and a reassurance of proper supervision. The approach considers how to teach a person with intellectual disabilities, and how to modify activities and rules so athletes with disabilities can achieve their personal best. With regard to supervision of athletes, the ratio has to be one adult supervisor for every four athletes.

The objective in organizing Special Olympics competitions is that they represent a refuge from the disadvantage and exclusion athletes typically experience. A Special Olympics event should be a place in which athletes *'feel comfortable and happy and for once put a smile on their face.'* This objective creates consequences for volunteer training in how to work with athletes, including the language they use and the execution of job assignments. It is important that volunteers know that the athlete comes first. In addition, it is important to understand that the athletes want to compete and have fun. Athletes are lost if they cannot compete. In short, the Olympic ideal is realized through support of an athlete's participation in competition. Coaches have to assess the athletes consistently, and this assessment requires a commitment to coach training and preparation. When athletes compete at the appropriate level, *'there is satisfaction and that's how we retain our athletes.'*

The early years of Special Olympics Namibia also brought the introduction of 'techne', the material actor. Techne involves logistics and the ability to access necessary resources. Mr. Paul Du Plessis, the current Principal of Dagbreek School and a technical teacher by background, is capable of meeting the organization's material-technical needs. He can explain what it takes to draw the chalk lines on a field correctly, how to design a technical aid for a student, how to build an Olympic Torch, how to arrange transportation, and how to protect materials and equipment from theft or damage. Under his leadership, Special Olympics Namibia purchased a container to secure equipment, and the office moved to Dagbreek School because it provided better security.

## GENERALIZED SYMMETRY: HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ACTORS

Recruitment and participation in Special Olympics Namibia happens in school communities. Some schools deliver volunteers (e.g., Windhoek International School and the University of Namibia) and others deliver athletes (e.g., Dagbreek, Moreson, Ehafo, and Onyose). The Special Olympics Namibia family consists of two technical staff and a board of directors. The two staff members include a National Director and a Sports Director, and they manage events and day-to-day operations. In its early years (1998-2001), Ms. Jutta Rohwer was the primary leader and wore many hats. She was assisted by a committee, rather than a full board of directors. From 2001, Special Olympics Namibia developed a board with Ms. Rohwer as Chairperson. She left the board as in 2008 because of health problems and Dr. Kagiso Moloji assumed the role of chairperson.

Non-human factors of Special Olympics Namibia include the technical or the material side of program operations, such as scheduling logistics, installation, and maintenance of sports equipment. The recruitment of Mr. Du Plessis is remarkable as it demonstrates the importance of professional, technical, and practical skills in Special Olympics operations. The practical and technical side of organizing a Special Olympics programs includes, for example, developing movable goal posts and installing sports equipment, especially hoops for basketball, which were received from overseas and had to be installed at the Windhoek International School. Sports materials were kept in a container at the Windhoek International School, but problems occurred with security, leading to the installation of better locks. Later, the center of activity moved from the Windhoek International School to the Dagbreek School (2004-2006) as a result of logistical concerns (e.g., securing and moving equipment and transporting athletes). Dagbreek increased its central role with the installation of a basketball field. There are good reasons why Special Olympics Namibia shifted its centralized location from the Windhoek International School to the Dagbreek School. For example, Mr. Nyambe left, equipment was not very secure, Windhoek International School was on the periphery for organizing events, and there was a need for a permanent office.

## NETWORKS

Special Olympics Namibia is a trans-local phenomenon. For example, one recruitment network demonstrates its trans-local nature. A foreigner (Kenyan, man, professor) recruited a Namibian (a woman, Afrikaans speaking, and the principal of a special school) who recruited a German-Namibian (a woman) who recruited a Namibian (a man) who assumed an international role in Special Olympics and in whose place another Namibian was recruited, who in turn recruited a Zimbabwean.

## CRITICAL EVENTS: MARKERS OF HISTORY

During the founding period, the critical event was the first participation of Special Olympics Namibia in an international event, specifically the 1999 World Summer Games in North Carolina, where Mr. Nyambe was the coach of four athletes who brought home bronze and silver medals. In 2003, another team of five and a football team went to the World Games in Ireland, and they brought back a bronze medal. In 2007, an athletic team and a football team participated in international competition. The football team earned a silver medal, one male athlete earned a silver medal and two female athletes earned bronze medals.

## LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL FACTORS

Namibia is a vast country with a population of approximately 2,000,000 people (of which about 500,000 reside in the capital city of Windhoek). In 2009, 1,272 athletes had registered for Special Olympics Namibia since its inception. There are 47 volunteers involved. The volunteers are students from the University of Namibia, polytechnics, and the Windhoek International School.

It is difficult for parents in Namibia to bring their children with intellectual disabilities out in public. Intellectual disability is considered embarrassing and language about intellectual disability is stigmatizing. For example, children with intellectual disabilities are labeled “mad.” The cultural preference is to confine children with intellectual disabilities to the home and backyard and not let them out in the open. Therefore, in the local context of Windhoek, media attention (e.g., radio and TV) is very important. In the rural areas, word-of-mouth communication is important. Also in the rural areas, traveling around with ‘a bakkie’ (pick-up truck) with pictures on it, providing information about Special Olympics could be an effective outreach strategy.

Involving parents in Special Olympics is challenging in Namibia. Few parents are interested in their children with intellectual disabilities. The students that are most involved in Special Olympics are those that stay for a whole term at the special education school. For other students, it is difficult to participate, in part because of the geography of the country.

Prior to fieldwork in 2009, Special Olympics Namibia created an agreement to establish a legacy center derived from the 2010 Federal International Football Association (FIFA) Hope for All Initiative. The objective of the center is to leave a lasting legacy after the 2010 World Soccer tournament in South Africa. The Katutura Football for Hope Center is situated in the Katutura township and will be operated by Special Olympics Namibia. The center will focus on education, public health, and sports. Although work has been underway for some time, the first bricklaying ceremony was held in June 2010.

## INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Deon is a Special Olympics athlete and a board member of Special Olympics Namibia. Deon was a soccer player and is currently a coach who trains other teams. Recently, he assisted in opening the Katutura Center for Hope. In his words, he says:



*I joined Special Olympics in 1992. During that time, I was here at school. I was also interviewed at the office. They called my mother and told her that, 'we want Deon to become a Special Olympics athlete so that he can come and join us and see what he can achieve.' From there I was helping the school children to play soccer and to be physically fit. We will have a few games and we will play against Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. In 2007, last year, I was appointed to go to Shanghai. In 2006, we went to a place on the other side of the country to challenge the physically disabled people. It was so much fun. And actually it was even my first time to be on an airline.*

When I asked him about his family's interest in his competitions, he said:

*To be honest, when I'm having events playing on the field, my mom is coming if she doesn't have something to do. The other ones, I don't know. Maybe I must bring the events near to them, like say Sam Nujoma Stadium so that they can be close and see how our disabled athletes carry on and do things like that and also not do. Yes, the other ones are interested but not their thing to come to the stadium. Maybe they say it's a waste of time. Even when I was going out of the country, it's only my mother who was guiding me to the airport, no one else from my family. But I don't mind whether they are there or whether they are not there. This is my future and whether they don't want or they don't like it I must just go forward and achieve what I can achieve.*

## STRUCTURAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the years, Special Olympics Namibia has achieved many structural accomplishments, including the establishment of a Special Olympics office at the Dagbreek School, the development of activities at local, regional, national, and international levels, and the involvement from the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture.

The Namibia Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture sees Special Olympics as a special sports program, different from the sport development in schools and communities and different from professional sports. Special Olympics fits very well into the government's objectives to give the right to sporting to all persons. This right is consistent with the constitution's commitment to eliminate barriers that deter people with disabilities from sports participation. The Ministry asserts that there is a human development, as well as a valid economic, rationale to allocating resources to people that have been marginalized and neglected. Reference is made to some communities where "*up till now people with disabilities are looked at as half human beings*" and the task of the Ministry to "*eliminate some of these things and to kind of change the mindset of people that even people with disabilities can do much better than people without disabilities. If you go in many communities, not only in Africa [or] Europe [or] Asia you will find that even the birth of people with disabilities is not tolerated. They used to suffocate them [...] because they feel that this is not an asset but a liability so they normally kill the baby. But I think with the Special Olympics in the world we change the perception. People will look at a person with a disability as an asset, and even to the extent of winning international matches. So therefore we should tolerate the situation.*" There is a very strong belief that "*if you have someone in your family with a disability, then your family must have tampered with something, which resulted in the family being cursed.*"

Special Olympics is a national sports organization in Namibia that produces tangible results. Many people with disabilities participate. Building Special Olympics Namibia into a national organization has been an important step. People with disabilities risk marginalization because there is an ingrained refusal to understand that people with disabilities are equal to other people. When organizations or programs are set up, there is always a risk that people with disabilities will be excluded.

Special Olympics is an organization that stands for the potential for change. *‘Ah, it’s really promoting a sense of responsibility, a sense of acceptance in the country that people with disabilities are just like any other person.’* This problem of discriminating against people with disabilities is also addressed in society in general as *‘the President appointed a personality from people with disabilities in the parliament.’* With Special Olympics, it is important to move beyond old perceptions and attitudes, see people with disabilities like any other person, and give them support without discrimination.

The Namibian Ministry reflects on the role of sports in national development. They realize that Namibia is an underdog in Africa and yet is doing quite well with certain outcomes. They also realize that there is a need for a School of Excellency in Sport, in which talented young people can receive encouragement. The realization is growing that sport programs not only bear fruits in terms of sporting, but also for the National Programs, especially the transformational agenda. The ministry believes that sports may indirectly contribute to the economy. Sports are slowly being perceived as beneficial for more than the athletes who participate: *“when our people go and participate we are marketing Namibia.”*

## **PARAGUAY**

Our research in Paraguay was guided by one overriding question: What best practices in community development exist in this country’s Special Olympics Program? In Paraguay, we asked to interview 30 people who are considered important to the Special Olympics network, including people more peripherally involved in day-to-day operations. For example, we requested to interview athletes, parents, board members, professionals, and government officials. In addition, we wished to visit a number of different locations or events that could help us understand the mission and operations of Special Olympics Paraguay.

We conducted interviews in a hotel in Paraguay. Although the hotel environment was unfamiliar to most of the interviewees, most people were comfortable because a Special Olympics staff member escorted them. Perhaps this manner of organizing interviews revealed something unique about Special Olympics Paraguay. The careful orchestration of the interviews required extraordinary attention to detail. This attention given through the interview experience is something that Special Olympics also provides, specifically to athletes. The interviews were also partly filmed and this aspect added another dimension because a banner of Special Olympics was placed behind the person being filmed. This leveraged the Special Olympics brand as part of the interview process, which is produced, consumed, distributed, and communicated. Our research played a role in how Special Olympics is branded in Paraguay. The media attention for our research started before we arrived in country. During the formal interviews,

which lasted about one hour each, the researchers focused on the roles that people play in the network and on particular historical events that explain what Special Olympics means to them.

## INTERESSEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Special Olympics International created Olimpiadas Especiales Paraguay (OEP), and it was originally located within the government, specifically the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry launched recruitment efforts, directed towards parents of children with intellectual disabilities. This led to a mother of a child with an intellectual disability becoming the first President of OEP. The Ministry recruited the mother by inviting her to participate with her son in a competition in the United States. The experience was not altogether successful, as the trip was poorly planned. OEP was slow to start and was plagued by larger ills of the country, namely corruption, although very little information is available from this first period.

Eventually, a shift in the network occurred with OEP moving out of the Ministry and becoming an independent organization. This shift occurred without creating mistrust in the government and without alienating important stakeholders in the network. Under the leadership of Ms. Irma Cuevas, OEP became a network that built a strong locally-entrenched organization, in which solid connections were developed among parents, and across the society, including schools, government agencies, media, and business. These connections were like personal friendships, described as central to Paraguayan identity. Expressions such as *'I guess I do have some friends'* and *'Friends will take you a long way'* are often used to explain why things are going well.

The creation of the Special Olympics Paraguay network emerged as follows. In the first phase of its existence, the interest was created from outside, namely through the initiative of Special Olympics International in Washington, DC. Consequently, the Ministry also acted as an outsider and recruited a mother of a child with intellectual disabilities to join the organization and become its leader. This recruitment process was not altogether successful, both at the individual and the organizational level. Special Olympics needed to move out of the Ministry and become an independent organization separate from the government. The shift in the network was realized through the recruitment of new leadership, specifically Ms. Cuevas, also a mother of a child with an intellectual disability. In figure 1, a funnel diagram represents the process through which connections yielded new leaders and an organizational shift.

In the second phase, the leadership grows in two different directions: internally as an independent organization and externally into community partnerships. This growth is presented in the diagram in two directions: a horizontal one for the internal development, and a vertical one that represents partnerships.

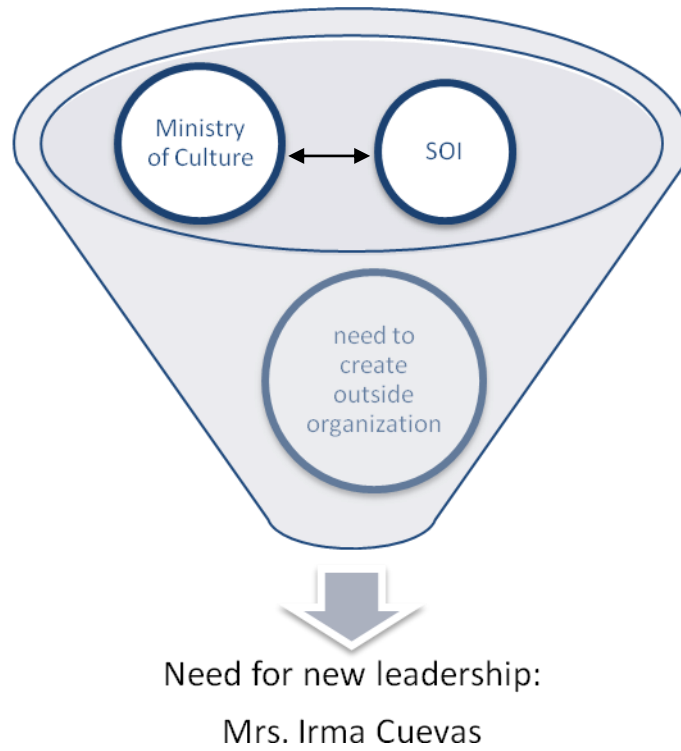


FIGURE 1. Development of new leaders and organizational development

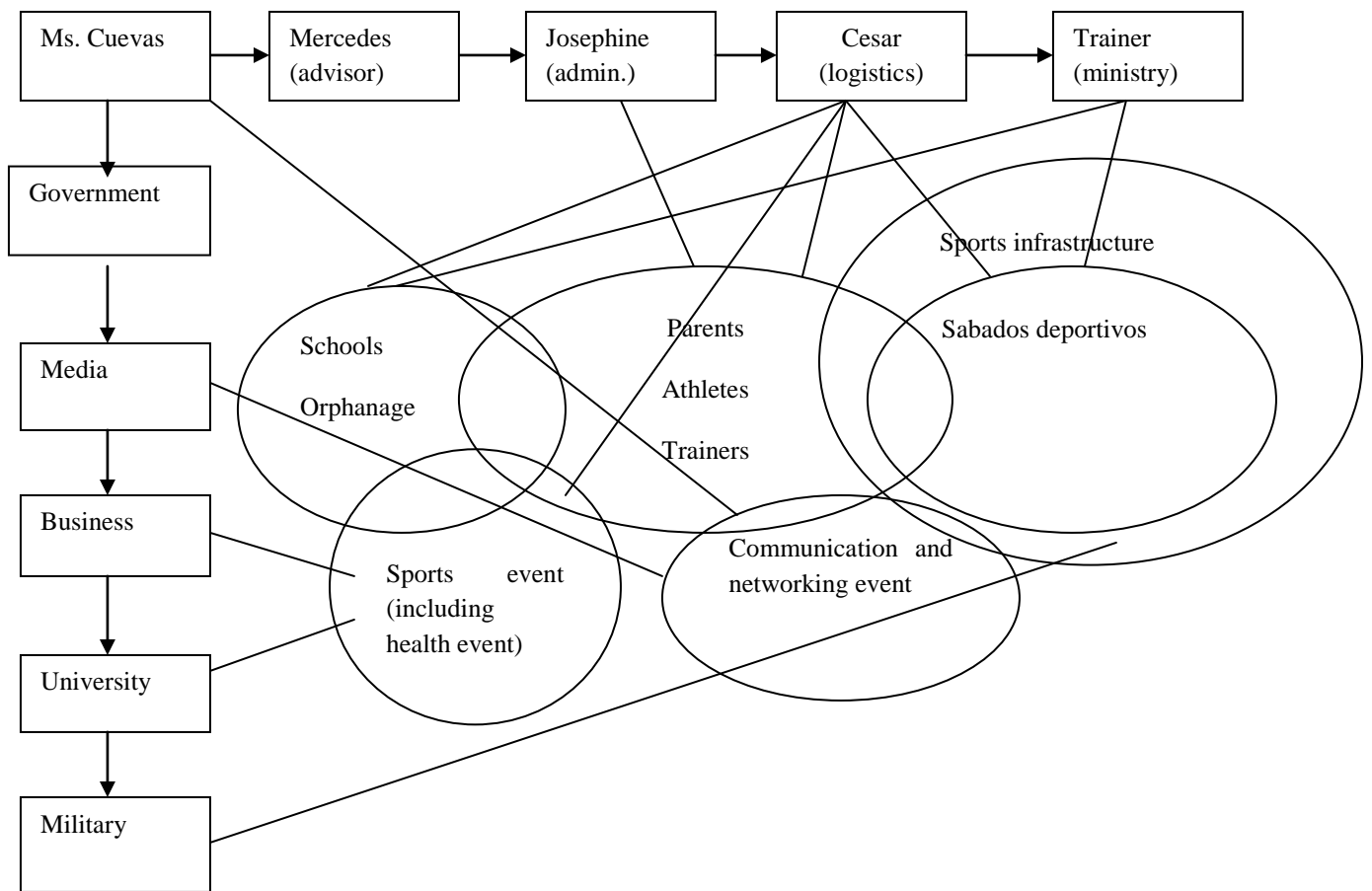


FIGURE 2. Development of Special Olympics Actor Networking

Figure 2 is a presentation of the current actor network of Special Olympics Paraguay. Ms. Cuevas describes her own leadership style as ‘verticalismo,’ which she explains means authoritative, in the context of control and mutual respect, relying on personal contacts and friendships. Her leadership is also based on the routine scheduling of certain activities, most prominently the Sabados Deportivos (Sportive Saturdays) and clear role definitions. Ms. Cuevas clearly functions as a primary actor for the initiation of new contacts. In terms of the process of ‘translation,’ she clearly established herself as the ‘obligatory passage point’ (see further in the section on translation).

In the horizontal dimension, we have depicted the internal network of OEP. It consists of a close triumvirate of women who consult each other, assisted by two men, a sports director and a trainer who have complementary tasks (one more concentrated on organizational logistics, the other more concentrated on teaching and training).

In the vertical dimension, several strategic partners are depicted. The history of these partnerships is interesting. For example, early on, OEP was situated within the Paraguayan government and it later became an independent organization. This transition does not mean, however, that OEP now operates without the support of the government. Indeed, OEP has retained important ties with the government. These ties are visible in two respects. First, the government appointed a sports teacher to OEP and second, OEP has its own line item in the national budget, which is the result of a carefully crafted relationship with the government over an extended period of time. Within this period, Special Olympics moved from time-limited grants for initiatives that required individual applications, to recurrent funding that requires subsequent reporting. Within the government, it is important to note that certain senators became involved with OEP because they have family members with intellectual disabilities.

The partnership between the media and sports for people with disabilities in general, and more specifically with Special Olympics, is quite extraordinary. This partnership was evident during interviews in three ways. First, sports journalists in Paraguay have discovered that reporting on sports events with Special Olympics athletes enhances their work considerably, taking them away from the more mundane aspects of sports reporting (e.g., reporting merely the scores and results) and offering them opportunities to create human interest stories. Some sports journalists have followed athletes, documented their success, and eventually learned that the media has the power to create national sports heroes or icons. This was the case with Juan ‘Juancho’ Duarte, an athlete who participated in running, in Special Olympics, Paralympics, and other sports competitions (where he would end up among the last to finish). His perseverance earned him significant media attention and the status of popular hero.

Punctualization: Sabados Deportivos

Punctualization in Actor-Network Theory means the outcomes that result from a well-functioning machine; typically multiple components are involved that are essentially hidden. If OEP is an example of a well-functioning machine, and the Sabados Deportivos can be considered the motor of this machine, punctualization exists at different levels. On the first level, Special Olympics for outsiders in Paraguayan society may be recognized as something ‘existing,’ but they would not be aware of the existence of the Sabados Deportivos. Among those involved in Sabados Deportivos (e.g., athletes, volunteers, and the military sport grounds), they would not be aware of the elements that sustain its success as a practice.

Sabados Deportivos represents the routines of Special Olympics in Paraguay. It occurs every Saturday, throughout the year. It occurs on the sporting grounds of the military, free of charge. It involves several sports including volleyball, tennis, and soccer. The swimming pool of these military sporting grounds used to be open to the public, but the facility is now dilapidated. Consequently, there is a sports program devoted exclusively to Special Olympics.

Examples of punctualization that pertain to Sabados Deportivos include the following:

- The involvement of the military as an actor in OEP is rather hidden. Nevertheless, the military is a very important actor that provides its sporting grounds free of charge. Without this assistance, Sabados Deportivos would be in jeopardy. The importance of this becomes clear when, at one point, a decision was

made to no longer allow Special Olympics to use the grounds. It required leadership and consultation at several levels in the government to reverse this decision.

- Although the involvement of the government is hidden, the salary of one of the trainers is covered by the government. Additionally, there is a line item for Special Olympics in the national budget.
- Some former athletes serve as coaches. Consequently, one can say that Sabados Deportivos is a vehicle for athletes' career development.
- Sabados Deportivos is also a meeting place. There is an arrival time, waiting time, and time spent going from one place on the grounds to another. This creates opportunities for people to meet each other. For example, one father took his photo album to the Sabados Deportivos to show us his son's accomplishments. This sharing represented an opportunity for the son, who was present, to experience recognition and appreciation.
- A rather exceptional phenomenon is that Sabados Deportivos is also a place for couples to meet. We were introduced to one couple who met each other in the context of Special Olympics.

## HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ACTORS

Special Olympics Paraguay, analyzed as a network, operates because of human and non-human actors. We will identify and describe these actors.

### HUMAN ACTORS

*Leaders.* Leadership in OEP represents a role that the elite can assume in society, through professional work, well established networks (that go back at least one generation), contacts with the media, and wealth. In addition, leadership is strongly characterized by women who are mothers of children with intellectual disabilities. At least one father is also an active leader. Additionally, strong leadership is found in the media. The media showcases the abilities of Special Olympics athletes, and thereby influences public perceptions and builds national heroes.

The early history of Special Olympics was not characterized by strong leadership. Rather, when Special Olympics was first initiated in the Ministry of Culture, it recruited leaders from the community. One early leader said that it was not clear whether they were seeking her because of her money, her skills, or because she was the mother of a child with intellectual disabilities. She accepted the invitation to participate with her son in a competition in the United States, but later felt that her son was not adequately prepared for the trip. Nevertheless, she agreed to assume a leadership role in Special Olympics.

Her leadership emerged despite early negative personal experiences with Special Olympics. The mother and her son participated in a swimming competition in the United States. However, poor communication and/or poor follow through on the part of the volunteer responsible for guiding the athlete caused her son to miss participating in the competition altogether. They returned home without having participated. It was a devastating experience. This

experience, however, led her to assume a leadership position in the organization and administration of Special Olympics activities in Paraguay “*to avoid that such a thing ever happens again.*”

Leadership is characterized by the leader becoming the ‘obligatory passage point,’ meaning that during problematisation (defined as ‘what is the problem to be solved?’) the primary actor establishes his or herself as an obligatory passage point. This is undoubtedly the case among senior leaders in OEP: problems that need solving must pass through the President of the organization.

For example, selection of an assistant-translator for this research was a long process in which the President was actively involved. One person was initially identified to translate. Another translator, however, was ultimately selected. This selection process required substantial diplomacy from the President to avoid alienating anyone. Another problem to be solved was finding a location for conducting interviews. Most interviews were held in the hotel where we stayed. These interviews became standard problems to be solved in which the Special Olympics office was actively involved in escorting interviewees and in some cases remained present during the interview. Moreover, the selection of interviewees was well planned and coordinated. For example, the suggestion to interview an athlete with a physical disability to represent people with intellectual disabilities was deemed inappropriate. All of these experiences were indicative of strong leadership: “*Even when the president is not there, she is still there.*”

The future for the president of OEP is not certain. There is no candidate slated to replace the current president.

*Supporters.* Within OEP’s leadership, there are several people situated in universities or the government who are close to the leader, providing professional consultation. Some of them are very well integrated in the university system, as trainers of physical education students. University teachers have also incorporated sports for students with intellectual disabilities in their curricula.

*Facilitators.* Some volunteers are recruited for specific Special Olympics events from among physical education students at the university. One coach is paid a salary directly from the government. Some of the coaches are drawn from schools and have hopes and a vision for what they wish to accomplish.

*Government.* The government is an important actor in Special Olympics activities. Progress made with the government is evident in that annual applications for funding, embedded in a cumbersome administrative procedure, were replaced with Special Olympics being directly written in the national budget as a recurring line item.

*Senators and other politicians.* Several senators and other politicians (such as ministers) are considered friends of OEP. They are sympathetic to the Special Olympics mission. They are ready to help if needed.

*Military staff.* Since Special Olympics uses military sporting grounds for its activities on Saturdays, it is important to consider whether and how military staff members are actors. In general, one can say that military staff is mostly absent. They become involved when the use of grounds is in jeopardy.



*University staff.* OEP has developed a long-standing, positive relationship with university staff. This relationship includes connections with administrators, staff, and students. The relationship with staff involves communication about the use of grounds and event organization. Some of the administrative staff members have developed excellent relationships with OEP, leading to recognition for their contributions. Administrative staff members mention that they communicate more formally with OEP than is the norm for Paraguay (e.g., fax messages several times a day). Special Olympics staff members enter into university classrooms to instruct student volunteers on what is expected from them during events. University professors supervise students, as well as teach them about sports for athletes with disabilities. Regarding the use of university grounds, Special Olympics coaches use these grounds during the week, specifically for the purpose of athletics. They share the grounds with other sports associations, such as the National Athletics Organization of Paraguay. The university's athletic facilities are among the best in the country.

*Businessmen.* Several businessmen are involved in the work of OEP. Their involvement is remarkable and a testament to their willingness to contribute. Their contributions are specific. For example, one businessman donates trophies for a particular competition and another contributes the banners. Both businessmen are enthusiastic supporters of Special Olympics. One of them was also Minister of Sports and provided significant support in this role. Another is a producer of Brazilian background. His first contact with Special Olympics was serendipitous. His dog broke loose and entered the grounds of a special education school next door while he was at work one day. The children at the school were frightened, so the teachers confronted him when he returned home. He was apologetic and wanted to make it up to the school, so the teachers advised him to contribute to Special Olympics. He then decided that his company would donate whatever products would be most useful to Special Olympics programs.

## NON-HUMAN ACTORS

*Government funding.* The government funds OEP annually and no longer requires OEP to prepare lengthy funding applications.

*Sporting grounds and facilities.* Asuncion is a city with approximately 50 special education schools, some of which have sporting grounds. These sporting facilities allow sports and physical activities to occur. OEP provides assistance with the children's physical activities, as some of the coaches visit the schools. The research team also visited an orphanage that accepts only people with intellectual disabilities who have no family or other resources. This orphanage also has sporting grounds that allow physical exercise and games for residents.

The sporting grounds of the military forces are regularly used for Sabados Deportivos. These grounds accommodate approximately 200 athletes who practice football, tennis, and volleyball. The athletic sporting grounds of the university are also used for training purposes during the week.

We conducted participant observation of a swimming event for children with intellectual disabilities at a private swimming club. The competition involved a delegation of Sabados Deportivos and many others, especially from schools. We concluded that there are several sporting grounds and facilities available to OEP.

*Pictures.* Pictures of people with intellectual disabilities participating in sports are taken regularly. They are assembled into photo books. These books document Special Olympics activity in Paraguay. Pictures also appear in newspapers and help build the memory of OEP.

*Flags, Banners.* Flags and banners that show the logo of Special Olympics are used regularly. For example, at a swimming event in which several organizations participated, flags were placed around the pool. During the awards ceremony, flags and banners signified that OEP sponsored the event. During training events on the university sporting grounds and during Sabados Deportivos, however, there are few or no flags or banners that signify OEP's sponsorship.

*Trophies, medals and other recognitions.* The use of trophies for collective recognition and medals for individual recognition is widespread across OEP. These acknowledgements are embedded in OEP events. The Director of Sports Events ensures that they are available; businessmen provide these trophies as a donation to OEP. The receipt of these awards requires ceremonies, and each Special Olympics competition includes a ceremony. All of the athletes receive either a medal or another token of recognition. Other contributors and donors also receive plaques or medals in gratitude for their contributions.

These OEP acknowledgements elevate the recipients' esteem. They are distributed in rituals unique to Special Olympics and signify belonging to the organization. Athletes who have competed, and their supporters, participate in rituals of recognition. These rituals have strong recruiting potential. They emphasize to athletes, staff, parents, and partners of OEP that they belong. In return, everyone who participated leaves with the message to carry on this good work.

## NETWORKS

The OEP network includes inner and outer circles. There is an inner circle that we consider 'political' and an inner circle that we consider 'administrative.' The two are intertwined but also enjoy relative independence.

The inner circle is active and sensitive in terms of contacts. Most of these contacts are with high level government officials, media representatives, as well as the local elite. These contacts are made continuously and are not always task-oriented. Instead, they are part of a larger Paraguayan culture of making friends. It is a strong cultural belief that friends will take you a long way, and it is widely recognized that OEP has many friends. These friends can be called upon in times of need. The inner circle is also hierarchically structured; there is division of labor in terms of who handles which contacts.

The outer circles of the political network include partners and high-level volunteers. Academics in medicine and sports science, business people, and members of the media participate. These individuals sometimes question their roles. For example, a professor in cardiology might say that he takes part in screening athletes' health as part of an event or prior to an international competition, but this may not be the most rewarding professional activity.

The outer circles of the administrative network include partners such as universities, schools or orphanages that offer their facilities and students to OEP. In order for them to open up their facilities and allow trainers to come in to their facilities, they have to trust that no damage will be done and that the activities will benefit their students. In one special education school, we also met an international volunteer who was working as a physical education teacher.

The participation of parents is also very strong in OEP, spans different networks, and exists at all levels. Parents are involved in OEP's inner and outer circles. The network of parents also extends into rural areas, as parents who belong to the inner circle of OEP also conduct workshops in which they teach and share the concerns of parents in rural areas.

## CRITICAL EVENTS

The history of OEP is marked by critical events, which we consider big markers of the organization, and each of the participants has his or her unique history, which we consider the small markers. In interviews, we systematically asked people to describe these events. Some examples include the following:

Big Markers:

- The founding of Special Olympics in Paraguay, first embedded in the government's infrastructure and later established as an independent organization;
- The creation of a paid staff position, funded by the government; and
- Special Olympics earning its own line item in the national budget.

Small Markers:

Some of the most significant markers are found in the experiences of mothers. We met with both younger and older mothers. They told us with great emotion about their difficulties in accepting a child with an intellectual disability and how their involvement in OEP meant coming out to the public with their children. For some parents, their involvement with OEP was minimal, while for others their involvement was extensive.

The continued exclusion of athletes from international competition may also mark their understanding of the organization. One such athlete declined further comments, but it was clear that the selection of athletes for international competition included some biases.

Outside partners, such as university administrators, commented that they were marked by the professional and multiple communications they received from OEP. These communications were more formal, unlike the ordinary and informal means of communication among Paraguayans. Several journalists expressed, sometimes with great conviction and emotion, how Special Olympics has impacted them. They explain how athletes have appreciated their work and recognize them in such a way that deeply touched them. For example, one journalist spoke of how an athlete dedicated her medal to her.

## LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL FACTORS

Several characteristics pervade Paraguay's local make-up. Its history is marked by a substantial presence of indigenous people. The colonial settlers were working in good relation with indigenous people and in turn provided them with protection from the Portuguese. This protection explains some of the country's borders. Protests by indigenous people over land issues are continuous and structural. There are two official languages: Spanish and Guarani. The majority of people in Paraguay speak Guarani, although Spanish is commonly used in the administration and schools. English is not common or known. Within OEP, there is little knowledge of English, which makes international communication somewhat difficult. OEP does not seem to be affected by these local issues.

Paraguay also has a past connection with Japan. There is a small Japanese population and a Japanese cultural center in the country. Other countries, such as France, have also established cultural centers. Their prominent presence may also be reflected in the presence of international volunteers. OEP may connect to these local places when it organizes certain functions, which mostly aim to recognize people and provide opportunities for connecting with the media.

Paraguay is a small land-locked country surrounded by much larger and economically stronger countries. The eastern side of the country is characterized by low priced electronics markets that are imported from other countries. The low taxes on these products provide for a competitive market in the border zones and are the result of concessions made by previous governments to underprivileged areas. OEP does not seem to be affected in any way by these phenomena.

The center of Asuncion is marked by the juxtaposition of governmental buildings which are continuously guarded by police and security agents, with its small and larger shops, and very poor living areas that border the river. In the parks of the city, groups of indigenous people camp in protest to reclaim their land rights. The government admonishes them for not taking care of small children who might not be well protected from the cold nights. These are structural characteristics that demonstrate continuous tensions and impact personal security in the city. On Sundays, one street away from an impoverished area, there might be an open antique market that attracts most of the middle class and tourists. These markets are parts of the local color that seem disconnected from the work of OEP.

Asuncion has a substantial number of special education schools, some of which date back to the 1950s. Several of these schools were visited as well as an orphanage that will only accept people with disabilities who have no other family members that can offer them care and shelter. These institutional resources are an important base from which OEP recruits athletes and offers activities.

## INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

OEP is a dynamic organization in which individual accomplishments are marked by medals in local and international competitions. OEP feels that it does well in attaining results. Moreover, individual accomplishment is also demonstrated by athletes. Several of them, after a successful career as an athlete, move on to become an assistant coach, or move on to another discipline. Still others were provided with jobs through their participation in OEP.

Individual accomplishment is also furthered through the ALPS program, which instills in athletes skills of self-expression and leadership.

Individual accomplishment also occurs among coaches. Some of them have been volunteers for several years, have had international success, and dream of still greater accomplishments, such as founding a tennis school for people with intellectual disabilities. Individual accomplishment is also found in university administrators and teachers who were either recognized for their efforts or have shown us how OEP entered the curriculum. Although the volunteers who are recruited among physical education students at the university may see their contributions as primarily obligations to fulfill a requirement, some of them also extend this work further. It is clear that individual accomplishment as an athlete is, to a certain extent, staged and ritualized. The presence of parents at such events and the receipt of medals and other types of recognition do not go unnoticed.

## STRUCTURAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

OEP has achieved structural accomplishments by systematically organizing a year-round range of sports for people with intellectual disabilities. Their schedule is quite remarkable and beyond the occasional competitions that characterize Special Olympics in other countries. OEP has developed a structural partnership with the government. While for many years, OEP made yearly requests based on applications and documentation, it now is supported in a structural way. Developing such a structural partnership is unique compared to many other countries.

## TRANSLATION

"Nothing is, by itself, either knowable or unknowable, sayable or unsayable, near or far. Everything is translated." (Latour 1988: 167). Latour's statement means that OEP is always translated, and it would therefore not be the task of any scientific exercise to seek a replication or copy of an original concept or practice. Rather, one must identify the characteristics of its translation. It is the translation from an international concept to local circumstances, organized and maintained by the leadership.

The characteristics of this translation can be most prominently identified among different partners, perhaps most prominently in the work of the media, whose daily business it is to translate to a larger audience. How then is Special Olympics translated in the Paraguayan context?

*The Media's Translation.* In the course of our research in Paraguay, we made contacts with journalists who work in radio, television, and newspaper. We interviewed them to understand the role of the media in the work of OEP or they interviewed us to find out about our presence and the role of research. Sometimes, these processes of inquiry occurred simultaneously, but for analytic purposes we will treat them separately.

One journalist explained to us that the work of translating OEP in Paraguay happens in several stages. One is the journalist's boredom with merely reporting sports results. These sports journalists want to identify emotions in the way sports are experienced, by focusing on how people with disabilities practice in the periphery of major sport events. Apparently, such authenticity is not immediately obvious, but rather is found as one starts to do the work. Personal contact with athletes nurtures these emotions and provides the journalist with a new way of seeing sports—

as authentic in expressions of emotion, the importance of participation, the impact of the body, and the efforts exerted.

In a second stage of translation, the media becomes interested in following the accomplishments and developments of individual athletes. How do they compare to earlier results? What explains the internal drives of individual athletes? A third stage is found in recognizing that the consumers of news reports share emotions. In a fourth stage, a hero or anti-hero can be born. This is the case for Juan ‘Juancho’ Duarte, a runner with physical and intellectual disabilities who participated in competitions, both for athletes with and without disabilities, and who was elevated by the media to a national hero or anti-hero (a hero because of his persistence and determination and demonstration of the importance of participation, and an anti-hero because of his running and arriving sometimes as the last athlete). It should be observed that Special Olympics as an organization did not much participate in this elevation or even knew of it. Mr. Duarte has not shown an affiliation with Special Olympics exclusively. On the contrary, he wished not to be perceived exclusively as an athlete with intellectual disabilities. His current aspiration is to be active in the training and sports of elderly people.

*Translation of Special Olympics by the Government.* Several senators and (former) politicians have developed relationships with Special Olympics. Some of these relationships are based on family members with intellectual disabilities and understanding the need for sports activities. These partnerships create goodwill towards Special Olympics. This goodwill makes the government’s support for Special Olympics easier. Since the founding of Special Olympics in Paraguay, the government has been closely involved. Several senators are keen to provide their support to Special Olympics in any possible capacity. They also seek Special Olympics’ reciprocal support for some of their initiatives.

*Translation of Special Olympics by the Business Community.* OEP introduced us to a few business partners, one of which was Mr. Federico Frutos. Mr. Frutos is a successful businessman in automobile parts and was also Minister of Sports in Paraguay. He explains that he started with very little means and traveled to neighboring countries such as Brazil to purchase auto parts. He explains how he was able to build a successful business in which his children now participate. During his tenure as a Minister of Sports, he was available at OEP functions and showed goodwill and support whenever possible. After his tenure as a Minister of Sports, and as a token of his involvement in the community, Mr. Frutos supports both sports and charitable organizations. He is convinced that this support humanizes his business endeavors.

## **THAILAND**

### **Interessement and Leadership**

The Peace Corps created Special Olympics Thailand (SOT). They were looking for an organization or school that could assume responsibility for Special Olympics, and they were not able to identify an organization in the community that already supported people with intellectual disabilities. A woman responsible for activities for people with physical disabilities took up the charge. She brought together a governing board of well-connected people, including some friends connected through studies in Britain, people with high posts in government, and others who

work on prestigious projects, such as the landscaping and infrastructure of golf courses. The activities were rather low key in the beginning stages and the focus was on how to raise sustainable funds to support the program. In a second phase of leadership, the daughter of one of the board members SOT was selected as the new National Director. She had been a swimmer with high visibility in the country and was coached by her father.

Special Olympics Thailand has grown in many dimensions. First, the fund-raising efforts were expanded in part because of the ex-prime minister who provides the venue and support for an annual fundraising event. Second, new board members from Thammasat University are engaged in fund development activities. Third, several entities recruit volunteers to assist with sports. The most notable are companies who ask their employees to engage in volunteer activities and the well-developed volunteer programs that Red Bull offers. Some board members donate their time to perform certain financial administration or other tasks. They would not mind giving up these voluntary positions but carry on nevertheless.

SOT leadership has cultivated the capacity to organize activities without relying on government support or on parents. A small administrative office houses a director and assistant and extends through to many others in the university and business communities, who offer their skills and time, especially for the purpose of fundraising. Some international businesses organize local fundraising and donate time, i.e. for the purpose of offering food services during games and events.

The organization's relationships with government and media are rather uneasy. The government itself organizes two sports competitions for people with intellectual disabilities. The vision behind these competitions is to showcase high performance sports activities. People who perform at lower levels and who do not meet the age criteria are excluded. Special Olympics' vision, however, does not exclude people with intellectual disabilities who are low performing, nor does it exclude people based on age. Moreover, Special Olympics provides the opportunity to compete internationally. From the user's point of view, e.g., the trainer who selects people for participation, this creates the possibility of choice, with the side effect of choosing to participate in one or the other because of various criteria and standards. The government's claim is that its competitions are more prestigious.

With regard to media relations, journalists cover what their superiors decide is important or needs to be covered. Apparently, attention given to Special Olympics activities is rather limited.

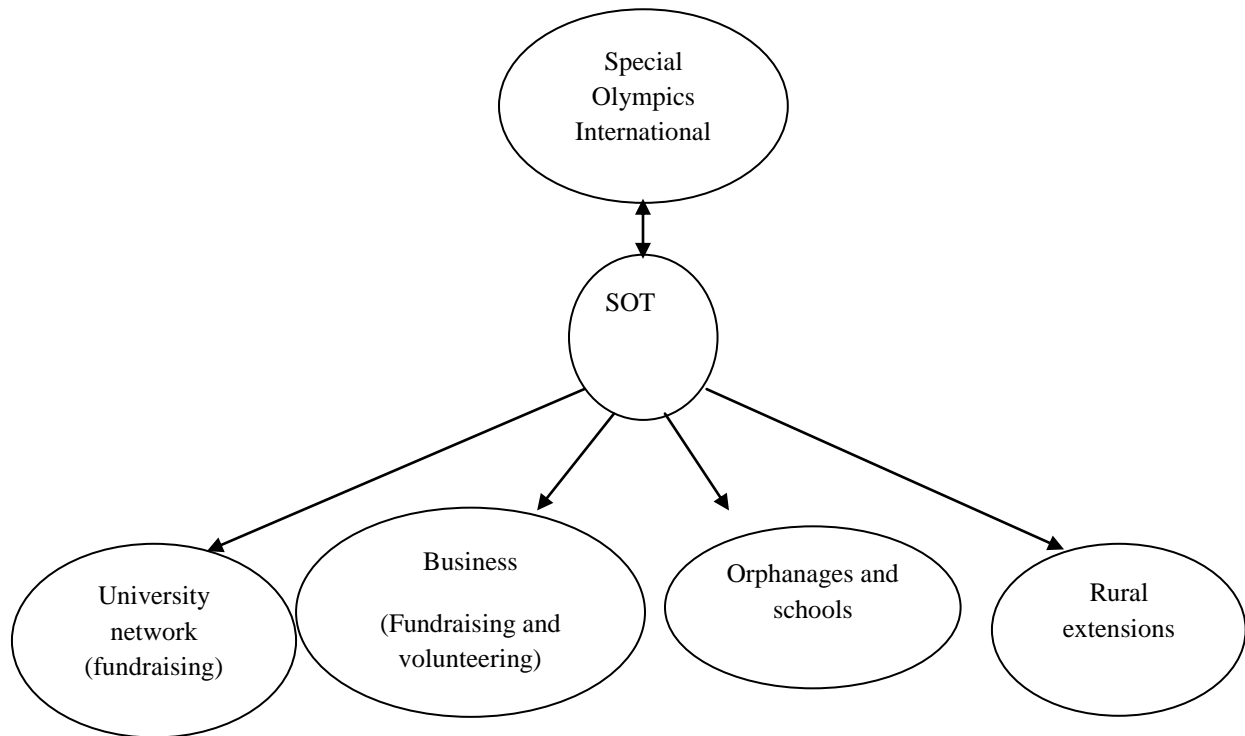


FIGURE 3. Development of Special Olympics Actor Networking in Thailand.

In Figure 3, the networking of SOT is illustrated. SOT is a small office that acts in cooperation with the international office (e.g., with regard to changing rules, materials, and programs) and also functions as an administrative office for fundraising activities and the coordination of school competitions. SOT recruits athletes from orphanages and schools. It relies on rural contacts to organize activities and coordinate logistics.

Punctualization:

If Special Olympics in Thailand is a well-functioning machine, then logistics management, fundraising and volunteer recruitment should be seen as parts of the motor of this machine that cannot be seen from the outside.

*Logistics Management.* Activities that bring people together require contacting them, offering them pleasant environments to work, securing funding, paying bills, and organizing transportation. These logistic operations are managed by a small office that seems to be extremely effective and task-oriented. The result is activities running very smoothly, even though they may have required months of preparation.

*Fundraising.* Many, if not all, of the people who chose to be engaged in SOT are attuned to fundraising. Fundraising requires trust and the stewardship of funds. It also necessitates mutually beneficial relationships. Fundraising can only be effective if it targets people with the means to donate. University alumni networks are of great importance in fundraising initiatives for SOT.



*Volunteer Recruitment.* SOT does not appear to recruit volunteers for the purpose of coaching or other activities, except in leadership positions that involve fundraising. Volunteers are not directly in touch with the SOT office. Instead, volunteers are recruited via an intermediary, such as a corporation that encourages its workers to donate time to volunteerism. Again, the preparation and management of volunteers requires substantial logistical skills.

Red Bull is an interesting example of a corporate partnership with SOT. This family-owned company from Thailand produced a drink that became commonly used among truck drivers trying to stay awake. Red Bull, however, has become an international brand associated with high impact sports as a result of international marketing. The family extends itself in Thailand by donating volunteer time to development projects. Any organization in need can contact them, and they will recruit volunteers to provide their services. At a large school competition, we observed how Red Bull volunteers would arrive, be briefed about their duties by a small staff, and facilitate the games and sports.

## HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ACTORS

Special Olympics Thailand, considered as an active network, operates thanks to human and non-human actors. We will identify, describe, and appreciate these actors. We should point out that SOT operates throughout the entire country.

### HUMAN ACTORS

*Leaders.* Leaders in Special Olympics Thailand are people who assume responsibility for logistics and fundraising activities. Their leadership is grounded in prestige earned through a governmental or business role, or in a university setting. Because of this prestige, they can make things happen that others cannot. Therefore, one can say that leadership in SOT bolsters elitism among people already considered elite. International, as well as local university history (i.e., alumni networks) are important in cultivated leaders.

*Government.* The government plays a role in the creation of boundaries for SOT. Because of its own activities in organizing sports events for people with disabilities, it defines itself as an actor involved at the local and competitive levels. This involvement has the effect of defining Special Olympics at the non-competitive level and as an all-age organization. The effect is the creation of niche building.

*Local Politicians.* At the beginning of an event, local politicians will speak to the crowd and afterwards also greet them. These are acts of legitimating and encouraging the organizers and athletes.

*Educators in Orphanages.* In orphanages for people with disabilities in Thailand, it is possible to select a career as a sportsperson. These orphanages are organized on a strict schedule and allot the time for household work, meals, and training. Orphanages are gender specific and meetings between genders, for the purpose of practicing sports, are strictly regulated. People with disabilities have very few belongings. The medals that they have earned are kept away from them, for various reasons. Within these contexts, it becomes clear that educators in such orphanages play important roles that facilitate athletes' participation in events and competitions.

*Grandparents and Teachers.* In some events organized by Special Olympics, especially those that require travel, parents are not able to attend. Also, daily responsibilities prevent parents from attending. Consequently, few or no parents attend events. In certain cases, however, grandparents may be able to accompany an athlete to an SO event. Teachers might also be in a position to play a role as an actor.

## NON-HUMAN ACTORS

*Golf Court Settings.* One golf course setting is used for fund raising, bringing together the local elite. At fundraising functions, a person with an intellectual disability would also have the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills, which were honed in the ALPS program.

*Sports Infrastructure.* Some sports complexes, including a high capacity indoor facility and outdoor stadium, serve as the venue for Special Olympics school-based competitions. Buses loaded with children and teachers arrive in the morning. A bus with Red Bull volunteers also arrives. Everyone gathers inside, and local politicians give their speeches and greet the athletes. Then the games begin. Later, local volunteers prepare and provide (free) meals for lunch. The day ends with awarding medals and taking pictures of athletes and volunteers.

## NETWORKS

A small team of collaborators operates SOT, and members extend their reach across the country. It is task oriented. A fund-raising activity is a task that requires preparation over a long period of time. Organizing a school activity is another task. The team works systematically. Regarding Board functioning, SOT is a group of friends, who does things for each other, partly out of a feeling that ‘noblesse oblige’ (if you belong to a certain status in society, you should do something for others, which simultaneously reinforces your status).

## CRITICAL EVENTS

The history of SOT cannot be seen independently from the transnational connections in which the country has engaged, particularly with Britain and the United States. It has an immediate impact on the big and small markers of the organization.

Big Markers include the following:

- Recruitment of the first director by the Peace Corps and the establishment of a governing board (many with international alumni and high level government connections);
- Recruitment of Nui as the second director of Special Olympics.

Small Markers include the following:

- Recruitment of volunteers through corporations

# UZBEKISTAN

Again, our research was guided by one overriding question: What best practices in community development exist in this country's Special Olympics program? We, therefore, focus on the agents that define the Special Olympics network. In Uzbekistan, this question required qualification because it is such a new country. We were introduced to the Special Olympics office team, including full-time staff and volunteers. In the next few weeks, we were introduced to the family programs, meeting with mothers and, on two occasions, fathers of children with an intellectual disability. We also attended their practices, outings to a local children's theatre, and other cultural performances. We convened in several United Nations (UN) offices, one international NGO, several local NGOs (dedicated to women's issues), some of them established by one of the daughters of President Karimov. Finally, we also visited one special education school<sup>1</sup> where we observed a dance practice demonstration. In all of these places, we were generally welcomed very warmly with the typical hospitality, which included tea, sweets, fruits, and in some cases abundant and overwhelming gift-giving, including books, music CD, and pamphlets. Many of these partners had, however, very brief or even nonexistent connections with Special Olympics. For example, the UN information officer referred to a football match played among UN staff members. The officer was particularly critical about the lack of structure of Special Olympics, in terms of its lack of verifiable evaluation criteria and use of developmental logical frameworks and funding cycles. UNICEF for its part, introduced us to the various activities that it was organizing with regard to disability, but the projects did not directly include collaboration with Special Olympics Uzbekistan (SOU). We concluded that many of the so called partners were rather potential partners.

We learned that Karaman Holding is the only benefactor of Special Olympics Uzbekistan, financing ten paid staff positions (the majority of them situated in Hotel Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Culture). We were not, however, introduced to Karaman holding officers for an interview. We also did not speak or meet with any members of the press. Additionally, we found out that many foreign NGOs face difficulties. Registrations and transfers of money are difficult or impossible. We often heard from Special Olympics staff that managing the organization is not easy, but we failed to clearly understand the specific difficulties, except for the example of fund transfers. What we did hear was strong nationalism and proud exhibition of local culture and heritage (mostly referring to the period prior to Russian occupation).

In meetings with family members, a pattern of interviewing emerged. These interviews were not formally organized. Rather, we were standing and talking with people (primarily mothers), while children played. The conversation would begin with the translator between the interviewer and interviewee. At some point, pictures were circulated to illustrate, or to change, the subject. Pictures are shown to document events and raise other issues. For example, during one meeting, a picture was introduced of a boy with intellectual disability and his girlfriend. A discussion

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<sup>1</sup> In Tashkent, there are 11 special education schools and two boarding facilities. The boarding facilities have 180 to 190 children, mostly from poor families, and in some cases the children were placed by the government. The preference of most parents, however, is to keep their children at home. Currently, there is a strong impetus towards inclusive education. This is very much at odds with the trend of massive institutionalization under the USSR.

started about sexuality. I asked whether people with disabilities could get married (given that it was marriage season in Tashkent, this seemed an appropriate question). The question was turned back to me. As an expert, people believed I should say something. I mentioned that marriage among people with intellectual disabilities is not exceptional in some parts of the world. I had observed this phenomenon when I was living in the US. I further mentioned that I knew of programs that would organize support for married people with intellectual disabilities. I also mentioned having seen a film in which children of parents with intellectual disabilities were born without having disabilities. In response, people commented that people with Down syndrome were probably likely to have children with Down syndrome. Other people joined in, and the conversation ended inconclusively (leaving the impression that ‘we may not be ready for this, but it’s good to know what’s going on in other countries’).

## INTERESSEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Regional European support led to the founding of Special Olympics Uzbekistan. The director of SOU is a former athlete, who is currently the Managing Director of Hotel Uzbekistan, a Doctoral candidate, and the mother of small children. She pointed out that although SOU has organized and achieved some positive outcomes, there are still difficulties to be faced, and that it is a great challenge to provide a young person with intellectual disability not only with opportunities for physical exercise and sports, but also employment opportunities. Many parents want more employment options for their children with intellectual disabilities, but there is still a long way to go before they can find work.

An administrative staff assists the director of SOU. This staff explained that there are fixed activities on a yearly basis, such as a school competition and a camp in the mountains. They showed pictures of these events to us. There were also posters available from previous promotional campaigns. The administrative staff assured us that the organization of these activities had become routine and posed few to no organizational problems (such as recruiting the athletes from schools, organizing the bus transportation). The staff also includes two volunteer mothers, who organize various activities, such as a family program. This program includes games with approximately 20 children, both outdoors or in a large indoor sports facility, and it also facilitates the children’s participation in cultural activities. The leader of the family program generated interest in the business community, such as restaurants. She would, in collaboration with another mother, approach restaurant holders to request sponsorship of a meal at their restaurant. On such occasions, the children received gifts. SOU would send thank you letters to the restaurant owner and sometimes mention to the city mayor that a certain restaurant owner had hosted a dinner in his restaurant. The theme of this charity dinner was that sport can help the child. Through sport, the child can gain confidence and the spirit to win.

Another initiative of interessement occurred with some of the volunteer dentists. They explained that they attended several workshops outside the country, organized by Special Olympics, in which they were trained for conducting volunteer activities. Upon their return, they made contact with several local schools and offered dental check-ups for children with intellectual disabilities. The schools found this offer rather strange but allowed them access. The

dentists believed that health related activities were incompatible with the more cultural orientation of the family program.

We also met with several potential partners who offered their facilities for start-up activities. For example, a women's NGO was set up with staff but needed projects and activities. We were shown the facilities that contained many empty offices. Similarly, this was the case for a government worker from a makhalla (this is a local communal structure) where we were warmly welcomed with traditional hospitality. This makhalla had been included in a community-based rehabilitation project, initiated by a Christian international NGO. This NGO, however, had decided that it would terminate its activities, and therefore made reference to other NGOs who decided to terminate their activities because working in Uzbekistan was rather difficult. The government worker of the makhalla declared her readiness for a possible partnership.

Lastly, we discovered interesting places in Uzbekistan where awareness could have been generated. For example, the official at the Uzbekistan Olympic Committee did not see any problem with Special Olympics being a member of the organization, but he emphasized the difficulties he faced when having to defend the interests of his country at the international level.

There is also a 'Museum of Olympic Glory' in Tashkent, which we had an opportunity to visit upon our request. It is housed in an interesting building and has won several awards. It hosts displays of the Olympic tradition, sports disciplines, and Olympic heroes. However, any reference to disability sports, let alone sports for people with intellectual disabilities, is notably absent.

We also met in the Ministry of Sports where a delegation of Paralympics is housed. From this meeting, it was not clear whether Paralympics and Special Olympics had developed any relationship at all, except for knowing of each other's existence.

We met again in the Ministry of Sports where we were overwhelmed with the local hospitality, in the presence of the President of Special Olympics Uzbekistan. In the presentation of activities, we were mostly informed of the important infrastructural investments that have been made throughout Uzbekistan (and in the course of our being there, we also visited a new building). We also saw a promotional film on sports in Uzbekistan. Again, any reference to disability sports in the presentation and in the promotional film was markedly absent. The President of Special Olympics also remained notably silent.

Lastly, from a visit to an orphanage for children with disabilities, we understood that sports for people with disabilities have a long history in Uzbekistan. There were teachers available for several sports disciplines. While continuing these practices, the availability of Paralympics and Special Olympics allowed them to participate in international competitions.

In summary, we concluded that leadership in SOU is shared among different members. The profile of the organization is kept low, perhaps for good reason. We are not aware of the existence of a governing board, only of a

president housed in the Ministry of Sports. Special Olympics operates in both the government and business environment. Its partners, in the United Nations system and international NGOs, as well in the government, acknowledge the existence of Special Olympics, but there has not been a real partnership. It is possible that Special Olympics employees that are paid by Karaman Holding could also occupy offices there in the future. The family program is the strongest, based on low key gatherings of parents during which opportunities are created for parents to bring their children, enjoy games, participate in cultural events, and meet with each other. The ‘bread and butter’ of Special Olympics Uzbekistan are yearly sports events that are efficiently organized. Volunteering is a new phenomenon in Uzbekistan and Special Olympics is credited with bringing this innovation to the country.

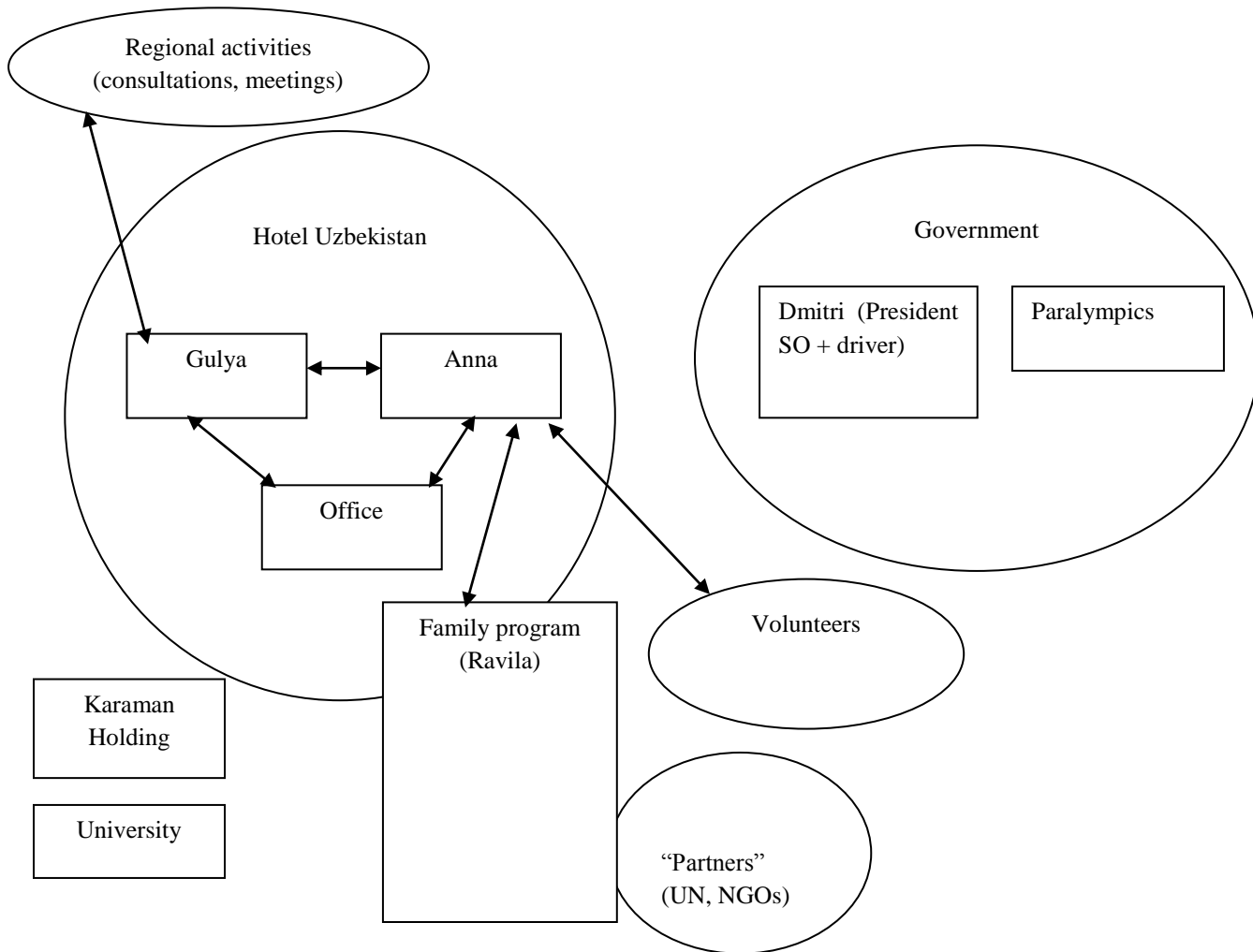


FIGURE 4. Development of Special Olympics Actor Networking in Uzbekistan.

In Figure 4, the various components of SOU are depicted. The Hotel Uzbekistan and the government are two major places where SO is formally represented. The connection between the two entities was not very clear. We also observed no indicators of an ‘obligatory passage point,’ although this point could have remained hidden to us. Karaman Holding is a major donor and supporter, but the connection with SO other than paying staff salaries was not clear. The university has been visited by SOU representatives, but the focus of the work (e.g. in thesis production) was rather removed from SOU’s direct interests. Volunteers in the area of medical outreach explained their efforts, but the direct link with the local Special Olympics office was not immediately obvious. They operated on their terms and on what they had received in regional training.

Punctualization: Sports = Culture

If Special Olympics in Uzbekistan is considered a well-functioning machine, then local culture and nationalist discourse, and in between many intermediary practices, should be considered the motor of this machine.

From the first few days in Uzbekistan, I noted that culture here is dominant:

*“What is very striking here is how Special Olympics goes together with arts and culture. It also appears in the language use: they speak of ‘physical culture’ (and not physical education). ‘Sports’ in this country is seen as a form of culture, a form of art. An art appears to be about communication, and about building confidence. It is quite interesting to see how sports go together with the art of appreciation in terms of religion and charity. I was told a few things about how sports, families, religion, communication and charity go together.”*

Many outsiders, including the daily visitors of Hotel Uzbekistan, may not know of the existence of Special Olympics Uzbekistan. There are no visual signs of its existence. It is hidden in the context of daily business and government operations, although it may become visible for some during the events organized during the year, only to become hidden again. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this punctualization is how Special Olympics as a phenomenon is embedded within the local culture at many levels

Sports = Culture. In Uzbekistan, the availability of many forms of cultural expression, in architecture, dress, those derived from Russian influence (notably in opera and ballet, and theatre), and the minority ethnic and Islamic cultural expressions (in text, science, and material culture) are quite rich. The culture of hospitality is expressed in the traditional building (with no windows on the street side but an always open door inviting people to enter the premises, which are inward looking into a courtyard holding precious fruit bearing plants), the offerings of tea, sweets, and fruits, and the traditional marriage and family set up (the mother of the husband-to-be searches for a bride, who then joins the compound). Interestingly, the woman is socialized for independence and the husband for dependence (upon his mother). The grandmother is the one who coordinates everything from the home base.

The culture of hospitality is also extended in offices and at the lowest government level, the makhalla, where we were always greeted with tea and sweets. In the context of this new country liberated from its oppressing forces, a strong discourse of nationalist power is setting the stage for all new developments. It reinforces its own capabilities, its rich heritage, its political leaders, and its future.

Local culture leaves little room for vulnerable people or for critical thinking. Special Olympics joins the daily cultural practices and yields to the national discourse. The family program operates at this level. It joins some games, in a small-scale way, sometimes in the context of huge sports infrastructure, and it contributes to how charity works (e.g., restaurant owners providing a dinner), and the families participate equally in cultural events.

## HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ACTORS

Special Olympics Uzbekistan, considered an active network, operates thanks to human and non-human actors. We will identify, describe, and appreciate these actors. We should mention that SOU operates in three places. In



Tashkent, it operates under the patronage of the Ministry of Education and Culture and in two other places under the patronage of the Women's Commission.

## HUMAN ACTORS

*Leaders.* Leadership in SOU includes individuals who contribute what they can, often within the constraints of limited funding and infrastructure. These people are situated primarily within a business or government environment and some are health professionals. They are people who decide for themselves to do something for others, even if it means little or no gains for themselves. They have control over the activities that they manage, but in terms of the organization itself, should not be considered obligatory passage points.

*Support staff.* Administrative and other staff handles the day-to-day operations of SOU. Transfers of money, communications, and logistics can present major hurdles. However, some of these staff have been with the organization for a longer period and manage these tasks well.

*Supporters.* Karaman Holding, a major business, supports SOU financially through paid staff salaries.

*Facilitators.* Volunteers and coaches are recruited haphazardly. We met one coach, a student of physical education, who had chosen to be a coach. This role represented a rather temporary engagement from which she expected few career prospects. Other volunteers, with more expanded perspectives, enjoyed doing their volunteer work but did not feel overly-connected to Special Olympics.

*Government.* The government is an important actor in Special Olympics' network, but rather indirectly. The government's focus is on implementation of large scale policy.

*University Staff.* SOU developed a relationship with some university staff indirectly via a regional effort. It is not clear that this relationship is sustained at the local level, nor whether the university has benefited from this relationship or whether students or other staff members contribute.

## NON-HUMAN ACTORS

*Hotel Uzbekistan Premises.* Hotel Uzbekistan is the location where the director and staff work. Special arrangements are also made for the staff's lunch. This business setting (which has been under different management over its history) is in large part the setting for local culture. During the time that we stayed in the hotel, it hosted a wedding reception almost every night. The hotel is also equipped to exchange money, but it is not equipped for credit card transactions. Therefore, the transfer of funds is complicated, which impacts SOU activities.

*Ministry of Sports Premises.* These premises host the President of SOU and a driver. The premises themselves are tightly controlled by police, and are set in a large park, which is a tribute to the nation.

*Sporting Grounds and Facilities.* Government sporting facilities are freely available to users. Major investments in newer facilities have been made throughout the country. Their use appears to be easy and requires little organization.

## NETWORKS

Three different types of networks exist for SOU. The first consists of high-profile contacts. For example, some possibilities were entertained to engage the daughter of the President of Uzbekistan for certain SOU activities. At UNICEF, we were advised that engaging with the second daughter of the President (who holds a post in UNESCO) could be beneficial.

A second type of networks exists with UN agencies and international NGOs. These networks have not, however, resulted in programmatic collaboration. In some cases, interesting information is shared. For example, UNICEF's Information Officer shared how effective fundraising through the use of targeted letters can be organized, but overall, these relationships potentially yield very little in terms of concrete results.

The low profile contacts that Special Olympics staff entertain with volunteers, children and parents, may be more authentic. For example, several parents meet on a Saturday afternoon (when they are available) to engage their children with games led by a physical education teacher who works in one of the boarding schools in Tashkent. She has two children with intellectual disabilities and enjoys working with other children. The purpose of these games and physical exercises is to improve the children's health. These contacts, however, are rather peripheral to the business or government partnerships in which SOU engages.

Parents might benefit from serving as SOU's low profile contacts. We met several mothers and a few fathers who come to Special Olympics because they wished to expose their child to other children and the outside world, as well as learn from these contacts.

SOU also entertains contacts with regions outside of the capital, such as in Samarkand. These areas involve schools and orphanages where children with intellectual disabilities are able to practice sports and who are recruited to participate in Special Olympics competitions. We also met with special educators who showed us educational posters.

## INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

One of the easiest accomplishments is to describe the international places that a team has gone to and list the medals earned. Natalya, who is giving the Saturday exercises, mentions: *“Of course, we hope that our children will be able to join in the Olympic Games. Our athletes have been going to Ireland, America, Boston, and Idaho. One had a second place, and in Dublin some had gold. There have also been local competitions in 2005, and Asian games with participation from Russia and Kazakhstan.”*

## STRUCTURAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

One accomplishment is certainly the assurance that Karaman Holding supports the salaries of SOU staff members. Another structural accomplishment may be the 'division' of Special Olympics, as it operates both inside and outside the government.

## TRANSLATION

In Uzbekistan, the larger framework in which Special Olympics is embedded is ‘culture,’ not sports. Special Olympics is about culture, and culture grows through communication. Sports are a form of body language along with other forms (e.g., circus and theatre), and the foundation for everything is the family. Special Olympics provides an opportunity to be part of another family. The primary role of the leadership of the family program is to recruit into this family. One recruitment strategy is to invite young parents to join. Another is to contact kindergartens and see whether a competition between young children could be organized. People here use Special Olympics to find out how to communicate. Special Olympics represents an opportunity to be ‘cultured,’ and it leads to confidence.

## **A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: COMMONALITIES VS. DIFFERENCES**

In a structural analysis, one compares a given set of elements, in order to identify commonalities and differences, and create a logical order among elements. In this analysis of Special Olympics, the elements are the four individual countries.

## IMPEDING AND PROMOTING FACTORS

What are impeding and promoting factors in a country that explain how Special Olympics develops? How can such factors be taken into consideration in identifying promising practices in community health and development?

## HISTORICAL FACTORS: A HISTORY WITH SPORTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (UZBEKISTAN AND THAILAND) VS. ONE WITHOUT (PARAGUAY AND NAMIBIA)

Uzbekistan and Thailand are both countries with a history of sports for people with disabilities. In Uzbekistan, sports for people with disabilities are organized within orphanages. Sports are organized for all students, regardless of their disability status. Offering Special Olympics in these orphanages represents a differentiation in terms of disability, as well as the possibility of competing at the international level. Thailand also has a history of organizing sports activities for people with disabilities. In these competitions, low performing students are excluded. Some of the competitions are also limited to students of the ages served in the school system.

Pre-existing sports activities for people with disabilities in a country forces Special Olympics to join the existing infrastructure or differentiate itself from what is already offered. In the countries we visited, the choice was made to offer its own activities and establish a Special Olympics niche. This differentiation is perhaps most obvious in Thailand. Self-reliance is important in SO Thailand, as evidenced by the strong emphasis on fundraising. In Uzbekistan, the opposite is true. Special Olympics fits into the mainstream of pre-existing cultural expressions. For example, the family program does what people in Uzbekistan do, i.e., they celebrate their hospitality culture and fit into cultural practices.

Paraguay and Namibia, however, are both countries without a history of disability sports. In both of these countries, Special Olympics partners productively with the government. The contributions of Special Olympics do not conflict

with existing initiatives or with other international disability movements. In Paraguay, Paralympics is non-existent, and in Namibia, Special Olympics and Paralympics are both represented in the government.

#### THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM: CLOSE HISTORIES OF COLONIALISM (UZBEKISTAN, NAMIBIA) VS. DISTANT RELATIONS (THAILAND, PARAGUAY)

Uzbekistan and Namibia both have recent histories of colonialism. In Uzbekistan, the remnants of Russian influence are met with mixed feelings; initiatives promote a national structure, based on pre-colonial history and an orientation towards cultural Islam. Namibia has a long history of colonialism, as it was twice colonized, by Germany and South Africa. The colonial influence is felt in Special Olympics' operations. The cultural interpretation of sports and family participation in cultural activities in Uzbekistan cannot be understood without considering the impact of Russian cultural expression. The continued influence of German and South African colonization account for the heterogeneous cultural influences in Windhoek as well as the proliferation of tribal African differences in Namibia. Perhaps most striking are the remnants of apartheid, reflected in the make-up of special education schools, and consequently also in the operations of Special Olympics. Special Olympics, however, is sometimes in a position to counter the stereotypes of colonialism, e.g. through the selection of athletes for international competition. Thailand and Paraguay are countries with distant histories of colonialism. Thailand never had a formal period of colonialism. Both countries are very self-reliant, Thailand in terms of its securing its funding and logistics, and Paraguay as a sports-loving nation.

#### THE (UN)IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS: PARENT-CENTERED (PARAGUAY AND UZBEKISTAN) VS. EVENT-CENTERED (THAILAND, NAMIBIA)

The participation of parents in Special Olympics is remarkably varied. Both in Paraguay and Uzbekistan, parents take part. This is partly because 'the distance' (both physical and psychological) is not very big. A competition in the local private swimming club in Asuncion is well attended by parents who cheer for their children and attend the awards ceremony. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, parents participate with their children in games and cultural activities. In Thailand, participation of parents is virtually non-existent. The reason is partly because recruitment occurs in orphanages, partly because of lack of time, and partly because of the long distances and the barriers to transportation. Equally, in Namibia, parents rarely participate in events. It is difficult for parents in Namibia to bring their children with intellectual disabilities out in public. Perhaps this is because intellectual disability is considered embarrassing and language about intellectual disability is stigmatizing. The cultural preference is to confine children with intellectual disabilities to the backyard and not let them out in the open. Sometimes, however, they do not participate because of poverty or lack of time.

## THE (UN)IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS: VOLUNTEER-CENTERED (PARAGUAY, NAMIBIA) VS. PROFESSIONAL-CENTERED (UZBEKISTAN, THAILAND)

Some Special Olympics programs can be defined as volunteer-centered, such as those run in Paraguay and Namibia, while others are more focused on professionals. This is a question of emphasis, not absolute findings. The programs in both Paraguay and Namibia are focused on the recruitment of university students. In Paraguay, recruitment is specifically focused on physical education students, while in Namibia there is a broad recruitment of students across academic disciplines. In both countries, the administrations of those universities support student volunteerism. In Paraguay, volunteers focus on contributions to the curriculum, while in Namibia the volunteer support is about overall exposure and well-being. In the two countries, the volunteers create specific identities by taking part in Special Olympics.

The volunteers that we met in Uzbekistan defined themselves as professionals. The leader of the family program had been a language teacher all of her career, but in retirement she defined herself as having become a ‘sports teacher.’ Other volunteers were health professionals that extended their services beyond private practice. The volunteers in Thailand that were ‘delivered’ by the business corporations focused on specific events. Their engagement was related to event-specific tasks without necessarily learning more about the organization’s big picture.

## SPECIAL OLYMPICS POTENTIAL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Special Olympics is a dynamic network in each of the four countries studied and works with a variety of actors. The emphasis differs from one country to another. Consequently, the kind of influence that Special Olympics can have on community development also differs from one country to another. In each of the countries, some actors are dominant and can become actants, i.e., they are connectors. These connections then become integral to the sort of network that can be developed and can lead to community development, defined in economic or well-being criteria.

### SCHOOLS (NAMIBIA)

Schools are the central actors of Special Olympics in Namibia. The Windhoek International School was crucial for training leaders, providing volunteers (who could work in Special Olympics as part of their training), and hosting events on their sports grounds. The teachers at special education schools in Windhoek have delivered much know-how in terms of logistics, and the University of Namibia contributes through its volunteers. Clearly, Special Olympics in Namibia could not function without the schools, where recruitment and training continually occur. Teachers are significant human actors, although their roles have diminished over the years and students have emerged as leaders.

### GOVERNMENT (PARAGUAY)

At different moments, the government of Paraguay has been an important actor (alongside many others). The government has hosted Special Olympics, reviewed applications for funding, provided protection to secure program continuation, and written Special Olympics in as a line item in the national budget. Governments can only act where

its citizens are active. In Paraguay, there are people who occupy important functions in society who also happen to have a child with intellectual disabilities.

#### FUNDING (THAILAND)

The belief that money is a necessity dominates in Thailand. Philanthropy is a way for many people to give back to their society. These are people who already have a lot in terms of power, experience, and prestige, and through their involvement in fundraising activities, they reassure themselves of their connectedness. Charity is a serious and necessary business. It brings people together. It bolsters connections, especially university alumni connections.

#### CULTURE (UZBEKISTAN)

Expressive culture through the arts is an overarching characteristic of Uzbekistan, which has many community values. Performing arts bring reflection on important roles and values of society. They require ‘physical culture.’ Dance and theatre require management of body movements (and those of the mind). Also, those who are part of the audience require discipline.

### BUILDING A CULTURE OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS ACROSS COUNTRIES

#### THE CULTURE OF THE SPORTS CAMP: FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Special Olympics has its roots in camps for children with intellectual disabilities. The camp environment takes people out of their ordinary elements. It can therefore truly be called ‘special.’ Originated in the United States, the culture of the friendly sports camp, with emphasis on participation, competition, and being rewarded for both, has been exported and translated in many other countries.

#### THE BRAND OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics has become an international brand, with protection of its name, logo, and programs. However, this branding is not equally implemented in all the countries that we have studied.

#### CLASH OF CULTURES?

Special Olympics is present in many countries, but it does not lead to a clash of cultures, because it adapts itself to local circumstances, and it functions within the premises of those cultures. In some countries, it operates under a low profile, and in others it is higher profile.

### EXEMPLARY ACTOR NETWORKS

Special Olympics works because people decide to make it work and they collaborate with others. In this section, I make, to a certain extent, abstraction of the many different actors that are working to focus on those that really matter. For each of the countries, it is possible to delineate the workings of an actor network, by focusing on its most prominent actors and to understand how these actors become actants, i.e., they search for other actors with whom they connect to ultimately form a network.

## NAMIBIA: WORKING WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (SPECIAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS, WINDHOEK INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA)

Namibia's success as an actor network is rooted in its educational focus. According to Mrs. Strauss, the Principal of Moreson Special School, the Kenyan who introduced Special Olympics into her school did it right 'because he was training the teachers' in how to train children with disabilities in sports. As she networked with other individuals and Special Olympics became an initiative that included more special schools, and then located resources within the Windhoek International School and the University of Namibia, it became a network of people who are situated within educational institutions. This is, however, not to say that some partners, such as a bank, the media, and the government, have not also played vital roles.

## PARAGUAY: WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT (MINISTRY, INDIVIDUAL SENATORS, MILITARY)

To explain Paraguay's success, one needs to consider the role of government in several ways. As an initial actor, the recruitment of leaders among mothers of children with intellectual disabilities is how the Ministry became an actant. This initial recruitment led to further recruitment among parents. The leadership found the way back to government, for example, in a collaboration with the military for the use of infrastructure, and in the assistance and friendship of individual senators. Paraguay's Special Olympics is much richer than a network with government partners, but the government played pivotal roles in its development and long-term sustainability.

## THAILAND: ALUMNI NETWORKS (FUNDRAISING)

Alumni networks underpin Thailand's success in developing its Special Olympics Program. After creating initial leaders in the country, the organization evolved as other like-minded people worked together for a common good. These connections were best identified among old college friends, initially people who also had a history of studying in Britain, and later among people who studied in the same local university. These alumni networks facilitated important network components that drive fundraising, volunteerism, and sustainability.

## UZBEKISTAN: WORKING WITH FAMILIES IN CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

The origin of Special Olympics Uzbekistan's success is in its low profile. Through family engagement in group activities, and therefore their 'coming out' to the community, they create the possibility of participation. They visit the infrastructures for sport, as well as those for the performing arts, and generate the opportunity to participate in the cultural life of the country.

## **EXEMPLARY PRACTICES OF TRANSLATION**

Special Olympics is a well-defined sports program that extends into health, family support, and leadership. Many Special Olympics programs have been implemented with much success. But perhaps even more important is to see how Special Olympics has been ‘translated’ into the culture, and the critical elements in this translation process. I have identified for each of the countries included in this study an exemplary practice of translation.

### **NAMIBIA: LEADERSHIP (IN COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT)**

In Namibia, strong residual effects of colonialism are evident in culture, politics, and society generally. The real challenge is to find ways to collaborate that do not reinforce colonial influences. Namibia’s leadership seeks a new future for the country, overcoming the remnants of colonialism and forging new, independent ethics. Leadership is found in the willingness of young people to be exposed and learn from experiences in uncharted terrains.

### **PARAGUAY: SABADOS DEPORTIVOS**

An exemplary act of translation is taking an idea and practice and determining how to sustain them. Sustainability is exactly what Sabados Deportivos means for Paraguay. Since they do sports on a weekly basis all year round, they can say that Special Olympics really exists. It is no longer an idea or a practice, but a program.

### **THAILAND: FUNDRAISING, VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT**

Thailand found interesting ways of translating Special Olympics into the local context, given serious constraints. How can Special Olympics be financially self-sustaining and how can it operate in a country where there is not a tradition of volunteerism? Answers to these questions have been formulated in the very close relationships that people maintain among families and friends. Also, large corporations donate volunteer manpower from among their paid staff.

### **UZBEKISTAN: LINKING SPORT TO CULTURE TO NATION-BUILDING**

Uzbekistan translated Special Olympics with great attention to its history and in the context of being a new nation. Special Olympics Uzbekistan leverages the country’s culture of hospitality. The family program is mostly accessible to children who live at home. Nevertheless, programs also reach out to children in orphanages (who already are engaged in sports). In the process of nation-building, Uzbekistan has built a sports infrastructure across the country. Everyone is welcome, without distinction. The government does not see the need to emphasize specific categories, since it intends to be broadly inclusive.



# **EXEMPLARY PRACTICES OF GENERALIZED SYMMETRY**

With generalized symmetry, we understand that practices require symmetry between human and non-human actors. Human qualities of leadership and skill and non-human resources, such as technology and infrastructure, complement one another. We seek to illustrate generalized symmetry for each of the four countries.

## **NAMIBIA: THE MEETING OF TECHNOLOGICAL, COMMUNITY-CHARITY, HEALTH, AND ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS**

A range of operations define a high functioning Special Olympics program: sports activities, finance and administrative activities, and protecting equipment from damage and theft. People think about Special Olympics in Namibia in different terms, e.g., as a charity, an education provider, a health promoter, and as an administrative entity.

While education and health related goals may be dominant, symmetry with material-technological goals is also important to consider. For example, management of a competition requires coaches not only to teach students in which direction they should run (an educational goal), or that athletes are checked for dental problems prior to a game (a health related goal), but also that the equipment is available and well managed or that the chalk lines on a football field are properly drawn (material-related goals), as well as that a field is left in a clean state after the game (an administrative-management goal). In the organization of an event, multiple skills and leadership are thus required. Namibia showed that it had a strong range of skills in the past, including at the international level. Despite these past achievements, some people become tired and wish to shift their attention to other priorities. Some frustration can also be observed, which revives the old demons of exclusion and discrimination under apartheid. Nevertheless, perseverance and a belief in the future can also be observed.

## **PARAGUAY: MOTHERS AND PROFESSIONALS, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC CONCERNS**

Generalized symmetry in the Paraguayan context can be found in the way that mothers who have a son or daughter with an intellectual disability are themselves professionals and have extended their knowledge by associating with other professionals (in education, psychology, and health). Special Olympics in Paraguay can thus be considered a family matter as well as a public matter. Both complement each other. The Special Olympics family is an extension of the nuclear family. Some parents are present in Special Olympics. This presence leads to genuine friendships with other families.

## **THAILAND: INCORPORATING THE WEST INTO THAI SOCIETY**

Thailand has sought to incorporate western elements in its daily culture, but it has also retained a unique culture, most prominently in its Buddhist expressions, which has created an interesting cultural hybrid. This hybrid is evident in Special Olympics' operations, with respect to its characteristics (e.g., respect for the new rules being

implemented) but also with a great attention to how things work in Thai society. For example, the use of the English term ‘Special Olympics’ is avoided, because people would not be able to understand its meaning. Another example is the absence of parents in a Special Olympics event. In the Thai context of orphanages, poverty, and occupation, this absence should not be understood as a lack of interest but rather as a consequence of the country’s particular situation.

## UZBEKISTAN: FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND NATION BUILDING

In Special Olympics Uzbekistan, generalized symmetry exists in how it operates among families and in the nation. The family represents the human actor; the community and the nation represent the infrastructure.

# CONCLUSION

## LOCAL AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

Special Olympics in each of the countries includes local and transnational networks. We have focused this report mostly on local networks, identifying its history, constituent actors, and actor networks. We did not focus on the trans-national network. Yet, in every country Special Olympics is both a local and transnational network. Both mutually reinforce one another. In some countries, the local network would survive without the transnational network. In others, the transnational network affords unique opportunities that helps Special Olympics survive locally.

The way Special Olympics is locally embedded varies from country to country. One influencing factor we have identified is the prior and current existence of other sports activities for people with disabilities. These pre-existing activities may create certain tensions. Both Special Olympics and Paralympics have introduced a way of thinking and practicing sports that may not be recognized at the local level. Some countries, however, have adapted their structures accordingly.

## HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN ACTORS

As actor networks, Special Olympics in every country is based on mutually reinforcing human and non-human actors, but these dynamics vary considerably from one country to another. It is also not clear whether the composition could be changed or whether other countries could benefit from knowing how things work in one country. Evidently, certain knowledge can be transferred, as well as certain commonalities with regard to the ‘brand’ Special Olympics, but the implementation also requires a good fit within the local culture.

## THE SPECIFIC NICHE OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### BRIDGES BETWEEN THE ELITE AND THE COMMUNITY

Special Olympics requires resources (both human and non-human) that are usually most readily available among the elite. People who are active in education, business, or government may be available to share these resources, based on trust, affection, and interest in the public good. These contributions can create a redistribution of human and material wealth. In countries where such redistribution is not possible, it is not likely that Special Olympics could be sustainable.

### THE GIFT OF PARTICIPATION

Special Olympics functions because it creates the possibility of participation. This participation is a characteristic of the camp in which Special Olympics originated: where participation may not be possible in ordinary society, the camp facilitates participation. The creation of the possibility of participation may be Special Olympics' unique gift, even greater than sports competition. Although athletes may want to compete and win, the real edge of Special Olympics is participation.

### BIO-POLITICS AND BEYOND

Special Olympics has developed health related practices, such as health screenings, prior to events. These medical services are supplements to core services. They provide an opportunity to humanize these services. The purpose of these services is not merely to control people through granting or excluding them access, but rather to make health services freely available. Such services would not be necessary if people with disabilities had the same access to health care that people without disabilities enjoy.

### CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Across every country and community studied, Special Olympics programs share a common gift: boundary-spanning for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Effective Special Olympics programs make cultural boundaries porous, including boundaries between people with and without intellectual disabilities, boundaries between people from different socioeconomic groups, boundaries between public and private sectors, and international boundaries that divide nations. At the local level, Special Olympics creates opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities and families to surpass the boundaries of their own expectations. Through this boundary-spanning phenomenon, Special Olympics extends horizons for individual athletes, families, communities, and nations.

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