Clandestine legitimacy work: when accepting is discreetly reshaping

The case of the World Equestrian Games

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Résumé :

In this paper, we develop the concept of *clandestine legitimacy work* as an extension of organizational legitimacy analysis. Mobilizing the recent developments of legitimacy studies, especially on legitimacy judgment and legitimacy work, we suggest that actors are setting up an on-going dialogue on the validity and the propriety of a given legitimacy objects. We also demonstrate the role of the social and the symbolic dimensions and of the day-to-day activities have on this work. We draw on a case study built from ethnographic data collected during the World Equestrian Games in 2014. We particularly focused our analysis on the roles performed by actors, who had different positions but shared something in common: passion of the sport horse. This allowed us to highlight the processes throughout which the rules imposed by actors are reworked. This confrontation led to a clandestine legitimacy work through which actors defined a consensus emerging over the prescriptions of the status.

Mots-clés : Legitimacy work, work approach, organizational legitimacy, events management

INTRODUCTION

Internal legitimacy, accorded organizations by their participants, is of paramount importance for organizational stability and effectiveness (Brown, 1994; Burawoy, 1979; Clegg, Rhodes & Kornberger, 2007). Yet, although often fragile and usually in a state of contestation, it is often taken for granted and appears under-researched (Drori & Honig, 2013; Brown & Toyoki, 2012). As Johnson (2004, p. 1) has observed: 'articulating the general processes that underlie [internal] legitimacy has remained a difficult and persistent problem'.

Specifically, organizations always gather people who have different status, origins, competences and visions but who are working together within the same area. This makes the overall acceptability of the organization by its members not so obvious, as the latter may have different expectations of what would be appropriate as organizational characteristics (e.g. system of authority, strategic vision, organizational rules) (Rueede & Kreutzer, 2015). The heterogeneity may lead to various evaluations, rendering, most probably, the work of legitimacy seekers a complex task or even inducing for some actors a lived experience that is not in line with their initial expectations. Indeed, promoting a certain vision of what should be the organization may engender "negative" legitimacy judgments if such property is perceived and interpreted as not compliant with the social-symbolic system in use (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). This could even turn to subsequent questioning of the organization and its procedures.

But, what actually happens when individuals find illegitimate some aspect of their own organization? Recently, literature on legitimacy judgement (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Tost, 2011) suggests that individuals may enter into resistance or suppress their judgement if they fear to be socially rejected. Yet, as Thornborrow and Brown (2009) show in their study on aspiration, discipline and identity in the British parachute regiment, some intermediary behaviour may exist, allowing both the realization of the self and the organization to work properly.

To further explore this question of the audience reaction to illegitimate objects, we draw on a case study design built from ethnographic data, collected over a one-year and a half period and coming from an international sport event, the World Equestrian Games that took place in Normandy in 2014. We had access granted in the competition areas of this world

championship of the equestrian world during the preparation phase, the test events and the event itself.

We particularly focused our analysis on the roles performed by specific kinds of actors, who had different positions within the organization but shared something in common: passion of the equestrian sport and the sport horse. This allowed us to highlight the processes throughout which the rules and procedures imposed by actors trying to legitimate the management of such an event that has sport for product are assessed by audiences whose judgment is made through a frame of reference built on equestrian sport as a passion. This confrontation led to a clandestine legitimacy work through which actors defined an organizational enclave within which a consensus emerged over the prescriptions of the rules and status.

1. THEORETICAL GROUNDING

In their recent observation of a "turn to work" in organizational research, Phillips and Lawrence (2012) note that this research perspective offers very exciting opportunities to better understand organizational processes as it often leads to an attempt to conceptualize the dialogue between the social and the symbolic dimension of both the context in which actors and organizations are embedded in and the processes they are submitted to or/and they are setting up. This focus on work and workers is not simply a matter of better grasping day-to-day work and practices but constitutes also an opportunity to better understand how action contributes to the on-going redefinition of the context in which it is enacted. A "work" oriented approach requires therefore bearing in mind these two common elements (the social and symbolic dimensions and the attention to action in a given context). Referring to this "turn to work", a recent stream of research on legitimacy appears very promising regarding the study of the manipulation of the social-symbolic as it questions the attempts to gain and exploit an absence of questioning (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008) commentaries or attacks (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) in a given organization.

Since Suchman's seminal work (1995, p.574), organizational scholars have mainly insisted on the fact that legitimacy should be considered as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Following this stream

of research, scholars have mainly regarded organizational legitimacy as an attribute that can be gained and exploited (Golant & Sillince, 2007; Zott & Huy, 2007), facilitating the transformations in organizations and helping maintenance of organizational stability and effectiveness (e.g. King, Lenox & Terlaak, 2005). In this perspective, even if external legitimacy represents a major stream of research, as it focuses on the intangible attributes an organization may possess and mobilize in order to achieve specific goals (Suchman, 1995) and collect specific and necessary resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Zott & Huy, 2007) to ensure its survival (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), in a specific work approach we will rather focus on the internal legitimacy perspective as the study of day-to-day activities may be an interesting lens to better grasp organizational structuring, maintenance and development. Indeed, internal legitimacy will be more dedicated on inciting people to voluntarily comply with organizational authority, rules, practices and strategy (Drori &Honig, 2013; Tyler, 2006). Accordingly, the mundane practices may reveal important legitimacy stakes, as it would consist in understanding how people work together and accept to do it.

Furthermore, recent calls have encouraged researchers to consider organizational legitimacy as an on-going achievement rather than an attribute, and appealed for exploring its complexity and on-going enactment at a micro-level (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Huy, Corley & Kraatz, 2014; Tost, 2011), which makes this concept particularly relevant for work approaches. Therefore, the notion of "legitimacy work" or "legitimation work" has started to attract scholarly interest (Landau, Drori & Terjesen, 2014; Rueede & Kreutzer, 2015; Trevino *et al.*, 2014). These recent studies suggested these two labels qualify practices contributing to legitimize an organizational object. As such, they build on and expand previous works that have highlighted several kinds of strategies taken by the legitimacy seekers to alter their social contexts in order to legitimate new businesses, new practices and new roles (e.g. Gardner, *et al.*, 2008; Reay *et al.*, 2006; Zott & Huy, 2007). Scholars here are insisting on the unveiling of strategies adopted by legitimacy seekers in order to influence the judgment of their targeted audiences. These studies thus largely exposed the symbolic dimension underlying legitimation processes. Indeed, achieve legitimacy implies undertaking symbolic actions (Zott & Huy, 2007; Brown, 1994).

Nevertheless, it appears that the functional universe of legitimacy evaluators has been quite disregarded, although a few studies have started to show the duality of legitimacy seekers' actions as being both symbolic and functional (Dacin et al., 2010). We believe that

the functional dimension plays a crucial part in attempting to influence evaluators' judgments and we suggest to look at how legitimacy seekers daily "work" the social-symbolic context of their evaluators. Indeed, as "a social evaluation made by others" (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015: 50; Tost, 2011), legitimacy represents the assessment made by evaluators of a given object through a particular framework of beliefs, values, and norms. Therefore, legitimacy emerges from social interactions between an entity and embedded actors (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). It is a social-cognitive process (Suddaby *et al.*, 2016) that crosses levels through an on-going dialogue between an individual evaluator's own judgment – *propriety* – and his or her perception of a potential collective consensus – *validity*. On the micro-level, the judgment of *propriety* made by individuals "refers to an individual's own judgment of the extent to which an entity is appropriate for its social context" (Tost, 2011: 689). This judgment will be a combination between the individual perception of the organizational properties and behaviors and the social norms they choose as suitable to establish their evaluation (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). On the more encompassing macro-level, "collective" judgments may also have a crucial importance as they may influence evaluators on the perception of validity that will exist to "the extent to which there appears to be a general consensus within a collectivity that the entity is appropriate for its social context" (Tost, 2011: 689). This will orient individual's judgment in a specific way (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). The propriety and validity 'factory' would be key elements of legitimacy then and it would be very interesting to look at how organizational legitimacy seekers are trying to build them.

This goes beyond the classical view of a passive unitary audience that would constitute the sum of all legitimacy conferrers (Rueede & Kreutzer, 2015). On the contrary, using a work lens to analyze organizational phenomena means considering the audience as active and (sometimes) multiple. Therefore, what happens when a negative evaluation is given to the object of legitimacy? Are legitimacy bestowers actively working on legitimacy object in order to make it compatible with their own frame of reference or are they passively waiting for the legitimacy seekers to rework the legitimacy object with the intention of making it more suitable for evaluators? Supposing that a work approach would help us answering this issue, we try in this research to open the black box of legitimacy work and propose that this work will not only be done by legitimacy seekers, actively trying to shape a suitable legitimacy object that will be positively evaluated by a passive audience, thanks to a common and shared set of social norms, but also by legitimacy bestowers that will react

actively to their negative evaluation by trying to rework and reshape the legitimacy at hand and create new consensus.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH SETTING

To address our research question, we used a single-case study design (Yin, 2003). Building from ethnographic data, we develop a particular case to study the role of actors setting up new practices within the organization they are working for. First author did an ethnographic study within the World Equestrian Games (WEG) organization. This event is the world championship of the equestrian sports that happens every four years. It took place in Normandy, France, in 2014. The previous edition was in Lexington, USA, in 2010 and the next one would also take place in the USA in 2018. During two weeks, horse riders are competing in eight different disciplines including three Olympic ones: show jumping (the most famous discipline), dressage (a performance on a highly trained horse) and eventing (the most complete competition, an equestrian triathlon including cross-country, a spectacular jumping race with natural and rooted obstacles, known for its dangerousness). The other disciplines are driving (a vehicle drawn by horses on a specific triathlon), endurance (a long distance race), vaulting (artistic gymnastics on a horse), reining (showing the abilities of ranch-type horses) and para-dressage (dressage practiced by disabled people which is a Paralympic discipline as well). There were also two disciplines in exhibition: polo and horse-ball (a kind of basket-ball on horses). Our field access was initially granted to the three Olympic disciplines and we had access to reining as well during the observation phase. We particularly focused on the role undertook by specific kinds of actors, who had different positions within the organization but shared something in common: the physical proximity with the horses and the competition. These different communities of actors are the following:

- members of the Organization Committee (OC): they are the organizers of the event, custodians of the authority. They establish all the rules and modalities of regulation, and wear a blue polo shirt.
- "stewards" of the FEI, the international equestrian federation, owner of the event: they are controlling on the field the compliance between FEI rules and the

practical organization of the games. They wear a panama hat.

- national federations (NF) staff: they are the support staff of the horse riders composed of officials, coaches, vets and grooms. They wear a flag on their polo shirts.

- horse riders: the athletes competing in all the various disciplines. They wear boots and riding breeches.

- volunteers: working on behalf of the OC, they are in charge of all the day-to-day activities of the event. They wear a green polo shirt.

- service providers: they are the logistics guys. They have been hired by the OC in order to plan and organize all logistical details and deal with logistical issues and crises. They wear a baseball cap.

The OC was frequently insisting on the strict separation of the different status and constant observance of the rules from all the actors. Friendly contacts and non-professional talks were not welcome for safety and etiquette reasons. Contacts with horses from other people that NF staff and OC vets were strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, although not being considered as an actor, the sport horse remains an interesting subject as a boundary spanner we will further describe.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION

2.2.1. Observation

According to our theoretical framework and our research approach, we needed to build a data collection apparatus on a micro-level basis that allowed *"detailed description of work life"* (Barley and Kunda, 2001: 84). Therefore, we used observation as it represents a relevant method to capture work interactions and processes (Barley and Kunda, 2001). Observing different phases of the event, we collected longitudinal data (field notes, photos, small talks) over a one-year and a half period, from the origin of the event until its end. This data collection was made through a participant observation as a volunteer member of the stable staff. This *"direct contact with social phenomena for an extended period of time"* (Barley and Kunda, 2001) occurred during five immersion phases:

- two "test events", which allowed the OC to test the organisation of a similar event

in real conditions in two different competition sites, the first one in eventing and the second one in jumping,

- recruitment of volunteers, especially those oriented on sport issues for all the competition sites,

- training of stable volunteers and preparation of the stable organization during the games,

- official competition within the stables, training and competition areas (a football stadium in Caen, Normandy) for the three Olympic disciplines (dressage, eventing and jumping). The stables were also welcoming show horses for the opening and the closing ceremonies.

Participant observation allowed us to find a mundane position within a temporary event where manual and very physical work remain dominant. It allowed us to experience the day-to-day activity in order to better understand and analyse it, these two facets of our research approach constituting relevant perspective for work research (Barley and Kunda, 2001). Moreover, this position seemed to us necessary to have an access granted inside restricted areas of such a temporary event.

2.2.2. Documentary collection

We performed a triangulation of our observation data with a variety of documents we collected during the whole observation period. Three different kinds of documents were gathered: official public documents (communication and recruitment materials, website, newsletters and press releases), internal documents (procedures handbook, internal notes and listings) and emails.

Our aim was to collect different kinds of data and to use different methods in order to go beyond the story.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

This paper uses a process perspective (Langley et al., 2013) to study legitimacy as a process coming from and leading the interactions between legitimacy seekers and evaluators. As we previously mentioned, our aim was to have a work approach and we therefore tried to stick as close as possible to the day-to-day processes and activities of people. Consequently,

different kinds of data were collected from the field, and different methods were used. Following Alvesson and Svenigsson's (2003) propositions we chose to adopt interpretative principles to conduct this research and to collect data. The interpretation of data did not just then consist in the codification of our material. Trying to keep in mind such an encompassing concept as legitimacy, we took our data body as a whole, which means going *"beyond the surface to look for something less obvious, or less easily revealed in a (quick) coding process"* (Alvesson & Svenigsson, 2003:967).

Therefore, in order to preserve the richness of the data and stick to a work approach, we started to give meaning to the day-to-day activities, individual representations and formal and informal discourses that we could trace in our material. This enabled us to shed light on the links between the key events and challenges that unfolded during the event, as well as on the interactions between key actors. More specifically, we identified four phases in the continuity of the WEG. We developed a thorough description for each of them (Geertz, 1973).

Going back to the literature on organizational legitimacy, as we wanted to further understand the phenomena we were observing, we found that even recent developments regarding legitimacy judgment (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Huy *et al*., 2014) could not fully explain what we observed. For instance, we were surprised that, first, we still knew little about the work of the legitimacy agent and, second, that we had almost no theory to explain how day-to-day interactions shape evaluators' legitimacy judgment. We therefore developed an open-ended, inductive coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to detect recurrent themes in the discourse of the actors involved and identify repeated social dynamics during the different phases of the event to understand how legitimacy stakes emerged and how they were negotiated by the multiplicity of actors. Then, using process decomposition and comparison techniques (Langley *et al*., 2013), we proceeded to axial coding in order to better grasp the structuring and redefinition of actors' legitimacy judgments and the actions that may illustrate them. This allowed taking into account both the functional and symbolic dimensions (Kamoche, 2000) of actions.

Analyzing our data through this method allowed us to highlight that any legitimacy judgment has to be "experienced" and "reworked" before people grant legitimacy to any organizational property. While Tost (2011) has already highlighted that once legitimacy judgment is made, it is put into practice, we noticed that this practice has consequences on the

definition of the perimeter of the object of legitimacy that is at once its content, its field of application and the places where it can be set in. In our study, this important step in the judgment process was essential for the actors to embody the legitimacy object, especially when some of its initial properties where judged as illegitimate in first intent.

3. RESULTS

In the four following phases, we reveal and analyse the legitimacy work of certain categories of actors in their attempts to transform their living organizational frame.

3.1. *"SPORT IS JUST A PART OF THE EVENT. YES IT IS IMPORTANT, BUT NO MORE THAN THE REST OF THE ORGANIZATION"* (OC MANAGER): THE INITIAL OBJECT OF LEGITIMACY, A PRODUCT MANAGED BY AN ORGANIZATION

The Organization Committee (the "OC" as its own members named it) was in charge of the whole preparation and organization of the event. On behalf of a public association gathering mixed funds coming from both public local authorities and private sponsorship, the OC was dealing with all the issues connected to the event: sport itself, management of spectators, events and activities related to the games, management of media, relationships with sponsors, and so on. Deliberately, OC decided that its main focus was not sport but the global management of an event. In its official communication, OC wished to focus on three different themes: sport, additional events ("Games village", activities, live shows, concerts and entertainment, sales demonstrations) and the promotion of the Normandy region as an important economic actor beyond equestrianism. The values (the *"spirit of the games"*) promoted by the OC were the following: *"achievement"*, *"respect"*, *"openness"* and *"transmission"*. Although those values could apply to horse-riding in general, they were conceived to be more than that. For instance, *"openness"* was conceived as the refusal to consider the games as an event for equestrian insiders only. This moral statement illustrated a wish from OC to consider sport as a product like another for the event. Practical instructions were given for the recruitment of OC staff and volunteers for an undistinguishable treatment of sport initiates and others. Even the managing director of the OC was not coming from the equestrian world and knew nothing about horses when he took up his post. We have noticed during our observation phase that for all OC members we have met, from top executives to

employees and blue-collars, the respect of the established rules was a top priority because of three main reasons: the public image of the Games, the overall security of the event and the respect of the budget. This managerial vision was translated into a lot of procedures resulting in many control modalities at all level. The Games were considered as a business like any other.

This conception of the event had some consequences on its organization. OC was frequently insisting on the strict separation of the different status and constant observance of the rules from all the actors. Distinction and categories were based on the status and not on the activity. This was symbolically visible through the different uniforms we mentioned previously (OC in blue, volunteers in green (the *"little green boys and girls"*), FEI stewards with purple panama hat, service providers with base-ball cap, etc.). Moreover, accreditations wore numbers indicating the zones where access was granted or not for their holders. Here, the strict distinction between categories became a little more complex as a geographical distinction arose: the access to *"competition areas"* in the large sense of the term (stadium as competition ground, schooling yards, stables, accreditation desk for horse riders and national federations, vet check gate, "grooms' village") was distinguished from the rest of the event. In top of that, a specific pictogram figuring the stables was appended on the accreditation to show if the holder had access granted to this area. The reason OC came up with was the security of the horses and especially the avoidance of doping and malice. Fences covered with a non-transparent banner were put all around the stables in order to protect horses from sight not only from people without accreditations at all but from people without the proper accreditation within the event. Nevertheless, wearing the *"good numbers"* was perceived as a real privilege. As one volunteer confessed to another one: *"D*** it! You've got the good numbers! How lucky you are! You'll get at the heart of the event!"* This led to funny behaviours from people gathering massively on small holes in the banner and trying to see famous horses like someone who is watching in a keyhole.

Regarding the relationships between all the stakeholders, OC enounced clear recommendations on what should be possible during the games. Friendly contacts and non-professional talks were not welcome for safety and etiquette reasons. Contact with horses from other people that NF staff and OC vets were strictly prohibited. During the preparatory training sessions that were organized for volunteers, these recommendations were systematically and frequently enounced. As two OC members indicated: *"We don't want any*

groupies here. You are not here because you are fond of one or another rider. You are here to do something. Be professional!”

Besides, from the official external written communication to the mundane internal verbal one, OC claimed the games were far more than a sport event. For OC, sport was conceived as a business like another one and there was no need to shed more light on it. This had practical consequences on the day-to-day activities. For instance, there was no special care for horse riders regarding their presence and access on-site comparing to the others. They were submitted to the same accreditation rules than other people. Another example could be the undistinguished treatment of *“sport”* volunteers (those who were working in the competition areas) and other ones. As OC manager and members justified it, the reason for such a procedure was a will to not create an organizational *“elite”* (sport vs. others) of people that could perceive themselves as such and remain isolated from the rest of the games world. As one OC manager firmly stated to a group of volunteers: *“You’re not better than the others. Everyone is helpful. The guy who guards the car park is as helpful as you guys are here. Understood?”*

To formalize their will, OC members wrote a quality handbook gathering all the possible and critical incidents that may happen during the games. All possible incidents they were thinking of were listed and, for each, a page was indicating the objective of the procedure, a thick description of what to do and all stakeholders that should be involved in the solution of the problem. The handbook was visible in the stable office and should serve as a mandatory reference in case of problems. Moreover, the procedure had another objective: trying to avoid inappropriate behaviours, especially from people who *“suppose they know what to do but forget this is the WEG and not a classical horse show (OC member)”*. Indeed, OC members confessed that they were very concerned to spread best practices and build a strong chain of command that would report systematically to them. During the games, all OC members were located in a place outside the competition, called *“headquarters”,* a command post that was supposed to gather and drive all WEG activities.

Additionally, during test events and at the beginning of the games rules were practically controlled with regular checks. Regarding accreditations for example, an external company, in charge of the surveillance of the event, was appointed to control very strictly all the people accessing all gates. People with no accreditations were systematically denied

access to the competition areas. Two incidents may illustrate this rigorous application of the rules. First, a very famous rider came to enter in the stable without having his accreditation number. He was pushed back. When somebody asked the gatekeeper: *"do you know who this guy is?"*, the latter answered: *"I don't care who he is. And, honestly, I don't give a s***. He has no pass. I will not let him in"*. And the rider turned around and walked away. The incident was reported to an OC manager who replied that it was perfectly normal. The gatekeeper just applied the rules.

3.2. *"THE OC? THESE PEOPLE ARE AMATEURS. TRUST ME, IT WON'T HAPPEN IN FRANCE BEFORE LONG!"* (SERVICE PROVIDER): THE NEGATIVE LEGITIMACY JUDGMENT ON THE OBJECT DUE TO A DIFFERENT FRAME OF REFERENCE

However, the vision and the rules promoted by OC led to usual conflicts and the different stakeholders expressed frequently their dissatisfaction. This had different causes though.

For riders, NF staff and grooms, the main problem was the dichotomy between the organization of the WEG and the usual customs. Indeed, they complained about the fact that OC set up different rules that were not consistent with the traditional way of organizing such an event. Moreover, even worse than that, the rules seemed sometimes to them so rigorous that they reckon it had a major impact on the general atmosphere within the competition areas. For the riders and the grooms, the everyday life within the competition areas was not really nice. One groom confessed that OC *"should relax. This is nonsense. It's like those guys have never been to a 5 stars"* (a top-level show jumping event). In addition to that, grooms were complaining about the poor quality of the organization. They said things were not really thought bearing in mind what they had to do on a daily basis. For example, they complained about the showers to wash horses that weren't functioning properly. They also reported about the skip for manure and horse droppings, which was very far from the stables and far too small for the number of horses in-site. Some of them even refused to go to the skip, letting their wheelbarrow and its load in the middle of the aisles of the stables. One last example illustrates the negative judgement these people had on the event's organization. During the second test event, the stables were set up on the synthetic floor of a training football stadium, which led to static electricity shots for people and, more importantly, horses while they

touched the metallic structure of their boxes. Some of them got really anxious and risked injuries because of their behaviours. Riders and NF staff complained a lot about this problem and OC had to find a solution (cover the aisles with sand) that represented an additional cost that was not planned.

Service providers expressed dissatisfaction as well but not exactly on the same ground. They complained about the disconnection between OC and the field reality. To their opinion, OC was full of *"amateurs"*. They considered that the way OC wanted to deal with horses within the competition areas was not *"clever enough"*. Service providers were professionals with a renowned expertise in horse event management as they were in charge of the Olympics Games in London 2012 and of regular show jumping at a global scale. Therefore, they considered that OC was treating them as mere service providers and not as expert partners. They wanted to be associated to the decision and not being told to implement it only. In fact, they were associated but it seemed to them that it was each time a problem occurred or could occurred. According to them, service providers were asked in case of problems to fix it, which gave them the impression that they had to deal with all the problems. As one of them said: *"It's lucky we're here. Otherwise they (OC) would have had a lot of problems!" (service provider)*. In addition to that, they were also complaining about the authoritarianism of OC members who were not really opened to dialogue regarding what should be done in the competition areas. We had some feedbacks from OC members regarding their relationships with the service provider: *"I'm tired of them. Why don't they do what we are telling them? We have procedures. Whether they like it or not, they must apply them!" (OC member)*.

For FEI stewards, the perceived quality of the event and the consequences it may have on the reputation of the FEI, led them to complain about the organization of the games. In fact, even if FEI is owner of the brand and of the event, the OC had a complete power in organizing the event. While FEI stewards was pointed that procedures should be eased because this was threatening the reputation people were having about the games, OC replied negatively to their requests on this issue arguing that procedures were made for safety and security issues. This answer was not satisfactory for FEI stewards and they kept complaining. As their role was to check on the field the conformity of the event with FEI rules and specifications, they were doing regular rounds within the competition areas several times a day, checking if everything was alright and noting each mistake in order to complain to OC.

Lastly, for volunteers, bitterness came quickly when they started their day-to-day mission. Two of them even resigned because they felt the mission was too difficult. For all of them, it was hard to accept what seemed to them a lack of professionalism from OC. In other words, OC, the people who were in charge of the events and, consequently, who were supposed to know, didn't know. This was visible through many daily problems volunteers had to face. One example is the material OC bought and rented to clean the stables and to help riders and grooms to unload and reload their belongings at the beginning and after the end of the games. This equipment was considered as highly inappropriate regarding the work that had to be done. Brooms were those of a housekeeper, shovels were those of a gardener and wheelbarrows were those of a builder. Volunteers chose to react with irony, saying: *"And now, are we sweeping the kitchen and digging the weeds?" (volunteer)*. They also complained a lot to OC members, as this equipment was highly inappropriate for cleaning the stables, which OC acknowledged, buying new equipment in emergency. There was also another reason for volunteers to complain about OC rules and procedures. It seemed to them sometimes vexing, as if volunteers mattered little for OC. Two examples may illustrate such a feeling. First, the event took place in a Stadium, in the heart of the city centre, where it was almost impossible to park a car. Therefore, a car park had been set up within the competition areas but was reserved to people with a specific entry pass. Volunteers asked for those pass for practical reasons but OC told them it was only for riders and officials. Some of them said this *"shows that (they) are nobody. They consider we are just workers. Do you job and shut up. You know nothing" (volunteer)*. The second example was the ban of eating inside the *"sport"* restaurant and the obligation to eat inside the staff restaurant, which was very far from the competition areas and the stables. This situation raised many schedule management issues and a deep incomprehension from *"sport"* volunteers, especially when an OC manager told them that they were *"not here to disturb the riders, ask for autographs of things like that. These people come here to have some peace and quiet"*.

3.3. *"TWO POLO SHIRTS? ARE YOU KIDDING ME? AND I'M SUPPOSED TO DO MY LAUNDRY IN MY TENT?"* (VOLUNTEER). REWORKING SYMBOLS AND PRACTICES AS A REWORK OF AN ACCEPTABLE LEGITIMACY OBJECT.

These contradictions seemed unbearable for actors within the competition areas and pushed them to imagine new regulations modes and circumvent official procedures and rules.

For instance, the universal rule that obliged volunteers, sport or not, to wear the green uniform was twisted in two different ways: the strict application of the rule and a satisfactory bricolage of practices. For instance, inside the stables the organization was devoted to two mandatory rules, which were *"security"* and *"cleanliness"*. Adopting a managerial perspective, the OC members frequently reminded volunteers about the necessity to keep these rules in mind, as they were key elements to prove the event was seriously organized. As a very intensive physical work, stable work was highly dirty and required wearing fresh and clean clothes every day. Yet, following the common procedure, only two green polo shirts have been distributed to each volunteer. Therefore, volunteers were not able to remain tidy more than two days in a row or else they will need to wear something else than the green polo shirts. Volunteers complained to OC, arguing *"cleanliness will be very difficult if we smell funny all day long"* (volunteer). Therefore, OC decided to distribute specific T-shirts and armbands to "stables" volunteers after a few days of competition allowing them to remain tidy. OC even allowed them to wear different clothes than the usual uniform during the days without any competition.

Another example illustrates these new regulations. Having contacts on a daily basis with national federations and their members (horse riders; grooms i.e. people taking care of horses, preparing them and grooming them; officials; employees; horse owners), *"sport"* volunteers had therefore a very mundane opportunity to distinguish themselves from other volunteers with a very special customisation coming directly from this proximity. Each federation made special lapel pins dedicated to the event. This lapel pins have been given for free every day to people inside the competition areas. At first, some people wore them spontaneously. Others followed them massively very quickly. Everybody was then trying to have around their neck the most important collection of lapel pins fastened on the cord of their accreditation. This lapel pins necklace became the affiliation symbol to the competition areas and a real lapel pins hunt begun, leading to a kind of swop between people inside the competition areas, whatever their status were.

3.4. *"WHAT HAPPENS IN THE STABLES REMAINS IN THE STABLES"* (VOLUNTEER). A COMMON AND NEGOTIATED REWORKED OBJECT OF LEGITIMACY.

Besides, there was something about the horse. Indeed, the sport horse was not any horse; it was a special one. Beyond its often extremely high financial worth, the sport horse was perceived within the competition areas as an elite athlete requiring a very special care,

sometimes even more than the horse rider him/herself. Other equine categories or type of horses (like show horses) were excluded in this case. During the last day of competition for instance, the closure ceremony was following the last jumping trial. Show horses were therefore supposed to enter within the sport stables in order to go into the stadium at the beginning of the closure ceremony. For unknown reasons, and this time it was a decision coming from the OC itself, it was decided not to allow the accommodation of show horses inside the competition areas but outside it and thus without any surveillance. One OC member said he was hearing people inside the competition areas saying that those horses should not be mixed with sport horses. He added he was aware of that and tried to find security reasons to justify his choice.

Nevertheless, and without regards to the security and hygiene rules they previously set up, which were supposedly unbendable, OC put show horses outside of the intended area just because they had nothing in common with sport. Indeed, the relegation of show horses outside the competition areas opened a real and dangerous breach inside the event secured area as, in order to bypass the stables and the schooling yards, show horses walked a hundred meters on an open street surrounded by dwellings with kids playing and cars driving. The OC member said: *"please cross fingers"* and ask if the show horses were nice and calm, as he knew something wrong could happen. Domination of sport imaginary, within the competition areas then led to the relegation of managerial imaginary at a secondary level.

Indeed new interactions began around and about the horse. Moreover they were not any type of horses; they were athletes that were making a strong and sometimes very famous pair with their horse riders. This was particularly what was worthy of interest for people inside the competition areas. Therefore, and unlike initial instructions of a rigorous separation imposed by the OC between the different kinds of actors (for instance volunteers were not to "chat" with NF staff and were to limit their contacts to the strict necessities of their duty), interactions arose about sport horses. The groom was here a strong medium between the supposedly different worlds. Indeed, his/her proximity with the horse allowed the fall of the boundaries the OC imposed and that were very often perceived as arbitrary.

In others words, because of the necessities of their duty and their day-to-day work and, in the same time, because of the mundane relationships they were maintaining, people inside the competition areas were demonstrating their will to belong not to a pre-existing category,

which they sometimes found *"arbitrary"* and even *"stupid"* or *"ridiculous"* because of its heterogeneity, but to the competition areas that constituted the *"reason of their commitment for the games" (volunteer)*. Indeed, regarding volunteers belonging to the competition areas for instance, the fact that people inside this category may have various knowledge of the equestrian world was considered as nonsense because of the variety of the work they had to do and of the special requirements their mission may include.

A specific phenomenon may illustrate this redefinition. Indeed, progressively, and according to the work done and the mutual trust that arose from the day-to-day tasks done by everyone, interactions modalities evolved between the different categories of people within the competition areas. At this stage, it was of high importance to notice that no OC member remained within the competition areas permanently. This allowed more freedom inside these areas and more casual interactions between the other kinds of actors (volunteers, logistics service providers, FEI officials, horse riders, grooms, horse owners and security service providers). Besides, and though it represented an unusual category, the presence of sport horses was a key element in the progressive change in the interactions between actors.

This had an unintended effect. At first, and following OC instructions, the contacts between the different kinds of actors within the competition areas were very limited and restricted to formal talks. The visual differentiation between different kinds of actor was a very efficient medium for that. But when uniforms disappeared, even temporarily, the boundaries fell down. Moreover, wearing an armband introduced a distinction between the sport volunteers and the other ones. Then, this recomposed practice had an opposite effect than the initial one wanted from the OC. A special dynamic appeared, and volunteers became *"sport"* workers with a volunteer status and not *"volunteers"* working in the sport area. This means that after a few days rather talking about themselves as people with a delegation from the OC, in charge of the control and the practical application of the rules, volunteers in the competition areas begun to introduce themselves as member of the competition areas, facilitating everyday life within this space.

For instance, after the first prize giving ceremony (Dressage, team results) and while the pair of athletes (horses and their riders) who received medals were coming back to the stables, a spontaneous guard of honour, followed by heavy applauses was set up by volunteers. This spontaneous momentum of celebration became ritualized afterwards for

every prize giving ceremony. This practice, transformed into a habit, far from the muted atmosphere wanted by the OC was never questioned and was even recognized by all actors (from OC to horse riders and NF staff) as a very excellent initiative. It was a practical demonstration of the delimitation and the establishment of the organizational enclave the competition areas were representing. Indeed, they were allowing new and specific interactions that were emerging through the celebration of sport values and were relegating managerial procedures to a position of secondary importance. Those were then considered not as impassable principles guiding every action but as tools people may use if they find them of any importance.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE LEGITIMACY OBJECT PERIMETER AND SHAPE DEPENDING ON THE AUDIENCE: THE ACTORS OF THE WORK

Our results first contribute to demonstrate that the legitimacy can be multifaceted and should not be considered as a monolith audiences would evaluate similarly. Besides, the perimeter of the object can also be shaped according to a multiplicity of criteria that will depend on the norms selection of the audiences but also on their own interest in accepting a legitimacy object that has a convenient perimeter. In our case, the focal legitimacy object was organizational rules. Various audiences, other than the OC, evaluated them. As the organizer of the event, OC members though they were representatives of the highest authority. As such, they were regarding rules they wanted to implement as taken for granted. However this appropriateness of the rules were so obvious for other actors. Resorting to a strategy of authorization (Vaara & Monin, 2010) that promotes validity, they tried to influence positively the cognitive and regulative dimensions of the legitimacy judgment of the audiences (Bitektine, 2011).

The different actors did not fully accept the rules in the first place, and all stakeholders reacted differently. Nevertheless they did not openly entered into a conflict with the OC. They subtly tried to adapt the legitimacy object to their own needs and perspective without contesting publicly its legitimacy neither OC's one. This is what we call *clandestine legitimacy work*. Indeed, this work did not consisted in shaping a new object of legitimacy,

which would have been for instance new rules, but rather in playing with the legitimacy object suggested by the OC and trying to stretch its limits in order to establish a suitable and acceptable perimeter for it. This was not done in the same manner by all categories of actors. Indeed, each of them caught some specific properties of the object and reworked them. This aggregation of reworked properties was done in order to establish a new consensus between all categories of actors. This helped creating a resonance with the normative beliefs of all the evaluators (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) while maintaining a frame alignment (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002) to what had been initially promoted by OC.

As we showed in our results the community of actors described here was not homogeneous at all but audiences shared something in common, the equestrian sport. This led to a transversal and iterative legitimacy work, suggested by the legitimacy seekers, rebuilt by the legitimacy bestowers and, in return, accepted by legitimacy seekers. Besides, the people we observed were very different, not only because their initial social status were different, but also because their mundane activities within the competition areas had a great variety. Yet the social-symbolic work of these people has something in common: a legitimacy object to assess through a common frame of reference that overcomes the initial status, i.e. the passion of equestrian sport. This is because they share the same vision of what the event should be that these people engaged in a convergent mundane legitimacy work. Besides, this blurred the classical separation between legitimacy seekers and bestowers (Tost, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015) as legitimacy work allows a transformation of the legitimacy object from the evaluators themselves.

4.2. CLANDESTINE LEGITIMACY WORK AS THE REDEFINITION OF AN ACCEPTABLE FRAMEWORK FOR ONESELF AND THE ORGANIZATION: THE CONTENT OF THE WORK

This led to a profound work made by audiences. In our case, clandestine legitimacy work was performed by the field organizational members (often considered as a quite "passive" audience) trying to render their everyday work bearable by recomposing procedures but also rules, social status and relationships alongside, at first for their own benefit. Here, evaluators are not passive actors mindlessly complying about the rules (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009). They demonstrate an active capacity to select the norms that are not only aligned with

their identity (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Tost, 2011) but also compliant with their own interest and convenient for their daily mission. This represents an empirical contribution to legitimacy literature by showing some kind of self-oriented legitimacy work coming from the audiences themselves and transforming the object they are supposed to evaluate when the initial legitimacy judgment is negative. Indeed, audiences twisted the elements of properties and validity the OC offered in order to reinterpret and re-build their own clandestine legitimized object (i.e. rules, procedures and way of working together) to make their working conditions consistent with their expectations and interests.

This was done through two strategies: *bricolage* (i.e. the customization of the uniforms) and *over-zealousness* (i.e. the demonstration that if we apply the rules properly, we do not have enough polo shirts for the event), as these were compatible means to transform the legitimacy object while maintaining its overall conformity with its initial shape. As these two means come both from our data, it may appear uncertain to raise them to the rank of concept. However, it seemed to us that they constitute practices very interesting to study organizational practices from a work perspective as they represent a median way for organizational members of dealing covertly but successfully with discordances without entering into open conflicts. Indeed, regarding legitimacy issues, scholars have demonstrated the importance of social pressures (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Johnson et al., 2006; Tyler, 2006). The strategies we described, complying with rhetorical strategies of legitimation promoted by legitimacy seekers (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) illustrate a micro-perspective on legitimacy that echoes Überbacher's (2014) and Vergne & Wry's (2014) calls to adopt a perspective focusing on the interactions between the different actors, legitimacy seekers and bestowers, when studying the way legitimacy is achieved and maintained in organizations.

4.3. CLANDESTINE LEGITIMACY WORK AS SHAPING AND NEGOTIATING BOUNDARIES: THE MARKS OF THE WORK

Once again, it may be contextual to our case, but this legitimacy work did not happen throughout the whole organization. As a matter of fact, this re-enactment of the rules and status led to the emergence of both a functional and symbolic organizational enclave, which boundaries initially physically existed but in which legitimacy work deployed by the different organizational members allowed the emergence of a peculiar place where the rework on the object properties was done to render everyday work acceptable for all the different actors. Within the enclave, legitimacy work transformed the functional and the symbolic frames of

rules and status and fostered the physical reality of the enclave, far more beyond the visible fences that were initially set up to mark it out. Simultaneously we assisted to an opposite but complementary movement that occurred during the event. The legitimacy work made by actors set up sealed boundaries between the competition areas and the rest of the event. Indeed, reworking their status and their roles, actors belonging to the competition areas begun to apply reshaped rules that were in return accepted by OC because of the boundaries that existed (being or not being in the competition areas). At the same time, the boundaries were relevant because they were no other boundaries inside the competition areas. Actually, thanks to *bricolage* and *over-zealousness*, boundaries between actors fell down and new kind of daily interactions occurred, which was strictly prohibited at first by OC, as we previously mentioned, but was finally accepted. This was made possible thanks to a boundary spanner, the sport horse. Interactions arose around the sport horse and status disappeared progressively. Our study shows that if legitimacy objects are accepted through the promotion of specific norms (Ruef & Scott, 1998; Shrivastava & Ivanova, 2015; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005), this is often insufficient to ensure their legitimacy as a work on the emergence of a common frame of reference needs boundaries to be negotiated by actors and reassuring them on the pertinence of their role, status and mission.

Lastly, this highlights the dual nature, both symbolic and functional of legitimacy work, pushing further Dacin, et al.'s (2010) work. In our case study, rules are both symbolic and functional. They are symbolic on the status they confer to the actors and functional on the content of everyday work they allow, enable, facilitate, constraint or forbid. In this perspective, legitimacy work covers both dimensions simultaneously. Indeed, when actors for instance customized their uniforms they transformed their day-to-day interactions by making visible the competition areas as a specific enclave within the event and developing friendly relationships even though it was initially prohibited by the rules. At the same time, their actions symbolically led to a redefinition of new status whose differentiation was made no more only on the affiliations to a specific category of actors, depending on their contractual relationships with the event but also on the place where they were working every day. Therefore, the legitimacy object was reworked according to these new interactions and status as the organizational properties and the set of norms through which evaluators made their judgements were transformed. This led to a new consensus the legitimacy seekers, i.e. the OC members, had to evaluate and accept in return. Such an iterative perspective on social

judgments of legitimacy adds a new perspective on legitimacy issues. Not only should legitimacy seekers maintain legitimacy constantly (Huy et al., 2014), but they also need to be open to legitimacy objects' flexibility and to dialogue with legitimacy bestowers on their perimeter.

CONCLUSION

We wanted to adopt a work perspective in this research on internal legitimacy dynamics as we were interested in analysing overlooked issues in organization theory constituted by both the dialogue between the symbolic and the social dimensions (Phillips et al., 2012) and the contributions of day-to-day activities in work approaches (Lawrence et al., 2013). In spite of some limits, inherent to our methodological approach focusing on a specific and temporary activity, we think our case study contributes to a better understanding of legitimacy work as it helps opening the black box of its processes. At the same time, it also enriches its complexity as we demonstrate how this work can be done iteratively and by both categories of legitimacy actors (seekers and bestowers) trying to shape and reshape a legitimacy object that is submitted to an ongoing dialogue between them. Last, this dialogue needs boundaries to emerge. These boundaries constitute symbolic and functional barriers, which allow interactions between actors in a privileged area. At the same time, within these barriers, boundary spanners will flatten status and help actors to establish dialogue. This may be contextual to our case but we believe it open interesting perspectives for further research.

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