



**International Journal of Tourism Policy**

ISSN online: 1750-4104 - ISSN print: 1750-4090  
<https://www.inderscience.com/ijtp>

---

**Negotiating the legacy-leverage nexus: the contribution of major sports events to regional development**

Martin Wallstam, Robert Pettersson, Dimitri Ioannides

**DOI:** [10.1504/IJTP.2026.10077577](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJTP.2026.10077577)

**Article History:**

Received:	05 September 2025
Last revised:	05 December 2025
Accepted:	05 December 2025
Published online:	13 April 2026

---

# **Negotiating the legacy-leverage nexus: the contribution of major sports events to regional development**

---

Martin Wallstam\*, Robert Pettersson  
and Dimitri Ioannides

Department of Economics, Geography, Law and Tourism,  
Mid Sweden University,  
Östersund, 83125, Sweden  
Email: martin.wallstam@miun.se  
Email: robert.pettersson@miun.se  
Email: Dimitri.Ioannides@miun.se  
\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** This paper examines how major sport events can be integrated into regional development agendas by analysing the legacy initiative created around the 2019 Alpine and Biathlon World Championships in Jämtland, Sweden. Although presented as a legacy program, research indicates that long-term value is more effectively generated through strategic leverage. This case study draws on a framework analysis of a regional development strategy and a focus group with key stakeholders to assess, first, how effective the program was as a legacy initiative, and second, what reframing it in terms of strategic leverage would have entailed. Findings show that the program fostered business networking and collaboration between national sport federations, but lacked measurable outcomes, strategic anchoring, and public-sector leadership. The study contributes to debates on legacy vs. leverage by highlighting the importance of early policy alignment and governance structures that embed events within long-term regional objectives.

**Keywords:** event management; event legacy; event leverage; strategic event leverage; regional development; event portfolio; major sporting events; sport events; event impacts.

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Wallstam, M., Pettersson, R. and Ioannides, D. (2026) 'Negotiating the legacy-leverage nexus: the contribution of major sports events to regional development', *Int. J. Tourism Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 7, pp.1–16.

**Biographical notes:** Martin Wallstam is a tourism scholar researching events and their role in regional development. Issues he has focused on include how to best measure the economic and social impacts of events, and in particular what those impacts mean for the places where events are staged. Fundamental to his research is the concept of 'value' and what is considered 'valuable' from a practitioner perspective. His research brings with it a number of different lessons for practitioners and policymakers in the interface between community development, tourism and events. Not least does his research point to the importance of shared frameworks when evaluating several events – so-called 'event portfolios' – for strategic purposes. A more consistent application of

evaluation models, in turn, means that communities and destinations are better equipped to leverage events, and to consistently achieve event legacies over time.

Robert Pettersson is Researcher – PhD in Human Geography and Associate Professor in Tourism Studies at the European Tourism Research Institute at Mid Sweden University. His research areas include event tourism, destination development, trends in tourism, visitor tracking. He is a Board Member in several boards locally, regionally and nationally. These engagements are often in tourism related companies and organisations.

Dimitri Ioannides is a Chaired Professor of Human Geography at Mid-Sweden University. He focuses on the economic geography of tourism and tourism planning and sustainability. He has been the series editor of *New Directions in Tourism Analysis* (Routledge) and sit on the editorial boards of several journals including *Tourism Geographies*. He is also on the Board of the International Polar Tourism Research Network.

---

## 1 Introduction

Using the promise of legacies to defend large-scale sports events has now become a common practice for event proponents (Brittain et al., 2017), who want to highlight why such events are worth bidding for, financing and organising. An example of this trend is that specially designated legacy programs now have become a staple of mega sports events. This is certainly the case of the Olympic games, who introduced the notion of legacy into charter of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2000 (Scheu et al., 2019).

However, the exact meaning of legacy is opaque. Thomson, Schlenker and Schulenkorf (2013) point out that the concept of event legacy has received limited critical analysis thus far and that researchers and practitioners interpret and apply it inconsistently. Since there is no widely shared conceptual framing of legacy (Preuss, 2007), host communities often struggle to realise legacies promised to them (Brittain et al., 2017). Research on the Rio Olympics illustrates how promised legacies – such as improved sustainability or reduced crime – often fail to materialise, fuelling public scepticism towards legacy claims (Phillips, 2016). Some commentators now ask whether ‘legacy’ has become a simple way of justifying the increasingly dubious and unsustainable phenomenon of mega events (Stewart and Rayner, 2016). Moreover, the idea of being able to actively manage legacy is so questionable that Chappelet (2012, p.76) concludes: “...legacy essentially is a dream to be pursued rather than a certainty to be achieved”.

Whereas some argue that major events are in a better position to deliver positive legacies than mega events are (Djaballah et al., 2015), others argue that the legacy concept is problematic in and of itself and should be revisited. In line with this criticism, Chalip (2017) proposes that strategic leverage is what communities should be seeking from events, not legacies. In this paper we will explore legacy and strategic leverage in the context of the Alpine and Biathlon World Championships, two major sports events

both of which were staged in the Swedish region of Jämtland within the span of 2 months in, 2019. These two events created a joint legacy program dubbed ‘WCR2019’.

Our aim is to analyse the WCR2019 legacy program using the conceptual framing of strategic leverage. To do so we will need to address two questions:

*RQ1:* Could it be considered effective as a legacy program? And what were some of the challenges of its legacy framing?

*RQ2:* What would it have meant (conceptually and practically) to reframe the program in terms of strategic leverage?

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Major events

Clear distinctions between event sizes are important because expectations, resources, and potential long-term outcomes vary substantially across event types. In the sport-event literature, the most common differentiation is between mega events – characterised by global media reach, multi-billion-dollar budgets, and transformative urban impacts – and major events, which are internationally significant but considerably smaller in scale (Getz, 2008; Müller, 2015).

Mega events such as the Olympic Games typically attract millions of spectators, require substantial public investment, and often drive urban redevelopment. In contrast, major events involve international elite competition and substantial visitor demand, but without the extensive infrastructural or financial footprint of mega events (Taks, 2013). They attract thousands rather than millions of spectators, are covered internationally but not necessarily in major global outlets and can usually be staged using existing venues.

For the purposes of this study, the Alpine and Biathlon World Championships hosted in Jämtland in 2019 are classified as major sports events: both drew prominent international athletes and significant media attention, but their budgets, attendance, and infrastructural demands were far below typical mega-event thresholds. This classification is important, as much of the legacy literature focuses on mega events, yet the strategic opportunities and constraints of major events differ considerably and remain comparatively understudied.

### 2.2 The legacy concept

The most cited definition of event legacy was provided by Preuss (2007, p.211) as being all “planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event, which remain longer than the event itself”. Legacies are now an integral part of the planning for most major sports events (Liu, 2017) and can, at their most basic, be divided into ‘tangible and intangible’, ‘hard and soft’ or ‘physical and spiritual’ (Chappelet, 2012). Definitions of tangible legacy are numerous and relatively straightforward, with infrastructural development and economic outcomes at the forefront. Intangible legacies are less conceptually clear since changes in attitudes must be defined, operationalised, and measured through methods that carry inherent limitations, unlike physical infrastructure which is easy to identify (Bohner and Wänke,

2002). Girginov and Preuss (2021, p.12) describe intangible legacy as “an emerging combination of attributes, processes, technology and interactions with the goal of creating public value”. Intangible legacies can take many forms. For example, hosting an event may lead to enhanced volunteerism and civic engagement or to shifts in social inclusion or community cohesion (Thomson et al., 2020).

However, distinguishing between different categories of legacy might not always be helpful. Thomson et al. (2020) suggest that the classification of some legacies as ‘intangible’ or ‘soft’ is unhelpful as it instils a sense of uncontrollability in those charged with attaining them. This provides an excuse to not address and systematically follow up on intangible legacies in the way one would tangible ones. Several studies also argue that legacy has become politicised, limiting its usefulness as a planning concept and constraining hosts through strict event contracts (Chalip, 2017; Kelly et al., 2019). Although criticisms of the legacy concept are valid, they could also be argued to be a question of semantics in the eyes of practitioners. As with the question of types and sizes of events, there is also a degree of confusion between terms such as ‘impact’, ‘leverage’ and ‘legacy’. Although event research makes clearer distinctions between these key terms, practitioners are not always able to do the same and instead often use the terms interchangeably (Scheu et al., 2019). For example, in a study of professional organisers of the 2015 Pan Am Games, practitioners described legacy in purely positive terms and included in it what academics otherwise classify as short-term impacts (Orr and Inoue, 2020).

### 2.3 *The strategic leverage concept*

The definitions and classifications of legacy give an overview of the types of long-term outcomes that can be expected from different types of events. However, they provide little, if any, guidance as to how such outcomes could be achieved.

To answer these questions, the concept of ‘strategic leverage’ has emerged as an alternate framing to the active pursuit of long-term event value (Chalip, 2006, 2014, 2017; Pereira et al., 2019; Ziakas, 2016). Strategic leverage is the act of systematically planning outcomes as they fit into local, regional or national development strategies, and doing so whilst taking into consideration the event, and the product and service mix of the destination in which the event is being staged (Chalip, 2004). Strategic leverage therefore implies that its application should not be to one event but to all relevant events in an event portfolio. This way, efforts to form long-term outcomes are systemised and made with community capacities and needs in mind.

Whilst the pursuit of legacies typically is outcome-oriented and coordinated by event organisers, strategic leverage focuses on processes and places responsibility more broadly on actors within the host community. Beyond local politicians, this includes public-sector agencies, destination marketing organisations, business associations, and local sport and cultural organisations. These stakeholders help shape the policy frameworks, partnerships, and programs through which events can be converted into sustained community benefits (Chalip, 2004; O’Brien and Chalip, 2008).

Recent work also emphasises that achieving strategic leverage requires *alignment* between stakeholders’ objectives and the intended development outcomes. Teare et al. (2024) demonstrate how both top-down policy direction and bottom-up community and organisational goals must converge for leveraging strategies to be effective. Their

findings highlight that misalignment between event owners, public-sector actors, and community groups often explains why leveraging initiatives fail to achieve durable social value.

What, then, is needed to achieve strategic leverage? Broadly speaking, strategic leverage requires three components:

- 1 *An event that is leverageable* (has leverageable assets) (Kelly, 2019; Sparvero and Chalip, 2007).
- 2 *A strategic context* (a destination on municipal, regional or national level) that the leverageable assets of the event can be aligned and integrated into (Chalip, 2017).
- 3 Leveraging measures that use event assets to create outcomes that match the policy goals of the destination. Aside from being aligned with local policy goals, such measures should also consider the existing product and service mix of the destination (Fairley and Kelly, 2017).

### **3 Materials and methods**

#### *3.1 Methodology: case study design*

This study adopts a case study methodology to examine how event-related legacy and strategic leverage were pursued within the World Championship Region 2019 (WCR2019) network in Jämtland, Northern Sweden. Case studies allow the researcher to analyse a phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. This makes the approach well suited for investigating how event strategies intersect with regional development agendas (Gerring, 2007).

The case in question is the coordinated legacy initiative created around the two major international sporting events in Jämtland County in 2019: the Alpine World Championships in Åre and the Biathlon World Championships in Östersund. The unit of analysis is the WCR2019 network – a cross-sectoral organisational structure established to coordinate event impacts and mobilise regional development outcomes. The network represents an instrumental case through which broader questions about event legacy, leverage, and regional policy integration can be studied.

#### *3.2 Case description*

The Alpine Skiing World Championships were staged in Åre from 4–17 February 2019 and the Biathlon World Championships in Östersund from 7–17 March 2019, both in the county of Jämtland, Sweden. The Alpine Championships attracted approximately 284 skiers, involved around 1500 volunteers, and sold ~37,000 tickets (Northcom, 2019). The Biathlon Championships featured 188 athletes, around 900 volunteers, and ~57,000 tickets sold (Sveriges Radio, 2020). The WCR2019 legacy program was initiated by the organising committees in collaboration with the regional government. Key stakeholders included the Jämtland regional authority, the municipalities of Åre and Östersund, national sport federations (alpine and biathlon), Mid Sweden University, business associations, and local firms.

The WCR2019 network intended to offer visibility to businesses that otherwise would not be able to sponsor such prolific events. Under the banner of ‘WCR2019’ all the member businesses would be provided with a platform to showcase their brands in the communities in which the events were located. WCR2019 set out three specific objectives to be achieved within the scope of the project:

- 1 to create a business network in the region
- 2 to enable local companies in the network to start selling products or services outside of the region
- 3 to attract new regional inhabitants that can be attributed to the project.

Once the desired outcomes had been set, the board went on to quantify them to ensure some degree of accountability:

- 1 recruit 150 network member organisations and businesses and hold at least 6 network meetings
- 2 at least 10 companies should be able to use the exposure related to the events to generate new business outside of the county
- 3 the event should lead to at least an additional 15 new county residents (in-migrants).

### *3.3 Regional context*

Jämtland is a sparsely populated northern region with a long history of hosting elite winter-sport competitions, supported by established venues, seasonal tourism mainly connected to skiing and hiking, and strong local sport organisations. Regional development efforts emphasise sustainable growth, international visibility, labour-force renewal, and alignment with the region’s Sámi administrative responsibilities. These contextual features shape both the rationale for hosting large events and the ambitions embedded in the WCR2019 legacy program (JHT, n.d.).

### *3.4 Data sources*

The analysis draws on two qualitative data sources:

- 1 the regional development strategy of the county in which the events were staged
- 2 one focus group with individuals directly involved in governing and delivering the events and associated legacy measures.

### *3.5 Document data*

The regional development strategy was integrated into the analysis based on its relevance to the aim of the paper, namely, to assess whether a stronger regional-strategic anchoring could have changed the outcomes of the legacy program being studied. This document provided information about strategic priorities and the strategic context in which the

legacy program was organised. The regional development strategy is nine pages long and outlines Jämtland County's long-term vision for sustainable development and regional collaboration, including responsibilities linked to the Sámi administrative area.

### 3.6 Focus group interview

A single focus group was conducted with four senior individuals occupying central positions within the event organisations and the WCR2019 network. One focus group was deemed appropriate due to the small and clearly defined population of actors with direct oversight of legacy and leverage planning in the context of the chosen case. The focus group and its participants (see Table 1) was selected using purposive sampling, targeting the board of the legacy program due to the members' substantial strategic responsibilities connected to the long-term outcomes of the events.

**Table 1** Focus group participants

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Role/Background</i>
P1	Event Director, Biathlon World Cup (Östersund)
P2	Event Director, Alpine World Cup (Åre)
P3	Board Chair/Director, WCR2019 Network Organisation
P4	Former Head of the Swedish Biathlon Federation

The focus group guide was developed deductively based on: themes identified in the event-legacy literature, principles of strategic leverage outlined in the conceptual framework, and regional development objectives derived from the policy documents. Questions focused on planning processes, cross-sector coordination, perceived successes, challenges, and reflections on the legacy program.

### 3.7 Analytical approach: framework analysis

Data were analysed using framework analysis, which is designed for applied policy research and supports systematic comparison across multiple qualitative data sources (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Goldsmith, 2021). This approach was appropriate because the study examines predefined phenomena and seeks to understand how it manifested within a specific governance setting.

The analysis followed five stages:

- *Familiarisation*: Reading and annotating the focus group transcript and documents.
- *Developing a thematic framework*: Using the strategic leverage model from the literature as the analytical structure.
- *Indexing*: Coding relevant material from all sources against framework categories.
- *Charting*: Comparing and organising coded material to examine alignment between policy objectives and event-related actions.
- *Interpretation*: Synthesising findings to assess how the WCR2019 initiative reflected or deviated from principles of strategic leverage.

## 4 Results

In this study we first present the two datasets as results. We then analyse them in a discussion based on the theoretical framing of the paper. Hopefully this yields a comprehensive analysis of the WCR2019 legacy program, to what degree it achieved its stated goals, challenges it faced and whether it could have benefitted from a strategic leveraging frame.

### 4.1 *The WCR2019 focus group*

Themes identified from the focus group interview consisted of the following subheadings that inform how the program fits into the strategic leveraging criteria in terms of the purpose, execution, and its perceived outcomes.

### 4.2 *'Making something of it'*

The regional government saw the events as an opportunity to showcase the potential of the region during the Olympic bidding process for the 2026 Winter Olympics that was ongoing when the events took place. More notably, the events were seen as a marketing exercise that could help to lure new residents to the region, countering the population drain of Sweden's peripheral regions in the process. One of the board members highlighted how the regional funding largely was geared towards the in-migration component of the WCR network mandate:

“...the region realised that they did not want to stand there after the World Championships and answer questions like, ‘What did we make of this?’ And then we talked our way into the project, which we then called ‘Take the Step’, which had major regional funding, and which was actually, I think unique, given its size in terms of regional funding and its focus.”

The board member then further pointed out that the effort was intended to break from the otherwise common tendency for destinations to focus on legacies related to increasing tourism revenue.

“And it was precisely about avoiding what is often discussed when it comes to staging new events, namely, focusing on the hospitality industry and the need to attract tourists. Instead, we are shifting the focus to talking about in-migration, that this should attract people to move to the area.”

Clearly, there was intent to leverage the events to regional policy goals as in-migration is one of the main goals on the regional agenda in this case study. And in doing so, also trying to shift the discourse from pure tourism related metrics to a wider discussion involving potential permanent residents. This demonstrates an awareness in the board of the legacies often expected in the context of major sports events and how these expectations could be developed.

### 4.3 *Absence of long-term planning*

The WCR board members lamented the fact that there was no concrete plan for how to move forward with the initiative beyond the staging of the events themselves.

Additionally, the program lacked a designated person who could work full-time with the continuation of the network and network activities once the events had passed.

The organiser of one of the two events explained how this fact led to lack of direction, and momentum, after the fact:

“We didn’t really have a very clear plan. We had a clear plan for how we would handle our final report and all those parts... but we did not really have anyone established for the time after, so again we had a long process about how things should be moving forwards. In other words, we had a tough restart in some ways, and it was very, I think, ad hoc, once we did restart...”

This response is ominous from a strategic perspective as one of the foundational purposes of the network was to maintain the network after the events and eventually pursue another set of World Championships 10 years down the line according to the focus group.

#### *4.4 Unexpected legacy*

Since they were co-founders of the legacy initiative, an unexpected benefit from the WCR network was that the Biathlon and Alpine federations used the interaction through the network to share knowledge and experiences before, during and after the events took place. In fact, the WCR network created a foundation, which arguably made the Biathlon and Alpine federations one of the strongest partnerships within Swedish sports in the eyes of the WCR2019 board. This effect was expressed by one of the senior board members:

“...one federation’s event became the other’s concern, in a way that I don’t think would have happened otherwise. [...] And I don’t think there are two other federations within (the national sports federation) who have this kind of relationship, and this level of collaboration and the same open flow of information between each other, where many just want to see us as competitors. [...] I think you also have to ask the question, what would have happened if we had run these World Championships on a parallel track without collaboration? And I think that would have been worse.”

#### *4.5 The regional development strategy*

Published in 2014, the regional development strategy of Jämtland county encompasses 7 goals and stretches between 2015 and 2030 (Figure 1). The agenda of the strategy is wide ranging and covers policy objectives such as jobs, social equity, energy and sustainability, to name but a few points.

The strategy forms what can consider to be a key component of the strategic leveraging framework, namely a policy context that ensures that any long-term benefit created by the events meshes with the needs of the community.

## **5 Discussion**

To address this paper’s aim, the following section integrates findings from the focus group and the regional strategy. Following the strategic leverage literature (Chalip, 2004, 2017; O’Brien and Chalip, 2008; Ziakas, 2016), the discussion interprets the WCR2019

legacy program's successes and challenges as a legacy endeavour (RQ1), then discusses what it would have meant if the WCR2019 program had been designed in terms of strategic leverage (RQ2).

**Figure 1** Regional development strategy 2015–2030, County of Jämtland

1. More jobs and more entrepreneurs with the support of good access to risk capital. Refine our raw materials in the county and strengthen the countryside. The university maintains excellence within the region's profile areas.
2. More students achieve high school diploma and go on to higher education. Good access to business-oriented further education.
3. Increased production of renewable energy and sustainable supply for the region's companies and households. High energy efficiency in all sectors and one independent of fossil energy. Increase efforts in all sectors of society to deal with climate change. No uranium mining.
4. Continued growth in the hospitality industry while meeting sustainability criteria. An active and creative cultural life, especially for children and young people. More companies in the cultural and creative sector to bolster the county's attractiveness.
5. Improved communications bridge the long distances. High-capacity broadband network and good service can be offered to all residents
6. Health and conditions, regardless functional capacity, on equal terms for the entire population. A safe county and a well-functioning and equal social welfare. The health service offers the county residents highly qualified care
7. The county is one of the most attractive in the country for young women. Good and well-developed reception for all new county residents. To age in Jämtland county creates opportunities for the individual and for society. The proportion of non-Nordic-born is the same as the national average.

*Source:* Regionförbundet Jämtlands Län (2014)

## 5.1 *The WCR2019 program's successes and challenges as a legacy effort (RQ1)*

### 5.1.1 *Network formation*

The WCR2019 program successfully met its quantified target of establishing a regional business network, exceeding the goal of 150 members by recruiting 177 firms and delivering more meetings than planned. This aligns with arguments that events can stimulate inter-organisational interaction and expand local networks (Misener and Schulenkorf, 2016; Lu and Misener, 2023). Participants emphasised that the network strengthened ties not only across firms but also between the Alpine and Biathlon federations, an outcome consistent with research showing that events may foster new collaborative routines and knowledge exchange (Clark and Misener, 2015).

However, while network creation is a common objective in legacy programs (Thomson et al., 2018), its long-term value depends on sustained governance and resourcing – conditions that were not in place post-event.

### *5.1.2 Business development outcomes*

The program aimed to enable participating firms to secure business outside the region, yet this goal was not systematically measured. This mirrors broader critiques that legacy claims often lack robust monitoring systems (Preuss, 2015; Girginov and Preuss, 2021). Without tracking mechanisms, the achievement of business-related legacies remains speculative, reinforcing concerns that legacy discourse risks producing symbolic rather than demonstrable outcomes (Stewart and Rayner, 2016).

### *5.1.3 In-migration goals*

Although in-migration was a central political rationale for the regional investment, no metric was developed to assess whether the ‘Take the Leap’ campaign generated new residents. Studies repeatedly show that demographic outcomes are among the most difficult to attribute to events (Taks, 2013; Liu, 2018), and the WCR2019 case reflects this challenge. The lack of follow-up illustrates what Chalip (2017) identifies as a key limitation of legacy frameworks: a tendency to emphasise intentions rather than mechanisms.

Together, these findings suggest that while WCR2019 generated activity, its measurable legacy was minimal – consistent with research indicating that many major events deliver limited long-term structural change without deliberate, coordinated leveraging strategies (Smith, 2014; Misener, 2015).

## *5.2 Reframing WCR2019 in terms of strategic leverage (RQ2)*

### *5.2.1 Leverageable assets*

Both World Championship events clearly possessed leverageable assets: international visibility, strong volunteer involvement, established sport infrastructure, and reputational capital (Kelly, 2019). The focus group demonstrated awareness of these assets, particularly regarding the potential to influence in-migration. However, recognising leverageable assets is insufficient without mechanisms to mobilise them (Chalip, 2006). WCR2019 lacked such mechanisms.

### *5.2.2 Alignment with regional policy*

Strategic leverage requires a close alignment between event-driven initiatives and regional development objectives (Chalip, 2017; Teare et al., 2024). WCR2019 engaged with three of the seven regional objectives – entrepreneurship/business growth, regional attractiveness, and in-migration – demonstrating partial alignment. Yet this alignment was not the product of a structured planning process; rather, it emerged post-hoc from thematic comparisons.

The absence of systematic integration illustrates a broader pattern noted in the literature: event organisers often work in parallel to, rather than within, regional planning systems (Kelly et al., 2019). This lack of embeddedness limits accountability and reduces the likelihood of long-term impacts (Preuss, 2019).

### 5.2.3 *Portfolio perspective*

Strategic leverage emphasises coordinating across an entire event portfolio to maximise synergies (Ziakas, 2010; Clark and Misener, 2015). In contrast, WCR2019 treated the Alpine and Biathlon events as isolated opportunities rather than as part of a broader, recurring event system- a missed opportunity given Jämtland's long tradition of winter-sport hosting.

This finding echoes prior studies showing that failing to adopt a portfolio perspective restricts destinations to one-off benefits rather than cultivating long-term development pathways (Ziakas, 2021).

### 5.2.4 *Partnerships and governance*

Although the WCR2019 network fostered collaboration among businesses and sport federations, partnerships with public-sector actors were less developed. The literature stresses that public sector leadership is essential for strategic leverage because governments control policy instruments, institutional continuity, and long-term development agendas (Chalip, 2017; O'Brien and Chalip, 2008). In this case, the legacy initiative was managed primarily by event organisers, resulting in weak institutional anchoring.

This 'structural gap' between organisers and policymakers mirrors challenges identified in other contexts (Kelly, 2019; Lu and Misener, 2023; Teare et al., 2024) and helps explain why leveraging outcomes were limited.

### 5.2.5 *Intentional vs. emergent outcomes*

While WCR2019 produced unexpected benefits – most notably the strengthened collaboration between national sport federations – these were emergent rather than strategically planned. Research consistently shows that emergent legacies are unreliable and often ephemeral (Chappelet, 2012; Rogerson, 2016), underscoring the need for deliberate, coordinated action rather than reliance on serendipity.

## 5.3 *The WCR2019 legacy program from a strategic leverage perspective*

The WCR2019 case illustrates several enduring problems with legacy-led planning:

- *Legacy frameworks emphasise outcomes*, not processes (Thomson et al., 2018), which risks producing goals without mechanisms.
- *Measurement gaps* undermine accountability (Preuss, 2015; Girginov and Preuss, 2021).
- *Organiser-led initiatives* seldom align fully with community priorities (Kelly et al., 2019).

By contrast, strategic leverage offers clearer guidance: event assets must be intentionally integrated into existing development systems, led by actors capable of sustaining change (Chalip, 2017; Ziakas, 2021).

This case reinforces the argument that without public-sector leadership and a portfolio mindset, leveraging initiatives produce limited long-term value. It also shows that even when organisers recognise policy priorities (e.g., in-migration), they may lack institutional authority to pursue them effectively- highlighting the importance of governance structures capable of bridging event and regional planning domains.

## 6 Conclusion

This study analysed the WCR2019 legacy initiative through the framework of strategic leverage, highlighting how major events may be aligned – or misaligned – with regional development priorities. Although the program aimed to expand beyond tourism-focused outcomes, it reproduced many issues noted in the legacy literature, including vague objectives, weak strategic integration, and challenges sustaining accountability (Preuss, 2007; Thomson et al., 2013; Chappellet, 2012). Its orientation towards predefined goals, and its delivery by event organisers rather than public-sector actors, reflected a legacy approach rather than a leverage approach as conceptualised by Chalip (2004, 2017) and O'Brien and Chalip (2008).

The findings emphasise that effective leveraging requires early policy anchoring, cross-sectoral coordination, and governance structures that link event initiatives to long-term regional strategies. While WCR2019 illustrates how non-mega events can pursue broader development ambitions, it also shows how institutional arrangements limit or enable such efforts. Future research should therefore focus on the role of policymakers and explore how regions integrate event portfolios into wider development planning.

## Conflicts of interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

## References

- Bohner, G. and Wänke, M. (2002) *Attitudes and Attitude Change*, Psychology Press, Hove.
- Brittain, I., Bocarro, J., Byers, T. and Swart, K. (Eds.): (2017) *Legacies of Mega Events: Fact Or Fairy Tales?*, Routledge, London.
- Chalip, L. (2004) 'Beyond impact: a general model for sport event leverage', in Ritchie, B. and Adair, D (Eds.): *Sport Tourism: Interrelationships, Impacts and Issues*, Channel View, pp.226–252.
- Chalip, L. (2006) 'Towards social leverage of sport events', *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.109–127, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775080601155126>
- Chalip, L. (2014) 'From legacy to leverage', in Grix, J. (Ed.): *Leveraging Legacies from Sports Mega-Events: Concepts and Cases*, Palgrave, pp.2–12.
- Chalip, L. (2017) 'Trading legacy for leverage', in Brittain I, Bocarro, J., Byers, T. and Swart, K. (Eds.): *Legacies and Mega Events: Fact or Fairy Tales?*, Routledge, pp.60–85.

- Chappelet, J. (2012) 'Mega sporting event legacies: a multifaceted concept', *Papeles de Europa*, Vol. 25, pp.76–86.
- Clark, R. and Misener, L. (2015) 'Understanding urban development through event portfolios: a conceptual framework', *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 29, No. 6, pp.672–685.
- Djaballah, M., Hautbois, C. and Desbordes, M. (2015) 'Non-mega sporting events 'social impacts: a sensemaking approach of local governments' *Perceptions and Strategies*', *European Sport Management Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.48–76.
- Fairley, S. and Kelly, D.M. (2017) 'Developing leveraging strategies for pre-games training for mega-events in non-host cities', *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, Vol. 35, No. 6, pp.740–755.
- Gerring, J. (2007) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Getz, D. (2008) 'Event tourism: definition, evolution, and research', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp.403–428.
- Girginov, G. and Preuss, H. (2021) 'Towards a conceptual definition of intangible Olympic legacy', *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp.1–17.
- Goldsmith, L.J. (2021) 'Using framework analysis in applied qualitative research', *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 26, No. 6, pp.2061–2076, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2021.5011>
- JHT (n.d.) *Fakta and Statistik*, Retrieved 28 September 2021 from <https://jht.se/fakta-statistik>
- Kelly, D. (2019) *Essays on Event Leverage: The Strategic Use of Event Leverage in Host Destinations* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Queensland], University of Queensland University Press, Brisbane.
- Kelly, D. and Fairley, S. and O'Brien, D. (2019) 'It was never ours: formalised event hosting rights and leverage', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 73, pp.123–133.
- Liu, Y. (2017) 'Quality of life as event legacy: an evaluation of Liverpool as the 2008 European capital of culture', *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp.653–670.
- Liu, Y. (2018) 'Legacy planning and event sustainability: Helsinki as the 2012 world design capital', *Sustainability*, Vol. 10, No. 7, pp.2453–2466.
- Lu, L. and Misener, L. (2023) 'Collective leveraging strategies and cross-sector partnerships: lessons from the Pan-American games', *European Sport Management Quarterly* (Advance Online Publication).
- Misener, L. (2015) 'Leveraging Paraspport events for community participation: development of a theoretical framework', *European Sport Management Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.132–153.
- Misener, L. and Schulenkorf, N. (2016) 'Rethinking the social value of sport events through an asset-based community development (ABCD) perspective', *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp.329–340, <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2015-0203>
- Müller, M. (2015) 'What makes an event a mega-event? Definitions and sizes', *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 6, pp.627–642.
- Northcom (2019) *Bästa Betyg under Alpine VM 2019*, Retrieved from <https://www.northcom.se/nyheter/srs-alpina-vm2019/>
- O'Brien, D. and Chalip, L. (2008) 'Sport events and strategic leveraging: pushing towards the triple bottom line', in Woodside, A. and Martin, D. (Eds.): *Tourism Management: Analysis, Behaviour and Strategy*, CABI, pp.318–338.
- Orr, M. and Inoue, Y. (2020) 'Practitioner perspectives of legacy: insights from the 2015 pan am games', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Vol. 12, No. 5, pp.717–729.
- Pereira, E., Mascarenhas, M., Flores, A., Chalip, L. and Pires, G. (2019) 'Strategic leveraging: evidences of small-scale sport events', *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.69–88.

- Phillips, D. (2016) 'What is Rio's Olympic legacy?', *The Guardian*, 16 December, Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/20/what-is-rio-olympic-legacy-brazil>
- Preuss, H. (2007) 'The conceptualization and measurement of mega sport tourism', *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, Vol. 12, Nos. 3–4, pp.207–227, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775080701736957>
- Preuss, H. (2015) 'A framework for identifying the legacies of a mega sport event', *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 6, pp.643–664.
- Preuss, H. (2019) 'Event legacy framework and measurement', *International Journal of Sport Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.103–118.
- Regionförbundet Jämtlands Län (2020) *Jämtland/Härjedalen 2030: Innovativt Och Attraktivt – Regional Utvecklingsstrategi*, Östersund, Available at <https://docplayer.se/16106572/>
- Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L. (1994) 'Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research', in Bryman, A. and Burgess, R. (Eds.): *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, Routledge, London, pp.305–329.
- Rogerson, R. (2016) 'Re-defining temporal notions of event legacy: lessons from Glasgow's Commonwealth Games', *Annals of Leisure Research*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp.497–518.
- Scheu, A., Streuss, H. and Könecke, T. (2019) 'The legacy of the Olympic games: a review', *Journal of Global Sport Management*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp.212–233, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2019.1566757>
- Smith, A. (2014) 'Leveraging sport mega-events: new model or convenient justification?', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp.15–30.
- Sparvero, E. and Chalip, L. (2007) 'Professional teams as leverageable assets: strategic creation of community value', *Sport Management Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp.1–30.
- Stewart, A. and Rayner, S. (2016) 'Planning mega-event legacies: uncomfortable knowledge for host cities', *Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 31, No. 2, pp.157–179.
- Sveriges Radio (2020) *Skidskytte-VM, 2019*, Retrieved from <https://sverigesradio.se/grupp/28810>
- Taks, M. (2013) 'Social sustainability of non-mega sport events in a global world', *European Journal for Sport and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp.121–141.
- Teare, G., Bakhsh, J.T., Bodin, K.L., Helsen, K., Taks, M. and Scheerder, J. (2024) 'Investigating top-down and bottom-up strategic alignment of event leveraging outcomes: the case of the 2021 UCI road world championships', *European Sport Management Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp.82–103.
- Thomson, A., Cuskelly, G., Toohey, K., Kennelly, M., Burton, P. and Fredline, L. (2018) 'Sport event legacy: a systematic quantitative review of literature', *Sport Management Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp.295–321.
- Thomson, A., Kennelly, M. and Toohey, K. (2020) 'A systematic quantitative literature review of empirical research on large-scale sport events' social legacies', *Leisure Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 6, pp.859–876.
- Thomson, A., Schlenker, K. and Schulenkorf, N. (2013) 'Conceptualizing sport event legacy', *Event Management*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp.111–122, <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599513X13668224082260>
- Ziakas, V. (2010) 'Understanding an event portfolio: the uncovering of interrelationships, synergies, and leveraging opportunities', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp.144–164, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2010.482274>
- Ziakas, V. (2016) 'Fostering the social utility of events: an integrative framework for the strategic use of events in community development', *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 19, No. 11, pp.1136–1157, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2013.849664>
- Ziakas, V. (2021) *Strategic Event Leveraging: Models, Practices and Prospects*, CAB International, Wallingford.

## Bibliography

- Bramwell, B. (1997) 'Strategic planning before and after a mega-event', *Tourism Management*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp.167–176.
- Chen, S. and Misener, L. (2019) 'Event leveraging in a non-host region: challenges and opportunities', *Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp.275–288.
- Hiller, H. (2000) 'Mega-events, urban boosterism and growth strategies: an analysis of the objectives and legitimations of the Cape Town 2004 Olympic bid', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp.439–458, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.00256>
- Ritchie, J. (2000) 'Turning 16 days into 16 years through event legacies', *Event Management*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp.155–165.
- Wallstam, M. (2022) 'Maintaining the status quo: the nature and role of policy stakeholders' perceptions of event value', *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp.219–234, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-06-2021-0053>
- Wallstam, M. and Kronenberg, K. (2022) 'The role of major sports events in regional communities: a spatial approach to the analysis of social impacts', *Event Management*, Vol. 26, No. 5, pp.1025–1039, <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599522X16419948390781>
- Wallstam, M., Kronenberg, K. and Pettersson, R. (2019) *Socio-Economic Impacts of Major Sports Events: An Analysis of the 2019 Alpine and Biathlon World Championships in Sweden*, Diva-Report, Available at <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2/1379792/FULLTEXT01.pdf>