

Analysis of the strategic leverage of sport dynamics of sport tourism events through a holistic approach

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Abstract

This study focuses on the development of sport dynamics arising from the strategic leverage of sport events and encompassing the planning of tactics and actions conducive to its implementation. Therefore, the objective of this study aims to analyse the sport dynamic leveraging efforts of the event organizers of two non-mega international events. This investigation included the case study of international open water events hosted in Setúbal, Portugal. Data were collected through: (i) documentary analysis covering the period 2010–2022; (ii) field observation of the two events in 2022; and (iii) 14 post-event semi-structured interviews with representatives of the event organizers and a local partner of the events. The data were examined through content analysis using deductive data categorization. The results highlighted the importance of strategic planning of the benefits of sport events, considering both the increase in sport (active and passive) participation and the strengthening of sport organizational capacity. This expanded vision of the development of sport dynamics can maximize more benefits for the host community. The long-term perspective of leveraging local sport dynamics provided by the study of international sport events emphasized the need for a strategic vision that combines an asset-based approach and a community needs-based approach.

Keywords: active and passive sport participation; event leverage framework; long-term benefits; organizational capacity building; strategic leverage.

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1. Introduction

Previous literature has highlighted the ability of sport events to provide a set of diversified benefits for the hosting communities (Chersulich Tomino *et al.*, 2020; Schulenkorf *et al.*, 2024). Within the scope of sport benefits, the management of sport events is impregnated on the premise that holding the event, in itself, promotes an increase / interest in sport practice (Misener, Taks, *et al.*, 2015). This assumption is contextualized into two effects (Weed *et al.*, 2012): (i) demonstration effect, also known as the trickle-down effect, which presupposes an increase in sport participation resulting from the inspiration generated by visualizing the performance of elite athletes, for example, in high-competition sport events; and (ii) festival effect, which justifies the increase in sport participation through the immersive effect generated by the celebratory atmosphere of the event. However, the sport benefits that can be obtained through hosting sport events may not be restricted to increasing local sport active participation. For example, in the study of a portfolio of nautical non-mega events (Pereira *et al.*, 2020), the findings show that events' strategic planning not only comprised actions aimed at promoting active sport participation (i.e. growth of sport practitioners), but also increasing the quality of the passive sport participation's experience (i.e. improving the quality of the spectators' experience), as well as the development of sport event management skills.

Several authors (Chalip *et al.*, 2017; Nordhagen, 2021; Taks *et al.*, 2018; Weed *et al.*, 2015) argue that to enhance local benefits related to sport participation, it is necessary to outline a sport event leverage strategy, defining strategic objectives for local sport development and planning its operationalization. In turn, Pereira *et al.* (2020) debate that the strategic perspective of sport leverage can be broader through the development of local sport dynamics as an objective of strategic leverage, for which the promotion of active sport participation is just one of the three tactics proposed for this purpose. Thus, according to Pereira *et al.* (2020), leveraging sport dynamics encompasses planning local benefits for sport (active and passive) participation and sport management.

Despite the growth of literature studying the increase in active sport participation generated by sport events (Potwarka & Wicker, 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021), the research focus remains prominently on the economic dimension of events, while much less research has been developed to understand sport leverage and its broader impacts (Chersulich Tomino *et al.*, 2020; Schulenkorf *et al.*, 2024; Zourgani & Ait-Bihi, 2023). Consequently, it is essential to deepen knowledge about the sport benefits generated by events, substantiating the existence of non-monetary impacts from sport events (Chersulich Tomino *et al.*, 2020). In addition, according to Teare and Taks (2021) the study of non-mega events is relevant, and in particular, those that are regularly hosted at the destination, enabling anticipation and planning of the long-term benefits that are intended to be leveraged for the local community (Oshimi & Yamaguchi, 2023), which contrasts with their scarce investigation, as it has been more common in mega-events (Schulenkorf *et al.*, 2024). To study regular events, applying a holistic approach to strategic leverage analysis has been recommended (Schulenkorf *et al.*, 2024); these authors favour a broader temporal perspective, both in relation to the different phases of each event (i.e. planning, implementation and outcomes), and in relation to successive events, rather than focusing the analysis merely on a one-off edition.

Since 2007, the city of Setúbal has hosted the Marathon Swim World Series, an international event in open water. This is the only open water event, accounted for the international elite ranking, hosted in the country of Portugal. In 2022, on two consecutive weekends, in addition to this event, the city of Setúbal hosted the European Junior Open Water Championship.

Following the above, there is a need to: (i) study the sport benefits of sport events; (ii) contribute to the increase in research focusing on non-mega events; and (iii) holistically approach the analysis on the topic of sport event leverage, encompassing the event leverage stages (planning, implementation and

outcomes) and the timeframe of the regular events that are hosted by the destinations. Thus, the objective of this study was to analyse sport dynamics leveraging efforts of the organizers of two international open water events hosted in Setúbal, Portugal. To this end, this investigation analysed the: (i) strategic objectives of hosting events within the scope of the development of sport dynamics; (ii) tactics and actions implemented for this purpose; and (iii) leverage outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Sport Leverage Conceptualization

Strategic leverage presupposes strategic planning of the benefits that are intended to be obtained for the host community through the development of actions running parallel to the event (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008). The "Event Leverage Framework" (Taks *et al.*, 2018, p. 186), which can be adapted to the various dimensions of sport events' strategic leverage (e.g. sport dimension), assumes that the sport context underlies the development of the leverage process, and it includes three sequential stages, namely, planning, implementation and outcomes.

The conceptualization of strategic sport leverage has been advanced by several authors, who have presented models in accordance with the specific context in which they are applied, focusing in isolation on sport benefits without contemplating the dynamics linked to both the promotion of active and passive sport participation and the development of sport management. For example, Misener (2015) published a model that aims to frame the strategic leverage of active sport participation for the specificity of the para-sport sector; Aizawa *et al.* (2023) designed a framework that establishes the role of local schools in leveraging sport events to develop long-term community's active sport participation; and Oshimi and Yamaguchi (2023) presented a leverage model of recurring non-mega participatory events for community development, including active sport participation benefits. For the general context of sport events, Chalip *et al.* (2017) published a model conceptualizing the leveraging of sport participation and development. This model is based on the premise of stimulating a culture conducive to the development of attitudes and opinions in the host community as a factor that facilitates the growth of active sport participation. It is precisely this sociocultural basis that will enable the systems and structures of the various organizations involved in the leverage process (i.e. event organizations, sport organizations and non-sport organizations) to share and/or use the several types of resources (material, human and knowledge) to increase local sport participation and development (Chalip *et al.*, 2017).

In the context of sport events, the community development theory has been used to frame the social benefits that can be generated from events, including active sport participation. This theory integrates a needs-based approach and an asset-based approach (Nel, 2018). The first focuses on identifying community problems and, consequently, on developing strategies that aim to solve them, and for this reason, it is more associated with short-term strategies (Kaplanidou, 2020; Nel, 2018). In turn, the asset-based approach emphasizes the skills and resources existing in the community to boost its development, which is why it is more associated with long-term strategies that contemplate sustainable changes (Kaplanidou, 2020; Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016; Nel, 2018). Blickem *et al.* (2018a) point out the existing personal, physical environment and collective (e.g. networks) assets as the building blocks of the asset-based approach, highlighting that greater efficiency in the use of resources, improved relationships and collective goal achievement are potential outcomes of this approach.

In this framework, Misener and Schulenkorf (2016) exposed an asset-based community development events model, which unfolds over six sequential stages, covering the identification and mapping of the community's capabilities and assets, the organization of a working group, the construction of the community vision and plan which, in turn, will lead to the mobilization of assets to leverage the event.

In turn, Oshimi and Yamaguchi (2023) presented a leverage model of recurring non-mega sport events, founded on community needs-based and asset-based approaches.

According to Kaplanidou's (2020) analysis of the two approaches to community development (i.e. asset-based and needs-based) for the context of sport events, there is no qualitative superiority of one over the other, but rather specificities and benefits of each depending on the community profile and the type of sport event that will be hosted there; the author also considers the possibility of applying a mix of both approaches to leveraging sport events.

2.2. Development of Sport Dynamics

Emerging from the evidences obtained in the study of a portfolio of nautical events, the development of sport dynamics was conceptualized as a strategic objective of the sport events' leveraging with three specific tactics to achieve it (Pereira *et al.*, 2020):

- (i) Prompting sport practices, aiming to promote motivation for practising sport.

The evidence on the increase in local active sport participation created / maximized by sport events is not consensual. The literature review developed by Teare and Taks (2021) presents disparate results, namely: 27% of the studies substantiated the positive impact of the event on active sport participation; 25% of studies highlighted precisely the opposite; and 35% obtained mixed results, namely the positive impact of the sport event on the development of active sport participation, albeit under specific conditions, and the uncertainty about the existence of this impact. This divergence of results is corroborated by other systematic reviews (Annear *et al.*, 2019; Potwarka & Wicker, 2021) that include the study of the sport events' impact on local active sport participation. Several authors (e.g. Misener, McGillivray, *et al.*, 2015; Potwarka & Wicker, 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021) attest to the importance of understanding the reason for the inconsistency of the results, and although it may be rooted in the methodology used by different studies and even the lack of theoretical framework, the authors prioritize the need for more research into the factors that induce a greater increase in active sport participation through the hosting of sport events. Some studies (e.g. Annear *et al.*, 2019a; Potwarka & Wicker, 2021) present the positive effect of carrying out complementary activities to sport events with the aim of increasing active sport participation in the local community, i.e. strategic leverage initiatives, strengthening the recommendation for developing strategic leverage (Bakhsh *et al.*, 2023; Chalip *et al.*, 2017; Misener, Taks, *et al.*, 2015; Taks *et al.*, 2018; Weed *et al.*, 2015). The fragile sustainability of increasing active sport participation in the long-term (Annear *et al.*, 2019; Bell & Daniels, 2018) is conditioned by the planning of actions that must be integrated within the time period delimited by an event, whose allocation of resources is also limited to this same period (Nordhagen, 2021).

- (ii) Enhancing sport shows, aiming to maximize the sport spectacle both on-site and on television broadcast.

Several studies (e.g. Snelgrove *et al.*, 2024; Teare & Taks, 2021) have exposed results that support this tactic, as spectators who watch live sport events demonstrate a feeling of inspiration that influences / mediates positively their sport practice intention. Furthermore, spectators who value the entertainment associated with the event (i.e. the hedonic factor) are the most satisfied with the experience of attending the event and those who most intend to repeat that experience (Hervás *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, the creation of hedonic experiences is recommended in the context of sport (active and passive) participation in sport events (Mascarenhas *et al.*, 2024). Hedonic experiences are even more relevant in the current "era of 'sportainment', the merger of sport and entertainment (...)" (Richelieu, 2020, p. 408), which can be used to strategically leverage the creation of value of the spectators' experience. In this sequence, enhancing sport shows could be a tactic to leverage local sport dynamics, directly achieving

an increase in active sport participation, and indirectly, an increase in passive sport participation. In this context, Pereira *et al.* (2020) identified several strategic actions to promote the quality of the experience, such as alternating competition moments with freestyle sessions, or even designing the competitive format to promote two distinct moments for the start of the competition, given its great capacity to attract spectators' attention.

- (iii) Tuning skills in sport management, aiming to develop local organizational capacity for sport events.

Refining the skills of the local staff needed to manage sport events contributes to the development of local organizational capacity (Pereira *et al.*, 2020). The development of the organizational capacity of events has been understood both as an expected benefit (Walzel & Eickhoff, 2023), and as a legacy of hosting sport events (Leopkey & Ellis, 2019; Mair *et al.*, 2023; Walzel & Eickhoff, 2023). However, it is important to highlight the strategic intention of developing organizational capacity, as mentioned in the study by Misener *et al.* (2020), in which the authors emphasize the need for a specific working group to leverage collaborative dynamics in organizing the event, and also, in the study by Girginov *et al.* (2017a), whose results verified the development of organizational capacity through strategic leverage of the sport event.

Accordingly, the development of sport dynamics emphasizes the breadth of benefits that can be maximized, taking into account: (i) the sport demand side, through increasing sport consumption, encompassing both active sport participants, i.e. those who travel to practise sport, and passive sport participants, i.e. those who travel to enjoy the sport show (Melo *et al.*, 2021); and (ii) the sport supply side, through improving the sport event managerial capacity of the local organizations. In this rationale, this study envisions the development of sport dynamics as a multifaceted approach, foreseeing the achievement of several benefits, simultaneously, both by stimulating sport supply and consumption. Given the complexity inherent in the development of sport dynamics, as it is assisted by a multiplicity of tactics to promote active and passive sport participation, and organizational capacity, and it involves a diversity of actors, the holistic analysis of the multitude of sport benefits with an enlarged timeline is adequate.

Given the literature previously exposed, few studies have analysed the development of sport dynamics as a strategic objective for leveraging sport events. In particular, it is necessary to examine the growth of active and passive sports participation, and the strengthening of the organizational capacity of the local community, in an integrated way.

3. Methodology

3.1. Events Context

This research studied two international open water events hosted in Setúbal, Portugal: FINA Marathon Swim World Series 2022 (MSWS) and European Junior Open Water Championship 2022 (EJOWC). The Setúbal City Council and the Portuguese Swimming Federation were in charge of both events, together with the Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) for the MSWS, and the Ligue Européenne de Natation (LEN) for the EJOWC.

In 2022, the international open water events in Setúbal were held on two consecutive weekends, in the Albarquel Urban Park, namely: the MSWS, on 28th and 29th May, and the EJOWC, on 3rd to 5th June. As shown in Table 1, the EJOWC brought together a greater number of athletes, participating nations and international delegates.

Table 1. Characterization of International Open Water Events Held in Setúbal in 2022

	MSWS	EJOWC
Athletes	67 swimmers (female: 28; male: 39)	158 swimmers (female: 72; male: 86)
Nations	16	21
International delegates	7	23
Staff	60	60
Volunteers	50	50

Note. MSWS - FINA Marathon Swim World Series 2022, EJOWC - European Junior Open Water Championship 2022.

In 2007, FINA held the first edition of the Open Water event in Setúbal, and since then, this has been the chosen destination for this event. Over this period, three editions of the event counted towards Olympic qualification in open water swimming, in particular for the Olympic Games in London (2012), Rio de Janeiro (2016) and Tokyo (2021). The competition consists of a 10 km race with athletes from the world's elite in open water swimming, in the female and male categories. In 2022, for the first time, the 6 km mixed team relay race was also held in Setúbal.

In turn, in 2022, the EJOWC was hosted for the first time in Setúbal. This event is an annual competition organized by LEN, which is affiliated with FINA as its European representative. In 2022, the competition consisted of: 5 km, 7.5 km and 10 km races, in the female and male categories, and two 5 km mixed team relay for junior athletes aged 14 to 19.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

According to the recommendations from Yin (2018), in this case study three types of data were collected: documentary sources; field observation; and interviews. The documentary sources and interviews provided a broader temporal perspective by examining multiple editions of the event, while direct observation allowed for the monitoring of planned and implemented strategic leverage actions during the sport events hosted in 2022. Additionally, the combination of several sources of data collection allowed triangulation, reducing the possibility of bias in the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data were examined through content analysis using deductive data categorization (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), with the support of NVivo (version 11) software. The categories were created according to the tactics conceptualized for sport dynamics leverage by Pereira *et al.* (2020).

3.2.1. Documental Research

Documentary data collection included: i) organizational documents of the events (n=40); (ii) official pages and the Facebook social network of the event organizers (n= 206); and (iii) publications from the local newspaper "O Setubalense" (n=13). The data collection time frame covered the period 2010–2022, according to the availability of published material.

3.2.2. Direct Observation

The observation of the MSWS and EJOWC events hosted in 2022 was carried out in the hosting event zone by the researchers during all the days that the sport competitions took place, including some complementary events (e.g. official dinners and technical meetings), totalling 34 hours. Prior to direct observation, the research team accessed the set of actions planned for the sport leverage of international open water events, which was provided by Setúbal City Council. The observation protocol adopted structured data collection in order to identify the: (i) physical and social context; and (ii) actions developed and actors who carried them out.

3.2.3. Interviews

In total, 14 post-event semi-structured interviews (#1-#14) were carried out, namely, 13 representatives of the event organizers and one representative of a local nautical club, as a local partner of the events (Table 2) – between the days June 21st and July 6th. Both the scope of the interview and the respective data collection procedures – i.e. guarantee of anonymity, verification of data by sending the *verbatim* transcription of the interview to each interviewee and respective authorization to use the data for exclusive research purposes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) – were explained to each interviewee. The average duration of each interview was 60 minutes, and a total of 191 pages were transcribed. The first author carried out the initial analysis of the interviews, later validated by the last author's review.

Table 2. *List of Interviewees*

Institution (Department - Position)	Participants (n=14)
CMS (Culture, Sport, Social Rights and Youth - Management) and FINA (Technical Committee)	1
CMS (Sport - Management and Technical Area)	7
CMS (Communication - Technical Area)	1
CMS (Protocol and International Relations – Management)	1
FPN (Sport Technical Sector – Event Management)	3
Local Nautical Club (Management)	1

Note. CMS - Setúbal City Council; FPN - Portuguese Swimming Federation; FINA - Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA).

The script for the interviews was adapted from Pereira *et al.* (2020) and structured in order to identify the: (1) strategic objectives of hosting events within the scope of the development of sport dynamics; (2) strategic leverage actions developed in the MSWS before 2022; (3) strategic leverage actions developed in 2022 at MSWS and EJOWC; and (4) benefits obtained by strategically leveraging sport dynamics.

4. Results

4.1. *Planning: Strategic Objectives of International Open Water Events in Setúbal*

Locally, the strategic line adopted by Setúbal City Council focuses on valuing the destination's natural and distinctive attributes for the practice of nature-based sport activities and taking advantage of organizational strengths to promote the destination's sport brand (JMS, 2022). This strategic decision is justified in resources and not in the popularity and representation of open waters in the destination, supported by the trickle-down effect assumption, as a side effect of holding an elite sport event (#1; #2; #4; #8; #14), as highlighted:

Firstly, the issue of putting Setúbal on the European and world map of major sport events. This is the most important thing. Of course, there is always the issue (...) that the organization of a major event, in which the biggest athletes in world sport come here over the years, has this great objective, of contributing to the increase in sport practice (...). Then there is a third objective, which is obviously the issue of developing sport as a municipal organic structure, that is, this issue of creating partnerships. The Setúbal City Council structure itself, over the years, has been able to gain experience, gain know-how and today is able to organize any large global event. (#1)

I think that the sporting panorama, in the last decade, in Setúbal has changed radically. I believe that decisions were made that actually made sense. (...) what distinguishes us from others? (...) So, it makes sense for us to invest (...) in water sports, outdoor sports, mountain sports. This is what will make Setúbal different. (#14)

(...) normally, a certain area is very active in a certain sport, in this case in Open Waters, and by being very active it starts, there is basic work, there are a lot of people practising Open Waters. And this means that, as a result of this development, increasingly important events will be held. (...) What happened [with the open water events in Setúbal] was precisely the opposite. (...) the pyramid sometimes works the other way around because sometimes to motivate people they need to see how things are. (#8)

At national level, the Portuguese Swimming Federation’s strategic sport objectives for holding the events include the promotion of open waters and the experience of federated practitioners in these types of competition, as well as the creation of a strong international image in the open water discipline, framed by conditions of excellence for its practice and justified by the organizational capacity for hosting international events (#11; #12; #13).

Therefore, the strategic objectives of the organizing entities, at local and national levels (i.e. Setúbal City Council and Portuguese Swimming Federation, respectively), underlying the hosting of international open water events converge to boost sport in the destination.

4.2. Implementation: Tactics and Actions Developed at International Open Water Events in Setúbal

The development of sport dynamics has been an objective continually pursued by the organizers of both events (i.e. MSWS and EJOWC) through carrying out actions consistent with the three tactics underlying its achievement (Table 3).

Table 3. *Sport Dynamics Leverage Tactics and Actions in MSWS and EJOWC*

Tactics	Actions
Tuning skills in sport management	Preparation of technical meetings with partners and organizers; Promotion of sport volunteering.
Prompting sport practices	Holding a mass participatory event as a complement to the elite event.
Enhancing sport show	Inclusion of a relay competition; Placement of a large video hall in the spectator area; Carrying out television broadcast and drone image capture.

4.2.1. Tuning Skills in Sport Management

Hosting international events with elite athletes has boosted local sport dynamics, helping to refine the sport management skills of event organizers at local and national level (Setúbal City Council and Portuguese Swimming Federation, respectively); for example, the preparatory meetings with event partners have been taking place for several years (#4; #8; #12; #14):

(...) a competition like this is the ideal place to form this team (...). I'm not going to be doing a briefing, or a meeting with [partners], to go down the river. (...) Now an event like this allows partners, if we know how to work – and I think we know how to work in this direction – it allows partners to be in agreement and to feel that we don't just want them (...) because they give us authorization (...); because they come to help us that day. No. We want them to be part of the group. (#8)

Promoting local volunteering has been an action carried out for several years, given its importance for holding international open water events in the destination (#1; #4; #7; #8). Mostly, volunteers are recruited from local schools (#1; #2; #4; #7), and in the 2022 events, an institutional relationship was signed with local schools in order to promote the recruitment of volunteers specialized in the sport area:

(...) there was an institutional relationship here with the [local] schools that offer professional technical sports courses. (...). They [the volunteers] are students of the professional sports course, therefore, technically they already have in their possession a set of knowledge that through competitions they are allowed to put into practice, and this is fundamental for them as students. Why is it important for us, as an institution, to use these types of students? Because they already have some tools and we don't need to be, from a training point of view, concerned with that. Our concern from the point of view of qualification and training is more towards other issues specific to the competition and with practical situations. (#7)

Additionally, to integrate volunteers with specialized tasks for the logistics of the competition and the safety of the respective athletes (e.g. canoeists and boat masters), it has been necessary to use the local network of partners, involving the local club, schools and the local network of volunteers / vessels. This local network of partners has been developed over the years that the MSWS has been hosted in Setúbal, strengthening the relationship between them:

(...) once again with such mutualisms, we began to extend our contacts. In other words, as we are a club that unconditionally supports school sports (...) I went and knocked on the doors of these teachers [school sports] (...). And so, knocking on doors, we managed to find all the people [volunteers] who were involved in both events. (#14)

4.2.2. Prompting Sport Practices

The practice of swimming in open waters, at local and national levels, has been promoted by holding a complementary event for this sport discipline (#1; #2; #3; #4; #11; #12; #13), which is considered a tool to increase its practice by FINA (2022). In Setúbal, the complementary event has been taking place since 2011, excluding the years 2020–2022, due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic situation. During these years, the complementary event had some variations in terms of format and type of participants. For example, in 2010 and 2011, the complementary event was part of the national championship, but only for federated swimmers; in 2015 and 2017–2019, the event had a mass event format and it was open to the entire population, in which 220 (2017), 400 (2018) and 500 (2019) individuals participated, as described in the Portuguese Swimming Federation annual official reports (Portuguese Swimming Federation, 2017, 2018, 2019b). A narrative of rapprochement between federated and recreational practices was also used in the promotional information for the mass event (e.g. “with the aim of providing an excellent sport experience, allowing interested parties the privilege of swimming on one of the biggest stages of the discipline, worldwide, in the last 12 years” (Portuguese Swimming Federation, 2019a, p. 5)), which is convergent with the perception of the representatives of the organizing entities (#1; #2; #13):

(...) on FINA's own initiative, it added an open event – which they call a mass event – to the main competition. (...) and this is a motivational factor for both master swimmers and younger swimmers to be able to participate in a place where the biggest stars of the moment in that discipline will swim, to swim in a unique setting that they don't see in other events – the number of tents, all that involvement with boats, security, everything. (#13)

The success of participation in these events is also due to the national promotional work of the Portuguese Swimming Federation (#11; #12; #13), and the Setúbal City Council publicity directed to local schools and swimming clubs, in combination with incentives for participation (#2; #12; #13):

At the Open Water mass event, a few years ago, we offered registrations to swimming schools. (...) Therefore, we allowed these people to also participate in the event. Promotional action with pure

swimmers, so to speak, or pool swimming schools. And it was important, and that's why we had that number, that is, here in the surrounding areas we advertised in all the swimming pools (...). (#2)

4.2.3. Enhancing Sport Shows

Three actions were identified to enhance the sport show (Table 3). In the MSWS hosted in 2022, compared to its previous editions, as a result of a strategic decision by FINA, a new competition was added to its calendar with the aim of promoting the entry of a team relay into the Olympic Games (Portuguese Swimming Federation, 2022). As a result, there was a need to further encourage sport shows in terms of media and participation in competitions (#1; #12; #13). Thus, the introduction of the relay competition at the events allowed FINA to “*test the organization, how to make the race more attractive from a media and television point of view to actually try to gain that space.*” (#1)

The intervention of Setúbal City Council and Portuguese Swimming Federation was limited to the operationalization of the aforementioned action (#2; #3; #4; #11), meaning that the entities only capitalized on the knowledge acquired over the years, as highlighted by #2:

For us it's another [competition]. Imagine, if we implemented it, it would be one more thing that gave us some knowledge, some way of perceiving, in terms of organization. (...) I think the test also enriched us, so that we can implement it in the future, when we do [competitions] on a closed circuit. (#2)

The tactic of improving the open water events' sport show is one of the current concerns of the Portuguese Swimming Federation and FINA (#1, #12, #13), which underlines the need to consider ways that increase its impact, both from the perspective of on-site spectators and those who view the events through broadcasts, as evidenced by #13:

(...) there is a transversal concern for all people who have some responsibilities in the open waters to make the event more sellable in terms of television, more enjoyable formats for people to follow, even people who are not linked to the sport discipline of the competition, become interested and keep watching it for a while. All of this is part of an international strategy that, obviously, the federations that host the competitions have something to say about because this is all a very complicated machine to put into operation. (#13)

In this sequence, television broadcasting and the use of drones to capture images were activated by the Setúbal City Council and Portuguese Swimming Federation to promote swimming in open waters (#1; #11; #12) in the latest editions, aligned with the quality of these images and the dynamics of television broadcasting.

The high cost of placing a giant video hall to enhance on-site spectators' viewing of the competition restricted its implementation in the Olympic qualification stages of the events (#1; #11).

In short, direct observation of the events held in 2022 verified the implementation of actions for tuning skills in sport management relating to the preparation of staff and volunteers with technical meetings and promotion of sport volunteering in the logistic department of event management, and of actions for enhancing sport show relating to the inclusion of a relay competition, television broadcast and drone image capture. In relation to editions prior to 2022 of the MSWS, all the actions shown in table 3 were verified through documentary collection and interviews, with the exception of the relay competition whose inclusion only took place in the 2022 edition. In particular, the collected documents covered social media publications by the organizers and the local newspaper. In addition, the quantification of sport active participation was obtained from the official reports of the Portuguese Swimming Federation.

4.3. Sport Dynamics Leverage Outcomes

In the organizers' perception, hosting international open water events provided several benefits in favour of the development of sport dynamics, both locally and nationally.

4.3.1. Destination's Competitive Advantage in Organizing International Open Water Events

The choice of Setúbal as the host destination for the last three Olympic qualifications highlights FINA's confidence in the organizational competence of the Setúbal City Council and the Portuguese Swimming Federation. LEN's recent choice for Setúbal to host the EJOWC confirmed the status of Setúbal City Council and Portuguese Swimming Federation in terms of hosting world open water swimming events, emphasizing the competitive advantage of boasting the destination's brand image, as highlighted by #5 and #12:

This event, namely the Juniors event, was an invitation that came to us at the last minute. Few people would have the capacity to organize that event worldwide. And, as we already had a fairly large expertise, in terms of previous events, we were invited by LEN and the Portuguese Swimming Federation, if we would like, if we intended, if we would be able to hold the event this year. (#5)

Even at an international level, the fact that we have the Setúbal event makes us a reference country in organizing events at an international level. It's normal for [one of the Setúbal City Council technical management members] to receive contacts asking for help in organizing these types of events. Therefore, I think this visibility has been good for us, for the country. (#12)

At the basis of this competitive advantage are the characteristics of the destination's very particular natural heritage, which guarantee the competition's distinction in comparison to other destinations that also host international open water swimming events (#1; #6; #8; #13):

(...) we have sea conditions, swimming conditions, which are not very easy to find [in other] events (...), therefore, the conditions in Setúbal are the true Open Waters, it is what the Open Water purists really want in the open water competitions. (#13)

These particular characteristics of currents and tides present in the competitions in Setúbal further highlight the positive performance of the Setúbal City Council and the Portuguese Swimming Federation, as they require a redoubled effort to ensure the event is held safely (#8), which is a result of teamwork between the two entities (#1; #2; #4; #8; #12). Furthermore, these results promoted the incorporation of elements from the Setúbal City Council and the Portuguese Swimming Federation into technical positions at FINA (#8; #12), which is also mentioned on the official Setúbal City Council page regarding the integration of one of its representatives (Setúbal City Council, 2017).

Furthermore, leveraging the destination's image through its strategic association with open water swimming events aroused the interest of sport event companies in holding recreational open water swimming events in Setúbal, as well as other sports with open water swimming (e.g. triathlon) (#8; #14), in addition to the local government's investment in infrastructure capable of developing this type of sport practice (#3; #4; #6; #8; #12; #14), as mentioned by #3:

(...) the fact that the event has gained in size and on the global stage, reveals that it has been possible to highlight the image of Setúbal in the sport discipline. At a local level, we have also had some news after the last editions. One of them is the construction of the Municipal Open Water Swimming Centre, because if this framework was not already created by the event, it would perhaps be a little more difficult to justify this investment. (#3)

4.3.2. Promotion of a Network of Partnerships to Facilitate Local Sport Dynamics

One of the benefits arising from leveraging sport dynamics is the creation of partnerships whose operating period extends beyond the period of hosting international open water events. For this to happen, the international dimension of the events is fundamental:

(...) we have been supporting Open Waters for 16 years and we firmly believe that if there is a big event in the city and if those swimmers need canoeists alongside (...) it is logical, it is natural that the canoeists from the [local] Club go to water and will provide this support. It is also obvious, there isn't any hypocrisy, that when we organize, as we often organize, an international kayaking tournament in the city, that Setúbal City Council (...) helps us to organize this tournament. And so we say that it really is a stance of mutualism. (#14)

(...) when you create a team for an event like this, involving the number of people it involves, from various areas, in addition to facilitating the organization of the event itself, it facilitates the annual work in partnership with other clubs. (...) But I think that, if everyone in boating is related, everything is easier. And in a competition like this [with an international nature] it is the ideal place to be able to form this team. (#8)

On the other hand, these partnerships also provide the transfer of knowledge between the participating national and international technical delegations, as a result of the proximity and relationship established between them:

the competition (...), makes us very recognized abroad (...) if I need something, if I want to know on a technical level, to learn, to improve – all of this creates a network of contacts, a closer connection, and then people are more friendly towards us. And that has always helped a lot. Having this event creates more proximity within this environment. (#12)

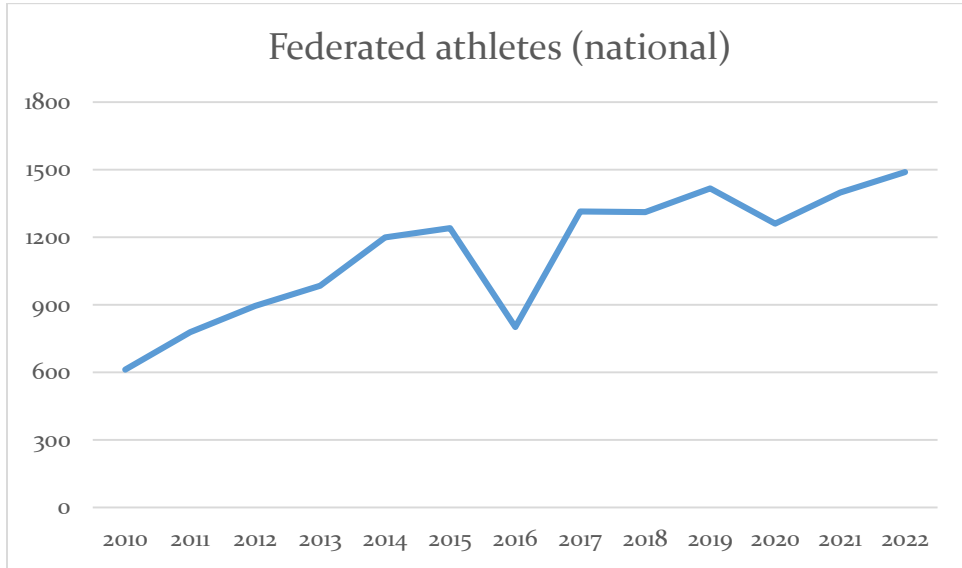
Setúbal City Council's partnership with the school community for volunteering is based on a win-win relationship, generating a better quality of specialized sport education, and also, in the near future, the creation of more qualified local sport human resources and with a stronger sense of community (#1; #4; #7):

[volunteering] has allowed us to gain an extraordinary local spirit here because most of the cases of these volunteer teams started with us ten years ago. (...). For example, [currently] some are club coaches, others are supporting sport projects of various local dimensions and, therefore, this issue also arises here. And this is very important. (#1)

4.3.3. Inconsistencies in Sport Participation

The increase in the practice of open water swimming is confirmed on a national scale (Figure 1), with a tendency towards a gradual increase in federated practitioners since 2009. For example, the EJOWC hosting aroused interest among national sport technicians:

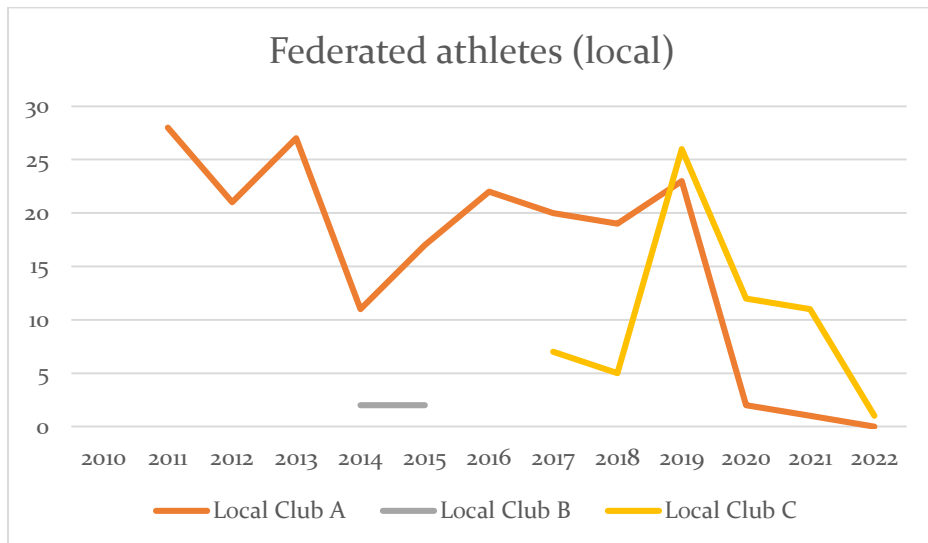
The international event in itself, I think, always creates leverage in young swimmers, but at a national level, especially the fact that the European Championship [EJOWC] was held here was advantageous because, firstly, it allowed for a wider selection than would have happened if it had been outside the country. There was an effort here to include more swimmers, new swimmers, there were more coaches coming to see what the open waters are (...), going to see the competition, being curious. Club swimmers who had never been involved in open water competitions were now involved in this one. And then yes, I think it creates leverage. (#12)



Source: Portuguese Swimming Federation annual reports (2010–2022).

Figure 1. Federated Athletes in Open Water Swimming at National Level (2009–2022)

However, the growth trend of federated practitioners in open water swimming observed at national level was not verified at local level (Figure 2). The analysis of the three clubs in Setúbal with federated athletes in open water swimming shows that one of them only had federated swimmers for two years (2014 and 2015), and the other two, in 2022, had not yet recovered the pre-pandemic number of practitioners (Figure 2). Furthermore, direct observation also revealed that none of the local clubs implemented sport leverage actions during the MSWS and EJOWC hosted in 2022.



Note. Club A: Clube Naval Setubalense; Club B: Escola Municipal de Desporto de Setúbal; Club C: A ONDA. Source: Portuguese Swimming Federation annual reports (2010–2022).

Figure 2. Federated Athletes in Open Water Swimming at Local Level (2009–2022)

Direct observation regarding passive sports participation verified the low presence of local spectators at the events, which was also highlighted by the organizers (#1; #2; #3; #6; #12). For the most part, the audience present at the events was made up of staff and families of the athletes (#2). In addition to the perception of the recent pandemic situation as a constraint on public participation in the 2022 edition of events (#1; #12), in previous editions, there were other factors which conditioned the lack of participation, such as overlap with other sport events: *“It was a football game for the national team that day and people, when it's football day, forget it, the other sports don't exist”* (#6).

Conversely, initial editions of the event attracted a large local audience (#1; #3; #5; #12): *“Initially, this event had a fairly large turnout in terms of population, in the first phase. And in fact, we sought a very wide dissemination among the population of Setúbal, and this population actually joined the event”* (#5); the high attraction of the local public also occurred in the Olympic qualification editions, as published on the municipality's website (e.g. Setúbal City Council, 2016). Additionally, in previous editions, parallel entertainment activities during the event also involved many residents despite their disconnection with the open waters (#1; #4; #6). This reality generates a disparity of opinions because, on the one hand, these activities have the capacity to attract the local community to the event, but at the same time, they also attract people who are not linked to the open water subculture, and as such, they do not repeat the experience (#4; #6):

“There's one thing that we know brings more people together, which is having parallel activities that the public likes to see, even if they have nothing to do with open water swimming (...). From a sustainable point of view, I think it works a little the opposite. (...) I think that there could be here, after a certain point, some repetition in the event (...) that person who is not very qualified from a technical point of view to observe, etc., who just comes to have a moment of pleasure, watching it. You've seen it. The event itself is not very easy to see, because it takes place far away, and so on. Therefore, there may be some loss of curiosity, which means people don't come and see it as often.” (#4)

“People went to see that second event [parallel activities to the event] that would ultimately be happening there and ended up staying to see the [open water] swimming competition as well. Because the swimming competition (...), if you notice the dynamics of the athletes' presentation, I think it's funny, they go there on stage, but, when they get into the water, (...) people are there inside to watch but they don't see much, if the presenter isn't always there providing some informational support of the event to the public.” (#6)

5. Discussion

The results of this study highlighted the importance of analysing strategic sport leverage through a holistic perspective of sport benefits that focused on maximizing local sport dynamics (Pereira *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, the adoption of the Event Leverage Framework (Taks *et al.*, 2018) allowed a complete analysis of the strategic leverage of international open water events, in the following phases: the first, regarding the strategic planning of the sport dynamics dimension, framed the strategic objectives of leveraging the events; the second, referring to implementation, glimpsed the tactics and strategic leverage actions implemented in the events aiming to achieve these objectives; and the last, the outcomes generated by the strategic leverage process, highlighted the increasing local / national sport dynamics through the simultaneous development of sport management capacity, and active and passive sport participation (i.e. sport practice and spectatorship). Consequently, the application of an analytical framework restricted to the focus of increasing sport participation, as evidenced in other studies (Aizawa *et al.*, 2023; Chalip *et al.*, 2017; Misener, 2015; Oshimi & Yamaguchi, 2023) would have been inappropriate / deficient to the organizational reality verified in this study. In this sense, an analysis strictly focused on the strategic leverage of the events hosted in 2022 at the destination would have been insufficient to understand the outcomes of long-term strategic leverage more deeply and

realistically, since the results highlighted the temporal influence on the development of the sport management capacity and sport active participation.

5.1. *Destination Image Associated with Excellence in Organizational Capacity*

Regarding the development of sport dynamics, the results of this study proved the convergence of strategic objectives between the entities responsible for organizing international open water events in 2022, at local and national levels. Thus, both entities intensified the image of the destination associated with the organization of international open water events and maximized the organizational capacity inherent to these types of event. For this purpose, it is important to highlight that one of the premises for leveraging sport participation is the possibility of the coexistence of different objectives between the various entities involved in leveraging the event and the need for their consensus and alignment in the outlined leveraging strategy (Chalip *et al.*, 2017; Pereira *et al.*, 2015, 2020).

5.2. *Development of Sport Management Capacity*

This study verified the efforts of the destination's local government in training local young people for sport management by promoting volunteering at events. Other studies have highlighted the development of social capital associated with volunteering at sport events, based on the feeling of belonging to the community, the development of personal, social, and even technical skills (e.g. Dickson *et al.*, 2020a; Rogerson *et al.*, 2021a), favouring the construction of relationships, and promoting learning and motivation to work towards social change (Peachey *et al.*, 2015).

The results of this research confirmed the implementation of strategic actions to foster a spirit of collaboration between all entities involved in organizing the events. The operationalization of meetings and the activation of local relationships underlying the organization of international open water events strengthened the sport dynamics not only during the events, but also after they were held, creating / consolidating partnerships with the school context, sport associations and local actors with boats related to sport volunteering. In this regard, greater integration of schools and sport clubs in the strategic planning and implementation of leveraging sport dynamics is crucial (Aizawa *et al.*, 2023; Bakhsh & Potwarka, 2020; Nordhagen, 2021). In other studies (e.g. Fairley & Kelly, 2017; Hoskyn *et al.*, 2018; Oshimi & Yamaguchi, 2023; Pereira *et al.*, 2015; Ziakas, 2016), collaboration between the various entities and stakeholders of the event was evidenced as a facilitating factor in the implementation of strategic leverage. Nevertheless, this study substantiates that, in addition to being a facilitating factor, collaboration is a benefit to sport dynamics leverage for the local community, which, when strategically planned and implemented, has positive long-term repercussions.

5.3. *Prompt Active and Passive Sport Participation*

The strategic vision of the host destination's local government to promote open water swimming is based on the destination's natural heritage for its practice and not on the (sparse) development of this sport at a local level. In this sequence, the results of this study reflect that the organizers, at local and national levels, assume an association of trickle-down effect with open water events, taking for granted the fact that the hosting of international events and the presence of elite athletes are sufficient to increase sport interest / participation.

However, the trickle-down effect that appears to exist at national level cannot be deduced for the local sport context, for two essential reasons: (a) taking into account the indicators of active sport participation, the association between the practice of the sport and trickle-down effect can only be considered at the national level, since the trend of regular growth in the national participation of federated athletes is not verified at the level of federated practitioners from local clubs; (b) the increasing number of participants in the event that is complementary to international events cannot be associated with an increase in local sport practice as its origin was not ascertained.

Furthermore, although the occasional existence of complementary events/activities contributed to increasing the exposure of the open water event to the community, a growth in local active sport participation was not verified, nor was a consistent intensification in passive sport participation throughout its successive editions. Nevertheless, the results suggest that the regular offer of non-sport related events/complementary activities increases the community's attractiveness to the event, so they should be seen as windows of opportunity to develop sport participation. To this end, non-sport related strategies should be designed as a reinforcement of other pre-event strategies to direct the attention of the community (e.g. schools and sports clubs) to the sport subculture to be developed (Chalip *et al.*, 2017; Martins, Pereira, *et al.*, 2024), so that it can be highlighted during the event, overlapping with other non-sport related activities. Moreover, holding complementary events extends visitors' stay, helping to increase their expense retention and/or social interaction and a feeling of celebration (O'Brien & Chalip, 2008).

In order to maximize the benefits for the community that hosts the sport tourism event, it is essential that the conception of strategic planning incorporates economic, social and sport leveraging actions, putting into practice the cross-leverage process (Martins, Mascarenhas, *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, these findings strengthen recommendations for the study of the specific conditions of each context capable of inducing the trickle-down effect (Misener, Taks, *et al.*, 2015; Potwarka & Wicker, 2021; Teare & Taks, 2021), underlying the importance of the development of the cross leveraging (Martins, Mascarenhas, *et al.*, 2024; Martins, Pereira, *et al.*, 2024).

The development of local sport participation must be part of the strategic planning phase of leveraging sport dynamics, otherwise the destination projects its capacity for excellence in organizing open water events with the best athletes in the world in elitist events, in disconnection with the local community (Pereira *et al.*, 2015; Ziakas, 2016). The strategic vision justified in the imagery dissemination of natural resources, based on the physical environment as the building block of asset-based approach (Blickem *et al.*, 2018), provided the impetus for the local political power to support the holding of international open water events. Yet, after the initial period of operationalizing the strategy for developing sport active participation (at the level of federated athletes), the perspective given by the broader temporal analysis reflects the lack of development of the local sport culture (i.e. a community need), considering active and passive sport participation, calling for the urgency of complementing the strategy with the needs-based approach. Therefore, an exclusive view of the asset-based approach runs the risk of being inappropriate for promoting local sport participation in the long-term (Chen *et al.*, 2022), imprisoning the advantages of hosting events within the scope of national purposes for promoting active sport participation.

The analysis of more than ten editions of the international open water event held in the destination verified that the sport dynamics development was a benefit that emerged precisely from the reproduction of the event over the years. The findings reveal that a convergence of strategic vision between the organizations allowed that, in all editions of the event, there were actions that promoted the sport dynamics, either permanently (such as actions to develop sport management skills), punctually (such as actions to improve the show, e.g. the relay competition and the video hall in the hosting event zone), or even frequently (such as the mass event to promote sport practice). Consequently, the development of sport dynamics over time, as an emerging benefit of the event for the local community, imposes a strategic vision that supports the persistence/cost of regularly hosting an elite international sport event, and ideally, maximizing the effectiveness of resources through a strategic design of a long-term portfolio of events (Ziakas, 2023).

6. Conclusion

As an objective of strategic leveraging of sport events, the conceptualization of the development of sport dynamics (Pereira *et al.*, 2020) is broad and heterogeneous, as it simultaneously aims to maximize benefits on both the sport demand side (active and passive sport participation) and on the sport supply side (skills in sport management). Some authors (e.g. (Bates & Hylton, 2021; Schulenkorf & Spaaij, 2016)) have proposed the overlap of the asset-based approach with the needs-based approach, as the latter is more common in event management, due to its association with short-term strategies. Despite these recommendations, to maximize the development of sport dynamics to its fullest, this study argues the need to subjugate its strategic planning to the combination of both theories of local community development (Kaplanidou, 2020; Oshimi & Yamaguchi, 2023).

In addition, from a managerial perspective, the results of the study suggest the importance of temporality as a preponderant factor in selecting the best approach to the development of the host community. Thus, the success of the application of the asset-based approach in the development of the local community that hosted the open water events was based on the mobilization of its assets, namely, the physical environmental and collective assets, as categorized by Blickem *et al.* (2018). In this destination, the successive hosting of these sport events over the years has enabled the strategic development of sport management skills. Nevertheless, in future editions of events, sport dynamics' leverage strategy needs to foresee local sport participation as a necessity, in order to complement the strategy based on the mobilization of existing resources in the destination. Furthermore, given the greater periodicity of non-mega events in relation to mega-events and the findings from this study, sport event organizers should design sport leverage planning in order to maximize the sport dynamics benefits – e.g. the organizational learning (Chalip, 2006) and the inter-community network (Jones *et al.*, 2018) – and their consolidation year after year.

Taking into account the synergies between the tactics that encourage active and passive sport participation, the development of sport dynamics must integrate actions to foster the sport subculture and reinforce sport identity in a celebratory environment (Annear *et al.*, 2019; Chalip *et al.*, 2017; O'Brien, 2007; O'Brien & Chalip, 2008; Pereira *et al.*, 2020; Weed *et al.*, 2015). Thus, although the sport (sub)culture in the destination does not necessarily have to be the basis of strategic leverage, it should be promoted in order to solidify the leverage of sport dynamics.

Considering the strategic focus and investment that has been made in infrastructure and specialized material resources for local sport management, and in particular for open water management, future editions of events could benefit from the application of leverage strategic sport dynamics framed by the model presented by Fairley and Kelly (2017); in this model, the authors propose pre-event training as a leverageable resource, and the development of actions to leverage both short-term benefits (e.g. entourages and integrating visiting teams into the local community through education and sport programming) and long-term benefits (e.g. creating an image of the destination as a place for elite training camps and tourism).

Future research should strengthen the line of research on the creation of social capital from events (Peachey *et al.*, 2015; Rogerson *et al.*, 2021), deepening the knowledge of leveraging sport dynamics through the approach of volunteering in non-mega events in other sports, and/or from the perspective of volunteers, in order to infer the benefits of leveraging local sport dynamics in the short and long-term. Given the importance of establishing and strengthening the community's strategic vision and its involvement in the agenda of initiatives aimed at its own development (Bates & Hylton, 2021; Kaplanidou, 2020; Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016), it is also important that future studies invest in a broader representation of local sport actors, such as sport clubs that offer open water swimming at local

level, as their lack of representation in the process of strategically leveraging the events under examination was a limitation of the present study.

Quantifying the increase in sport participation is another limitation of this study, given the lack of specification regarding the number of new practitioners [i.e. individuals who transitioned from sedentary to practicing (Chalip *et al.*, 2017)], as well as the number of sport practitioners which may have occasionally changed sport discipline (i.e. sport participation displacement, in this case a change from pool swimming to open water swimming), and also, regarding their origin (local or national). Additionally, the lack of quantitative data on passive sport participation in the event makes it difficult to fully analyse the results of sport strategic leverage actions. In this sequence, future research on the development of sport dynamics should analyse active sport participation, quantifying new practitioners, as well as passive sport participation, anticipating the quantification of spectators in non-ticketed events. Furthermore, the study of the factors that enhance the increase in sport participation (active and passive) is of vital importance for planning how to leverage sport dynamics, from the perspective of local consumers, including both practitioners and spectators.

In conclusion, this study highlighted the importance of the strategic planning of the benefits of sport events, taking into consideration both the increase in active and passive sport participation, and the strengthening of sport organizational capacity. This expanded vision of the development of sport dynamics can maximize more benefits for the host community. The temporal perspective of leveraging local sport dynamics provided by the study of international sport events highlighted the need for a strategic vision that combines an asset-based approach, which supported the investment in the development of open water swimming and sport events in the host destination, and the community needs-based approach, to promote the continuity and depth of strategic leverage of local sport dynamics by stimulating greater involvement by the local community.

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