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Governance and Interinstitutional Coordination: A Major Challenge for the Success of International Sporting Events

Malak Jibraili*, Zineb Jibraili** Abderrahim Rharib***
*(LAMIGEP, EMSI Marrakech
Email: M.jibraili@emsi.ma)
** (LAMGEP, ENCG Eljadida
Email: zinebjibraili@gmail.com)
***(LRPFG, ENCG Casablanca
Email : a.rharib@encgcasa.ma

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Abstract:

The staging of international sport events mobilizes a multiplicity of actors operating across national, regional and local scales. Effective multi-level governance and inter-institutional coordination are thus decisive for operational success, legacy outcomes and stakeholder legitimacy. This paper develops a theoretical treatment of governance architectures and coordination mechanisms in the context of major sport events. Drawing on event studies and sport management scholarship (notably Getz, Leopkey & Parent, Thibault & Babiak, and Chappelet), the article articulates core concepts of multi-level governance, identifies recurring coordination failures and proposes a conceptual framework that highlights the role of hybrids: strategic central oversight combined with decentralized operational delivery. The framework foregrounds four enabling conditions — role clarity, structured communication, aligned incentives, and adaptive decision-making — as critical to mitigating risks associated with institutional fragmentation. Theoretical implications and directions for empirical testing are discussed, with practical recommendations for policy makers and organizing committees seeking to improve governance capacity in future events.

Keywords **— event legacy, hybrid governance, inter-institutional coordination, multi-level governance, sport events, stakeholder alignment.**

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I. INTRODUCTION

International sport events—ranging from global spectacles such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup to continental and regional championships—have become focal points for economic investment, political ambition and social expectation. Organizing such events requires an intricate orchestration of public agencies, international and national sport federations, local authorities, private sponsors, contractors and civil society groups. The sheer diversity of actors and the distribution of authority across institutional layers generate a governance challenge: how to coordinate disparate mandates, reconcile competing objectives and deliver complex operations under strict temporal and reputational constraints.

Scholarship in event studies and sport management has long highlighted governance as a central determinant of event outcomes. Donald Getz's foundational work situates events within broader public-private networks and emphasizes the need for integrative policy and planning (Getz, 2008; 2012). Complementary research by Leopkey and Parent, Thibault and Babiak, and Parent & Chappelet has elucidated the institutional tensions that arise when sovereign public interests (security, urban legacy, tourism) intersect with federative and commercial imperatives (sporting integrity, brand protection, sponsor returns). These tensions are most acute in multi-level settings where national strategies,

municipal capacities and international regulatory frameworks must align in practice as well as on paper.

Practical experience shows that failures of coordination can be costly. Poorly defined responsibilities create duplication or gaps in service delivery; opaque decision-making undermines accountability and generates reputational risk; misaligned incentives prompt conflict among lead agencies, federations and private partners. Conversely, well-designed governance arrangements can amplify the positive impacts of events—facilitating efficient delivery, maximizing social and economic legacy, and preserving institutional trust. The objective of this paper is thus twofold: first, to synthesize theoretical perspectives on multi-level governance and inter-institutional coordination as they pertain to sport events; second, to propose a parsimonious conceptual framework that identifies the structural and procedural conditions enabling effective governance in high-stakes event contexts.

This inquiry adopts a theoretical orientation rather than an empirical case study approach. It integrates insights from public administration (multi-level governance theory), organization studies (network governance, stakeholder theory) and event management literature. The focus on theory is intentional: while numerous case studies document what went wrong or right in particular Games or competitions, there remains a need for generalizable conceptual tools that can guide comparative research and inform organizing practice across jurisdictions.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical background, defining multi-level governance and distinguishing governance models commonly encountered in sport event delivery (centralized, decentralized and hybrid configurations). Following that, a targeted literature synthesis examines coordination mechanisms—structural, procedural and relational—that scholars and practitioners have proposed to manage inter-institutional complexity. Building on these foundations, the discussion develops a conceptual framework that foregrounds four enabling conditions for coordinated governance and maps their anticipated effects on event success and legacy. The paper concludes by articulating managerial implications and proposing avenues for future empirical validation.

II. Theoretical Background: Multi-Level Governance in Sport Events

The concept of *multi-level governance* emerged from political science and European integration studies (Marks, 1993; Hooghe & Marks, 2003) to describe systems in which authority and decision-making are dispersed across multiple, overlapping levels of government and non-state actors. Rather than functioning through strict hierarchies, these systems rely on dynamic interactions among institutions that share competencies over policy design, financing, and implementation. In the context of international sport events, this model offers a compelling analytical lens: no single organization, not even the international federation or the host government, can unilaterally control all aspects of planning and delivery. Governance becomes a process of negotiation, coordination, and adaptation among actors with distinct mandates but interdependent roles.

Sport events exemplify *polycentric governance* structures in which power is distributed horizontally and vertically. Vertically, decision-making spans from global institutions such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) or FIFA, through national sport federations and ministries, down to local organizing committees (LOCs) and municipal authorities. Horizontally, governance encompasses diverse sectors—public, private, and civic—each contributing specific resources, expertise, and legitimacy (Parent & Chappelet, 2015). This multiplicity produces what Chappelet (2021) calls a "governance mosaic," a constantly evolving configuration of partnerships, contracts, and accountability relationships.

Getz (2008) emphasizes that event governance cannot be reduced to management alone; it represents a "system of values, relationships, and structures" guiding collective action toward shared objectives. In major events, however, shared objectives are often ambiguous. Governments may prioritize nation branding and infrastructure

development; federations focus on competitive fairness and brand consistency; sponsors seek visibility and returns; host communities value social inclusion and environmental sustainability. The resulting governance challenge is not only technical but also normative—balancing efficiency, equity, and legitimacy within a complex network.

Leopkey and Parent (2009, 2011) propose that governance in sport events operates through multiple overlapping regimes: the *institutional regime* (laws, regulations, norms), the *organizational regime* (formal structures and contracts), and the *relational regime* (informal trust-based cooperation). Effective coordination requires alignment across these layers. When misalignment occurs—for instance, when national legal frameworks constrain local delivery capacity or when informal relationships bypass formal procedures—governance failures emerge, leading to inefficiencies, conflicts, or loss of stakeholder confidence.

Multi-level governance theory highlights two key dimensions of coordination. The first is vertical coordination, referring to alignment across hierarchical levels—international, national, regional, and local. This dimension ensures that strategic goals cascade coherently into operational plans. The second is horizontal coordination, concerning collaboration among organizations at the same level—such as between ministries, federations, and corporate partners—whose mandates intersect. Research in both public administration and sport management (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Parent, 2015) suggests that the interplay of these two dimensions determines the overall coherence of governance.

In sport event settings, *hybrid governance* structures have emerged as a pragmatic solution. These combine centralized strategic oversight with decentralized operational delivery. For example, the IOC or FIFA typically retain strategic control over branding, competition standards, and global communications, while local organizing committees handle infrastructure, logistics, and community engagement. This division of labor requires institutional trust, formal agreements (e.g., Host City Contracts), and well-defined mechanisms for information sharing. The success of such hybrids depends on clear role delineation, structured communication channels, and the capacity to adapt as the event evolves.

Importantly, multi-level governance also introduces temporal complexity. Governance arrangements evolve across the event life cycle—from bidding and planning through implementation to post-event legacy management. Each phase mobilizes different actors and coordination needs. As Getz (2012) notes, governance systems are most vulnerable during transitions—when responsibilities shift from one institution to another, such as from organizing committees to legacy authorities. Ensuring continuity of governance principles across these transitions is therefore a critical success factor.

In sum, the theoretical literature converges on a key insight: multi-level governance in sport events is both an opportunity and a risk. It allows for shared responsibility and resource mobilization at unprecedented scales, yet it simultaneously multiplies coordination challenges. Understanding how institutional design, trust relations, and communication frameworks interact is essential for building resilient governance architectures. The next section therefore turns to *inter-institutional coordination*, examining mechanisms, models, and barriers that define the operational reality of governance in international sport events.

III. Inter-Institutional Coordination: Frameworks and Challenges

While multi-level governance defines the structural distribution of authority, inter-institutional coordination refers to the processes and mechanisms through which these diverse actors align their decisions, share resources, and resolve conflicts in real time. Coordination is therefore the operational expression of governance — it translates abstract institutional arrangements into collective action. Within sport event management, coordination is particularly complex because it must integrate actors from different institutional logics: political (public administrations), bureaucratic (federations), commercial (sponsors, suppliers), and community-based (volunteers, NGOs). Each operates according to distinct incentive systems, temporalities, and accountability norms.

1. Coordination Frameworks

Scholars have proposed several frameworks to conceptualize coordination across institutions. The *network governance* approach (Provan & Kenis, 2008) emphasizes relational interdependence rather than hierarchical control. It views coordination as emerging through negotiation, trust, and shared norms rather than top-down authority. Within sport events, Parent and Smith-Swan (2013) observe that organizing committees frequently operate as *network orchestrators*, facilitating collaboration among public and private partners who retain substantial autonomy. This networked form of governance can generate flexibility and innovation, yet it requires strong relational management to prevent fragmentation.

A complementary framework is *collaborative governance* (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which highlights structured deliberation and joint problem-solving among stakeholders. In this model, coordination succeeds when institutions invest in dialogue, transparency, and mutual understanding of objectives. For example, integrated planning committees that bring together municipal authorities, security agencies, transport providers, and sport federations illustrate the collaborative governance principle. Empirical research in Olympic and Commonwealth Games contexts shows that such bodies enhance horizontal integration and facilitate crisis management through pre-established communication routines.

Another conceptual lens is the *institutional coordination mechanism* approach (Alexander, 1993; Peters, 2015), which classifies coordination tools as **structural**, **procedural**, or **relational**.

- **Structural mechanisms** include formal hierarchies, joint committees, and contractual arrangements that allocate authority and define reporting lines.
- **Procedural mechanisms** rely on standardized processes such as joint planning, shared databases, or harmonized decision protocols.
- **Relational mechanisms** depend on informal trust, leadership, and interpersonal networks that enable adaptive problem-solving.

Parent and Chappelet (2015) argue that effective governance in sport events requires the simultaneous activation of all three mechanisms: formal structures for clarity, procedures for predictability, and relationships for flexibility.

2. Coordination Challenges

Despite the theoretical sophistication of coordination models, practical implementation remains fraught with obstacles. The first challenge is institutional fragmentation. Large-scale sport events often involve overlapping jurisdictions and unclear boundaries of authority. Ministries, municipalities, federations, and private contractors may duplicate efforts or pursue incompatible objectives. The absence of a central integrative authority amplifies coordination costs and slows decision-making.

A second recurring issue is asymmetric power relations. International federations and global governing bodies, such as the IOC or FIFA, typically possess symbolic authority and contractual leverage over host governments. This imbalance can marginalize local stakeholders, undermining democratic accountability and the legitimacy of decisions (Parent & Séguin, 2007). Conversely, excessive political control can constrain operational autonomy, leading to bureaucratic rigidity. Achieving a balance between vertical accountability and horizontal flexibility remains a persistent dilemma.

A third challenge involves temporal misalignment. Institutional actors operate on different timelines: political institutions respond to electoral cycles; sponsors prioritize short-term visibility; organizing committees face immovable event deadlines. These temporal asymmetries can erode coordination if not managed through shared milestones and adaptive planning tools.

Communication breakdowns constitute another chronic obstacle. Inadequate information sharing between organizations generates operational inefficiencies and safety risks. Research on previous Olympic Games (Leopkey & Parent, 2011; Chappelet, 2021) reveals that failures in cross-agency communication often correlate with crises in logistics, security, or media management. Establishing interoperable communication systems and cultivating a culture of transparency are thus critical governance tasks.

Finally, cultural and normative diversity complicates coordination. Institutions bring different values, organizational cultures, and accountability standards to the table. Reconciling the procedural rationality of government bureaucracies with the performance orientation of sport federations or the profit motives of private partners demands intercultural competence and adaptive leadership (Parent, 2015). Successful coordination therefore hinges not only on institutional design but also on the interpersonal and cultural capacities of actors.

3.Toward Integrated Coordination

The literature suggests that coordination effectiveness depends on a combination of structural clarity and relational capacity. Structural arrangements provide stability and accountability, while relational trust ensures responsiveness and adaptability. Getz (2012) and Parent & Smith-Swan (2013) converge on the view that sustainable coordination requires hybrid governance: a central "hub" responsible for strategic integration, supported by semi-autonomous "spokes" delivering operational tasks. This hybrid form mirrors the event ecosystem itself — decentralized in execution but unified in purpose.

In conclusion, inter-institutional coordination represents the operational backbone of multi-level governance. Its success depends on the capacity of institutions to align goals, manage interdependencies, and sustain cooperation over time. The next section develops a conceptual framework that synthesizes these insights, identifying the enabling conditions that underpin successful governance in international sport events.

IV. Governance Dynamics in International Sport Events

The governance of international sport events operates within a fluid ecosystem where strategic oversight, operational delivery, and stakeholder legitimacy must coexist under high pressure and limited time. Unlike conventional public projects, sport events are temporary yet highly visible institutions that mobilize vast resources and public expectations. Their governance dynamics thus combine institutional complexity, temporal urgency, and political sensitivity, requiring constant negotiation among actors embedded at different levels and within divergent logics of action.

Parent and Chappelet (2015) emphasize that the governance of sport events is not a linear process but an evolving configuration of power relations and coordination practices. It unfolds across phases—bidding, planning, implementation, and legacy—each phase demanding different types of leadership, control, and collaboration. Understanding governance dynamics therefore entails examining how institutions interact, learn, and adapt over the event life cycle.

1. The Hybrid Governance Paradigm

Empirical studies of Olympic, World Cup, and continental sport events reveal a consistent pattern: the emergence of hybrid governance models. These models blend centralized strategic authority with decentralized operational autonomy. Central bodies (e.g., international federations or organizing committees) provide the strategic framework, define global standards, and ensure brand integrity, while decentralized entities (e.g., local authorities, delivery agencies, community partners) handle implementation and local engagement.

This hybrid form of governance allows for flexibility and contextual adaptation, but it also generates tensions between control and autonomy. Excessive centralization may stifle innovation and responsiveness; excessive decentralization risks inconsistency and fragmentation. The challenge is to design mechanisms that maintain strategic coherence without constraining operational creativity. Getz (2008) frames this balance as the core tension of event governance: integrating

multiple institutional logics into a unified but adaptable system of action.

2. Four Enabling Conditions for Effective Governance

Drawing from the preceding literature, four enabling conditions emerge as critical to ensuring successful governance and coordination in international sport events.

2.1. Role Clarity

Ambiguity in institutional roles is a major source of inefficiency and conflict. Clearly defined mandates, responsibilities, and decision rights are essential for coordination. Role clarity reduces duplication of effort, enhances accountability, and allows institutions to act autonomously within their defined domains. In the Olympic context, for instance, clear delineation between the International Olympic Committee (strategic authority) and the Local Organizing Committee (operational authority) is vital for seamless delivery (Leopkey & Parent, 2011). Role clarity is thus a structural foundation for trust and performance.

2.2 Structured Communication

Coordination depends on information flow. Structured communication channels—formalized reporting systems, shared information platforms, and regular inter-agency meetings—ensure that all actors remain aligned as circumstances evolve. Parent & Smith-Swan (2013) argue that structured communication converts informal collaboration into institutionalized practice, minimizing misunderstandings and enabling rapid response to crises. Digital communication tools and joint situation rooms, increasingly common in contemporary mega-events, institutionalize these exchanges and foster collective situational awareness.

2.3 Aligned Incentives

Institutional cooperation cannot rely solely on goodwill. Effective governance requires that the incentives of all stakeholders—political, economic, and symbolic—be aligned with shared outcomes. Misaligned incentives lead to opportunism, cost overruns, or reputational disputes. Aligning incentives involves contractual design, shared performance indicators, and transparent resource allocation. For example, linking public subsidies or sponsorship visibility to measurable legacy outcomes can reinforce collective commitment. As Getz (2012) notes, governance structures that integrate shared value creation are more resilient under pressure.

2.4 Adaptive Decision-Making

Finally, governance systems must remain adaptive. Sport events are exposed to uncertainty—economic fluctuations, security threats, pandemics, or technological disruptions. Rigid bureaucratic systems are ill-suited to such volatility. Adaptive decision-making involves flexibility in procedures, empowerment of operational units to make timely decisions, and learning mechanisms that allow institutions to adjust in real time. Parent and Chappelet (2021) describe this as *dynamic governance*, where the system evolves through feedback and experimentation. The ability to adapt without losing strategic alignment is a hallmark of governance maturity.

2.5 Interactions and Outcomes

These four conditions are interdependent. Role clarity provides the structural framework within which communication and decision-making occur; structured communication fosters mutual understanding that sustains incentive alignment; and aligned incentives motivate adaptive behavior within shared boundaries. Together, they enable what can be termed *coordinated autonomy*—a state in which institutions act independently yet coherently toward collective goals.

When these enabling conditions are absent, governance dysfunctions emerge. Lack of clarity breeds territorial disputes; weak communication amplifies coordination gaps; misaligned incentives fuel opportunism; and rigid decision-making hampers responsiveness. Conversely, when all four are institutionalized, governance becomes a strategic asset—enhancing efficiency, legitimacy, and the overall success of the event.

4.4 Linking Governance to Event Success

The success of international sport events depends not only on financial or sporting metrics but also on institutional performance—the capacity to manage complexity and deliver public value. As Getz (2008)

and Leopkey & Parent (2011) argue, governance quality directly affects both short-term outcomes (operational excellence, stakeholder satisfaction) and long-term legacies (trust, infrastructure use, policy learning). Multi-level governance and inter-institutional coordination are thus not merely administrative challenges but key determinants of sustainability and legitimacy in the global sport event system.

The conceptual framework proposed here (Figure 1, not shown) positions the four enabling conditions as mediators between governance structure and event success. This theoretical model invites empirical testing through comparative analyses of different event typologies, scales, and governance configurations. Ultimately, it advances the argument that governance is not a background variable—it is a central driver of how sport events generate value, legitimacy, and legacy.

V. Implications for Event Success and Managerial Practice

The governance and coordination mechanisms outlined above hold significant implications for both the success and sustainability of international sport events. While the literature often emphasizes tangible outcomes—attendance figures, financial performance, or media coverage—there is growing consensus that *institutional success* underpins all these indicators. Effective governance is thus a precondition for operational efficiency, stakeholder legitimacy, and legacy creation.

1. Strategic Implications for Policymakers and Governments

For governments, international sport events serve as vehicles for diplomacy, urban development, and nation branding. However, without coherent governance frameworks, these ambitions risk devolving into fragmented initiatives and political controversy. Policymakers must therefore institutionalize multi-level coordination platforms that integrate ministries, regional authorities, and municipal agencies into a unified planning and monitoring system.

Creating inter-ministerial committees or legacy commissions with cross-sectoral mandates can facilitate vertical integration and reduce redundancy. Moreover, embedding *legacy objectives*—such as sustainable infrastructure, community engagement, or gender inclusion—into contractual arrangements ensures that governance serves not only event delivery but also long-term societal impact. The case literature on London 2012 and Vancouver 2010 demonstrates how early alignment between central and local governments contributed to lasting urban and social outcomes (Parent & Chappelet, 2015).

Governments should also invest in **capacity building** for public officials engaged in sport event governance. Training in project management, network leadership, and collaborative decision-making enhances institutional resilience and reduces dependency on ad hoc committees or external consultants.

2. Operational Implications for Organizing Committees

Organizing Committees (OCs) operate as the nerve centers of event coordination, mediating between the mandates of international federations and the constraints of local institutions. The theoretical model proposed here suggests that OCs must actively cultivate the four enabling conditions of governance—role clarity, structured communication, aligned incentives, and adaptive decision-making—through both formal and informal instruments.

First, OCs should adopt clear governance charters defining decision rights, escalation protocols, and accountability matrices. This institutional clarity prevents duplication and promotes efficiency. Second, integrated information systems—digital dashboards, shared planning software, and transparent documentation—can facilitate structured communication and collective situational awareness. Third, aligned incentive systems may include performance-based funding, joint recognition programs, and transparent reward structures for partner institutions. Finally, OCs must institutionalize adaptive governance through learning loops: regular reviews, simulation exercises, and feedback mechanisms that enable rapid course correction.

These managerial practices not only enhance coordination but also build organizational memory, providing valuable lessons for future events. As Parent and Smith-Swan (2013) observe, one of the recurring weaknesses in sport event governance is the loss of institutional knowledge between cycles. Embedding learning processes within governance systems helps overcome this discontinuity and fosters a culture of reflexivity.

3. Implications for International Federations and Sponsors

International federations play a dual role: as regulators ensuring global standards and as strategic partners seeking consistent brand identity. Their governance influence can be both enabling and constraining. To avoid excessive centralization, federations should adopt subsidiarity principles, granting local partners autonomy in context-sensitive areas such as community outreach, cultural programming, and volunteer management. This not only enhances local ownership but also strengthens legitimacy among host populations.

For corporate sponsors and private partners, inter-institutional coordination provides a framework for responsible engagement. Transparent governance increases predictability and reduces reputational risk. Sponsors should thus align their objectives with event governance principles—supporting sustainability, integrity, and inclusiveness—rather than focusing solely on commercial exposure. As Getz (2012) suggests, the integration of corporate social responsibility into event governance constitutes an evolving frontier of partnership models.

4. Legacy and Learning

Ultimately, the quality of governance determines the legacy of sport events—not only in physical infrastructure but in institutional capacity, policy innovation, and civic trust. Events that institutionalize transparent and adaptive governance practices leave behind stronger administrative systems capable of managing future projects beyond sport. Conversely, poorly coordinated events can erode public confidence, deepen fiscal deficits, and generate governance fatigue.

Institutional learning represents a critical outcome of effective coordination. Governments and sport bodies that document, evaluate, and disseminate governance lessons create a virtuous cycle of improvement. Theoretical insights into multi-level governance thus have practical resonance: they inform not just the organization of sport events, but broader debates on public management, intergovernmental relations, and collaborative governance in complex systems.

VI. Conclusion

The governance and coordination of international sport events represent one of the most intricate and decisive aspects of their success. As demonstrated throughout this theoretical exploration, multi-level governance creates both opportunities and challenges: it allows for resource sharing, policy alignment, and collective learning, but it also introduces complexity, power asymmetries, and potential coordination failures.

Effective inter-institutional coordination is therefore not a by-product of event organization but a strategic necessity. It requires clear distribution of responsibilities, transparent decision-making, and the establishment of formal and informal mechanisms of collaboration among actors operating at different institutional levels. The literature shows that successful cases—such as the London 2012 Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup in Germany (2006)—relied on governance models that balanced centralized authority with participatory processes, allowing for flexibility, accountability, and stakeholder inclusion (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2013; Chappelet, 2018).

At a theoretical level, this article underscores that multi-level governance in sport events should be seen not as a fixed hierarchy but as a dynamic network of interdependent relationships shaped by negotiation and trust. The governance of mega and international sport events embodies a temporary but powerful laboratory of institutional interaction, where state, market, and civil society actors converge under the pressure of global visibility and temporal urgency.

Future research should further examine how these governance systems evolve across different political contexts, and how digital tools, sustainability

imperatives, and stakeholder expectations are reshaping coordination practices. Understanding these transformations is vital to ensure that international sport events not only achieve operational success but also generate lasting social, economic, and political legacies for host nations and communities.

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