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**Planning and Implementation of Event Leveraging Strategy:
China's Legacy Pledge for Motivating 300 Million People to be Involved in
Winter Sport**

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Highlights

1. Acting as a lever to the lever, building sport participation through hosting the Olympics leverages sport industry development and promotes a broad agenda of social and economic development.
2. A state-led leveraging exerts a significant influence on resource mobilisation, goal alignment, and cross-sector coordination.
3. The leveraging process is both propelled and confined by contextual features (political and cultural).
4. Leveraging becomes an indicator for measuring the success of the Games and is overly politicised and task oriented.
5. Sustainable participation pathways have not yet been carefully crafted.

Abstract

This paper examines China's planning and implementation of leveraging, using the Beijing 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, to achieve the winter sport participation legacy of 300 million people involved in winter sport. Drawing upon interviews and documentary data, the findings reveal that the planning of the leveraging programme, which was politically motivated, was a centralised and government-led bid to stimulate participation and consumption within China's winter sport industry and that it also served broader economic, social, and political state agendas. The main implementation pathway relied heavily on the existing structures for the provision of sport and education, and, due to a lack of state resources (facilities), support was sought from the private sector. The planning and the implementation of the programme was not a sequential process but an iterative one. Although the target of 300 million people involved in winter sport was reached almost one year before the Games, this study suggests that state interference to steer the direction and development of leveraging may have served as a double-edged sword: On the one hand, it provided much government-led impetus for goal-setting across sectors and departments, directing extensive cooperative efforts and resources towards leveraging. On the other hand, it may not have been the most sustainable approach for increasing participation, due to the overreliance on top-down implementation and short-term policy interventions. This research provides insights for future event hosts

regarding the embedding of participation leveraging goals in broader policy frameworks.

Keywords: China; socio-political contexts; event leveraging; Winter Olympics; sport participation; winter sport industry

Introduction

The use of sporting mega-events to enhance sport participation has a few precedents (e.g., the London 2012 Olympics) despite a lack of direct evidence that it is effective (Weed et al., 2015). A consensus exists among scholars that, unless events are embedded in a long-term development strategy, discernible sport participation impacts and legacies are unlikely (Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2018). Parallel to the growth in literature on mega-event legacies (Thomson et al., 2019), scholars have continued to advocate for event leverage thinking to generate a broad range of social and economic benefits for host communities (Chalip, 2004; Misener, McGillivray, McPherson, & Legg, 2015; O'Brien, 2006). This line of work has opened up new understanding concerning how to develop sport participation through sporting events hosting.

However, research on sporting mega-event legacy leveraging has tended to focus either on the strategic planning of leveraging (Chalip, 2006; Reis, de Sousa-Mast, & Gurgel, 2014) or on the implementation of leveraging and its outcomes (Hayday, Pappous, & Koutrou, 2017; Lovett, Bloyce, & Smith, 2020). Little is known of the relationship and interaction between planning and implementation. In addition, as research on event leveraging for sport participation emerges in western cultures, work examining the topic outside western contexts remains limited. Our study

addresses these knowledge gaps by focusing on a non-western case, the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games, in order to build a culturally informed understanding of event leverage.

Our investigation was prompted by a few notable features of the Beijing 2022 Games. First, China's bid documents stated a legacy goal to 'inspire at least 300 million people to take part in winter sports' (Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games Bid Committee, 2014, p. 7) through the '300 Million People Involved in Winter Sports' programme (hereafter referred to as 'the 300 Million Programme'). Although it resembles London 2012 in terms of proactive planning and sport participation goal setting (the goal of encouraging two million people to become more active by 2012; DCMS, 2008, p.3), the Beijing 2022 case is different in that the 300 million target to enhance the public's familiarity with winter sports was achieved in January 2021, as announced by the IOC (2021). This signifies a unique case of a sport participation legacy ambition (goal attainment) being fulfilled prior to the event (whereas the UK government abandoned its sport participation targets one year before the London 2012 Games; Bretherton, Piggin, & Bodet, 2016), prompting our investigation into the design and implementation of the leveraging plan.

In addition, the 300 million goal was an ambitious target when it was announced at the time of China's bidding for Olympic hosting rights, because winter sport participation levels in the host region (the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei Region) were low at that time: Only 7.4% of city residents (aged 16+ years) reported having participated in winter sports at least once, compared with 79% who had participated in sport generally in 2015–2016 (Dataway, 2017). Only approximately 200 ice-skating venues and 500 ski resorts existed across the country at the end of 2015 (GAS, 2016a). The limited resources available and the nature of winter sport participation (in terms of its heavy reliance on weather and facilities) posed further challenges to the leveraging effort, providing a noteworthy case for study.

Against this background, our study investigated planning and implementation for the leveraging of Beijing 2022 to enhance winter sport participation in China leading up to the Games. Focusing particularly on the 300 Million Programme, we explored rationales for the target set and identified the relevant systems, implementation structures, and provisions for improving winter sport participation. We also summarised key mechanisms used and challenges faced during the programme implementation.

Literature Review

In the past 20 years, the topic of sporting-mega-event legacies has received substantial research attention (Thomson et al., 2019). A group of scholars have argued that, for sustainable positive benefits to be generated from events, explicit strategic approaches must be embedded in the events to create opportunities and mobilise resources (Chalip, 2004, 2006; Miserner et al., 2015; O'Brien, 2006). The use of an event hosting opportunity to achieve broader social and economic outcomes by forming and implementing explicit strategies and tactics is termed event leverage. As explained by Chalip (2004), event leverage means 'activities which need to be undertaken around the event itself which seek to maximise the long-term benefit from events' (p. 228).

An increasing number of studies have examined event leveraging to achieve sport participation. Derom and Van Wynsberghe's (2015) investigation of a community cycling event in Flanders revealed that, despite the adoption of bottom-up leveraging strategies, financial limitations prevented tangible, long-term improvements in sport participation (e.g., infrastructure) and that effective leveraging required a high degree of cooperation among the various levels of government. The study of Reis et al. (2014) on the sport participation legacies of the Rio 2016 Olympics suggested a missed opportunity for sport participation legacy planning and management in Brazil

and highlighted the importance of leveraging to encourage and promote sport participation.

Moreover, Misener et al. (2015) provided a theoretical contribution to the study of event leveraging for sport participation when they examined the leveraging opportunities that parasport events provide to enhance community sport participation. The authors advanced a theoretical parasport leveraging framework to outline means for leveraging parasport events to achieve participation outcomes.

Essentially, event leveraging involves proactive identification of the potential positive impacts of event hosting as well as of strategic approaches for value creation and positive outcome generation (Morse, 2001). Such an approach therefore requires careful consideration of available resources and of general social and cultural conditions so that event-related activities can be carefully planned and ‘event leverageable assets’ capitalised on (Kellett, Hede, & Chalip, 2008, p. 103). Thus, to achieve successful leveraging, the importance of planning is apparent. However, the benefits of planning are arguably attainable only if a plan can be implemented in the first place (Lai, Li, & Feng, 2006). Mainstream policy and management literature has long warned of the dangers inherent in treating policy-making and implementation as separate (Lipsky, 1980). A more recent study advocated a non-linear and adaptable planning–implementation process (Braithwaite, Churruca, Long, Ellis, & Herkes, 2018). Factors that shape and influence implementation can be complex and multifaceted (Hudson, Hunter, & Peckham, 2019), and potential solutions vary according to context.

A few studies examining the challenges of event leveraging implementation have revealed that, at the local level, legacy creation is constrained by problems with the sustainability of and funding support for leveraging programmes (Misener et al., 2015), insufficient and/or unsustainable human and physical resources to support implementation (Taks et al, 2018), and lack of

advancement in sport provision (Lovett et al., 2020). So far, however, implementation challenges and issues behind leveraging have yet to be closely explored in an Asian context.

In summary, as the body of event leverage-related knowledge accumulates, with relevant studies expanding to other contexts such as non-mega sporting events (Ramchandani, Davies, Coleman, Shibli, & Bingham, 2015; Taks, Green, Misener, & Chalip, 2014), more empirical evidence is necessary (Chen & Misener, 2019), for example focusing on non-western contexts. Moreover, how even leveraging is planned and implemented through a nationwide effort in host countries remains unclear.

Our study, therefore, aims to address the aforementioned gaps by adopting an event leveraging model for building sport participation (Chalip, Green, Taks, & Misener, 2017). Although other event-leveraging frameworks are available, for example Taks et al.'s (2018) work focusing on a non-mega-event context, the model of Chalip et al. (2017) is considered to be suitable here, offering a holistic approach for a macro-level analysis of the leveraging process. The model defines the basic concepts relevant to event leverage and identifies core variables influencing the process of leveraging events to enhance sport participation, thus offering a structure that guides our investigation into how to plan participation leveraging (i.e., strategies and tactics) and how to make it happen (i.e., implementation).

Specifically, the model identifies three categories pertinent to event leverage: (a) *who* (relevant *entities*: event organisers, sport and non-sport organisations); (b) *what* (the resources necessary to enable leveraging, including the categories of physical-, human-, and knowledge-based resources); and (c) *contexts* (including culture, attitudes, and opinions) and *structures and systems* that affect the strategies and tactics employed for leveraging goals.

We are vigilant regarding the Western context in which the model was conceived and the fact that it has yet to be empirically applied in a sporting mega-event host country setting with vastly different political features and governance structure. Indeed, although China has significantly progressed on all-round reform since the adoption of a socialist market economy and the opening-up initiative in 1978, it continues to operate according to the principle of ‘allowing the market to play a basic role in allocating resources that are subject to state macro-control’ (Xi, 2014, p. 96). This guiding principle is prominent in the sector of sport (Zheng, Chen, Tan, & Houlihan, 2018). Therefore, the study adopts an awareness and appreciation of cultural and political differences for data analysis and interpretation.

Method

To explore how event leveraging for sport participation is planned and implemented in China, a qualitative research strategy is applied. This strategy is useful for understanding human experience and the meanings attached to experiences in general (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). More specifically, for obtaining insights into policy stakeholders’ decisions, values, motivations, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the leveraging of the Olympics to enhance sport participation.

Data collection

Two approaches were used for data collection: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. We began by reviewing a total of 29 policy and strategic documents relevant to the 2022 Games, which we retrieved from official governmental websites, specifically concerning plans for promoting and developing winter sports at both national and regional levels (the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei region). The materials for review were selected on the basis of their relevance to the research

context as well as the accessibility of relevant files. Strategic documents and reports published by the four relevant entities—the central government/representative sub-national governments, the Beijing Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (BOCOWG), the General Administration of Sport (GAS), and the Ministry of Education—identified by the model of Chalip et al. (2017)—were screened and analysed by the two Chinese- and English-speaking research members. This was done to obtain information on leveraging planning and implementation.

While the documents' contents were viewed as evidence (Prior, 2003), they were also used to complement the development of interview guides and to identify key organisations and governing departments involved in leveraging Beijing 2022 for winter sport participation. This led to a mapping exercise, with a list of 11 departments/organisations identified, from which potential interviewees were drawn (see Table 1). As part of a major, ongoing research project, this study presents findings gathered from the first phase of the project, which focused on how the 300 Million Programme was planned and implemented at the national level. In addition, representatives who were key stakeholders from the winter sport industry were included.

For the semi-structured interviews, a mixture of purposive sampling and snowballing approaches was adopted, which resulted in a total of 18 interviewees. Specifically, we commenced data collection by using a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that each organisation/department from the aforementioned list was fully represented, facilitating a diverse range of views. Next, a snowball sampling approach was incorporated whereby other stakeholders were invited for interviews on the basis of previous interviewees' recommendations. The interview recruitment process was terminated when data convergence and saturation were achieved.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

Guided by the leveraging model (Chalip et al., 2017), we developed a generic interview protocol with open-ended questions addressing leveraging goals, leveraging structures and systems, culture, attitudes, and opinions as well as resources. Drawing on literature and document reviews, the list of questions was then refined to customise it for the Beijing 2022 context, with a specific focus on policy formulation and implementation for the 300 Million Programme. Prior to each interview, the interview questions were revisited and revised to render them suitable for the functions of the organisation that the interviewee represented and the organisation's role in the 300 Million Programme. The personal background and experience of the interviewee were also taken into consideration.

Interviews were conducted in Chinese either face-to-face in public spaces or by telephone. The first few interviews were conducted between August and September in 2019, and the others took place between March and April in 2020. Interviews ranged from 30 mins to 125 mins in length and were recorded digitally with interviewees' consent. All interviews were transcribed. Further clarification was sought from the interviewees during data collection and analysis to ensure data accuracy.

Data analysis

Both documents and interview transcripts were subjected to repeated readings and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were engaged at the levels of semantic and latent focus (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2017) and were mainly coded physically by the two bilingual (Chinese- and English-speaking) research members. A preliminary list of recurrent and significant patterns was generated. This involved close reading of the data, using a code to tag each piece of relevance to the research aims and to the concept of event leveraging, sport participation legacy plans, key

activities involved in event leveraging, and implementation aspects included in the plans. The process was terminated when no new codes emerged.

Informed by the model of Chalip et al. (2017), codes corresponding to four categories (Goals, Structures, and Systems; Contexts; Resources; and Implementation) were sought, organised into candidate themes, and then subjected to a review and revision process. Thus, the process iterated between deductive and inductive processes in order to identify relevant categories and their associated themes. Two meta-themes were identified in relation to the planning and implementation of the 300 Million Programme. A leveraging structure (Figure 1) was constructed, and the key stakeholders working at the Department of Mass Sports (DMS) of the Winter Sports Management Centre of the GAS (WSMC) verified the accuracy of Figure 1.

Quotes cited in the paper were translated by the aforementioned research members, proofread by a native English speaker, and reviewed by the third author as an ‘outsider’. Multiple perspectives also allowed for triangulation (Tracy, 2010). A back-translation technique was employed to ensure linguistic consistency. Quality of data analysis was also sought by referring to Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p. 96) 15-point checklist, which was used as a guideline for checking areas in which the quality of thematic analysis might potentially fall short at each stage of analysis (i.e., transcription, coding, analysis, and written reports).

Results

In keeping with standard approaches to policy design and analysis (e.g., Carew-Reid, Prescott-Allen, Bass, & Dalal-Clayton, 2013), it is heuristically useful to breakdown the analysis by examining planning and implementation of the leveraging separately and sequentially. Each of those was then considered with reference to three aspects.

Leveraging planning: Nature of the task, goals, structures, and system

Nature of the task. As the staging of Beijing 2022 was politically motivated, so too was the delivery of the 300 Million Programme, with its success constituting one of the *indicators* (KPIs) for measuring the success of the Games (Respondent 4, MCD of the BOCOWG). Therefore, all parties (sport related and non sport related) took the initiative to embrace the task, as explained by a staff member of the DMS of the WSMC of the GAS (see Table 1 for abbreviated terms):

These words [to motivate 300 million people to participate in winter sports] from President Xi are the highest instructions from the top for the development of winter sports... This is a political task, a political responsibility, ... a systematic project, [and] a social project [i.e., the mobilisation of resources available in society], which relies on more than one department or institute (Respondent 11).

The political motivations of the 300 Million Programme influenced its planning and implementation in three ways. First, because the 300 Million Programme was defined as a '*political mission*' (Respondent 11), the programme was intended to be realised and ready for presentation at the time of the Games because this timing was considered optimal for gaining 'political credit' and limelight. Both interviews with the DMS of the WSMC and the GAS's policy document (2018) confirmed this.

Second, there was iterative planning and implementation. The planning underwent stages of progression, with multiple versions published after Beijing won the bid. Our document analysis revealed that multiple national-level policy decrees concerning the 300 Million Programme were issued from 2016 to 2019. While the early decrees were being implemented, more decrees were being promulgated to reinforce the implementation. Although these decrees built upon each other to

a certain extent, the onus was on relevant governmental departments to shoulder their own responsibilities. As such, the decrees were all prepared by different governmental departments. For instance, the Mass Sport Department of the GAS was responsible for the promulgation of *'the Plan for the Popularization of Mass Winter Sports (2016–2020)'* (GAS, 2016b), the Sport Economy Department was responsible for designing the *'Winter Sports Development Plan 2016–2025'* (National Development and Reform Commission, 2016), the Winter Sport Management Centre of the GAS spearheaded the *'Implementation Outline to "Inspire 300 Million People to Participate in Winter Sports" (2018–2022)'* (GAS, 2018), and the Ministry of Education was responsible for *'Guidance on Accelerating the Promotion of National Youth Winter Sports into Campus'* (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Third, the political motivations for the 300 Million Programme also meant that a top-down administrative approach within the Chinese government system could be effectively applied to achieve the programme goals. Consequently, national-level policy decrees on the 300 Million Programme were circulated, whereby the sub-national governments and relevant departments were required to enforce and implement the assigned tasks. As an example, Beijing has closely followed the national guidance on the implementation of the 300 Million Programme, demonstrating maximum cooperation/support in the pursuit of national targets (Beijing Municipality, 2016; Beijing Municipal Sports Bureau, 2020).

The reliance on the government system was well illustrated by a respondent's explanation of a policy document issued by the highest government authority (The State Council, 2019), which ensured that not only Beijing but all provincial and local governments across the country followed guidelines and implemented plans for the 300 Million Programme:

The promotion and implementation of the programme rely heavily on local governments... However, if local governments do not pay attention to the programme or if they consider the programme unimportant, it may be difficult to implement. But, because this document [The State Council, 2019] was issued jointly by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, it was directly distributed to the municipal and provincial governments; this document contains the guiding principles that governments at various levels stick to. As such, we are more likely to see local governments actively deliver the programme and be highly motivated in doing so (Respondent 13, DMS of the WSMC).

Goals. The 300 Million Programme was ultimately intended to fulfil the bid document's promise of 'motivating 300 million people to be involved in winter sport'. In the initial policy, the definition of the '300 million participants' target included both '*people directly involved in winter sports*' (such as athletes, coaches, referees, recreational participants, and students who participated in winter sport activities organised by schools) and '*people indirectly involved in winter sports*' (including audiences of winter sport events and related activities, participants in winter experiential activities,... and employees in the winter sport industry) (National Development and Reform Commission, 2016). However, this categorical definition was dropped in a key policy document issued two years later (GAS, 2018), and only the broad goal of 'motivating 300 million people to be *involved* in winter sport' was emphasised. A staff member from the DMS of the WSMC (the focal organisation for the implementation of the 300 Million Programme) explained that the target was not a 'rigid numeral concept' but a strategic indication for guiding the delivery of the programme.

The provinces have already adopted their own quotas; for instance, Beijing's is 8 million, and Hebei's is 30 million'... There would surely be numbers reported. However, the key consideration [for the implementation of the 300 Million Programme] was to accomplish the task at an appropriate pace and at the right timing. (Respondent 11)

Hence, the focus was on 'the quality and the scope of influence' rather than on the 'headcount' (Respondent 12). However, the wording of the target has changed more recently: 'Involved' was replaced with 'familiar with' (IOC, 2021) and 'engaged in' (BOCOWG, 2021). Interestingly, whilst the IOC (2021) announced early in 2021 that 'the vision of making 300 million Chinese people *familiar with* winter sports ... is already becoming a reality', the BOCOWG made the modest claim in the official Pre-Games Legacy Report published months later that 'encouraging 300 million Chinese people to *engage in* ice and snow sports is gradually coming true' (BOCOWG, 2021, p. 2). This supports the theory that the achievement of the 300 million target should be unveiled at the time of the Games for maximum political effect.

Moreover, strategic planning was used to link the 300 Million Programme with other non-sport-related state priorities, weaving a multifaceted Games-legacy tapestry. The 300 Million Programme was effectively employed as a lever not only for sport industry development but, more importantly, for broader economic, social, and political agendas—particularly the Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei Region Coordinated Development Plan for the region hosting the 2022 Olympic Games (the Bid book; Respondents 9, 12, 13, and 14). Notably, although the 300 Million Programme was introduced because of the successful Olympic bid, winter sport already had its place on the agendas of relevant national sport departments (e.g., the DSE, the DMS, and the DYS of the GAS) before the bid: Winter sport constituted part of the national strategy for seeking 'new sources of economic growth', as confirmed by respondents from both the BOCOWG and the WSMC of the GAS

(Respondents 3 and 12). Winning the right to host the 2022 Olympic Winter Games nevertheless rendered the development of winter sport a ‘key task’, penetrating other strategic areas (e.g., economy, education, health, tourism, culture, and social development), and the development of winter sport was therefore supported by more resources from those areas (Respondents 6, 7 and 15).

Furthermore, children and young people (aged 6–18 years) were strategically targeted as the primary group for the 300 Million Programme (Ministry of Education, 2018). As a respondent from the DYS of the GAS explained, this young demographic was considered to represent the ‘three foundations’ of sport, ‘the foundations of mass sport, elite sport, and the sport industry’. Moreover, it was accessible through the education system (Respondents 9 and 14). Children and young people were also the target of other national sport and fitness strategies (i.e., the National Fitness Plan and the 13th Five-Year Plan for Sport Development). Respondent 17 from the China Winter Sport Industry Alliance commented that, in his personal experience, targeting young people was an effective marketing strategy because *‘when the kids went skiing, the parents would go as well, meaning that the entire family would participate’*.

Structures and system. Figure 1 outlines the leveraging structure entailing five core leveraging entities (shaded in grey). These are national governmental departments or affiliates of government agencies (i.e., the GAS, the Ministry of Education, and WSMC), the event organiser (i.e., BOCOWG), and the legacy organisation of Beijing 2008 (i.e., Beijing BODA). Figure 1 also maps the other entities (both at the national and sub-national levels) involved in the planning and implementation of the 300 Million Programme and the leveraging relationships (in the forms of partnership collaborations or administrative affiliations, linked by dashed or solid lines).

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

At the national level, various national ministries provided direct or indirect support (using provincial and local subsidiaries) for the implementation of the 300 Million Programme. The GAS and the Ministry of Education were at the core of the leveraging structure.

The DMS of the WSMC (an administrative subsidiary of the GAS, which manages development for both elite and mass winter sports in China) was the key leveraging organ traditionally responsible for promoting winter sport participation. Although it was not created specifically for the 2022 Games, the department's responsibilities have been realigned to focus *solely* on the 300 Million Programme. Respondent 12 from the DMS of the WSMC described a major reshuffle of department personnel, which included the appointment of a new departmental head and of a staff member—carefully selected from the GAS crew—charged with coordinating the implementation of the 300 Million Programme.

Within the GAS, the DMS, DYS, and DSE were heavily involved in the 300 Million Programme. They prioritised winter sport development in their respective purviews through the formulation of policies, the provision of guidance, the development of initiatives, and the allocation of financial resources. Within the Ministry of Education, the DPHAE played a major role in facilitating winter sport participation in school settings because children and young people were the key target group (as previously mentioned).

As the event organiser of the Games, the BOCOWG played a supportive role in improving winter sport participation. In addition to organising sport competition and venue development for the Games, the BOCOWG also contributed to fostering a winter sport culture in the host city and country, educating young people on winter sports, and cultivating public support for and awareness of the Games through its related functional areas.

At the sub-national level, local governments, their sports bureaus (mainly the youth sport, sport industry, and mass [adult] sport divisions as well as winter sport management centres/associations that existed), education bureaus, and the schools under the bureaus' administration formulated and implemented plans adapted for local conditions in accordance with direction and guidance from national counterparts. Because winter sport was relatively undeveloped prior to winning the bid, many provincial and municipal bureaus of sports set up dedicated winter *sport centres/associations* (e.g., Beijing, Hubei, Sichuan, Xinjiang, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Gansu) to manage winter sport development activities at the local level, with some of these activities related to the 300 Million Programme.

At the bottom of Figure 1, non-governmental actors—winter sports businesses such as ice rinks, ski resorts, winter sport training enterprise—are shown to support the delivery of winter sport participation activities by acting as primary providers of relevant products and services (winter sport venues, training sessions, and courses).

<Insert Table 1 about here>

Leveraging implementation: Pathway, constraints and mitigated approaches, and sustainability concerns

Implementation pathway. The leveraging structure of the 300 Million Programme rested upon China's existing policy system. It was therefore relatively easy to insert winter sport into relevant individual departments' existing agendas. Respondent 6 from the DMS of the GAS elaborated that a basic cross-departmental-collaboration foundation was pre-established to facilitate consensus across national governmental departments regarding the National Fitness Programme and mass sport participation agenda. In addition, as cross-confirmed by three staff members from the

BOCOWG (Respondents 3, 4, and 5), several cross-organisation liaison working groups for Olympic education, the Games legacy, and cultural activities were established. These also facilitated the implementation of the 300 Million Programme.

Implementation was enforced through administrative lines from the national level to the local level. The respective system, as well as the political motivations for the 300 Million Programme, is typical of China's authoritarian political regime and bureaucratic system. A respondent from the MCD of the BOCOWG deemed the system of implementation for the 300 Million Programme to be an advantage of the Chinese context and described its role as a guiding principle in the organisation of the Beijing 2022 Games:

The central government's plan was clear at the time the BOCOWG was created. We shall rely on the existing system to organise the Games. We have to follow the 2020 Agenda to be frugal and sustainable. We cannot do the 2022 Games by investing everything without cost control as we did in 2008. We shall use all the channels and resources we can. This is about relying on the existing system. This is also the distinctive advantage of the Chinese system in hosting mega-events (Respondent 4).

Overall, the leveraging implementation pathway was described as being heavily reliant on the sports and education systems (as shown in Figure 1). Notably, the education system was considered more efficient than the sports system because it was relatively more '*structured*' in terms of its regulated administrative system and funding support system. This was explained by a respondent formerly working at the DSE of the GAS:

The sports system has no vertical administrative system between the national level and the community level (except in the cases of a few sports schools affiliated with local sport

bureaus in the north-east that offered winter sport sessions and courses). On the other hand, schools are all well connected within the education system so that ‘what happens at the top level can be transmitted downwards to exert effects at the local level’ (Respondent 9).

In addition, a respondent from the DMS of the WSMC cited the mobilisation of available sources from both inside and outside of the government system— rather than heavy reliance on the government—as being the key implementation strategy used to secure resources for winter sport participation. Two main explanations exist for winter sports enterprises’ extensive involvement in the implementation process. First, their involvement was consistent with the broad policy strategy to shift from a government-centric approach to a government-guided approach and to thereby maximise national and local resources for sport development (Respondents 9, 11, and 15). More importantly, in practical terms, the implementation of the 300 Million Programme necessarily relied on the private sector because ‘almost all of the ice and snow facilities [were] privately owned and operated’ (Respondent 18). In terms of the governance mode, a collaborative and incentive-based approach was adopted for winter sport development as further explained by Respondent 18:

In order to increase participation [for the 300 Million Programme], the so-called ‘government purchasing strategy for services’ method was used. Public schools would purchase services from the nearby rinks/ski sites for their students to learn skating/skiing... A few years ago, the Beijing Sport Bureau wanted to develop their own elite skaters to represent Beijing for national and international competitions, but they lacked three key things: first, ice rinks, second, athletes, and, third, coaches. Cultivating athletes takes time.... so they paid us to do it.

Implementation constraints and mitigated approaches. The lack of personnel resources, high facility operation costs, and poorly established winter sport culture were the main constraints on winter sport participation development that surfaced from the data. Specifically, a shortage of winter sport coaches and instructors with appropriate skills was noted. To mitigate this issue, two main ‘quick-fix’ approaches were adopted by winter sport businesses: One was to recruit retired professional winter sport athletes or to attract north-easterners with winter sport skills to Beijing and other economically developed southern cities as coaches and personal trainers. Simultaneously, large commercial ice rinks, ski resorts, and winter sport training businesses selected, from among their own ranks, coaches with transferable skill sets such as gymnastics, dancing, and roller skating and provided them with internal training sessions to become entry-level winter sport coaches. Other approaches, such as the training of winter sport coaches and instructors through the education system that offered winter sport-related degree programmes in universities and colleges, constituted a slow remedy and failed to address immediate needs. Winter sport training sessions for PE teachers in selected elementary and secondary schools nationwide might not have yielded winter sport teachers of adequate competence.

In relation to winter sport facilities, by the end of 2019, 876 ice rinks (Xinhuanet, 2020) and 770 ski resorts already existed (Wu, 2020). However, the long-term financial viability of operating these winter sport facilities was doubtful. This was partly because the promised treasure-based policy tools (e.g., tax remission and loans), which were purported to attract business investment in winter sport for programme implementation, were rarely delivered in reality. Respondent 18 revealed that:

At the time Beijing won the bid in 2015, Premier Li Keqiang announced that the electricity prices at snow and ice facilities should not be higher than the industrial rate. We thought this

would be a great policy as we all paid the commercial rate, which was twice the industrial rate. An ice rink typically uses more than 1 million units of electricity each year. That means ¥1.2 million RMB (\$185, 913) in electricity spending alone. If the industrial rate was applied, it would save us more than half a million. But after so many years, I didn't hear of one rink getting the industrial rate.

Furthermore, a key implementation barrier acknowledged was the lack of cultural values and beliefs in relation to winter sports amongst members of the general public. A consensus existed amongst key stakeholders that winter sport in China exhibited a '*weak*' foundation and was '*barely established*' (Respondent 11), which created another challenge for the 300 Million Programme. In contrast to other types of sport participation (e.g., summer Olympic sports), a '*technical threshold*' was associated with winter sports participation (Respondents 16, 17, and 18) such as skiing and skating. As Respondent 11 noted, participation was constrained because of a perceived competence gap:

Even if you have never played badminton or table tennis, you can swing the racket and have a go. Winter sport is different. If you don't know how to play, you simply cannot play, and playing without appropriate training and preparation is potentially risky.

Moreover, a cultural and folk phenomenon with Chinese characteristics—*mao dong* 'the cat in winter', meaning 'staying at home during winter', which is widespread in the north of China—further prohibited winter sport participation, as illustrated by Respondent 17:

Particularly for northerners, there has been a long tradition of staying indoors for the entire winter... *mao dong*... [so it is important to] promote playing outside during

winter; they don't have to ski... It can be something as simple as having fun playing in the snow... [We are working on] trying to encourage them to come out of their houses in winter first. Then, we can talk to them about participating in winter sports..

Therefore, the focus of the leveraging efforts has been on changing residents' opinions and attitudes towards winter sport through four primary strategies: (1) raising basic understanding of winter sport through the publication of textbooks (mainly targeting primary and middle-school students) and general literature edited by the BOCOWG or other institutions (e.g., the higher education sector); (2) organising festival activities and fun sport-related games and contests (e.g., the Winter Sport Culture Festival, the Snow Carnival, and the Future Star Winter Sunshine Sports Games); (3) promoting winter sport culture in existing sporting and non-sporting programmes and initiatives delivered by various administrative bodies (e.g., the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Communist Youth League, the Central Civilisation Office); and (4) utilising both official media and other social media platforms to raise awareness of winter sport.

In particular, in promoting winter sport participation, the role of media was considered important to help foster positive attitudes towards and interest in winter sport among members of the general public. In the study, sports industry stakeholders considered that media publicity for the 300 Million Programme and for winter sport was the most positive effect of Beijing 2022 (on winter sport participation). Respondent 16 elaborated:

[The media] has sent a very positive message promoting winter sport participation among young people... [Since the Beijing 2022 bid], the media commentary has shifted... They no longer overemphasise the risks of skiing. This is profoundly meaningful and has helped to change the entire market. I have personally noticed that many of my friends have taken their

children skiing since then... The most important benefit of the Winter Olympics and the policies subsequently issued is that they changed public opinion on winter sports. Many individuals, as well as state schools, used to be very resistant because they thought winter sports were too dangerous.

Sustainability concerns. Although the securing of the Beijing 2022 hosting rights and the delivery of the 300 Million Programme spurred public interest in winter sport, long-term planning and the building of pathways for sustainable winter sport participation continued to be lacking. Most policy documents and strategies reviewed in this study were relevant only until 2022. When questioned on long-term plans for utilising facilities and the sustainability of participation programmes/initiatives, respondents from the government organisations generally provided vague answers, reflecting a lack of initiative and long-term strategic thinking.

I can't answer this question... There are no definite answers to the question yet. [I] will ask the leaders to see what they think about what to do after 2022. At the moment, we have only one goal: to motivate 300 million people to be involved in winter sports (Respondent 12).

Notably, several policy documents called for schools, organisations, and companies to organise winter sport participation among their own students and employees (GAS, 2016a, 2018). At the local level, such policy propaganda translated into schools and state-owned organisations being encouraged to pay for their students' and employees' one-off winter-sport taster sessions, supported by governmental funding. Consequently, a certain proportion of participation was generated through an external push rather than being intrinsically driven; thus, the probability that

the participants continue to engage in winter sport is questionable. This was confirmed by

Respondent 17:

The problem is a low conversion rate. [Of the participants,] 70% to 80% were one-time only skiers. Even if the government paid to cultivate the market, the means to retain these one-off participants became a thorny issue, for both skiing and skating.

The same respondent also revealed that this dynamic, whereby '*the government paid to cultivate the market*', was ground-breaking in the field of sport:

Except skiing and skating, no other sports had this privilege... All the way down to the district government, including the education bureaus, the local governments (mainly in the host region) provided subsidiaries to arrange for primary school students to have at least one skiing class each semester.

Therefore, although the aforementioned policy incentives (e.g., tax remission) to jumpstart winter sport businesses, the cultivation of the market, and the stimulation of public interest in winter sport by overwhelming media coverage all contributed to short- and medium-term growth for winter sports, major concerns existed regarding the short-lived nature of excitement around winter sport and the lack of sustainable mechanisms to 'convert' one-off winter sport participation to regular, active winter sport participation (Respondents 16, 17, and 18). Respondent 16 explained:

In response to the call of the central government, local governments provided policies to support the winter sport industry. Some enterprises rushed in to grab the Winter Olympics dividend. Their decisions were not based on the sustainable development of

the market... In fact, more than 70% of the ski resorts in China were very basic with low construction standards. Their products and services simply could not meet the needs of consumers.

As revealed by the interviewed industry stakeholders, ski resorts for one-off tourism-like experiences ^[1], despite being potentially capable of serving customers who were new to winter sport and *'just wanted to have an experience, take photos, and play with snow'*, were *'rudimentary, basic, ... and sometimes even underequipped for winter service vehicles'* (Respondent 17). As commented by Respondent 16, *'many of these ski resorts will be phased out ... in the post Beijing 2022 era'*. This raises more questions regarding sustainability.

Discussion

The target of motivating 300 million people to be involved in winter sport was not equivalent to 300 million winter sport participants. Our data analysis highlighted that the interpretation of the target was fluid and evolving. Later in the delivery process, the 300 million figure was used as a slogan to greatly accelerate winter sport development rather than as a mere hard target to assess the effectiveness of the 300 Million Programme (though the completion of the Programme, as measured through the fulfilment of various criteria, will nonetheless be reported as part of the Games' legacy evaluation in the post-Games era). As a political mission, the target was proposed (vaguely) by top political figures, and its ambiguity allowed for flexible interpretations to construct more achievable performance measures (Jing, Cui, & Li, 2015). Nonetheless, as revealed by this study, the measures were downplayed in the implementation process to garner more leveraging benefits. This was not surprising for China. Previously, ministries sometimes exerted

decisive tactical influence when ‘implementing the sometimes ambiguous national policy goals set by top leaders’ (Lawrence & Martin, 2013, p. 30). In addition, another factor that requires consideration when explaining the apparent achievement of 300 million target is that, as already mentioned, the participation in winter sports in China was historically relatively low in comparison with that for summer sports. Hence, when resources became available, and public interest was stimulated, participation increase was likely because winter sport participation had not yet reached ‘saturation’.

In terms of both its nature and functionality, the 300 Million Programme was somewhat special. It fulfilled the promise from China's Winter Olympics hosting bid, supported national strategic development (particularly in the sport industry), and, consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2019), contributed to regional economic and social development. With a clear goal established and alternative strategies for its achievement explored and outlined (Carley, 1980), the 300 Million Programme appeared to feature a mixture of rational and incremental models in its planning and decision-making process (Etzioni, 1967): On the one hand, the decision and pledge to leverage Beijing 2022 for sport participation was less technical and more political; on the other hand, it was carefully planned and applied through various key state projects to maximise outcomes.

For Beijing 2022, the Chinese government adopted a prominent lead role in establishing a leveraging structure and system, with plans developed comprehensively and collaboratively by national and local governments and by various national governmental departments. Although collaboration between governing bodies and organisations exerted positive effects in terms of shared strategic vision and strategic planning on other occasions (Bell & Gallimore, 2015; Chalip, 2004; O’Brien, 2006), collaborative leveraging appeared to be overly politicised and task-oriented in our case. The character of the leveraging alliance (Beesley & Chalip, 2011; Kellett et al., 2008)

that was established by and benefited from various pre-existing coordination groups had both advantages and disadvantages. Its advantages included the ability of stakeholder groups to collaborate for a ‘superordinate goal’ (Chalip et al., 2017, p. 264) and a relatively strong sense of ownership and accountability for leveraging. This represents one strength of a state-led approach that enables synergistic leveraging (O’Brien, 2006). The disadvantages of collaborative leveraging were reflected in the lack of initiative, creativity, and long-term strategic planning among some of the partner groups involved, and these shortcomings were detrimental to legacy sustainability. Nevertheless, the structure in question has enabled platforms to share leveraging goals and achieve co-implementation (Task et al., 2018).

For the delivery of the 300 Million Programme, the DMS of the WSMC (see Table 1 for abbreviated terms) was the closest equivalent to an ‘advocated organ for facilitating leverage’ that existed (Chalip & Scott, 2005; Misener et al., 2015). The national education system was the primary implementation pathway for the enhancement of winter sport participation among young people, featuring thousands of ‘landing’ points (i.e., schools) in cities and villages and providing direct communication channels and financial resources. Other studies have recognised schools as an important entity possessing ‘significant reach and contact with the participant market’ (Chalip et al., 2017, p. 267). Some research (cf. Taks et al., 2018) has noted local sport clubs’ lack of engagement in leveraging efforts, albeit for different reasons. In the case of Beijing 2022, the minimal involvement of local sport clubs related to the distinctive features of the Chinese sport development system, whereby entry-level sport participation, particularly in winter sports, occurs mainly through either schools or enterprises.

In terms of resources, Beijing 2022 was a somewhat unusual case in the sense that winter sport participation leveraging activities were delivered at a time when participation infrastructures

were under construction, coaching personnel were being trained, and other officials and administrators were being recruited. Thus, although one can argue that necessary preconditions should exist for participation to be expanded in terms of the capacity to enrol and serve new participants (Taks et al., 2018), China has been attempting to ‘catch up’ and to overcome these shortages with a state leveraging effort through the so-called ‘government purchasing strategy for services’ governance mode. This has created immediate market opportunities for winter sport businesses.

Implementation of the 300 Million Programme received substantial support from the winter sport industry, which possessed most of the winter sports facilities that existed prior to the bid and also continued to invest in new ice rinks and ski resorts after 2016. Although no in-depth examination has been conducted on the rationales for engaging with winter sport-related services or building ski resorts, these actions were likely prompted by financial subsidies and other incentives (Cordes, 2002), resulting in sustainability concerns (Henstra, 2016) both in terms of participation behaviour and facility management.

The implementation of the 300 Million Programme was found to be subject to various problems. Some constraints were triggered by lag in personnel and facility development. Other constraints to the implementation process were procedural in nature, in the sense that established or—as in our case—unestablished patterns of beliefs in winter sport were an obstacle (Chalip et al., 2017; Yee, 1996). Therefore, extensive leveraging efforts were devoted to enhancing winter sport culture and changing people’s perceptions of winter sports. To inspire interest in winter sport participation, ceremonies and festivals (i.e., so-called celebration events; Chalip, 2004) were favourable tools for inciting interest in winter sport participation to promote winter culture and winter sport, echoing the suggestion of Chalip et al. (2017). The media’s role, as ‘a significant

shaper of cultural values and beliefs' (Chalip et al., 2017, p. 262), was also confirmed in our study. Specific to the Chinese context, support from media and communities was relatively easy to obtain due to state macro-level control. In the political sphere, few lobbying efforts were required to encourage local-level engagement with the 300 Million Programme.

Overall, findings suggest that strategically leveraging an event to build sport participation may be possible if central and local-level challenges are addressed and coordinated. This is consistent with theoretical assertions (e.g., Chalip et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the necessary processes for a sustainable outcome need to be better understood. In the Chinese case, a comprehensive framework for a sustainable winter sport participation legacy remains to be fully developed. Many support mechanisms (e.g., project subsidies, one-off taster sessions) have provided little long-term value for capacity building, particularly in relation to the development of the social networks, knowledge, and skills required for participation (Girginov & Hill, 2008). Nevertheless, a strong implementation intention and political motivations (Webb & Sheeran, 2007) have promoted and contributed to the attainment of the 300 million goal.

Conclusion

To examine the planning and implementation involved in leveraging the Beijing 2022 Games for winter sport participation, this study embraced a contextualised understanding of reality (Henry, 2007) through the application of qualitative research approaches. The planning for the 300 Million Programme was largely centralised, initiated, and led by the government. Evidence also indicates strategic planning and customisation to China's political and social features. The findings of the study thus expand our understanding of the motivations for and planning of event leveraging in a new political context.

From a cultural perspective, a historical lack of winter sport participation in China was perceived, in this study, as a major obstacle impacting leveraging efforts. To overcome such challenges, various media were extensively used to raise public awareness and foster favourable opinions of winter sport leading up to the Games. This has been particularly effective in addressing people's concerns regarding the safety in winter sports participation. The empirical finding thus confirms the observations of Chalip et al. (2017) and their call for the strategic use of media not only in event leveraging for longer-term economic and destination-branding benefits (Chalip, 2004) but also for sport participation.

The fulfilment of politically motivated targets regarding sport-participation leveraging from a mega event does not guarantee sustained participation behaviour. More policies are likely to be introduced to enhance the sustainability of the participation legacy during and after Beijing 2022. Follow-up investigation is merited. Future research is also recommended to investigate the long-term effects of the 300 Million Programme on the winter sport industry and how Beijing 2022 is used for leveraging by the winter sport industry. To expand on this national-level research, future studies on cases of leveraging are advised to explore leveraging strategies and tactics developed by sub-national governments (in both hosting and non-hosting cities) and to demonstrate contextual sensitivity.

Note

1. According to the 2019 China Ski Industry White Book, ski resorts can be divided into three categories according to their core visitors: one-off tourism-like experience ski resorts, day-trip ski resorts (with no lodging options), and destination ski resorts (with all the amenities

and services nearby). The proportions for these three categories in 2019 were 77%, 20%, and 3% respectively.

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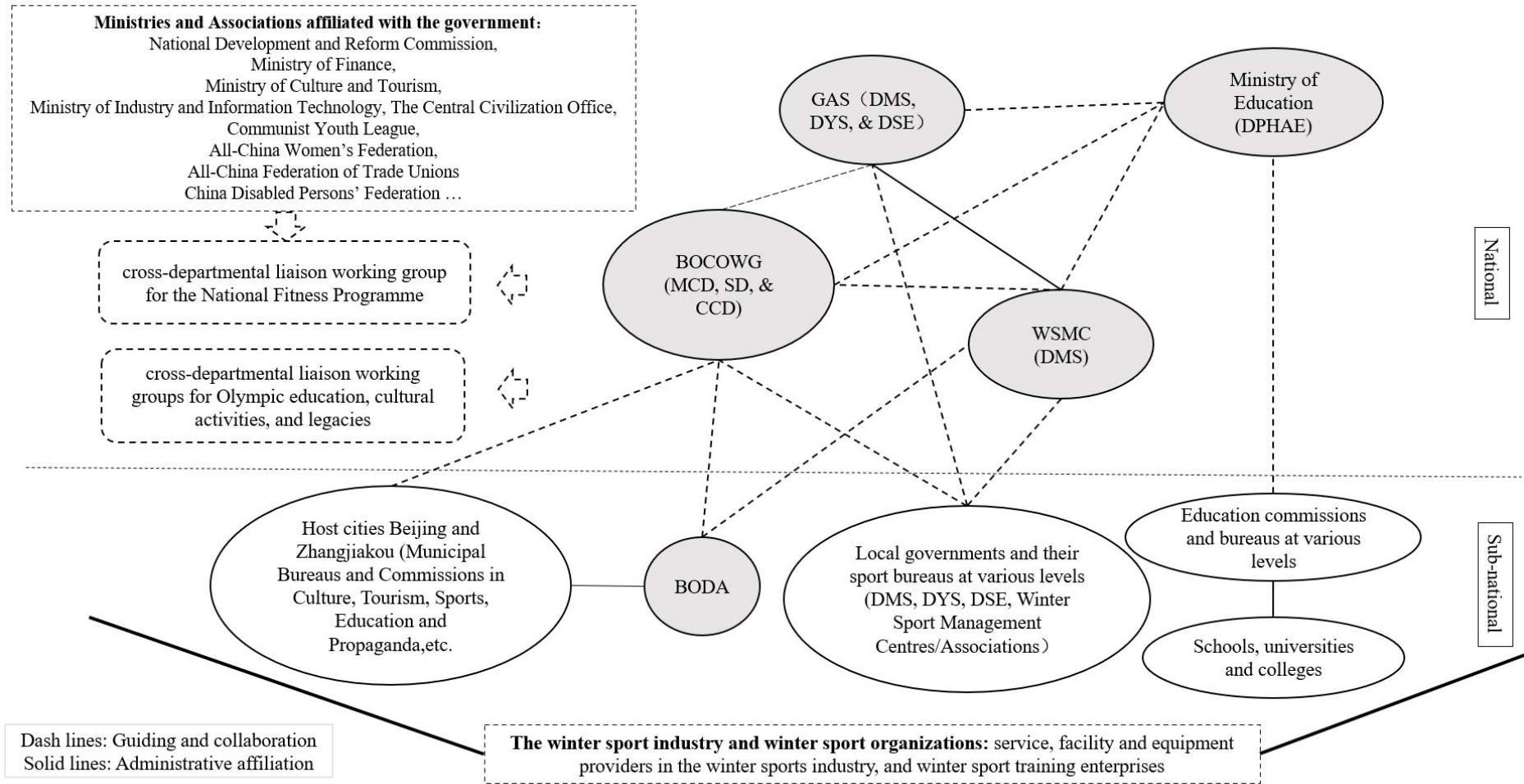
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1 **Table 1. Glossary of abbreviated terms of organisations/departments and from which the Interviewees were drawn**

Interviewees	Abbreviated Term	Full Names of Organisations/Departments
Respondent 1	Beijing BODA	Beijing Olympic City Development Association
	BOCOWG	Beijing Organising Committee for the 2022 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games
Respondent 3	CCD of the BOCOWG	Culture and Ceremonies Department of the BOCOWG
Respondent 4	MCD of the BOCOWG	Media and Communications Department of the BOCOWG
Respondent 2	SD of the BOCOWG	Sports Department of the BOCOWG
Respondent 5	GPD of the BOCOWG	General Planning Department of the BOCOWG
	GAS	General Administration of Sport
Respondent 6	DMS of the GAS	Department of Mass Sports of the GAS
Respondent 9	DSE of GAS	Department of Sports Economy of the GAS
Respondent 10	DYS of the GAS	Department of Youth Sports of the GAS
Respondents 7 and 8	DPR of the GAS	Department of Policy and Regulations of the GAS
	WSMC of the GAS	Winter Sports Management Centre of the GAS
Respondents 11-13	DMS of the WSMC of the GAS	Department of Mass Sports of the WSMC of the GAS
Respondent 14 and 15	DPHAЕ of the ME	Department of Physical, Health and Arts Education of the Ministry of Education
Respondent 16		A national ski resort development and management company
Respondent 17		Ski resort consultancy/China Winter Sport Industry Alliance
Respondent 18		A national commercial ice-rink operator and ice sport training institution /Beijing Skating Association

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Central Government (State Council)



7 Organization names are in abbreviation and noted in Table 1.

8

9 **Figure 1. Winter sport participation leveraging structure** (Organization names are in abbreviation and noted in Table 1).

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