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Organizational Learning from Sport Major-Events: The Case of the Asian Men's Handball Qualification for Paris 2024 Olympic Games

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ABSTRACT

Studies on sports event management have focused on how host residents perceive the event and its impacts, but very little is still known about how such experiences can facilitate organizational learning (OL) in host sports organizations. The study explores the potential of major sports events to generate human and social capital amongst the public and the ensuing process of OL for host sports organizations. Using the 2023 Asian Men's Handball Qualification for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games held in Qatar, a mixed-method concurrent nested design was employed, collecting quantitative (survey questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) data from event attendees and event managers, respectively. The interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge, as well as individual and collective learning, stimulated a combination of low levels of organizational formalization and specialization and individual (i.e., tacit) knowledge, which has resulted in an 'operational adhocracy' form of OL in sports organizations dominated by embracing knowledge.

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1. Introduction

Major sports events present unparalleled opportunities for organizational learning (OL) because they involve long-term planning, research, and implementation and bring together multiple stakeholders. The liminal nature of sports major events creates a context where individual and group experiences can be lived uniquely. Most of the previous studies in sport event management have focused on how host residents perceive the event and its impacts (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2009; Rocha, 2020), thus, we know very little about how such experiences can facilitate

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OL in host sport organizations. The current study explores the context of the Asian Men's Handball Qualification for Paris 2024 Olympic Games, hosted in Doha, Qatar in October 2023. The event was organized by the Qatar Handball Federation (QHF) in partnership with the Asian Handball Federation (AHF). Expectations around sports events hosted in the Middle East have been high (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018; Khalifa, 2020), but those expectations rarely include what sport organizations can learn from the events. The present study addresses this gap by integrating three sets of literature to answer the question of how organizations use sport events for the production, ordering and storing of knowledge. In doing so, the study explores the potential of sports major events to generate human and social capital amongst the public and the ensuing process of organizational learning (OL) for host sports organizations. Host country's sport organizations are privileged beneficiaries of any major event because they are directly involved in the bidding, planning, and delivery of the event, enjoying unique learning opportunities (Girginov et al., 2015).

This paper proceeds as follows: first, the literature review presents the study theoretical bricolage; second, the methodology is described; third, empirical findings from attendees' experiences and event managers are presented, and finally, the implications for OL for both the QHF and the AHF are discussed.

2. Literature Review

This section introduces the theoretical bricolage used to tackle the complexity of OL as the phenomena under investigation. As Kincheloe (2005, p.323) elucidates, 'Focusing on webs of relationships instead of simply things-in-themselves, the bricoleur constructs the object of study in a more complex framework. In this process, attention is directed toward processes, relationships, and interconnections among phenomena'. Getz (2012) also maintains that event knowledge creation can be achieved through interdisciplinary approaches, but OL was not part of his framework for understanding and creating knowledge. The three theoretical lenses employed include event studies, which see the sport tournament as the site of knowledge production, social and human capital and its potential to generate social value and to serve as an external knowledge acquisition mechanism, and OL, which helps unpack the ontological and epistemological dimensions of knowledge.

2.1. Sport Major Events as Knowledge Generators

In his analysis of major events and social change, Roche (2017) noted the collective agency exemplified in these events to reflect and retract the social context of their time. He elaborated on three major contextual changes with significant implications for knowledge generation and learning. The first change concerns the qualitative transformations in event mediation, meaning that these events have become much more accessible to mass public participation. This first contextual feature suggests that with mass participation comes greater interactions between events' organizers and the public, and thus the ability to generate, store, collect and share more information as well as to acquire new knowledge. The second change involves understanding the ideological framing and content of event messages. The ideological imperative of sustainability,

inspired by the UN Sustainable Development Goals shapes both the structure and content of knowledge and OL. The third change reflects events' shifting geography. During the twentieth century, those events tended to be a privilege of the Western developed countries, but recently they have increasingly been hosted by non-Western countries. Qatar is one such country which actively seeks to host major events, providing a very different cultural context for the delivery of events and the OL that takes place. Qatar's culture is defined by the Arabic language and Islam, which unites the thinking, values and behaviors of Arab people (Najm, 2015). Thus, local sport organizations will display unique characteristics and behaviors which may not be consistent with similar organizations in the West. One such characteristic is the hierarchical structure of society and its institutions, which impacts OL and decision-making. These three general characteristics of major events provide the broader background for understanding their potential to serve as knowledge generators, as discussed below.

Handelman's interpretation of planned public events is pertinent to the present study. He conceptualized the mandate of those events as to engage in the ordering of ideas, people and objects. For Handelman, planned public events represent concentrations of symbols and locations of communications that convey participants into versions of social order. He identified three types of public events, which help us understand their role in society and meaning-generating capacity. The first type of public events is those that model the lived-in world and that make a transformation happen that directly affects social order. The second type of public events presents the lived-in world by holding up a mirror to social orders and reflecting versions of it. The third type is events that represent the lived-in world as they offer propositions and counterpropositions about the construction and reconstruction of social order. The present study is concerned with events that represent dealing with substantiation of affirmation and providing axiomatic icons of versions of social realities. In our case, this concerns the relationship between the International Handball Federation (IHF), the event owner, the AHF, the local organizer, and QHF, the host, as major stakeholders of the tournament.

Another important feature of major events, which is critical for the process of knowledge generation, is their liminality (Chalip, 2006; Turner, 1984). For Turner (1984), liminality concerns the unique combination of time and space which sits outside of everyday life where normal social rules and boundaries are suspended. The liminality of major events gives rise to communitas 'in which events participants create a shared meaning and reconstruct social reality without racial, ethnic or linguistic boundaries' (Ziakas, 2016, p. 1141). Bringing together people and creating shared meanings are the foundation for OL (Curado, 2006). Sacco (2017) echoes this view by arguing that large events are platforms for culture-led development with respect to 12 developmental dimensions, where the quality of production of knowledge is one of them.

Sport events represent planned occurrences which are designed and delivered by an organizing committee (OC). OC are special organizations, which Løwendahl (1995) describes as a temporary one, which is 'seen as an aggregate of individuals involved in longitudinal processes of learning communications, interpretation and sense-making' (p. 350). Thus, IHF, AHF and QHF represent a temporary entity which uses preexisting and develops new knowledge to plan and deliver the tournament and shape stakeholders' experiences.

2.1.1. Sport Major Events and Social and Human Capital Formation

Qatar National Vision 2030 is based on four pillars, including human, social, economic and environmental development. The sport sector is an essential part of the fabric of Qatari's society and plays a critical role in advancing all four areas of development. Sport major events feature prominently in Vision 2030, with 80 such events hosted in 2023 alone. These events drive developmental activities as well as serve as an important bridge between Qatar and the world. These events, therefore, represent a strategic resource, the value of which resides in the actions and interactions they make possible or support. The symbolic meaning of sport events is not inherent but emerges from the interactions they stimulate; thus, they are conducive to and promote learning. Getz (2012) argues that because events are means toward an end, a multi-stakeholder approach is needed. For him, the core phenomenon in event studies is the experience of different stakeholders, hence the focus on the experiences of the tournament's attendees and their value for event organizers.

The social capital generated from major events, understood as the personal networks, knowledge and skills acquired and more broadly as the social and economic value created, has been recognized by many scholars (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 2001). The level of inter-personal trust, civic engagement and organizational capability in developing sport, including staging major events, counts. Social capital provides the cultural will to address organizational problems collaboratively. Bourdieu (1984) and Putnam (1993) explicitly acknowledge the potential of sport and sport organizations to meet social and economic needs that increase the well-being and productive capacity of the members of a community.

Social capital has been largely investigated as one of the desirable outcomes of hosting sport events (Gibson et al., 2014; Misener & Mason, 2006; Zhou et al., 2021). This study draws upon Putnam's (1995) definition of social capital, based on the idea that sport and leisure activities can create social value (Schulenkorf et al., 2011; Spaaij, 2012). The literature has differentiated three dimensions of social capital: bonding, bridging, and linking (Gittell & Vidal, 1998; Woolcock, 2001). Social bonds are connections with family, kin, and friends, people who are part of their social group. Social bridges refer to connections with people who are not part of their closer social group, for example, people from a different culture or religion. Social links represent possibilities of connections with organizations and/or people who are part of different social strata e.g., authorities with whom they have rare opportunities to connect.

In the context of sport major events, human capital has not received as much attention in the literature as social capital, apart from some exceptions. Becker (1962) defines human capital as investments in areas such as education, health and well-being that can improve performance of individuals. Although previous studies point to indicators of human capital, there is no agreement about specific dimensions of the construct. The current study focused on indicators that represent the benefits of doing/engaging with sports. This is supported by the inspirational effect of sport events, which assumes that attending sport events can somehow inspire people to engage in physical activity (Ramchandani et al., 2017; Weed et al., 2015). There is no clear agreement in the literature on whether hosting sport events can inspire people to become more physically active, with many studies showing marginal or no effect (Potwarka & Wicker, 2020).

Event experiences can impact the formation of both social and human capital (Gibson et al., 2014; Kaplanidou et al., 2021). Event experiences have been postulated as a bi-dimensional construct, represented by a cognitive dimension (awareness, memory, learning, judgment, and understanding) and an affective dimension (feelings, emotions, and preferences) (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Pettersson & Getz, 2009). Pettersson and Getz (2009) also acknowledge the existence of a 'conative' (the will to act) dimension, which in the case of experiences, is the same as actual behaviors. Perceptions regarding different objects (e.g. sport team, tourism destination image) follow a sequential order, with cognitive perceptions informing affective perceptions (Agapito et al., 2013; Kwon et al., 2005). Experiences should follow the same sequential pattern, with cognitive leading to affective experiences. The potential of cognitive and affective experiences to inform the formation of social and human capital might be affected by actual behaviors, such as attending more matches or engaging more with media about the event. Therefore, we control for behaviors when testing that relationship.

2.2. Major Events and Organizational Learning (OL)

OL has been defined as 'the process through which organizations change or modify their mental models, rules, processes or knowledge, maintaining or improving their performance' (Chiva et al., 2014, p. 689). Literature distinguishes knowledge from learning, where knowledge represents what we know at a certain point in time, while learning concerns the accumulation and the modification of what we know (Curado, 2006). Knowledge management and OL have been explored in sport organizations (Girginov et al., 2015; MacIntosh et al., 2023; O'Reilly & Knight, 2007; Schenk et al., 2015). Zeimers et al. (2019) examined the process of OL for corporate social responsibility in sport organizations by drawing on the 4I conceptual framework of Crossan et al. (2021) (i.e., intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing). Zeimers et al. (2019) note that sport organizations' learning involves both processes of exploitation and exploration, which leads to tensions between preexisting knowledge and new learning. This finding highlights the accumulative nature of OL, which always builds on preexisting knowledge. MacIntosh et al'.s (2023) study of athletes learning at the Youth Olympic Games emphasized the interplay between learners, context and organizational support in acquiring individual knowledge.

Several recent literature reviews focused specifically on knowledge management in sport major events. Qin et al. (2022) describe the institutionalization of knowledge management in the context of the Olympic Games and highlight the limited utility of the knowledge generated due to the inherently temporary nature of Games organizing committees. Knowledge in such organizations is mostly embodied in individuals who possess the expertise and skills, which would be difficult to apply in non-Games contexts. Salazar et al. (2017) somehow disagrees with the limitations of this form of learning. He points out the role of 'policy mobilities industry' in the context of major sport events, by which models are learned from one setting and deployed in others through the mediation by bureaucrats, consultants and activists. Stewart's (2013) examination of Olympic Games knowledge creation offers an important point which has been largely ignored in organizational learning literature. She analyzed the functional and detrimental ignorance in OL and highlighted the

role of politics and socio-economic contexts. Stewart revealed the strategic usefulness of detrimental ignorance when Games Organizing Committees 'know what not to know' because as soon as their knowledge of something is revealed, these organizations run the risk of this knowledge being shared, manipulated or criticized.

The current study follows Pawlowsky's (2001) framework of OL, which proposes four integrative dimensions of OL including (i) different system levels of learning (i.e., individual, organizational, network); (ii) different learning modes (i.e., cognitive, cultural and action-learning or knowing, feeling and acting); (iii) different learning types (i.e., single-loop (type I), double-loop (type II), deutero learning (i.e., type III)); and (iv) different phases of a collective learning process. The study focused on OL (i.e., system level) by addressing the three learning types as they relate to the cognitive and affective experiences of event attendees and sport officials. It further emphasizes type II organizational learning, concerned with organizational adjustment to the environment as a form of organizational development. As Pawlowsky (2001) elaborates, 'this learning prototype [type II] is based on the assumption that organizations have theory-in-use, interpretation systems and frames of reference that guide and determine organizational behaviour' (p. 77). The implication of using these frames of reference is that if the environmental feedback, which in our case was largely obtained from the event attendees and officials, challenges the organizations' assumptions about its relationship with their members and partners, then we can say that learning of this type has occurred. Finally, regarding the phases of learning, the present study was able to attend only to the first three phases including the identification of information through surveys, interviews, and participant observations; the exchange and diffusion of knowledge through debriefings and workshops with event organizers and handball officials; and the integration of knowledge into existing knowledge systems by adding research findings to the Qatar Olympic Academy (QOA) and QHF databases. A future study will explore the final phase of OL concerned with the transformation of the new knowledge into action.

The politics of knowledge production necessitate clarifying the relationship between the event learning environment and the research team. Basten and Haamann (2018) synthesis of 18 approaches for OL across three domains provides the analytical tool for that. The first domain focuses on *people* as knowledge brokers who cultivate a sense of trust and create mental maps of knowledge resources. The role of knowledge broker in the present study was assumed partly by the research team supported by the organizing committee of the event. The second domain identifies the *processes* of establishing informal learning environments not only by sport organizations but also by participants from outside the organization—commonly referred to as 'communities of practice'. The third domain involves the use of *technology* in OL in the form of knowledge repositories. In the context of the tournament, several knowledge repositories have been deployed, including publications, presentations and workshops delivered by the research team.

2.3. Major Events, Public Experiences and Organizational Learning: An Integrative Framework

Figure 1 shows the theoretical bricolage underpinning the study in the form of an integrative study framework, which builds on Pawlowsky's (2001) dimensions of

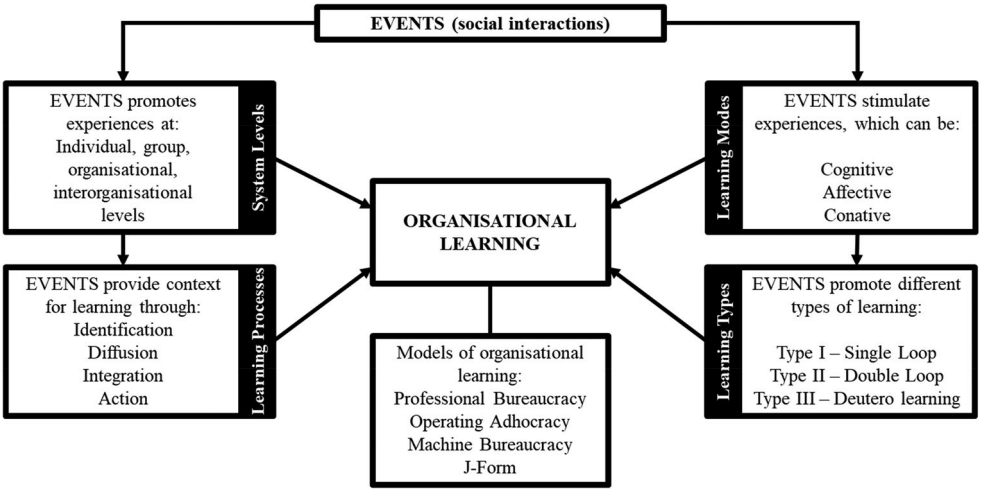

Figure 1. Integrated framework: Organizational learning and sport events experiences (adapted from Pawlowsky, 2001).

organizational learning framework and integrates the event's social value and public experiences. The figure demonstrates that social interactions created by events have an impact on Pawlowsky's (2001) four dimensions of OL: systems levels, learning processes, learning modes, and learning types. At *system levels*, events promote experiences at individual, group, organizational, and interorganisational levels. This has an impact on the second level—*learning processes*—where events provide context for learning through identification (recognising new knowledge), diffusion (spreading that knowledge with other members of the community), integration (embedding the knowledge into individual, group, or organizational levels), and action (applying the knowledge at any level). At the same time, events stimulate cognitive, affective, and conative experiences, informing the third dimension—*learning modes*, which have an impact on the fourth dimension—*learning types*: type I (single-loop—correcting errors within existing norms and assumptions), type II (double-loop—questioning and modifying the underlying norms, goals, and assumptions), and type III (deutero learning—learning about the learning process itself). All four dimensions have an impact on OL. The integration of the event with Pawlowsky's (2001) four dimensions of OL is based on three key assumptions. The first assumption is that the event represents a particular version of the game of handball and its relation to the host city, organizers, athletes and spectators, as well as broader issues concerning the social value of sport. As such, the event relates to the system-level dimension of OL because it concerns all four levels of learning. The second assumption is that the event stimulates cognitive and affective experiences, which have individual (i.e. human capital) and social impacts (i.e. social capital). Thus, participants' experiences correspond closely to the three modes of learning. Finally, the event provides a specific context for the interactions and learning opportunities marked by a sense of liminality and communitas. In this sense, the event is associated with the process of learning because it stimulates the identification of information, its diffusion through shared experiences and interactions, the integration of this information into

either individual/social impact created by the event or organizational codes, and the eventual use of such learning for individual or organizational actions.

Social capital is not only a desired outcome of sport event, but it also serves as an external knowledge acquisition mechanism. Social interactions play a critical role in knowledge sharing, and in developing shared visions and language (Hajli & Hajli, 2013; Lefebvre et al., 2016; Seippel, 2006). From an organizational point of view, Leenders and Gabbay (1999) defined social capital as 'the set of resources, tangible or virtual, that accrue to an actor through the actor's social relationships, facilitating the attainment of goals' (p. 2). Here, the 'actor' is understood as an organization or its members.

Pawlowsky's framework was complemented by Lam's (2000) framework, which expands on how knowledge, organizational forms and societal institutions interact to shape learning. Lam's (2000) framework helps to explain the relationship between the type of knowledge generated through the event and the different forms of OL. This is an aspect of OL, which Pawlowsky (2001) does not deal with. Lam (2000) suggested that knowledge has two key dimensions—epistemological and ontological. The epistemological dimension refers to the mode of expression of knowledge, which can be tacit (i.e. personal and contextual) and explicit (i.e. aggregated and codified). The ontological dimension concerns where knowledge resides, thus it can be either individual (i.e. residing in one's brain and bodily skills) or collective (i.e. how knowledge is shared and distributed among members). Lam (2000) combined these four characteristics of knowledge (i.e. tacit, explicit, individual and collective) and produced four types of knowledge including embrained, embodied, encoded and embedded knowledge (Girginov et al., 2015). Embrained knowledge is simultaneously individual and explicit as it resides in the head of individuals and is based on codified knowledge in the form of theories, models and rules, and is concerned with knowing. In contrast, embodied knowledge is also individual, but it is tacit and resides in one's bodily experiences, and as such it is action-oriented and concerned with doing. Encoded knowledge is collective and explicit and comes in the form of information through signs, symbols, rules, and procedures. Finally, embedded knowledge is also collective, but it is tacit and is concerned with organizational routines and shared norms.

Lam (2000) then made the important point that all organizations contain a mixture of knowledge types, but the importance of the type of knowledge may differ depending on the form of the organization. Highly formal, well-structured and governed organizations tend to rely more on explicit standardized knowledge; thus, they develop coordination and control mechanisms. Conversely, less formalized and loosely governed organizations use more tacit knowledge residing in the experiences of key officials, who are afforded greater autonomy in decision-making. Thus, organizations use different knowledge agents which could be either key officials or collective bodies such as boards, committees or project teams. By combining the level of standardization of knowledge and work (i.e., high vs low) and the knowledge agent (i.e., individual vs organization), Lam (2000) arrived at four types of organizational forms or models of OL and argued that each form is associated with a dominant knowledge type. The first configuration between the type of knowledge and organizational model of learning is 'professional bureaucracy' where the organization derives its capability from the 'embrained' knowledge possessed by its well-educated key officials who promote its standardization and staff

formal training. The second model of OL is 'machine bureaucracy' which is closely associated with 'encoded' knowledge grounded in specialization, standardization and control. Organizations emphasizing this type of learning are concerned with achieving stability and efficiency, where the role of tacit knowledge is very limited. The third model of OL is 'operational adhocracy' which uses mainly 'embodied' knowledge which resides in its key members and experts. Individual experts in these types of organizations enjoy a great deal of autonomy and they tend to generate mainly tacit knowledge. Finally, the 'J-form' of organization after the Japanese knowledge creating companies (Nonaka et al., 1996) derives their capability from the 'embedded' knowledge as found in the shared strong organizational culture, routines and members' relationship. The theoretical bricolage allowed constructing OL as embedded in a web of relationships and processes rather than as a technical matter.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a mixed method concurrent nested design which uses one data collection phase during which quantitative and qualitative data were both collected simultaneously (Creswell et al., 2003). The nesting in the current study meant that the quantitative survey of the event attendees was embedded (nested) in the predominant qualitative method. While the nested method addressed the experiences and the building of human and social capital for event's spectators, the predominant method sought information from a different level including event organizers and handball officials. The data collected from the two methods were mixed during the analysis phase of the study and the design was guided by the integrated OL framework. Quantitative data were outcome-based and were collected using survey and document analysis. Qualitative methods were exploratory, and process-based, where data collection included interviews, observations and document analysis. The interpretation of quantitative data aimed to elucidate the theoretical framework, while the qualitative data were interpreted for sense-making and particularization of the findings. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods produced converging (i.e., same conclusions) and complementary (i.e., related to different objects but complementary) results, which enhanced the validity of the results (Heale & Forbes, 2013). The concurrent nested design allowed for data integration and complementarity (Table 2). The research was approved by the ethics committees of the universities of all authors.

3.2. Survey – Procedures and Participants

Ten volunteers were trained to collected data from attendees of the Tournament. Data were collected during all 32 matches of the tournament from a large and diverse pool of participants ($n = 306$). Respondents were from different nationalities (11.1% Qatari, 40.8% Arab expats, and 48% other expats), different genders (39.2% female, 60/8% male), and different age groups (26.1% 18–25 years old, 32% 26–35 years

old, 32.7% 36–50 years old, 9.2% above 50 years old). Most of the respondents have been living in Qatar for more than 6 years (60.8%), while a smaller percentage have been in the country for 5 years or less (39.3%). The sample demographic statistics resemble the population parameters of Qatar, where 11% of the population is Qatari, with most residents being expatriates (Department of Economic, 2024). While we cannot claim generalizability to all fans, the sample was large and diverse enough to serve its purpose to inform our interviews with sport managers.

To measure cognitive and affective experiences, we drew upon Mannell and Kleiber (1997), Pettersson and Getz (2009), and Taks and Rocha (2022). (Table 1). The stem for experience items read, 'Considering your experiences attending the Asian Men's Handball Qualification for Paris 2024, please, express your level of agreement with the statements below' (1- *strongly disagree* to 5- *strongly agree*).

Individual impact items were created based on the definition of human capital (Becker, 1962; Brannagan & Grix, 2023) and operationalized as a first-order latent variable measured by three items. Social impact items were created as a second-order latent variable represented by three first-order latent variables: bonding, bridging and linking social impacts (Ager & Strang, 2008; Spaaij, 2012)—each one measured by three items (Table 1). The stem for individual and social impact items read, 'Please, rate the items below, considering the impacts the Asian Men's Handball Qualification for Paris 2024 had on you'. Demographics (gender, nationality, time living in Qatar, and connection with handball) and behaviors toward the event ('conative' experiences) were added to the model as control variables. Connection with handball and behaviors toward the event were selected as control variables because they can have an impact on human and social capital formation that extrapolates the experiences with the event itself. For example, attendees who have experiences as former handball players or coaches or who have attended multiple events might perceive individual and social impacts from the investigated event based on accumulated experiences. Therefore, we controlled for the impact of these variables to explain unique impacts of the investigated event experiences. Additionally, we controlled for gender, nationality and time living in Qatar because previous studies (e.g., Sorrentino et al., 2020) have shown that event impacts can be differently perceived by attendees with different demographic characteristics. To keep the focus on event experiences, we added these demographic variables as controls. They were entered in the SEM model as exogenous variables, directly affecting the endogenous variables—individual impacts and social impacts.

3.3. Interviews – Procedures and Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three officials from the UAE Handball Federation, the Bahrain Handball Federation, the AHF, a national team coach, and three officials from the QHF. Interviewees were selected based on their role in the event and responsibilities in either QHF or AHF. Interviews lasted between 30 and 70 min and were voice-recorded. The interview guide was built around the five core capabilities (i.e., collective skills) that make up the overall capacity of most organizations and are fundamental for the process of OL, including the capability to act, to generate development results, to relate, to adapt and self-renew and the capability to achieve coherence (Zinke, 2006).

Table 1. Factors, item wordings, factor loadings (λ), cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (ρ), mean and standard deviation of measures.

Factors	Items	λ	AVE	α	ρ	M	SD
Cognitive Experiences			0.76	0.902	0.902	4.10	1.04
	The quality of the event organization was outstanding	0.885					
	I had only positive experiences from the event	0.903					
	The organization of the event exceeded my expectations	0.817					
Affective Experiences			0.83	0.932	0.934	4.16	1.07
	During the event I felt happier than I usually do	0.859					
	I had a lot of fun watching the matches	0.940					
	Being at the event lifted my mood	0.936					
Individual Impacts (Human Capital)			0.73	0.888	0.889	4.01	1.06
	The event inspired me to learn more about physical benefits of doing sport	0.838					
	The event inspired me to learn more about social benefits of doing sport	0.890					
	The event helped me to learn more about other cultures	0.829					
Social impacts (Bonding Social Capital)			0.72	0.874	0.880	3.86	1.14
	The event had a positive impact in my bonds with my family	0.757					
	The event had a positive impact in my bonds with my friends	0.891					
	The event helped me to get closer to other people who I already knew	0.883					
Social impacts (Bridging Social Capital)			0.82	0.931	0.931	3.78	1.20
	The event helped me to connect with new people	0.909					
	The event helped me to meet people that I wouldn't have met otherwise	0.902					
	The event helped me to connect with people who are not part of my social group	0.901					
Social impacts (Linking Social Capital)			0.80	0.921	0.921	3.15	1.38
	I got connected with local sport organizations because of the event	0.901					
	I got connected with sport event organizers because of the event	0.914					
	I got connected with sport authorities in Qatar because of the event	0.861					

Table 2. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data.

Key themes	Quantitative evidence	Qualitative evidence
Cognitive and affective experiences	$M = 4+$ Likert scale Indirect effects (.860; $p < 0.001$; .902; $p < 0.001$)	Interviews and reports
Social impacts	$M = 3.70+$ Likert scale	Interviews/documents
Individual impacts	$M = 4.01$ Likert scale	Interviews
Ordering of experiences (from cognitive to affective)	$\gamma = .937$ ($p < 0.001$)	Interviews – Modes of learning
Facilitating inter-organizational learning	Not in the questionnaires	Interviews – Modes of learning
Learning types (double-loop and deutero learning)	Constructs in the survey: experiences and impacts	Interviews/documents

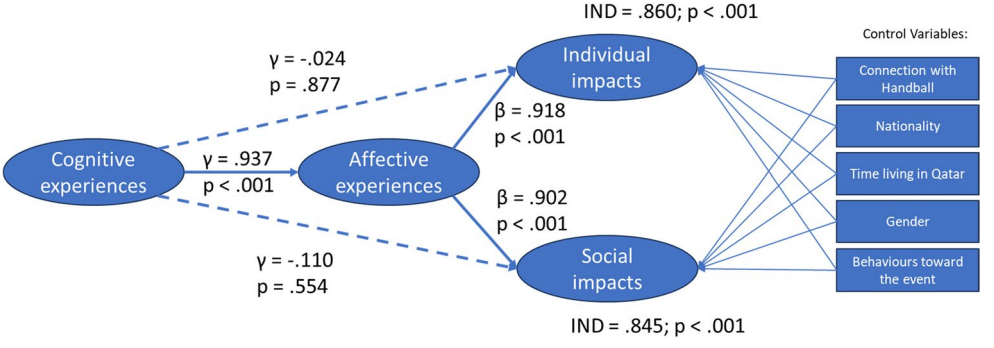

Figure 2. Structural model of the relationship among experiences and individual and social impacts.

3.4. Data Analysis – Survey

We proposed and tested a structural model (Figure 2) to understand how cognitive and affective experiences explain individual (human capital) and social impacts (social capital) the sport event helped attendees to form.

A covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted, following the two step-approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). From the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), we tested the constructs' internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha—α), composite reliability (ρ), convergent validity (using the average variance extracted—AVE), and discriminant validity (checking whether AVEs exceeded the squared correlations between constructs) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). After confirming the psychometric properties of the measurement model, we tested the structural model using CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR as fit indices. Then, we evaluated the magnitude and significance of individual path coefficients in the model. Because the structural model is a mediational model, we estimate indirect effects using the product-of-coefficients strategy (Sobel, 1982) with the multivariate delta method (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) available in Mplus.

3.5. Data Analysis – Interviews

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and two researchers undertook a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2012, 2022) reflexive experiential thematic analysis.

It represents a reflection of the researcher's interpretive analysis of the data conducted at the intersection of: (i) the dataset; (ii) the theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and (iii) the analytical skills of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Our approach to data analysis was simultaneously deductive and inductive to better answer the research questions. Thus, we developed some initial (i.e., deductively) codes, such as social interactions and impacts, as well as emerging (i.e., inductively) codes, including capabilities and experiences.

The thematic analysis yielded five themes, each bearing directly on both the individual and organizational learning including (i) engagement strategies to increase audience participation and club membership (i.e., capability to act); (ii) federation development and capacity building (i.e., capability to achieve developmental results); (iii) collaborations and partnerships (i.e., capability to relate); (iv) impact of hosting on sport development at national levels (i.e., capacity to achieve coherence); and (v) challenges and areas for improvement (i.e., capability to adapt and self-renew).

3.6. Data Consolidation

Data consolidation was achieved at three levels, including study design, method and interpretation (Fetters et al., 2013). At the design level, a case study was used where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to build a comprehensive understanding of the OL production. At the method level, the merging of data was applied to bring the two sets of data together. Finally, data integration was achieved through a narrative weaving, where the qualitative and quantitative findings were described on a theme-by-theme basis (i.e., systems levels of learning, learning modes and learning types). Data weaving followed a two-step approach. The first step included qualifying quantitative data by factor-analysing the quantitative data from the questionnaire, which then became themes. The second step involved comparing these themes to the themes analyzed from qualitative data. For example, the results showed that on average, respondents had positive cognitive and affective experiences during the event. Thus, event experience became a theme. Respondents also reported that the event had positive individual and social impacts on them, which allowed identify positive impact as a theme. A third theme, 'ordering of experiences', concerned the sequence of cognitive experiences, which were confirmed as antecedents of affective experiences, which in turn can explain large portions of individual and social impacts.

The three themes derived from the quantitative data compare well with the themes from the qualitative analysis. More specifically, engagement strategies to increase audience participation and club membership correlate well with 'event experiences and the ordering of experiences' themes. The quantitative theme 'positive impact' fits well with its qualitative counterpart impact of hosting on sports development. Event-related documents (i.e., plans and communications) were examined for tacit and explicit forms of knowledge. Table 2 shows the integration of quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of integration was complementarity, where the two methods were 'used to measure overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon' (Greene et al., 1989, p. 258). The practical integration of data is illustrated in the three

subsections of the result and discussion section. Analytically, the three main components in the study's research question, including knowledge production, knowledge ordering and knowledge sharing were addressed with reference to the different types of interactions stimulated by the event, the individual and organizational forms of learning and codification respectively. Table 2 shows that cognitive and affective experiences were firstly measured quantitatively ($M = 4+$ indicating positive experiences), then these experiences were explored during our interviews with managers and report analyses, using a qualitative strategy. The table shows that similar procedures were applied to understand human and social impacts of the event (high means indicating human and social capitals, which were later explored in interviews). The order of the experiences was proposed based on the literature and confirmed by quantitative evidence ($\gamma = .937$; $p < 0.001$). This was explored during the interviews using the concept of modes of learning (Pawlowsky, 2001). Qualitative evidence was used to explore how the event facilitated interorganizational learning, i.e. modes of learning, which fundamentally depends on managers knowledge (not attendees). The integration still allowed us to investigate learning types, when you used results from the survey (experiences and impacts) to feed our interview discussions. Admittedly, the research design has some temporal limitations concerning capturing OL development as a process over time, sampling biases, and the impact which its exploratory nature may have on internal and external validity.

4. Results and Discussion

Results are discussed considering the relationships between being, knowing and doing as components of organizational learning, where organizational learning is the knowing, individual learning is the being, and experiential learning is the doing (Guerra-Gómez & Pérez-Sánchez, 2025). Results of the measurement model showed close fit (RMSEA [90% CI] = .052 [.040; .063]; CFI = .983; TLI = .977; SRMR = .028; $\chi^2/df = 1.81$). The constructs have good composite reliability and internal consistency as all values are above .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). AVE of all constructs are above .50 and none of square correlations were larger than the AVE, indicating convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Factor loadings of all items were above .707, indicating that shared variance was larger than measurement error. Overall, CFA results indicate that scales have very good psychometric properties in the tested sample. Means and standard deviations (Table 1) show that, on average, respondents had positive cognitive and affective experiences (means above 4, in a 5-point Likert scale) in the event. They also report that the event has had positive individual impacts on them. Average values for social impacts show that all three dimensions of social capital stay close but still below the agreement point (4): bonding ($M = 3.86$; $SD = 1.14$), bridging ($M = 3.78$; $SD = 1.20$), and linking social capital ($M = 3.15$; $SD = 1.38$).

4.1. Structural Equation Modeling Results

The structural model also fits the data closely (RMSEA [90% CI] = .053 [.045; .061]; CFI = .968; TLI = .963; SRMR = .046; $\chi^2/df = 1.85$). Path coefficients indicate that, in the tested sample, cognitive experiences are antecedents of affective

experiences ($\gamma = .937$; $p < .001$) which in turn can explain large portions of individual impacts ($\beta = .918$; $p < .001$) and social impacts ($\beta = .902$; $p < .001$). The direct effect from cognitive experiences to individual impacts was non-significant ($\gamma = .024$; $p = .877$) but the indirect effect through affective experiences was significant (IND = .860; $p < .001$). The direct effect from cognitive experiences to social impacts was non-significant ($\gamma = .110$; $p = .554$), but again the indirect effect through affective experiences was significant (IND = .845; $p < .001$). These results support the importance of sequential experiences, starting with cognitive and moving to affective ones. The SEM model in Figure 2 relates to the study research question by explaining how the event generates human and social capital through experiences. The model also creates a clear schematic explanation to inform interview discussions, where we explored with sport managers what and how they have learned from their experiences in hosting the event.

4.1.1. The Handball Event and Different System Levels of Learning – Knowledge Ordering

The tacit nature of human knowledge and its relationship with OL have been emphasized by several scholars (Granovetter, 1985; Lam, 2000; Polanyi, 1966). Our findings suggest that a good deal of learning took place at the individual level. For example, event attendees indicated that the tournament has inspired them to learn more about the physical and social benefits of doing sport as well as to learn about other cultures ($M = 4.01$). These three indicators capture the human capital accrued as a result of attending the event. Handball officials also acknowledged the learning that had taken place for them:

> … there is always something to learn from Qatar in terms of organizational matters. After meeting with the president of the federation, a lot was learned from this championship to be applied in the federation. Examples include organizing referees, organizing players' entrance, and the timing intervals from the moment players enter until the start of the match. (AHF official A)

Individual learning is closely connected to OL, indicating that the AHF, as a main stakeholder in this event, benefits from the experience gained by its officials. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether the embrained knowledge (Lam, 2000) acquired by the official will be encoded in the form of organizational manuals, procedures, and protocols. At the inter-organizational level learning occurred throughout the tournament, which included multiple interactions between representatives from QHF, AHF and IHF.

Despite limited formal documentation, some officials, such as official E identified cognitive learning experiences that resulted in modifications to organizational practices, particularly in communication, accommodation, and transportation management. For example:

> Recently, I have learned a lot from listening to feedback and making sure we address any mistakes in future events. One key lesson has been improving how we position journalists, making technical adjustments to focus more on social media […]. Also, we have started using WhatsApp, Twitter, and other platforms to streamline communication.

> From past tournaments and this one, I have realized just how valuable they are in speeding up communication. These help us avoid delays.

In summary, the handball event fostered learning across multiple levels: enhancing individual human capital, supporting organizational learning within the QHF (despite limited codification), and facilitating inter-organizational learning through collaboration with regional and international federations. This layered learning underscores the role of sport events in advancing knowledge at personal, organizational, and inter-organizational levels.

4.1.2. The Handball Event and Organizational Learning Modes – Knowledge Production

The conceptualization of event experiences overlaps with Pawlowsky's (2001) three modes of learning—cognitive, cultural, and action (conative) and were observed amongst event attendees (see results in Table 1). In addition to the human capital cognitively gained through lived experiences, spectators also indicated that they were able to meet new people, including those who are not part of their usual social group, adding cultural learning (bridging social capital—$M = 3.78$). Affectively, attendees expressed that the event had a positive impact on their bonds with family, friends, and other acquaintances (bonding social capital—$M = 3.86$). Conatively, the event prompted participants to connect with their local sport organization and the sport authorities of the country to explore ways to get involved in sport (linking social capital, $M = 3.15$). An immediate impact of the event on attendees, which combines the three forms of learning, concerned the formation of both human and social capital. This finding lends strong support for the link between social capital and OL. As Putman (2000) explains, like the notions of physical and human capital, the term social capital refers to features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that increase a society potential to become more productive. Sport clubs and associations are perfect examples of social organizations where people engage with such organizations through volunteering, participating, coaching or officiating and have the potential to help make their communities a better place to live. Putman (2000) also makes this point explicit in contending that it is the civic nature of the community which makes it rich, not the other way around. Wilson (1997) noted the important role of social capital in creating public goods, one of which is OL. The social value of sport, as a public good, has been evidenced by a recent report by Sung (2024). Drawing on globally available research evidence, the report outlines the contribution of sport to health and well-being, equality, education, economic development, and environmental sustainability. No sport organization could make claims about public goods creation without knowledge generation, social interactions and OL.

Handball officials exhibited mostly the cognitive and affective form of learning in the form of embodied or tacit knowledge (Lam, 2000). Limited examples of action learning were found, including how insights from previous events were applied to optimize current practices related to media management. As the official D expressed, 'Positive and negative reports are always submitted after the end of competitions. After that, the federation works to avoid the negatives through their issued decisions,

and the positives are developed from the technical and organizational side'. A similar view was echoed by official B: 'Certainly, every action involves making mistakes and learning from them. In institutional work, mistakes are corrected by amending regulations and the basic system. If a loophole is found in the regulations, it is solved by amending and improving them to solve existing problems, which helps control tournaments'. The reflection process illustrated by officials B and D highlights action learning, where officials build on prior experiences to refine technical and organizational strategies. However, official F sheds light on the tacit nature of this knowledge: 'Well, it was verbal, a specific meeting, I mean, there wasn't any, but for me as an organizer, I recorded the report, I recorded some important points that are important to me'. This statement illustrates the low level of organizational knowledge codification, which remains mainly in the heads of key officials and is not shared across the organization.

Despite the low level of codification, handball officials such as official D spoke affectionally about the event and Qatar's reputation, as a means to OL: 'Today, when visitors from abroad come to us, they praise our handball arenas and express a desire for similar facilities. Officials from nearby federations have even requested blueprints for our arenas to learn from'. Thus, the knowledge production was the outcome of a three-fold social interaction process, including spectators' experiences with the event, the event officials' interactions with other stakeholders and the research team with the organizers. Knowledge production is an interactive and contextual process, which in the current case was shaped by the nature of the event (i.e., ownership, delivery) and the level of formalization of the learning organizations. Thus, the knowledge production was the outcome of various interactions stimulated by the event at different levels.

4.1.3. The Handball Event and Organizational Learning Types and Forms – Knowledge Storing

Lam's (2000) framework has helped connect the type of OL to the form it takes. The form of OL in sport organizations was predicated on the different levels of their formalization and specialization. Study findings show that organizations involved in the event focused on type II learning (i.e., double loop), which is concerned with an adjustment to the environment. Zeimers et al'.s (2019) study is another example where this type on OL is explored during the process when sport organizations acquire new knowledge. In contrast, type I learning (i.e., single loop) deals mainly with the identification of performance gaps and their rectification by the organization, while type III learning (i.e., deutero) involves learning to learn or how to solve problems. Given the unique nature of the event, types I and III learning were not considered as a priority for the QHF.

The study examined the social interactions initiated by the QHF and the OC as they were responsible for a large part of the OL that has taken place in the context of the event. Previously, Girginov and Preuss (2022) identified 13 types of relevant social interactions in the context of major sport events including event promotional campaigns, programmes for coach education, programmes for elite athletes development, research/evaluation projects conducted, athlete appearances before, during, and after the event, organization of petitions, partnerships stimulated by the event,

event-stimulated celebrations, inter-organizational collaborations, sport events hosted before the event, sport events hosted after the event. Findings from interviews and surveys suggest that OL has been stimulated by four types of social interactions, including event promotional campaigns, partnerships, event-stimulated celebrations, and inter-organizational collaborations. Using Pawlowsky's (2001) framework, we observed that QHF's engagement in these interactions fostered Type II (double loop) learning, prompting adaptation to new challenges and feedback. As the official F noted,

> We collaborate with the Olympic Committee in organising events to ensure our event does not overlap with another. Additionally, our budget comes from the Olympic Committee, and we cooperate with the Red Crescent for ambulance services. We also collaborate with clubs and influencers on social media.

This quote illustrates how partnerships and collaborations went beyond logistical coordination, creating valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and experiential learning within the QHF network. In this way, individual learning and social capital development were facilitated mostly through event promotions and celebrations, while the OL took place in the context of partnerships and inter-organizational collaborations. Those interactions prompted handball officials to rethink some of their organizational practices with a view to changing them. The role of the research team was most pronounced in this regard as we were able to present the results from the public experiences to the event organizers and to draw their attention to the relationship between the event, the social interactions stimulated by it, the social capital generated and the OL that has taken place.

The organizational form that has emerged from the findings could be defined as 'operational adhocracy', which utilizes predominantly 'embodied' knowledge residing in key organizational members and experts (Lam, 2000). Those members enjoy a great deal of autonomy and can influence the decision-making process of the organization and its operating procedures. As Stewart (2013) noted, this form of organizational learning lends itself easily to a 'know what not to know' attitude, which prevents sport organizations from examining the impact of 'inconvenient' knowledge on their operations. The rather low level of formalization and specialization of the QHF and the presence of only 16 full-time staff members can explain this form of organizational learning. As expressed by official D: 'Certainly, we can see that hosting international tournaments has had an impact on improving the administrative and organizational capabilities of the staff'. However, as elaborated by official F, transferring embrained knowledge to encoded knowledge at organizational level remains a challenge:

'I was personally recruited by the QHF from the AHF… However, there aren't specific strategies or plans aimed at improving our utilization of events to enhance our capabilities. While we do have an overarching strategy that includes capacity development and training, it's not as if we explicitly target these opportunities with a deliberate plan. It's more about an implicit understanding within the management and staff that these events will inherently develop their skills. This approach doesn't explicitly focus on avoiding past mistakes in future tournaments but rather on a general expectation of skill development through participation'.

One reason for the lack of an OL strategy could be the nature of this event, which is owned by the IHF. Such arrangements limit the scope of responsibilities

of the host federation and by extension, the learning opportunities provided by the event. As the official F elaborated: 'So, the Asian [Handball] Federation was present in the field, and it manages the championship, the referees, and the observers; it manages the championship. As an organizer, my authority is to provide logistics only'.

5. Conclusions and Implications

The delivery of the Handball Olympic Qualifying tournament in Doha, as a major planned public event, represented a particular opportunity for OL for the organizations involved. The event has ordered people and ideas into a version of social reality which promotes family and community ties and positive attitudes toward sport. The integration of event studies, social capital and OL into a conceptual framework guiding the study allowed examining the production, ordering and storing of knowledge. The event stimulated four main types of interactions, including event promotional campaigns, partnerships, event-stimulated celebrations and inter-organizational collaborations, which provided the QHF and the organizing committee with several learning opportunities. The research team acted as a knowledge broker who enhanced event organizers' understanding of the relationship between public experiences of events and the creation of human and social capital, which serves as a basis for forming shared meanings and learning. There were three unique aspects of the study that shaped the findings including the event ownership, the multi-theoretical conceptual framework for studying OL by bringing together seemingly separate event aspects and the cultural context. OL is shaped by the politics of international events, which differentiate event owners and delivery agencies, and the rights and responsibilities that come with this division. The delivery of an event of this magnitude always involves partnerships and inter-organizational relations, which stimulate OL, as demonstrated by the analysis.

A major takeaway from the event has been the value of understanding its role in building attendees' human and social capital. The structure of public experiences, as involving cognitive and affective dimensions, overlaps with the three dimensions of OL modes (i.e., cognitive, cultural and action learning) and thus, it needs to be considered as a major source of OL for sport organizations.

The study also revealed the interplay between tacit and explicit knowledge as well as individual and collective learning in the context of major sport events. The combination of (a) low level of organizational formalization and specialization and (b) individual (i.e., tacit) knowledge has resulted in an 'operational adhocracy' form of OL in QHF dominated by embrained knowledge. This form of OL poses dangers to the organization when key officials leave and take the accumulated knowledge with them. It also differs from the Anglo-American model concerned with explicit knowledge that is market-oriented and emphasizes efficiency and standardization and the Japanese model, which focuses on tacit knowledge, developed *via* socialization and teamwork (Lam, 2000). This finding reflects the cultural context of the host organization, which is characterized by a hierarchical structure and respect for seniority. The role of culture in shaping OL in Arab countries has been explored by various commentators (Alamri et al., 2014; Siddique, 2017), but apparently it was not sufficient to explain the forms and types of OL found by the present study. As Hanafi and Arvanitis (2015, p. 7) insightful analysis of knowledge production

in the Arab world demonstrates, the journey to 'knowledge society' is much more complex. The authors criticized the Western approach to knowledge economy as based on four pillars which do not correspond to Arab realities including as (i) an economic and institutional regime to provide incentives for the efficient use of existing and new knowledge; (ii) an educated and skilled population to create, share, and use knowledge well, (iii) an efficient innovation systems of research centers and universities to tap into the growing stock of knowledge and to adapt it to local needs, and (iv) information and communication technology to facilitate the process of knowledge creation and dissemination. The sport sector in Qatar, with some exceptions, lacks those pillars, thus OL takes different forms.

The practical takeaway for OC and managers is two-fold to: (i) recognize explicitly the learning opportunities provided by events and develop a plan for knowledge production and dissemination; (ii) ensure a good balance between tacit and explicit and individual and collective knowledge to facilitate organizational learning.

As with any research, the present study also has some limitations. The study only attended to the three dimensions of OL and did not investigate the specific phases involved in this process. The study presents a snapshot of the knowledge and learning process and did not examine the changes of organizational procedures and practices of QHF because of the OL that had taken place. Future research needs to examine the final phase of OL, including the transformation of new knowledge into action by following up with sport organizations concerned. The survey results are limited using a non-representative, convenience sample of event attendees. Whilst this characteristic of sampling does not allow us to extrapolate the results for the whole population of event attendees, findings are still highly relevant as they were analyzed in tandem with results from interviews of officials. Interviews were conducted with a limited number of officials. Despite the limitations, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the analysis of how OL was stimulated during the event.

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