

Original article

Leadership Dynamics in Sustainability: The IOC and Paris 2024 Olympic Games Experience

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Abstract. Navigating the relationship between competitive achievement and sustainability in sports organizations calls for creative leadership strategies. This study explores how shared and transformational leadership styles can impact the sports industry's adoption of sustainable practices. The sports industry faces distinct obstacles due to its high-profile nature and intense competition. Through applying theories from relational and functional leadership, the research highlights the significance of visionary leadership, adaptation, and stakeholder involvement in attaining sustainability objectives. The results indicate that executives focusing on these factors more successfully incorporate sustainability into their firms' values and activities. This study lays the groundwork for more studies on digital involvement, leadership diversity, and the influence of different environmental elements on environmentally responsible sports activities. The report adds to the current conversation on sustainable leadership in sports by providing practical advice to executives who want to make their companies more environmentally, socially, and economically responsible.

Keywords: sustainable leadership, transformational leadership, sports sustainability, stakeholder engagement

Introduction

Sports organizations must adopt a leadership approach that balances competitive achievement with

environmental, social, and economic commitments to meet the sustainability imperative. Conventional leadership styles frequently need to adequately meet the complex requirements of sustainability in the competitive and highly scrutinized sports industry. Research on these dynamics in sustainable sports organizations is scarce despite emerging theories suggesting a shift towards shared, context-aware leadership techniques. Leaders must innovate and foster a culture of sustainability in this intricate context, balancing performance with sustainability objectives. This article investigates the leadership styles, attitudes, and practices that promote sustainability in sports organizations, contributing to the overall sustainability goals.

Leadership dynamics

The relevance of traditional leadership models has been questioned, considering leadership dynamics in today's knowledge-driven economy (Avolio et al., 2009). Scholars recommend utilizing relational and functional leadership theories to analyze the relational dynamics in shared leadership and how they influence team outcomes (Zhu et al., 2018). According to Drescher et al. (Drescher et al., 2014), more study still needs to be done on the dynamics of shared leadership and its effects and emphasizing the significance of context in facilitating, inspiring, and gaining advantages from dynamic delegation, but also acknowledging critiques that current leadership studies and theories may not sufficiently account for leader behavior in context. According to Lämsä and Keränen, contextual dynamics have a role in the connection between managers and employees, and responsible leadership is viewed as located within a context (Lämsä & Keränen, 2020). Team workload combined with shared leadership influenced collective emotional tiredness when shared leadership dynamics

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were minimal. The importance of vertical and shared leadership in new venture top management teams was also emphasized, focusing on the impact on startup performance (Ensley et al., 2006).

On the other hand, action-centered leadership stimulates intricate adaptive system dynamics, creating an environment conducive to facilitating actions (Baltaci & Balci, 2017). The proposed investigation into the role of various emotions in developing and emerging leadership relationships (Uhl-Bien, 2023) underscores the importance of shared leadership, where multiple individuals are acknowledged as leaders in distinct roles (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016). Additionally, the Dynamic Leader Inventory is highlighted as a tool to enhance leadership development by providing self-assessment standards (Manning & Robertson, 2011). Research highlights the need to comprehend shared leadership dynamics, contextual influences, and the function of diverse leadership philosophies in diverse organizational settings. The study emphasizes the importance of examining emotional factors, contextual dynamics, and the interdependence of leadership events while analyzing leadership dynamics.

Sustainable sport organizations

More sustainable sports organizations recognize the necessity of incorporating sustainability into their operations. Studies have demonstrated that encouraging sustainable behaviors among sports players can significantly decrease the environmental footprint of sports organizations (Trail & McCullough, 2018). This is especially important considering how many resources and energy professional sports teams use in their daily operations. Green practices have been recognized as a way to help the environment significantly and offer cost savings and advantages to sports companies (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). Engaging young people as volunteers in sports events can promote individual sustainability and allow sports organizations to utilize them as catalysts for sustainable practices (Strittmatter et al., 2021). In light of customers' increasing focus on sustainability programs and their active participation in sustainable efforts, sports organizations have been placing more emphasis on environmental sustainability in recent years (González-Serrano et al., 2020). The necessity of incorporating sustainability into the sports industry has also been emphasized by the UN's designation of sports as a pertinent enabler of sustainable development (Könecke et al., 2021). Sports organizations are becoming more interested in environmentally friendly techniques, as seen in using sustainable architecture in many venues (Kellison & Kim, 2014). Furthermore, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has launched sustainability programs

and encouraged the organization of sporting events in a sustainable way as part of its significant efforts to promote sustainability (International Olympic Committee, 2021).

Leadership dynamics in sustainable sport organizations

Managing leadership dynamics within sustainable sports organizations is essential to ensure the organizations' continued performance and effect over the long term. Sustainable leadership entails integrating sustainable practices into organizational performance and cultivating a culture of continuous learning (Iqbal & Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). It has been determined that shared leadership is especially beneficial for developing sustained efforts in sports organizations (Andersson, 2022). Avoid making assumptions about sport-for-development organizations and acknowledge the substantial variations in organization/funder connections, organizational capacity, and potential for sustainability (Coalter, 2010). According to Kim and Cruz, transformational leadership is crucial for fostering a more positive and long-lasting sports environment because effective leadership in sports is influenced by the interplay between the coach's leadership behaviors, the players' traits, and external factors (Kim & Cruz, 2022). Avery and Bergsteiner state that one must think about the future when making decisions, encourage creativity, build a strong team, and provide high-quality goods and services to lead sustainably (Avery & Bergsteiner, 2011).

Sustainable leadership in the sports sector requires leaders to demonstrate courage, optimism, and adaptability when addressing challenges, emphasizing the transformative nature of leadership in overcoming obstacles (Wang et al., 2021). Women in leadership positions play a crucial role in evaluating employment practices within sports organizations and promoting diversity in decision-making roles (Banu-Lawrence et al., 2020). Moreover, youth engagement is essential for achieving sustainable outcomes in youth sports organizations, broadening our understanding of what makes these organizations sustainable (Strittmatter et al., 2021).

Environmental factors and stakeholder perspectives also significantly influence leadership dynamics in sport-for-development organizations, highlighting the need for a multilevel approach to understanding how ecological factors shape leadership development (Jones et al., 2018). The persistent underrepresentation of women and the use of gender quotas reflect the gendered structure of sports leadership, underscoring the ongoing need for gender equality in sports governance.

Effective leadership practices are transformative and essential for driving social change and creating sustainable futures (Pless & Maak, 2012). Specifically, in both for-profit and non-profit sports organizations, transformational and transactional leadership styles significantly influence organizational learning, underscoring the importance of leadership styles in enhancing learning outcomes (Megheirkouni, 2017). To fully comprehend the relationship between leadership and ethics, ethical leadership in sports must bridge the gap between normative and descriptive research approaches, integrating insights from sports psychology and sports management (Constandt et al., 2020). Consequently, developing responsible leadership is crucial for generating long-lasting positive outcomes in the sporting event industry, reinforcing leadership's key role in achieving sustainable results (Megheirkoun et al., 2022). Therefore, achieving sustainability in sporting events requires not only effective administration and political leadership but also a commitment from stakeholders to sustainable values.

In addition, economic and social factors significantly influence women's participation in sports leadership, emphasizing the role of external determinants in shaping organizational gender diversity (Lesch et al., 2022). Within intercollegiate athletics, the leader-member exchange theory illuminates how perceptions of transformational leadership affect organizational culture, as reflected in stakeholder views on leadership (Kihl et al., 2010). As a result, effective human resource management in sports and recreation becomes critical for leadership and organizational development, highlighting the responsibilities of sports managers (Chelladurai & Kerwin, 2017). To address the underrepresentation of women in coaching and leadership roles, training programs specifically designed for female coach developers aim to enhance leadership skills and promote gender equality within sports organizations (Kraft et al., 2020).

To ensure sustainability in elite sports, it is essential to consider athletes' perspectives, thereby expanding our understanding by incorporating their insights (Dohlsten et al., 2021). This inclusive approach aligns with the integrative leadership process model, which explains how different factors create leadership processes by showing how specific events and mechanisms function together in a series of leadership cycles (Eberly et al., 2013). Consequently, revamping leadership in sports management requires cognitive reframing and governance considerations, emphasizing the need to understand how leadership is socially constructed within the sports management field (Billsberry et al., 2018). In this context, social learning

initiatives like the Alberta Women in Sport Leadership Impact Program aim to enhance gender equity and leadership diversity within sports organizations (Culver et al., 2019). Finally, individual leadership techniques play a significant role in career advancement in sports organizations, contributing to the body of research on self-leadership within sports settings (Megheirkouni, 2018).

IOC's Vision in Action: Sustainable Leadership and Economic Growth at Paris 2024"

Sustainable leadership in sports has become an essential driving force in addressing global environmental and social challenges. Organizations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Paris 2024 Olympic Games organizers have taken significant steps to ensure sustainability is at their operations' core. This leadership is not limited to reducing environmental footprints but also encompasses long-term planning, inclusivity, and global collaboration, setting new benchmarks for the future of sport. The IOC has embedded sustainability as a fundamental pillar of its strategic roadmap, Olympic Agenda 2020, which aligns closely with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Nikolaou et al., 2023). The IOC's Sustainability Strategy, introduced in 2016, outlines its comprehensive environmental and social responsibility approach. This strategy is implemented across three spheres of responsibility: the IOC as an organization, the IOC as the owner of the Olympic Games, and the IOC as the leader of the global Olympic Movement (International Olympic Committee, 2016).

A vital element of the IOC's leadership in sustainability is its requirement that all host cities be certified under the ISO 20121 standard for sustainable event management at least three years before the Olympic Games. This standard ensures that sustainability is not just an afterthought but is embedded into the planning and execution of every aspect of the Games, from venue construction to waste management. For example, during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the IOC pioneered the use of zero-emission electric vehicles to transport athletes and officials, significantly reducing the carbon footprint of the event (International Olympic Committee, 2020). The IOC's sustainability strategy focuses on five key areas: infrastructure and natural sites, mobility, resource management, climate, and the workforce. Through these areas, the IOC guides National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and International Federations (IFs) in adopting sustainability practices. Developing standard guidelines, methodologies, and tools helps NOCs and IFs integrate sustainability into their operations, influencing sports organizations worldwide. As Thomas Bach, President of the IOC, stated:

“The IOC’s role is not only to reduce its own environmental impact but to lead and inspire the entire Olympic Movement to embrace sustainability.” (Paris 2024 Organizing Committee, 2023)

This global leadership extends beyond the Games themselves, fostering a culture of sustainability within the broader Olympic Movement. Following the IOC’s global leadership, the Paris 2024 Olympic Games have set a new standard for sustainability in mega sporting events. Paris 2024 is the first Olympic Games designed from the outset with sustainability as a core principle. One of the key goals is to reduce carbon emissions by 50% compared to previous Games, a remarkable achievement made possible by utilizing 95% of existing or temporary infrastructure and powering all venues with 100% renewable energy, including solar and wind power (Paris 2024 Organizing Committee, 2023).

According to Tony Estanguet, President of the Paris 2024 Organizing Committee,

“We are determined to deliver the most sustainable Games in history. Sustainability is not an option. It is a commitment we have made to future generations.” (Paris 2024 Organizing Committee, 2023)

This initiative reflects the IOC’s broader commitment to reducing the environmental impact of the Games while encouraging future hosts to adopt similar strategies. Moreover, Paris 2024’s sustainable initiatives extend far beyond energy usage (Table 1). The organizers are introducing plastic-free venues, where 700 beverage fountains will replace single-use plastic bottles. This will significantly reduce waste and further the event’s goal of zero waste. The Olympic medals will continue the legacy of Tokyo 2020 by being crafted from recycled materials, including old electronic devices, showcasing the Games’ commitment to the circular economy (International Olympic Committee, 2020). In addition to its environmental efforts, Paris 2024 emphasizes social inclusion and gender equality. For the first time in Olympic history, there will be equal participation of male and female athletes, a milestone in promoting gender equality within the sporting world. The Games are also committed to being fully accessible for people with disabilities, ensuring that all services, from transportation to venue design, are adapted for individuals with mobility challenges.

As Andrew Parsons, President of the International Paralympic Committee, stated:

“Together we are changing Paris, France, and the world with the Paralympic Games.”

This inclusivity demonstrates Paris 2024’s commitment to creating a socially responsible and accessible event for all. Further demonstrating this leadership, Marie Barsacq, (Paris 2024 Impact and Legacy Executive Director), commented:

“The initial results are already here, and they are the product of shared efforts with all the stakeholders of Paris 2024... acting together for a positive, sustainable, and shared legacy.”

Georgina Grenon (Paris 2024 Environmental Excellence Director), emphasized this experimental approach:

“We wanted the Games to be an experiment, so we could seek and roll out innovative solutions that would accelerate the ecological transformation.” (Paris 2024 Organizing Committee, 2023).

Paris 2024: Balancing Budget Efficiency with Sustainable Economic Impact

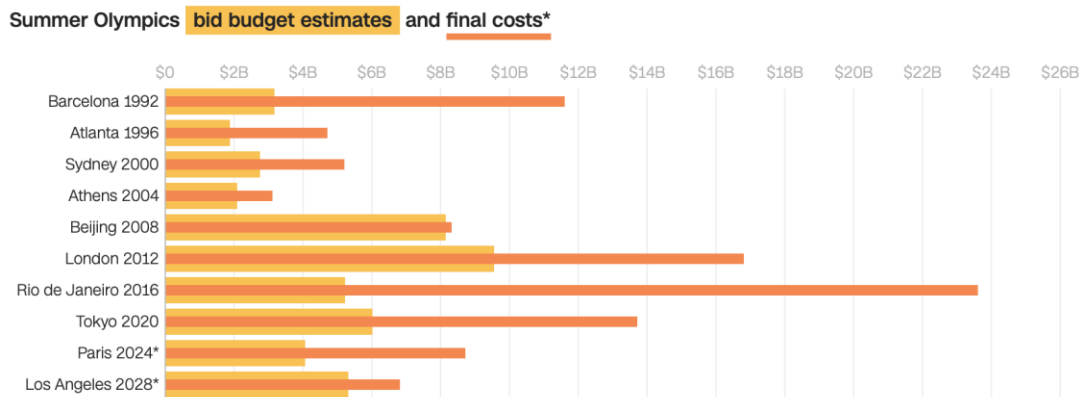
Ahead of the competition, the total spending for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games was projected to be 9.1 billion U.S. dollars. This was the lowest budget of the Summer Olympics since 2000, when 8.1 billion U.S. dollars were spent on the Sydney Olympics (Fig. 1-2). The highest spending on the Olympics since 1996 was on Beijing 2008, which cost a staggering 52.7 billion U.S. dollars (Statista 2024). An independent study by the Centre de Droit et d’Économie du Sport (CDES) of the University of Limoges revealed that the Olympic Games Paris 2024 will bring significant economic benefits to the Paris region. The study projects a net economic impact between EUR 6.7 and 11.1 billion, with an intermediate estimate of EUR 8.9 billion. This impact stems primarily from tourism, construction, and the organization of the Games. With or without tickets, visitors to the Games are expected to spend approximately EUR 2.6 billion, adding to the region’s economy. Notably, 78% of suppliers for the Games are small and medium-sized businesses, and over 500 companies are from the social and solidarity economy. The Games also aim to create lasting and inclusive employment, with nearly 181,000 jobs connected to the event.

Summary

The study focused on the efficacy of transformational and shared leadership styles in ingraining sustainable practices, highlighting the critical role that leadership dynamics play in promoting sustainability within sports organizations.

Table 1. Paris 2024 Olympic Games Sustainability Data with Long-Term Impacts and Budget Details (Paris 2024 Organizing Committee, 2023)

Category	Data	Future Profits	Long-Term Impacts	Economic Budget Details
Carbon Emission Reduction	50% reduction compared to previous Games	Lower operational costs and reduced environmental impact	Significant contribution to combating climate change and reducing the overall environmental footprint	Budget allocated for sustainability initiatives: €120 million
Renewable Energy Usage	100% renewable energy	Cost savings from energy efficiency and reduced carbon footprint	Reduction in energy costs, potential for carbon credits, and long-term sustainability in operations	Renewable energy infrastructure costs offset by long-term energy savings
Infrastructure Use	95% temporary or pre-existing infrastructure	Reduced construction and energy costs	Enhanced infrastructure lifespan, reducing future capital expenditures for new construction	Budget savings from reuse of temporary infrastructure: €90 million
Employment Creation	181,100 jobs	Job creation and economic stimulation	Economic boost in local job markets, long-term career opportunities for workers	Projected economic stimulus from job creation: €2 billion
Cycling Infrastructure	20,000 temporary bicycle parking spaces	Promotion of sustainable transport and reduced traffic	Promotion of green urban mobility, reduced road congestion and long-term urban planning benefits	Cost of cycling infrastructure: €30 million with long-term benefits to city transport
Recycled Materials for Medals	100% of metals for medals sourced from recycled materials	Cost savings and contribution to circular economy	Long-term partnerships with local suppliers, reducing future costs and ensuring sustainable sourcing	Savings from locally sourced food projected at €10 million
Gender Equality	50% male and 50% female athlete participation	Equal gender representation leads to global recognition	Permanent waste reduction practices implemented in future events, reduced costs over time	Waste management savings: €15 million through recycling and reduced disposal costs
Plant-Based Food Options	More than 50% plant-based food options	Healthier food options support local agriculture and lower environmental impact	Equal gender representation leads to global recognition and societal progress	Budgetary investment in gender parity initiatives expected to enhance global appeal and sponsorships
Economic Impact on Île-de-France	€6.7 billion to €11.1 billion	Boost to the local economy	Healthier food options support local agriculture and lower environmental impact	Long-term food sourcing partnerships reduce costs and support local economies
Renewable Electricity Usage	100% renewable electricity	Reduction in carbon footprint and operational costs from energy efficiency	Boost to the local economy through increased spending and tourism revenue	Total economic impact projected between €6.7 billion and €11.1 billion
Circular Economy for Materials	90% of assets with a guaranteed second life	Long-term cost savings and reduced environmental impact from reuse of assets	Reduction in energy costs, promotion of energy-efficient technologies in other sectors	Long-term energy cost savings and potential carbon credits
Public Transport Access	100% of venues accessible by public transport, 75% within 500 meters of a station	Reduced emissions and increased convenience for spectators	Prolonged use of assets leads to reduction in waste and capital expenditure on new infrastructure	Projected savings of €90 million from asset reuse over 10 years
Active Mobility and Cycling	415 km cycling lanes and 20,000 temporary bicycle parking spaces	Lower transportation emissions and promotion of healthy, eco-friendly travel options	Reduction in transport emissions and improvement in air quality in urban areas	Cost savings through reduction in public transport subsidies, improved air quality benefits
Food Sourcing	80% locally sourced food, 30% organic	Lower transportation costs and environmental benefits from supporting local farms	Boost to cycling culture, enhancing the city's long-term sustainable transport system	Cycling infrastructure projected to save €50 million in urban transport costs over 20 years
Waste Reduction	80% waste recovery or avoidance	Reduction in landfill costs and improved environmental reputation	Increased demand for local and organic food boosts regional agriculture and reduces carbon footprint	€10 million savings through local food sourcing, boosting regional employment
Bio-Waste and Recycling	First event to implement bio-waste sorting and recyclable packaging	Reduced waste disposal costs and alignment with future regulatory standards	Reduction in landfill waste, promoting long-term environmental sustainability in the region	€15 million savings from waste reduction initiatives, promoting long-term resource management



Note: Costs are in real 2022 US dollars.

* Clarification: Costs only include researcher estimates of direct costs related to the sports infrastructure and events. Paris and LA costs are projections.

Source: "The Oxford Olympics Study 2024: Are Cost and Cost Overrun at the Games Coming Down?" by Alexander Budzier and Bent Flyvbjerg; SSRN. 2024
Graphic: Alex Leeds Matthews, CNN

Figure 1. Summer Olympic Games 1992-2028 costs (Budzier, 2024)

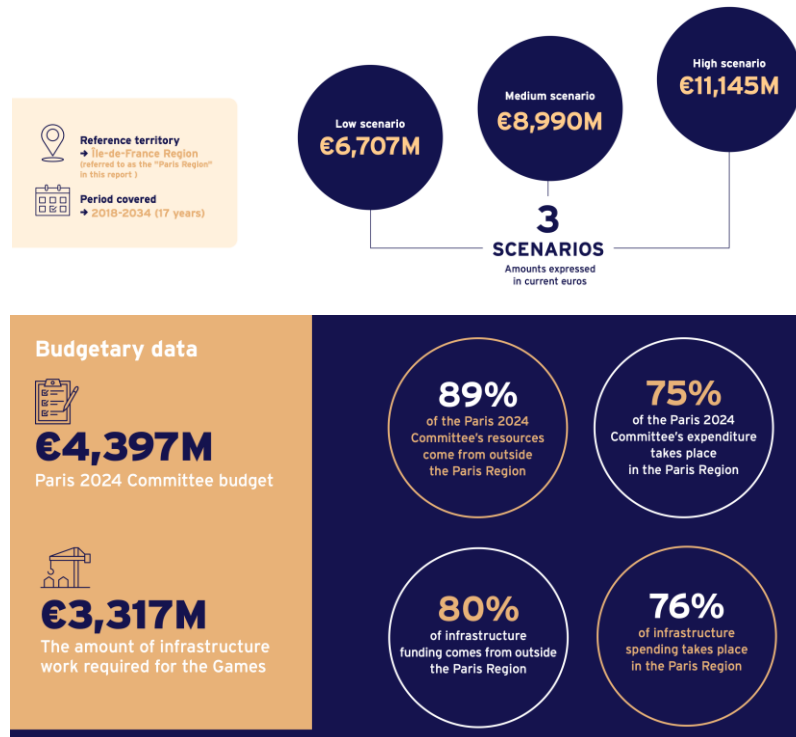


Figure 2. Ex-ante economic impact study of the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games and budget (Centre de Droit et d'Économie du Sport (CDES), 2024)

It was discovered that the key to overcoming sustainability difficulties in the cutthroat world of sports competition is leadership techniques that prioritize adaptation, a shared vision, and stakeholder engagement. The research offers a thorough framework for sports organizations aligning with sustainability goals by stressing the need for inclusive and innovative leadership practices. These results lay the groundwork for future research into how leadership affects sustainability outcomes; specifically, they call for a more in-depth analysis of digital engagement tactics, the results of diverse leadership teams, and the part played by regional and sport-specific contextual variations. This article examines transformational and shared leadership approaches to show how important it is for sports industry executives to set an example by acting sustainably and encouraging a culture of responsibility among their followers. The results indicate a strong connection between innovative leadership methods and improved sustainability results, promoting a change towards more inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive leadership strategies. The ideas presented here provide a beneficial framework for sports businesses looking to incorporate sustainable practices focused on environmental responsibility in a changing market.

Future research

Future research should use longitudinal study designs to capture the evolution of sustainability practices over time to evaluate the impact of leadership behaviors on sustainability outcomes within sports companies. Furthermore, research must be done on how leaders can use social media and digital technology to involve stakeholders in sustainability projects. It is also necessary to evaluate how well these tools work to improve accountability, transparency, and community involvement. A better understanding of how diverse leadership teams affect sustainability results may emerge from studies that examine the relationship between sustainability practices and leadership diversity (gender and cultural diversity included). Lastly, research that draws comparisons between other sports and geographical areas would enhance our knowledge of the contextual elements affecting the adoption of sustainable practices and provide a worldwide viewpoint on leadership dynamics in sustainable sports organizations.

Conclusions

Based on performed literature and economic datasets, the following conclusions were formulated:

(1) Sustainable leadership is critical to integrating environmental, social, and economic goals in sports

organizations. Shared and transformational leadership styles help balance competitive pressures with sustainability, fostering innovation and stakeholder engagement. These leadership dynamics enable organizations to adapt to challenges and achieve meaningful sustainability progress.

(2) Leadership diversity and digital engagement are vital for advancing sustainability in sports. Leaders who embrace diverse perspectives and engage stakeholders through digital tools create more accountable and inclusive organizations. This drives the successful implementation of sustainable practices and aligns sports organizations with global sustainability goals.

(3) The Paris 2024 Olympic Games demonstrate that sustainability can drive significant financial returns. In addition to the projected EUR 11.1 billion net economic impact, the Games' emphasis on local suppliers and inclusive employment ensures that economic benefits extend to small businesses and the social economy, supporting long-term regional growth.

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