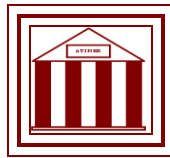


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**Post-Event Leverage and Olympic  
Legacy: A Strategic Framework  
for the Development of Sport and  
Cultural Tourism in Post-Olympic  
Athens**

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos  
President  
Athens Institute for Education and Research

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**Post-Event Leverage and Olympic Legacy:  
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**Abstract**

Although the hosting of the 2004 Olympics in Athens constituted a unique opportunity for the diversification and enrichment of Athens' (and Greece's) tourism product, the evident lack of coordination between commercial providers and public governing bodies inhibited the development of a joint strategic approach to leverage the Games. However, the successful organization of the Olympics left a valuable intangible and tangible legacy for Athens, enhancing its heritage and tourism infra/superstructure respectively. Given the unrealized aspiration of harnessing the post-Olympic facilities, this study examines the potential of Athens to exploit its Olympic legacy for the joint development of sport and cultural tourism. This attempt seeks to synthesize a common ground for sport and cultural tourism development in Olympic cities by focusing on Olympic tourism in the post-Games period as it relates to the use of Olympic legacy and post-Olympic assets. A qualitative approach was adopted by conducting nine semi-structured interviews with city officials and tourism administrators. Findings reveal the conditions for synergistic development of sport and cultural tourism and the actions required to mobilize the network of actors, resources and assets that can enable Athens to move from its current inertia and implement post-event leveraging. The study argues that it is still not late for Athens to leverage its post-Olympic assets/legacy capitalizing on its unique and rich cultural heritage interwoven with the Olympic Games. Towards this direction, the study sheds light on what and how can be corrected in order to mitigate the sources and consequences of problems, while providing lessons for future Olympic cities. Finally, a strategic framework is suggested for leveraging the Olympic legacy and developing sustainable post-Olympic (sport and cultural) tourism products.

**Keywords:** Post-games Olympic tourism, Olympic legacy, post-event leverage, sport tourism, cultural tourism

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## **Introduction**

There is a general consensus that Athens successfully staged the Olympic Games of 2004 (Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004; Gold, 2011; Weed, 2008). The successful organization of the Olympics left a valuable legacy for Athens and the major projects that were implemented in the preparation for the Games, such as the new international airport, the new metro network, and the new sport facilities, enhanced the sport and tourism superstructure of Athens (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004; Tziralis, Tolis, Tatsiopoulou, & Aravossis, 2006).

Yet, a successful event and successfully marketing the host city are distinctly different concepts (Ritchie, 2000). In the case of Athens, there were major planning failures concerning the lack of coordination between the organizers of the Olympic Games and the tourism bodies (Singh & Hu, 2008), the lack of leveraging benefits from the Games (Weed, 2008), and the lack of post-Olympic use of facilities (Gold, 2011). These planning failures obviously constrained the attainment of expected outcomes from the Olympics, hence, not only diminishing their positive impacts but also limiting the scope of Olympic legacy that if viewed more broadly, it could be still leveraged with the aim to substantially benefit Athens and Greece in general.

In this context, empirical research examined the impacts of the Olympic Games on Athens addressing the impact of the Games on economy (Kasimati & Dawson, 2009), urban restructuring (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004), national identity (Tzanelli, 2008), generic tourism (Zografos & Deffner, 2007), sport tourism (Ziakas & Boukas, 2012), and cultural tourism (Boukas, Ziakas, & Boustras, 2013). While these studies document the breadth of a rich, potent and multi-dimensional Olympic legacy, this potential remains untapped due to a generalized inertia that characterizes post-Olympic Athens. To mobilize stakeholders, collaborative actions and joint strategies need to be implemented based on a common vision. On these grounds, synergies can be fostered in post-Olympic Athens that can enable the leveraging of its post-Olympic assets.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the prospects of post-Olympic Athens to exploit its Olympic legacy for the collaborative joint development of sport and cultural tourism. This examination may shed light on what and how can be corrected in order to mitigate the sources and consequences of problems. The focus on sport and cultural tourism as it is induced by the Olympics can help us find the best means on how to effectively leverage Athens' Olympic legacy and develop sustainable post-Olympic tourism products.

### **2004 Athens' Olympic Legacy**

Athens' Olympic legacy has been multi-dimensional including, among others, physical, social and cultural dimensions. This is mainly because Athens sought through the Olympics the multiple goals of upgrading its urban environment and infrastructure, improving its image and rejuvenating its tourism industry (Beriatos, 2006). Athens followed a multi-nuclear strategy dispersing the construction of new facilities, which led to the creation of sport

and leisure clusters (Gospodini, 2009) or urban poles of interest (Serraos, Ioannou, & Papaioannou, 2007) that concentrated in their premises sport, leisure and commercial activities. This altered the physiognomy of Athens' urban tissue by combining in the architecture of its Olympic projects modern design with traditional characteristics that resulted in a 'glocalized' urban landscape (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004). Nonetheless, the Olympics also brought unintended consequences (Maloutas, Sayas, & Souliotis, 2009), such as their excessive financial cost, environmental problems (Hadjibiros & Sifakaki, 2009) and housing evictions (COHRE, 2007).

Arguably, the Olympics generated a significant legacy for Athens that is epitomized in its built and human heritage. In terms of tourism development, the Games brought about the unification of the city's urban landscape with the coast at the South (Kissoudi, 2008; Sykianaki, 2006), enriching this way its tourist product mix and facilitating the transportation of tourists, via the initially made for the Olympics, tram-line that connects the city center with Athens' southern outskirts (Boukas, Ziakas, & Boustras, 2012; Zografos & Deffner, 2007). Further, because the rationale for hosting the Olympics, was based on the intention to project the cultural identity of Athens and Greece (Boukas *et al.*, 2013; Fauquembergue, 2008; Traganou, 2010), the Olympics acted as the medium for the unification, enhancement and projection of many areas with cultural significance (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004). The cultural significance of the Olympics for Athens was also highlighted by the Olympic Truce (IOC, 2008), the Cultural Olympiad (ATHENS 2004, 2004), and the integration of modernity (Kissoudi, 2010) with the past (Khirfan, 2010) that exhibits the multicultural character of the city (ATHENS 2004, 2004; Boukas *et al.*, 2013). Finally, the Games provided an opportunity for the participation of various people that amplified the concept of volunteerism (European Commission Citizenship, 2005; Karkatsoulis, Michalopoulos, & Moustakatou, 2005; Panagiotopoulou, 2005).

In summary, Athens has undergone dramatic spatial and landscape transformations in its restructuring as a post-industrial metropolis having at its core the tourism, recreation, culture, and trade services (Gospodini, 2009). Whilst the Olympics gave an impetus to urban reshaping and status of Athens, the challenge for the city is to capitalize on its modern 'glocalized' capabilities and Olympic legacy in order to revive its tourism industry. Consequently, the development of sport and cultural tourism represents an essential means to enrich and diversify Athens' post-Olympic tourism product.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

The examination of how to utilize Athens' post-Olympic assets for sport and cultural tourism development can be grounded upon the theoretical underpinnings of (1) legacy planning of the Olympic Games and mega-events, and (2) event leveraging. This allows situating the planning for sport and cultural tourism legacies of the Olympics (and mega-events) in a joint framework and envisioning their effective leveraging.

Although the concept of legacy is not new, it is only until recently that it has been formalized suggesting the need for strategically developing long-term, sustainable legacy plans (Leopkey & Parent, 2012). Legacy has been conceptualized as the planned and unplanned, positive and negative, intangible and tangible structures created through a sport event that remain after the event (Gratton & Preuss 2008; Preuss, 2007). Mega-events have the capacity to generate various types of long-lasting legacies, commonly understood as the impacts and outcomes of events (Cashman, 2006; Mangan & Dyreson, 2009; Toohey, 2008). This dictates host cities to plan for achieving positive outcomes and preventing or mitigating negative impacts. The issue thus is what event planning processes or models can enable host cities to harness mega-events.

The concept of leverage has been introduced by Chalip (2004) to denote those activities, which need to be undertaken around the event itself, and those which seek to maximize the long-term benefits from events. This approach entails a forward, ex ante and analytic mindset for legacy planning focusing on why and how intended outcomes can occur, thereby explaining the processes and strategic means that can enable their attainment. From this perspective, events should be seen as opportunities for interventions; not interventions in themselves (Chalip, 2004). As O'Brien (2006) suggests, events and their opportunities are merely the seed capital; what hosts do with that capital is the key to realizing sustainable long-term legacies.

Recognizing events as capital brings forth the need to cross-leverage them with a host city's other capitals. From this standpoint, it is essential to develop a broad framework for leveraging the opportunities events create in synergy with the host city's assets, such as sport and culture, by fostering their inter-connectedness in order to achieve their joint use in tourism development. The challenge is to create the appropriate conditions in which event stakeholders can reach a consensus in formulating leveraging initiatives that embed sport and cultural Olympic legacies in the tourism development of the host city. Therefore, it is important to introduce leveraging programs for jointly harnessing a sport and cultural tourism legacy and enriching as well as diversifying a host city's post-Olympic tourism product.

### **Methodology**

This study was part of a larger research that examined Athens' tourism development in the post-Olympic era. Findings from this research indicated the status and qualities of post-Olympic Athens as a national capital that needs to more effectively exploit its cultural tapestry in order to become a competitive cultural destination (Boukas *et al.*, 2012). Further, findings illustrated the multifaceted Olympic heritage of Athens, which brings forth the opportunity for cross-leveraging the Olympic legacy with its cultural assets (Boukas *et al.*, 2013). Finally, findings also revealed the unexplored potential to leverage the Olympic legacy for sport tourism development (Ziakas & Boukas, 2012).

In line with the three previous studies, a qualitative approach (Yin, 2009) was chosen for the investigation of post-Olympic Athens' prospects for sport and cultural tourism development. Semi-structured interviews were



employed, as they allow more detailed information to be gathered, by providing an opportunity for the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses (Weiss, 1994). Nine interviews were conducted with high-rank tourism officials and representatives who have/had an important contribution to the Athens' Olympics during and after their organization. This purposive sampling of high-rank administrators aimed to draw knowledge from the most informed actors who have influenced the tourism legacy of the Games.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim in the Greek language. Thereafter the interviews were translated in English and analyzed manually. Content analysis focused on the theme of indentifying the opportunities and challenges for sport and cultural tourism development. This structured approach allowed to categorize data according to prior research and incorporate new insights. Data that did not fit the coding scheme were categorized as alternative themes. All the results were checked for validity and consistency by comparing them with the three previous studies and also by going back to the general literature, thereby helping to substantiate the findings of the study.

## **Results**

All informants supported that the organization of the Olympics provided to Athens a range of state-of-the-art venues and facilities for sport and cultural tourism uses. Also, the respondents explained that the Olympics were a unique opportunity for Athens to upgrade its infrastructure by building new sport facilities, accommodation, changes the city's look, and transport links as well as industrial space. In this regard, the interviewees claimed that the venues are the 'raw material' for the development of high quality sport and cultural tourism, while the whole city's infrastructure has been renovated facilitating this way the comprehensive development of different types of sport and cultural tourism. The informants emphasized that according to the plans of the government during and after the Olympics, the venues were scheduled to primarily accommodate sport and cultural uses.

The interviews revealed that another opportunity derived from the Games was the effective/efficient know-how in event management due to the international assistance from other countries especially in the areas of planning and technology use. Athens' organizational bodies shared knowledge and best practices with other organizers of mega-events and therefore, developed valuable insight. As it was emphasized, the organizational capacity brings an opportunity for the city to adapt these practices for the future development and promotion of sport and cultural tourism. Since the venues and the know-how exist, it is a matter of entrepreneurship and effective management for proceeding to the diversification of Athens' tourism product.

The findings of the interviews indicated that there was also an improvement in its tourism superstructure. Even though the number of accommodation units in Attica was not increased significantly, there was an upgrade in terms of their service quality and many of them were fully

renovated. As a few respondents underscored, many tourist businesses were upgraded prior to the Games in order to offer services of much better quality than the past and be more competitive. Given the demanding nature of sport and cultural tourists for increased service quality, Athens has a unique chance to meet their expectations.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that one of the most significant comparative advantages of Athens for developing sport and cultural tourism is its natural resources. In this respect, Athens could be an ideal urban destination that combines culture, good weather, shopping, and the appropriate environment for nautical sport tourism. For example, a respondent mentioned the marina of Aghios Kosmas, which has a 1,000 yachts capacity with the potential for constructing a luxury hotel. Similarly, another respondent indicated as a significant sport tourism destination the marina of the Faliron Olympic Coastal Zone Complex, which has the potential to be used for sport tourism and it has already hosted sport crews that arrived there for training at the Aegean Sea.

The respondents provided different explanations on the troubling question of why the potential of Olympic legacy remains unrealized. All informants agreed that the main problem for the city as well as for the whole country is the current economic crisis that leads to persistent social problems and affects negatively the potential for development. However, some respondents underlined that the crisis also brings forth the need for rapid decisions in order the comparative advantages of the city to be fully used for its faster recovery.

Most interviewees agreed that the construction of large venues created an unbearable maintenance cost. For this reason, these venues should also be used for other purposes in combination with other recreational uses. For example, there have been suggestions to use some of the facilities for paintball, yachting, and as theme parks. In this regard, change of land use is the key for the post-Olympic use of the facilities. It is not possible all of them to be used for athletic purposes, especially in sports that are not popular in Greece. Hence, most of the informants emphasized that changing their land use for other purposes such as cultural events, conferences and parks can enable the development of sport tourism in synergy with cultural tourism.

All the informants pointed out that many of the opportunities for tourism development are lost because the plans for the post-Olympic development of the venues in Athens and their implementation have been dramatically delayed. Moreover, some respondents mentioned the lack of a strategic plan concerning how each venue should be used and by whom, which raises problems regarding the efficiency of the tourism policy to develop a holistic post-Olympic product. Hence, according to the findings of this study, the Olympics inherited an expensive and valuable legacy to the hands of the authorities, which however, do not use it accordingly in order to promote Athens as a sport and cultural tourism destination.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed the failure to achieve the sustainability of Athens' assets mainly because of the permanent nature of the facilities used for staging the Games. Although the permanent nature of

Olympic venues could justify their long-term utilization, there have not been done many efforts towards achieving their sustainable management. As the respondents indicated many stadia are closed and there are no valid plans for their utilization. Most of the informants emphasized the lack of collaboration between interested parties for using the facilities in tourism development because of bureaucratic constraints or because the dialogue between ministries and local communities led to a dead end. Therefore, the findings of the interviews indicate that the context of the post-Olympic use of the Olympic venues for joint sport and cultural tourism development is both fruitful and problematic. Given the economic problems that Greece currently faces, there is an urgent need to formulate and implement a strategic plan for the collaborative use of post-Olympic assets in sport and cultural tourism development.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that it is possible for Athens to overcome its current inertia if the city adopts a strategic approach to leverage its Olympic legacy. This requires an analysis of its resources and adaptation of its strategic planning accordingly by utilizing its post-Olympic assets and establishing inter-sectoral linkages between sport and cultural tourism providers that are compatible with their economic, social and environmental needs. Thus, Athens' destination assets should be leveraged through strategies aimed at generating a flow of benefits and optimizing the returns to the city.

Considering Athens' structural weaknesses of the public sector and the economic crisis that currently hinders the city, the tourism administration needs to reconfigure the city's tourism product-service mix and fully exploit its Olympic legacy. The building of partnerships between the public and private sectors can enable the leveraging of the Olympic legacy. Through these partnerships several benefits for both sides are evident such as the allocation of the risk (Roumboutsos & Anagnostopoulos, 2008), where the Greek public sector can operate in a regulatory and legal context and the private sector can deal with the maintenance, financing and management skills (Tomadaki, n.d.). According to Furrer (2002), forms of public-private partnerships can lead to the acceleration of public investment decisions. Public-private partnerships for leveraging the Olympic built heritage of Athens could become a valuable means for escaping the grave situation of the economic recession.

The study shows that diversification and enrichment of Athens' tourism product is a challenging task. The inertia in leveraging the post-Olympic assets needs to be urgently redressed in order for Athens to harness their potential. To do so, Athens needs to capitalize upon its Olympic legacy by developing a portfolio of sport and cultural events. An event portfolio strategy can reach a wide range of audiences and thus attract extensive tourism visitation (Ziakas, 2010; Ziakas & Costa, 2011a; 2011b). This requires that cities begin to think holistically about events and by organizing and managing their event portfolios effectively, they can move from being cities with events to become 'eventful cities' (Richards & Palmer, 2010).

On this basis, a comprehensive sport and cultural tourism development strategy in Athens can develop enriched types of tourist products that would enhance its distinctiveness and authenticity as a destination. As such, the Olympic legacy provides added value to the sport-based tourist attractions that Athens can develop by using its post-Olympic assets for sport and cultural tourism development.

### **A framework for leveraging post-Games Olympic tourism**

In order to leverage Athens' Olympic legacy and venues, this study proposes a tourism development framework for using a number of Athens' post-Olympic facilities (Table 1). This framework requires that the public sector establish partnerships with private organizations and provide the mechanisms to enable the implementation of all the initiatives via the cooperation between sport and cultural tourism providers.

Based on Chalip's (2004) general event leveraging model and Weed's (2008) Olympic tourism leveraging model, a strategic planning framework is proposed for leveraging post-Games Olympic tourism as shown in Figure 1. The two opportunities for leverage are the legacy of the Games and its effects on the cultural heritage of the host city. As such, Athens should capitalize on its Olympic legacy and rich heritage assets. This requires the implementation of synergistic cross-leveraging strategies aimed at optimizing sport-related and cultural-related tourism benefits. These strategies can encompass the manifold dimensions of Olympic heritage while enriching the city's tourism product by integrating its sport and cultural tourism offerings.

In order to attain these joint strategic objectives, there are two grounding strategies, which constitute the ground for further strategies and actions to be employed. The first grounding strategy is to utilize the Olympic venues for organizing events and activities. This takes advantage of the structures built for the Olympics and the associated prestige embodied in the collective memory from previously having hosted events in the Olympics. The second grounding strategy is the use of Olympic legacy and heritage themes in media (advertising and promotion) to reinforce destination images. This is because as time has passed, after the hosting of the 2004 Olympics the Games gradually become a part of the destination profile. Thus, the hosting of the 2004 Olympics should be used to promote the attributes of Athens in the post-Games period. As such, Athens' Olympic association sets should be transferred to its destination image. For example, the top quality sports along with the successful organisation of the Games can be linked and transferred to high-quality tourism products and services, or the modern infrastructure of the Olympics can be transferred to create the image of a modern and efficient Athens.

Based on the grounding strategies, there are a number of derivative strategies that can be implemented to enrich an Olympic host city's tourism product. In particular, Athens by capitalizing on both the Olympic legacy and the range of cultural heritage assets, can design Olympic-related attractions (e.g., easier access to the city coast, theme/natural parks, Olympic museum,

etc.), develop a portfolio of sport and cultural events, package sport and cultural attractions, and attract conferences/exhibitions in the Olympic venues. These strategies can sustain the value of Olympic legacy incorporated in the development of cultural heritage tourism, transferring thus the 'glory' of the Olympics to the attractions, events, and conferences/exhibitions of the city's tourism product mix.

The applicability of the proposed post-Games leveraging framework on Athens is constrained by the severe economic crisis the city (and Greece) currently deals with. It has to be recognized, however, that the crisis is mainly the result of chronic structural pathologies and deficiencies of the Greek administrative and political system. The changes and restructuring that are under way may facilitate the development and implementation of leveraging initiatives. To do so, Athens' tourism policy should incorporate leveraging programs into its immediate plans and invest to the Olympic legacy and sport/cultural tourism in its effort to restore the city's shattered economy. Despite the fact that many years passed after the Games, it is still not very late as Athens' Olympic legacy and heritage is inexhaustible and as such, will always have strong connections with the Games due to its ancient routes as well as the first modern Games.

As the findings of this study indicate, there are a number of opportunities for the joint development of sport and cultural tourism in post-Olympic Athens, which however, are offset by a series of challenges. The opportunities include the multi-dimensional Olympic legacy, the state-of-the-art Olympic facilities and venues, the improved tourism superstructure, the know-how in event management, the variety of complementary cultural tourist activities, and Athens' natural resources. These constitute the destination's assets that need to be exploited by Athens' tourism policy.

On the other hand, the lack of strategic planning and the non-differentiation of the city's tourism product hinder its competitiveness. The size and cost of facilities put a burden in the city for their maintenance especially as long as they remain underutilized. Moreover, the ineffective marketing and the weak financial operation constrain the quality of Athens' tourism product. These challenges are exacerbated by the economic crisis that bedevils the whole country. In addition, the lack of comprehensive tourism policy and the continuous decrease of Athens' competitiveness due to structural weaknesses, mass tourism, seasonality and damage to the environment resulting from unrestricted tourism activities, deteriorate the status and conditions of the city's tourism industry.

To overcome the challenges that inhibit the joint development of sport and cultural tourism, a number of complementary strategic actions should be implemented. The different sport and cultural tourism products can be bundled with other main or complementary tourism activities and attractions to reach different target markets. The government should privatize the Olympic venues via leasing and investment schemes as well as it should seek to establish a climate of confidence and stability in the tourism industry. In terms of service quality, Athens' administration needs to establish appropriate mechanisms to control and ensure that services are delivered according to promised standards.

All these actions require update legislation to respond to the needs of sport and cultural tourism's providers and consumers. To achieve sustainability, the tourism policy should safeguard the environment and disperse tourism impacts to central and peripheral areas. Also, to make distinctive Athens' post-Olympic tourism product, the city should refocus on its cultural and traditional characteristics (heritage, customs, architecture, etc.). Finally, the strategic actions should be coordinated through the formation of an integrated joint marketing strategy for sport and cultural tourism, which can eventually lead to the creation of a diversified tourism product.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to examine Athens' prospects for sport and cultural tourism development. The proposed strategic planning framework envisages the creation of synergies between the sport and cultural tourism sectors in Athens. In addition, the need for an integrated joint marketing strategy for sport and cultural tourism is highlighted in order Athens to develop a diversified, differentiated and competitive tourism product.

The planning failures of Athens raise the critical question of how the underutilized Olympic assets can be leveraged to develop a sustainable post-Olympic tourism product. This depends on the efficacy with which the Olympic legacy and the destination capitals are cross-leveraged in the post-Games period. From this standpoint, the leveraging of major events does not end with the completion of an event but there can be implemented post-event leveraging programs to attain sustainable outcomes. These outcomes accrue from the implementation of cross-leveraging strategies and the creation of synergies with other forms of tourism that optimize their benefits to a host destination.

In conclusion, this study stresses the need to develop a broader planning and leveraging framework for Olympic host cities that incorporates sport and cultural tourism into its scope and extends leveraging in the post-Games period. Specifically, tourism planning should build sport and cultural programs and activities tied to the Olympic assets and facilities. The leveraging of the Olympic legacy for sport and cultural tourism development represents a relatively unexplored pillar of potential post-Olympic initiatives aimed to foster tourism development in the long-run after the end of the Games. As a result, this time-horizon brings forth the potential of embedding the leveraging of post-Olympic tourism in the sustainable development agendas of Olympic cities and creating cross-leveraging synergies among different forms of tourism such as sport and cultural tourism.

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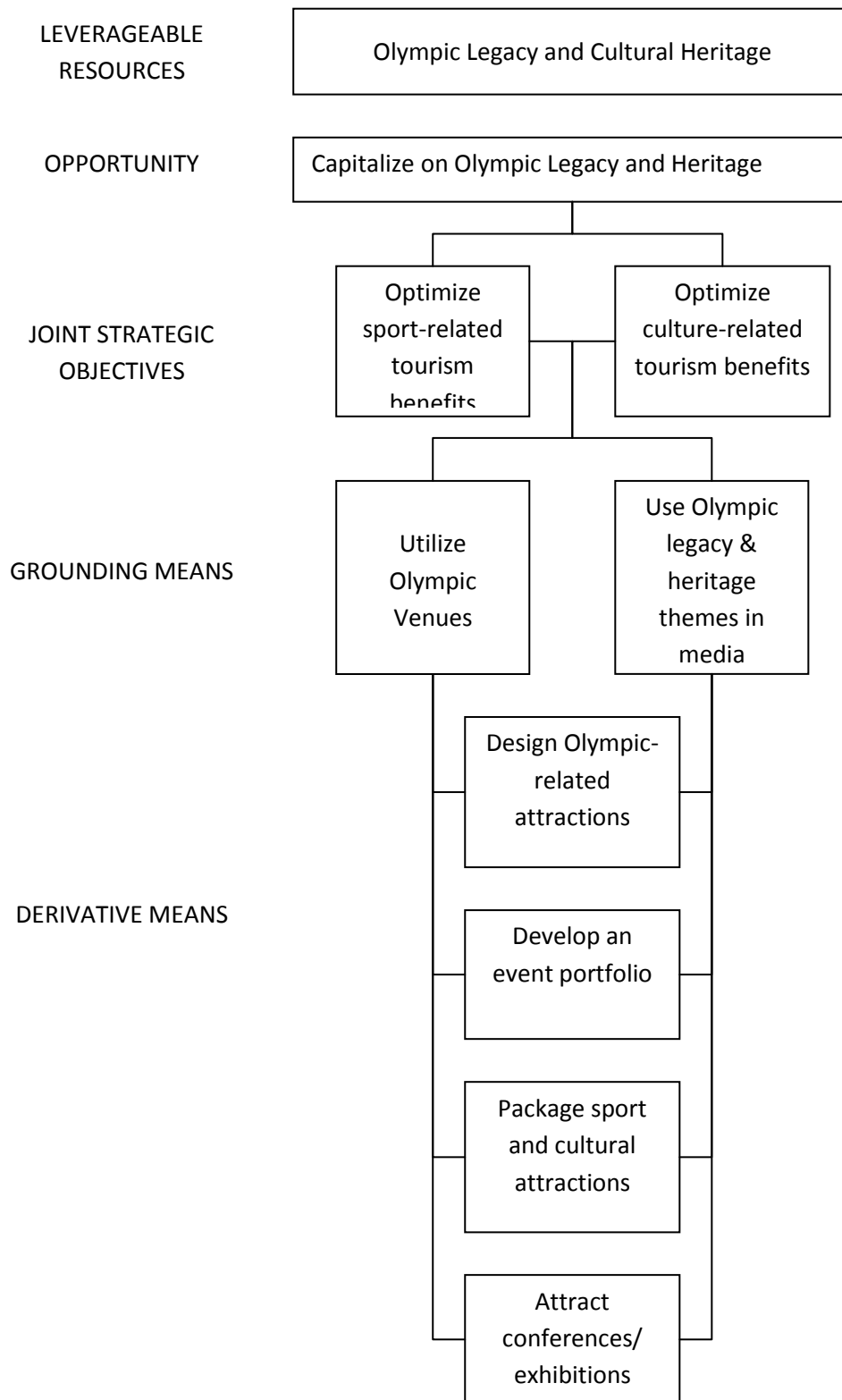
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**Table 1.** Athens' Post-Olympic Facilities as Assets for Sport and Cultural Tourism Development

Facility	Sport Tourism Activities/Events (in 2004 & Future Use)	Cultural Tourism Offerings/Events (in 2004 & Future Use)
Athens Olympic Sports Complex	Athletics, Basketball, Swimming/Water Sports, Tennis, Indoor Cycling	Parks and Promenades, Convention Halls, Exhibition Halls, Commercial Shops, Cafes, Restaurants
Hellinikon Olympic Complex	Baseball/Softball, Hockey, Canoe/Kayak, Handball, Fencing	Parks and Promenades, Convention Halls, Exhibition Halls
Schinias Olympic Rowing and Canoeing Centre	Canoe/Kayak, Rowing	Parks and Promenades, Convention Halls, Exhibition Halls
Aghios Kosmas Olympic Sailing Centre	Sailing Events	Parks and Promenades, Convention Halls, Exhibition Halls

*Source: Adapted from Ziakas & Boukas (2012).*

**Figure 1.** A Strategic Planning Framework for Leveraging Post-Games Olympic Tourism



Source: Boukas *et al.* (2013).