

# Towards a conceptual definition of intangible Olympic legacy

Intangible  
Olympic legacy

Vassil Girginov  
*Brunel University London, Uxbridge, UK, and*  
Holger Preuss  
*Johannes Gutenberg-University, Mainz, UK*

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Intangible legacy encapsulates the essence of Olympism and its manifestation, the Olympic Games. Despite significant interest in the capacity of the Olympics to produce notable changes in society, conceptual difficulties in defining and measuring intangible legacy persist. The study develops a conceptual definition of intangible Olympic legacy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study follows a four-step concept definition approach. It examines and integrates three strands of literature including intangibles, social interactions and public value, which is combined with insights from a longitudinal empirical investigation of intangible Olympic legacy for National Sport Organisations (NSO).

**Findings** – The proposed concept of intangible legacy defines it as an emerging combination of attributes, interactions, processes and technology, with the goal of creating public value which is the ultimate goal of the Olympic Games. Since intangible legacy is qualitative rather than quantitative, a reconsideration of the current research paradigm is also proposed.

**Research limitations/implications** – The study develops a new analytical device for the investigation of intangible legacies for specific publics such as NSO.

**Practical implications** – The study carries practical implications for Olympic and events/festival promoters as it allows defining and operationalising the key attributes of the concept.

**Originality/value** – This is the first study to conceptualise intangible legacy of mega events.

**Keywords** Concept definition, Intangible Olympic legacy, Public value, Social interactions, Qualitative research, Institutionalisation

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Intangible legacy encapsulates the essence of Olympism and its manifestation, the Olympic Games. Pierre de Coubertin framed Olympism as a movement for social reforms in the late nineteenth century, but it was not until the beginning of the twenty-first century when Olympic aspirations assumed material existence through the notion of legacy.

The link between Olympic claims and their effects on society has been questioned as early as 1749 when Gilbert West published the first modern dissertation on the subject. He was concerned with the quality and sufficiency of evidence and analysis and questioned the accuracy of events and perceptions about the ancient Games since the material available for studying them is so often myth, fable and tradition (Girginov, 2013). West's (1749) point applies equally to the modern Games, as definite claims about the role of Olympism in society have been limited to suppositions and reduced to a form of linear correlational relationship (Delbridge and Fiss, 2013).

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Despite growing scholarly interest in the field, as admitted by commentators, conceptual difficulties in defining and measuring legacy persist (see [Koenigstorfer et al., 2019](#); [Scheu et al., 2021](#); [Thomson et al., 2018](#), systematic reviews on legacy, and [Roche, 2017](#) comprehensive analysis of the relationship between mega events and social change), which hampers knowledge development and the work of governments and Organising Committees. Given the primacy attached to legacy and the inherent challenges in capturing it, there is a need to address a major gap in our knowledge and to develop a coherent conceptualisation of intangible legacy. Developing a sound conception about a phenomenon is of critical importance as it provides the basis for its measurement, which then serves to inform our future plans. The aim of this paper is to develop a conceptual definition of intangible Olympic legacy. This has not been achieved before.

Legacy is a key strategic priority of the Olympic Movement in the twenty-first century and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), host governments and cities are now expected to demonstrate what is done in the name of the Games, to whom and to what effect ([IOC, 2017](#)).

This conceptual paper is organised in six sections. First, it positions legacy as an epitome of Olympism and unpacks it as an ongoing social construction process. Second, the process and criteria for developing the concept are explained. Third, the notion of intangible is interrogated with the view to establish its main attributes by using National Sport Organisations (NSO) as a case in point. Fourth, the creation of public value, as the ultimate goal of legacy, is discussed. Fifth, the test for concept goodness is applied to the proposed definition of intangible legacy. Finally, the paper draws some theoretical and practical implications.

### **Legacy as an epitome of Olympism**

The Olympic Games have always been more than a mere sporting competition. As a public event, the Olympics are based on a consequential logic – by showcasing human excellence on the sport field, they aspire to affect social life by inspiring people to take up sport, and more broadly, to bring about change by making the world a better place. As [Handelman \(1990, p. 12\)](#) points out, this is a functional relationship, which “lies at the epistemological core of any conception of public event. The features of the public event indicate that it points beyond itself, or in other words, it is symbolic of something outside itself”. The Olympic Games, as a goal-directed public event, therefore, have a consequential relationship with social life because what is done in their name has material consequences for individuals and societies. It follows that legacy represents an embodiment of Olympic aspirations for change in societal structures. The Games represent a “trait-making” project as opposed to smaller “trait taking” sport projects that fit into pre-existing structures ([Hirschman, 1995](#)).

To implement the changes claimed, the Olympic Movement must be able to actively mobilise and to deploy various resources to influence other groups. The Olympics represent a strategic resource, the value of which resides in the actions and interactions the Games make possible or support. [Hiller \(2012, p. 90\)](#) makes this point clear “the meaning of a symbol is not inherent but emerges from interactions with others”.

The focus of Olympic aspirations has evolved over time and followed a progression from educating people through sport (i.e. micro) to addressing wider social and political objectives (i.e. macro) where sport was the driving force behind Olympism supported by democracy and universality ([Müller, 2000](#)). The *raison d'être* of social movements is their explicit concern with seeking to remedy or alter some problematic issue. The Olympic Charter expresses that “The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity” ([IOC, 2019, p. 11](#)). This broad goal is spelled out into 18 actionable areas, which if realised will impact on the interests of other parties ([IOC, 2019, pp. 16–17](#)).

Hosting an Olympic Games, therefore, becomes an exercise in interpretation of an intervention promoted by the ideology of Olympism and the legacies they leave reflect

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various stakeholders' visions and actions. [Girginov \(2018\)](#) frames the creation of Olympic legacy as a four-stage continuing process involving "investing", "interpellating", "developing" and "codifying". The origins of legacy are not to be found in the Games' bid document but with Olympic Movement which permits its members to use the accumulated common cultural capital and to invest it into a set of visions to be implemented locally and globally ([MacAloon, 2002](#)). Olympic legacy visions aspire to alter significantly social structures and are inherently political because they are based on the principle 'the person is political' which is crucial for forging collective ties that are the prerequisite of social change (cf. [Rojek, 2014](#)). Interpellation entails transforming legacy visions into a trusteeship relationship where one party undertakes to change the capacity of another by reinforcing the collective "can do" mentality. "Developing" in the legacy making concerns promoting participation in Games-stimulated interactions that supports the resource development process. Finally, legacies are codified and turned into cultural and/or social capital by studying, documenting, sharing and remembering them. Cultural and social capital here are interpreted both in [Bourdieu's \(1986\)](#) and [Putnam's \(2000\)](#) sense as they pertain to individuals (i.e. Bourdieu) or communities (i.e. Putnam). Ultimately, legacy is a collective enterprise premised on interactions.

### Methodological approach to concept definition

Concept formation in social sciences has always been a challenging undertaking, yet it remains a fundamental step in any research ([Outhwaite, 2010](#)). This is partly because, as [Goertz \(2006, p. 27\)](#) puts it, "Concepts are about ontology". Thus, the task of concept construction goes beyond providing a definition of it, and inevitably involves value judgements by the researcher as to what is important about an element that features in it. As [Nunnally and Bernstein \(1994, p. 88\)](#), argue "no precise method can be stated to outline the domain of variables for a construct properly... the theorizing process is necessarily intuitive." [Gilson and Goldberg \(2015\)](#) argue that conceptual papers are important for the management field not for building new theory, "but rather they seek to bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level insights, and broaden the scope of our thinking ... it is the "what's new" question that distinguishes a conceptual paper from a review" (p. 128).

[Jaakkola \(2020\)](#) summarises the methodological requirements for conceptual papers in management and marketing and proposes that their main role is the "conceptual integration across multiple theoretical perspectives" with the main goal to "summarizing and integrating current understanding; outlining the conceptual domain of a new phenomenon or idea; structuring a fragmented field by analyzing it through a particular theoretical lens" (p. 22). The current study addresses these requirements through the integration of the ideological claims of Olympism with the theoretical perspectives on intangible resources, social interactions and public value.

The study follows [Gerring's \(1999\)](#) and [Podsakoff et al. \(2016\)](#) approach to concept formation. [Podsakoff et al. \(2016\)](#) argue that a good conceptual definition should: (1) be both parsimonious and a holistic description of essential attributes of a concept of interest; (2) describe the property to which a focal construct refers (e.g. thought, a feeling, a perception) and an entity to which the property applies (e.g. a person, an organisation); and (3) specifies attributes (i.e. dimensions) of a construct.

Similarly, [Gerring \(1999, pp. 357–358\)](#) asserts that:

Concept formation conventionally refers to three aspects of a concept: (1) the events or phenomena to be defined (the extension, denotation, or definiendum), (2) the properties or attributes that define them (the intension, connotation, definiens or definition), and (3) a label covering both 1 and 2 (the term). Concept formation is thus a triangular operation; good concepts attain a proper alignment between 1, 2, and 3.

In [Gerring's \(1999\)](#) view, "Goodness in concept formation is most fruitfully understood as an attempt to mediate among eight criteria: familiarity, resonance, parsimony, coherence, differentiation, depth, theoretical utility, and field utility (p. 367, see [Table 1](#))." He also warned that concept formation represents a set of trade-offs between these eight desiderata.

Gerring's criteria for concept goodness were complemented by [Podsakoff et al.'s \(2016\)](#) model for developing conceptual definitions, as it goes beyond answering a single question and offers a greater guidance on how to proceed in concept formation. The four key stages of the model include: (1) identifying potential attributes by collecting a representative set of definitions; (2) organising the potential attributes by theme and identify any necessary and sufficient and shared ones; (3) developing a preliminary definition of the concept; and (4) refining the conceptual definition of the concept.

This study followed the four stages of concept formation in an iterative fashion by constantly consulting literature and the views of those concerned with constructing legacy and formulating and refining the definition. It is based on a longitudinal investigation of intangible Olympic legacy for NSO spanning some 12 years (2008–2020) and involves extensive literature review and empirical work with the 2012 London and 2014 Sochi Olympic and Paralympic Games. The literature review process is explained in detail in [Scheu et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Girginov and Preuss \(2019\)](#) where the starting point of the search was the two bibliography lists on the subject developed by the IOC's Olympic Studies Centre. These lists were complemented by searches in the Web of Sciences, Scopus and Sports Discus data bases. At the same time, the study explicitly addresses all eight criteria proposed by [Gerring \(1999\)](#). The choice of NSO for illustrating the concept of intangible legacy was deliberate because they represent the foundations of Olympic Movement and perform several critical functions.

### Unpacking intangible in legacy

As a movement for social reforms, Olympism makes three main claims including programme, identity and standing concerning educating young people, global solidarity and identifying with the goals of other organisations such as UN and UNESCO ([Girginov, 2018](#)). Olympic claims are, therefore, largely inspirational and thus very difficult to attribute to them some material existence ([Cotton, 2013](#); [Girginov, 2016](#); [Mahtani et al., 2013](#)).

Literature offers an array of terms associated with the notion of intangible including intangibles, intangible assets, intangible capital, intangible resources, intellectual capital, social capital and intellectual property. Conceptual orientation becomes more complex when considering the subcategories of different terms. [Dumay \(2009\)](#) reports 34 different frameworks for measuring and reporting intellectual capital, while [Kaufmann and Schneider's \(2004\)](#)

Criterion	Key question
Familiarity	How familiar is the concept (to a lay or academic audience)?
Resonance	Does the chosen term ring (resonate)?
Parsimony	How short is a) the term and b) its list of defining attributes (the intension)?
Coherence	How internally consistent (logically related) are the instances and attributes?
Differentiation	How differentiated are the instances and the attributes (from other most-similar concepts)? How bounded, how operationalisable, is the concept?
Depth	How many accompanying properties are shared by the instances under definition?
Theoretical utility	How useful is the concept within a wider field of inferences?
Field utility	How useful is the concept within a field of related instances and attributes? Further questions: Which contexts matter (or should matter), and under what circumstances?

**Table 1.**  
Criteria of conceptual goodness

Source(s): [Gerring \(1999\)](#)

review of literature has shown that the field lacks a standard definition for intangibles or intellectual capital, and that the classification of intangibles into three categories is not sufficient.

This study follows [Lev's \(2001, p. 5\)](#) definition of intangible assets as “a claim to future benefits that does not have a physical or financial (a stock or a bond) embodiment”, which emphasises their specific character. [Diefenbach's \(2006\)](#) extends this definition to include two other properties of intangibles concerned with their use, quantity and quality: “An intangible resource is everything of immaterial existence used or potentially useable for whatever purpose that is renewable after use and decreases, remains or increases in quantity and/or quality while being used” (p. 411). This is an important point suggesting that intangibles are not a fixed but a fluid property which varies across time and context. [Kristandl and Bontis \(2007\)](#) further suggest that intangibles can be regarded from four different perspectives: a process standpoint (i.e. resources exchange), a legal standpoint (i.e. property rights), a standard setting standpoint (i.e. recognition criteria) and from a managerial standpoint (i.e. strategic investments).

Despite a voluminous body of literature on Olympic legacy, with a few exceptions ([Dolan et al., 2019](#); [Girginov, 2016](#); [Owen, 2006](#); [Postlethwaite et al., 2019](#)), intangibles in sport have not received sufficient attention in terms of their properties, creation and beneficiaries. [McCartney et al.'s \(2010\)](#) systematic review of the health and socioeconomic impacts of major multi-sport events do not mention the word “intangible” at all. Extant studies have been limited to identifying potential aggregate intangibles such as knowledge ([Kaplanidou, 2012](#); [Kaplanidou et al., 2019](#)) networks, civic/national pride ([Billings et al., 2013](#); [Waitt, 2001](#)), volunteerism ([Shipway et al., 2020](#); [Zhuang and Girginov, 2012](#)), city branding and residents' perceptions ([Andranovich and Burbank, 2011](#); [Karadakis and Kaplanidou, 2012](#)), intellectual properties, societal beliefs, policy and politics ([Preuss, 2007, 2015, 2019](#)), willingness to pay ([Atkinson et al., 2008](#)), subjective wellbeing ([Dolan et al., 2019](#)) and discursive construction ([Chatziefstathiou and Henry, 2009, 2012](#)). Olympic education forms a specific category of intangibles produced by dedicated programmes. It introduces change in beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours, as demonstrated by [Hwang's \(2018\)](#) systematic review of literature and [Naul et al.'s \(2017\)](#) analysis of international approaches in the field. While literature has established several intangibles from major sporting events, none of them has been studied from the perspective proposed in this paper. It is explicitly concerned with identifying the critical role of interactions between the event and specific publics (i.e. NSO) with the goal of creating public value as central for understanding what intangible legacy means and how it emerges. This conclusion is consistent with [Thomson et al.'s \(2018\)](#) systematic review where intangibles are referred to in aggregate form such as public life, politics and culture and mass participation in sport.

The [IOC's \(2017\)](#) Strategic Legacy Framework defines legacy as a causal relationship between a vision and after-effects, but it fails to specify whose vision is to be privileged and presents intangibles as a predetermined rather than a constructed outcome. It acknowledges the challenges to conceptualising and identifying and measuring intangible legacy “*although it is likely the most relevant in regard to actual benefits to people and society* (emphasis added)” (p. 15).

Intangible Olympic legacy, therefore, represents a claim for future benefits which have no material embodiment. They emerge because of interactions between different actors which vary over time, quantity and quality, and are contingent on contextual factors. [Davis and Groves' \(2019\)](#) analysis of London legacy's masterplan as an anticipatory assemblage of heterogeneous elements that construct futures as knowable and actionable objects in the present supports this point.

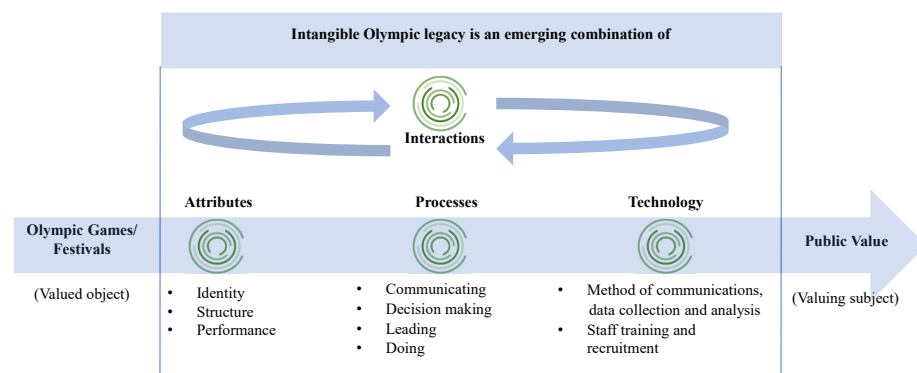
This study defines intangible Olympic legacies as an emergent combination of attributes, processes, interactions and technologies pertinent to any group or organisation. The ultimate

purpose of intangible Olympic legacy is the creation of public value. This is achieved through the relationships people and organisations form with the Games (Girginov and Preuss, 2019). The proposed definition has four important implications for the conceptualisation and measurement of legacy. First, intangible legacy is not a fixed property, rather it evolves over the course of conceiving, organising and leveraging the Games. Second, intangible legacy is created because of the internal and external interactions a group gets involved in. Third, the creation of public value becomes possible because of human appraisal and only comes into being at the experience and perception levels. It represents a relationship between the Games (i.e. a valued object) and a subject (i.e. organisation/individual) who evaluates them. Finally, intangible legacy has an important time dimension, which reflects people’s perceptions and experiences at a moment in time. This means that intangible legacy ought to be measured not at a single point in time rather over the life span of the Games. These four definitional implications of intangible legacy reflect the four perspectives identified earlier by Kristandl and Bontis (2007) including a processual (i.e. Olympic-induced interactions and resources exchange), a legal (i.e. may involve creation and use of property rights), a standard setting (i.e. establishing an Olympic-inspired designation) and a managerial perspective (i.e. creation of intangibles as a strategic organisational investment).

The key properties/attributes of the proposed definition of intangible legacy including organisational attributes, processes, interactions and technologies are shown in Figure 1 and discussed below. What this definition means in practice is that if we are to understand what intangible legacy means for a NSO, we need to study its objectives, main attributes and forms of engagement of its different constituencies (i.e. staff, volunteers, athletes) with the Games over time. Since intangible legacy is ultimately about public value as perceived by different stakeholders, it follows that it serves primarily developmental purposes. Intangible legacy thus, takes on the dual role of a means and a developmental end in itself, by first, assisting in building an organisation’s capacity (i.e. *developmental end*), and then using this capacity as a *means* to deliver value for the organisation. For clarity, we use NSO further in the text to illustrate the analysis, but its logic can apply to any other collective body.

*Organisational attributes*

Literature on organisational attributes suggests multiple approaches for measuring ranging from 20 to more than 250 indicators (Levesque et al., 2014). Studies on organisational capacity tend to agree on four main variables including human resources (e.g. motivation, knowledge base, experience), external (e.g. relationships, trust, domain logic), infrastructure (e.g. organisational culture, research, computers and IT) and financial (e.g. resources,



**Figure 1.**  
Key properties of intangible legacy concept

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assets, cost of labour) (De Vita *et al.*, 2001; Gazley and Christensen, 2008; Wigboldus *et al.*, 2010).

The analysis of literature allows identifying three domains of organisational attributes including identity (i.e. an organisation internal and external image, vision, satisfaction), structure (i.e. organisational structure, governance, membership, club network) and performance (i.e. participants/fan base, services offered, communications and outcomes) (Girginov *et al.*, 2017). The three domains provide a guide for the operationalisation of organisational attributes, and in combination help explain organisations' ability to mobilise and deploy resources needed for the creation of intangible legacy.

Edwards and Gillham (2013, pp. 3–4) identify four types of intangibles resources including moral (i.e. legitimacy, integrity, solidarity support, sympathetic support and celebrity), cultural (i.e. artefacts, conceptual tools and specialised knowledge), socio-organisational (i.e. infrastructures, social networks and organisations) and human (i.e. labour, experience, skills, expertise and leadership). Preuss (2019) argues that a Games' legacy is the result of changes caused by six "event structures" including infrastructure, knowledge/skills/networks, policy/governance, beliefs and behaviour in society, intellectual properties and environment. Those event structures are somewhat like Edwards and Gillham's (2013) organisational resources and highlight the varied nature of resources that social movements need to advance their causes.

### *Social interactions*

Social interactions are central for engagement with the Olympics and largely determine what different agencies do in this domain. Turner (1998, pp. 13–14) defines social interactions as "the process whereby the overt movements, covert deliberations, and basic physiology of one individual influence those of another and vice versa". It follows that when a NSO articulates a vision for sport, they invite their constituencies (i.e. athletes, members, fans) to interpret it and to react accordingly.

According to Turner (1988), social interactions have three interrelated properties including motivational, interactional and structuring. The motivational property explains how the process of interaction is affected by different motivations. What people actually do when they influence each other, refers to the interactional processes. The structuring processes "denote the fact that social interactions are often repeated across time as well as "organised in physical space" (p. 16). The structural aspect also emphasises the ability of NSO to sustain and to extend their interactions with the different target groups beyond the Games.

Social interactions shape people's consumption of sport and the development of their lifestyles. People's experience of events are predicated on social interactions (Marques *et al.*, 2021), and as Downward and Riordan (2007) and Sprecher *et al.* (2002) demonstrate, interactions are also important for understanding the demand for sports and the accumulation of personal and social capital, opportunities, information and support. In the context of NSO's relationship with their stakeholders, eight main types of social interactions simulated by the Olympic Games can be identified, including motivational, knowledge generation/dissemination, advocacy, service provision and consumption (i.e. interactional), partnerships, celebrations, collaborations and legal actions (i.e. structural) (Girginov, 2018).

### *Processes*

As discussed above, legacy creation is a four-stage continuing process involving investing, interpellating, developing and codifying. Each stage of the process includes a series of organisation-specific activities, which take place across three plains including information, people and action. The core organisational processes across the information plain concern

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communicating and controlling, leading and linking relate to people and doing and dealing characterise the action plain (Mintzberg, 2011).

### *Technology*

Technology is critical for the creation of legacy and usually refers to the use of digital (and other) means for communications and service provision, and methods for data collection and analysis, for sharing individual experiences and staff recruitment and training delivery.

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### **Intangible legacy as public value**

Public value is a property of fundamental importance for the intangible legacy concept, but it has been largely neglected in Olympic studies (save Foley *et al*, 2015). Moore's (2009) assertion that non-profit organisations' missions is not only about revenue assurance but also about value creation, applies to the Olympic Movement. Literature on conceptualising and operationalising public value has resulted in a multitude of inventories. Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) identify 230 studies and 72 different values pertinent to different aspects of public administration. The main thrust of the notion of public value concerns the critical role of public authorities for the functioning of society and an explicit concern with the "collective", which resonates with Olympic values. Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) also suggest that public values are hierarchically ordered and include instrumental and prime values. This entails that a complete public value analysis ought to include both causal inquiry (instrumental values) and moral inquiry (prime values).

This study employs Meynhardt's (2009) non-normative conception of public value, which overcomes the tension between objectivists and subjectivists views of value. This interpretation is different from Moore's (1995, 2009) much-utilised definition of public value, where a public authority must establish its legitimacy, support and build capacity first in order to produce public value. Meynhardt proposes that value emerges "as a result of a relationship between a subject that is valuing an object and the valued object. Value does not exist independently outside of that relationship" (p. 198). Meynhardt (2015, p. 149) synthesises the literature and proposes four theoretical concepts for understanding public value including:

(1) value exists in relationships, (2) the public is inside, that is the public only exists at the level of human experience, (3) public value is grounded in basic needs and (4) public value is perceived and not delivered and is always relative.

In essence, public value represents a relationship between a subject that is valuing an object and the valued object. Meynhardt then asks the fundamental question "who is the public" and makes the point that the answer depends on political, sociological or legal considerations. According to Frederickson (1991) several perspectives on the public are possible including the public as: (1) interest group (the pluralist perspective); (2) consumer (the public choice perspective); (3) represented (the legislative perspective); (4) client (the service-providing perspective) and (5) citizen. This is a critical question in the context of legacy because Olympism is premised on a philosophical anthropology which promotes an idealised vision of the exemplary person (Girginov and Parry, 2004). Most studies on public perceptions about the Games have failed to specify who is the public (e.g. Fredline *et al*, 2006), and Foley *et al* (2015) only make a passing reference to Meynhardt (2009) in this regard.

Meynhardt's (2009) analysis draws attention to three further points. First, he contends that "value is bound to evolving relationships and ongoing processes of subjective evaluations and revaluations" (p. 199). It follows that evaluations of the Games' value will evolve over time as evidenced by studies on public opinions about the Olympics (Bunt *et al*, 2011; Cohen, 2013; Hiller and Wanner, 2011; Kaplianidou, 2012; Koenigstorfer and Preuss, 2018; Peryman, 2013; Weimar and Rocha, 2019). Second, he interrogates the basic of



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evaluation, or in other words, what forces are responsible for initiating the evaluation. One such key force is needs, but emotions, opinions and norms can also trigger the evaluation process. Therefore, it would be reasonable to expect that different publics will have different reasons for evaluating their relationships with the Games. In the context of the present study, the analysis then ought to be asking “what makes the Olympic Games valuable for a NSO?” This question requires changing the focus from the universalising claims of the Olympics, as striving to bettering the world through sports, to a particularism concerned with an individual or group perspective. Commenting on Olympism, [McAloon \(2002, p. 779\)](#) makes this point clear “Being a movement means *moving* on the things that matter most, or should matter most, not to some abstract Humanity but to real human beings”.

[Brookes and Wiggan \(2009\)](#) apply Moore’s model to analyse the public value of sport from Sport England’s perspective when London was awarded the Games. The study suggests that the Olympics stimulated a significant policy shift in the perceived public value of sport in England from “greater good of sport” to “sport for sport’s sake”. The authors note that opportunity and access were the two main mechanisms for delivering public value. Using a contingent valuation approach, [Atkinson et al. \(2008\)](#) analyse the willingness of residents from London, Manchester and Glasgow to pay for the London Games. The authors put forward seven intangible impacts (i.e. feel good factor, awareness of disability, motivation, legacy of facilities, environmental improvements, healthy living and cultural events) which fall in either the perceptions or experiences category. [Byers et al. \(2019\)](#) theoretical framework for analysing the delivery of legacy also suggests that stakeholders’ interpretations and interactions are responsible for both producing and limiting legacy delivery. Outside sport, [Filep et al. \(2015\)](#) propose a research agenda for a positive psychology of events where people’s experiences and the feel-good factor assume a central role. These studies further reinforce our conceptualisation of public value as existing at the level of perception and experience, that is, it is in the eye of the beholder.

Third, for [Meynhardt \(2015\)](#), public value creation suggests an active perspective on how organisations shape and co-create people’s experiences of social reality. It is about “impact on how people think and feel about society” (p. 193). [Mazzucato’s \(2018, p. 6\)](#) definition of public value creation echoes this view: “the ways in which different type of resources (human, physical and intangible) are established and interact to produce new goods and services”. In contrast, value extraction’ concerns “activities focused on moving around existing resources and outputs and gaining disproportionately from the ensuing trade”. The Olympic Games have always been a site for both value creation and value extraction, which urges the analysis of intangible legacy to account for the former and challenge the latter. As Mazzucato’s insightful analysis demonstrates, there can be no value outside the public sphere. Her observation applies also to the organisation of the Olympics, which has always been contingent on the political, logistical and financial support of public authorities. Even the so-called first privately funded 1984 Los Angeles Games did in fact receive \$75m of federal government subsidies or 12% of their total cost ([GAO, 2000](#)).

Meynhardt’s and Mazzucato’s analyses of the public value creation process further reinforce the critical importance of understanding social interactions, resources development and the presence of a specific public. The Olympic Games, therefore, offer a classic example for public value creation: hosting an Olympic Games requires first, to invests the accumulated public capital in the form of Olympic discourse, symbols and resources, which is then followed by various interactions and resource exchanges that ultimately lead to the creation of public value as defined by different groups and organisations. Sport organisations, as a distinct interest group, perceive public value because they can positively relate their experience of the Games to their basic needs (cf. name deleted to maintain the integrity of the review process).

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## Testing the new definition of intangible legacy for concept goodness

This section applies Podsakoff *et al.*'s (2016) and Gerring's (1999) tests to assess the concept goodness of the proposed definition of intangible Olympic legacy. First, in addressing Podsakoff *et al.*'s three conditions, it is argued that the definition is parsimonious and holistic in that it succinctly and clearly describes the phenomenon as an emergent combination of five key attributes as well as its ultimate goal. Second, it describes both the property to which intangibles refer, that is, the perceptions and experiences of the public concerned and the entity to which this property applies, that is, sport organisations. Third, it specifies the attributes (i.e. organisational attributes, processes, interactions, technologies and public value) of the intangible legacy construct, thus allowing for their operationalisation.

Applying Greening's (1999) criteria for concept goodness also provides confidence that the proposed definition of intangible legacy is sound. The eight criteria are examined in turn below.

### *How familiar is the concept to a lay or academic audience (familiarity)?*

The concept of intangibles is central to the Olympic Movement and has been the subject of numerous studies for over 20 years. It also forms an essential part of the vocabulary of all national and international sport organisations and media commentators, including a dedicated legacy strategy by the IOC (2017).

### *Does the chosen term ring (resonance)?*

The term "intangible" has been used widely by public, non-profit and commercial organisations in their strategic and operational planning and discourses. These organisations are required to demonstrate that everything they do delivers not only tangible benefits (i.e. jobs, facilities), but equally inspiration, enhanced self-belief, social interactions and governance (i.e. intangibles).

### *How short is (1) the term and (2) its list of defining attributes (parsimony)?*

As per Podsakoff *et al.*'s (2016) criteria above, the proposed definition of intangible legacy is short and offers a list of five operationalisable attributes.

### *How internally consistent (logically related) are the instances and attributes (coherence)?*

Gerring (1999) defines coherence as "the sense in which the attributes that define the concept, as well as the characteristics that actually characterize the phenomena in question, "belong" to one another" (p. 373). From an organisational point of view, all five attributes of the concept are closely interrelated and mutually constructive. All sport organisations have a structure, members, participants, policy documents (i.e. attributes). These attributes reflect the presence (or absence) of certain capital such as values, knowledge, skills, networks and finances. Enhancing organisational capital leads to better structures and processes in achieving the strategic aims of the organisation. Processes such as the presence of governance and operating principles and procedures allow for effective decision making and greater results. Legacy-related interactions are contingent on good governance and the ability of an organisation to mobilise and deploy its capital. The use of technology (i.e. specific methods for communication, data collection and analysis, staff recruitment and training) is what makes organisational structures transparent and accountable, which in turn creates the conditions for more effective governance, interactions and capital accumulation.

### *How differentiated are the instances and the attributes (from other most-similar concepts)?*

#### *How bounded, how operationalisable, is the concept? (differentiation)*

What really differentiates one concept from the similar class of concepts is the degree of its operationalisation. All five key attributes in the definition of intangible legacy are

operationalisable and thus their referents can be located in physical space. Aspects of NSO's attributes, social interactions, resources, performance and perceptions of effectiveness have been successfully operationalised and measured (see [Darcy et al., 2014](#); [O'Boyle and Hassan, 2014](#); [Wolfe et al., 2002](#)). Another important distinguishing characteristic of intangibles is that they represent a claim to future benefits that does not have physical embodiment ([Lev, 2001](#)). A final important distinguishing element of the definition is that, in contrast to the summative, and limited IOC's Olympic Games Impact framework ([VanWynsberghe, 2015](#)), it is both formative (i.e. captures the process of legacy formation) and summative (i.e. it captures outcomes).

*How many accompanying properties are shared by the instances under definition? (depth)*

A strong measure for the depth of a concept is its ability to bundle together different characteristics of the phenomenon (i.e. intangible legacy). The proposed definition of intangible legacy "bundles" together five broad characteristics of any sport organisation and thus provides sufficient depth of the concept.

*How useful is the concept within a wider field of inferences? (theoretical utility)*

The main goal of social science concepts is to support the building of theories. The current conception of intangible legacy does that by providing some important building blocks (i.e. concepts and principles) which may be used to formulate a theory of intangible legacy creation following the theory-research-practice approach.

*How useful is the concept within a field of related instances and attributes? further questions: which contexts matter (or should matter), and under what circumstances? (field utility)*

The main field utility of the concept of intangible legacy is that it provides a distinct referent for its attributes which can be identified and observed in the real world. Thus, they can be used by Olympic and event promoters to define the intangible benefits for different publics and to measure them.

Stage two of [Podsakoff et al.'s \(2016\)](#) model contains a further test for the fitness of the concept concerning the evaluation of whether each attribute is a necessary or sufficient property of the concept. As the authors elaborate "Necessary (essential) properties are things that all exemplars of the concept must possess. Sufficient (unique) properties are things that only exemplars of the concept possess" (p. 181). The proposed definition of intangible legacy includes five key attributes all of which are necessary properties for any organisation regardless of the field in which it exists. Nevertheless, NSO also possess a range of sufficient properties in each key attribute that are typical only to the organisations in the sector. For example, NSO are both producers and consumers of their own services (i.e. capital and process), they are heavily reliant on volunteers (i.e. processes and interactions) and are the only recognised national representative of a sport on the Olympic Games (i.e. organisational attribute). Thus, the proposed definition meets the test for necessary and sufficient property of the concept as well.

## **Conclusion**

The Olympic Movement has embraced the notion of legacy as a central tenet of its philosophy and strategy. This entails a commitment to demonstrate a causal relationship between Olympic claims. The concept of intangible legacy encapsulates the essence of Olympism and appeals strongly to politicians, Games promoters and businesses. The current thinking of legacy is premised on an objectivist ontology with a positivist epistemological approach which seeks to establish a causal link between the Games and any benefits with the view to

predict and control the impact of the Olympics (IOC, 2017). This is a very problematic assumption, and we have argued that it is high time to move beyond claims for abstract humanity and to turn the legacy gaze internally to real individuals, organisations and communities. This can be achieved by adopting a constructivist approach to legacy which acknowledges that it is an emerging combination of attributes, processes, technology and interactions with the goal of creating public value. Public value is interpreted both as a noun (i.e. sets of standards against which something is compared) and a process (i.e. what the public values). It comes into existence at the level of perceptions and experience and requires interactions between a valuing subject and a valued object. Barney's (2004, p. 41) insightful observation about the role of technology in network society fully applies to the construction of Olympic legacy: "social constructivism purports to reintroduce history, culture, contingency, contestation and politics – in a phrase – *human agency* – back into the study of technology and recommends sociological and empirical over philosophical and theoretical approaches to that study".

Since most intangible legacy is qualitative rather than quantitative, a reconsideration of the current research paradigm is also needed. This implies employing quality criteria and verification strategies capable of capturing meaningful representations of intangible legacy. The measurement of intangible legacy then needs to be institutionalised not for the sake of bureaucracy but to ensure sustainability, codification and dissemination of knowledge. Further research is needed to operationalise and empirically test the concept in relation to a specific public (i.e. NSO, age group). Following Meynhardt's (2009) three propositions of public value, future studies ought to explicitly address (1) the relationships groups/organisations form with events, (2) to what extent these relationships address the group's basic needs and (3) how public value has been experienced (not just perceived) by the group and changed over time.

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**Corresponding author**

Vassil Girginov can be contacted at: [Vassil.Girginov@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Vassil.Girginov@brunel.ac.uk)

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