

#2 TRANSITION AND EARLY PLANNING

Structuring delivery
after the award



Foreword

Winning the right to host a mega-event is often described as a finish line. In reality, it is the starting point of a different and more complex phase. The period that follows the award is neither purely political nor fully operational. It is a passage in which commitments made during the bid must be transformed into organisations, processes, and planning frameworks capable of sustaining years of delivery.

This second Knowledge Paper focuses on that passage, distinguishing between **transition**, which bridges the award of the event and the establishment of the delivery structure, and **early planning**, which begins once that structure is in place and starts shaping how the event will be delivered.

Drawing on direct involvement in projects such as Expo 2030 Riyadh, Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, Expo 2020 Dubai and the Rome Ryder Cup 2022, this paper reflects on how these phases unfold in practice, how they differ across event typologies, and why early decisions taken during this period have long-lasting effects on delivery performance.

Roberto Daneo & Giorgio Re

Founders, WePlan

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**TRANSITION
AND EARLY
PLANNING**
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Abstract

The lifecycle of a mega-event does not progress seamlessly from award to execution. Between these moments lies a period in which governance is defined, organisations are created, and the first strategic planning choices are made. This paper analyses that period by separating transition and early planning and by examining how these phases are structured in different event systems.

In the World Expo framework, the transition phase is governed by the preparation and approval of the Registration Dossier, a mandatory step that conditions the start of delivery.

AWARDING A MEGA-EVENT

GOVERNANCE DEFINITION

ESTABLISHING THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE

STRATEGIC PLANNING

PROVIDING
STRUCTURE TO
COMPLEXITY

HIGH LEVEL
SCHEDULING

ENSURING
CAPACITY
TO DELIVER

In the Olympic context, transition culminates in the establishment of the Organising Committee, after which early planning is guided by strategic documents such as the Games Delivery Plan and the adapted Master Schedule. In other events, including the Ryder Cup, transition and early planning are shaped by governance models in which the right-holder retains a direct delivery role.

Through these experiences, the paper highlights how early organisational and planning choices influence credibility, risk management, and the capacity to deliver complex events.

Introduction

The moment of award is usually accompanied by strong political visibility and public attention. Yet it is also the moment when uncertainty increases.

Bid committees are no longer sufficient, delivery organisations do not yet fully exist, and many of the assumptions that under-

pinned the candidature still need to be tested against reality.

In this context, **the period immediately following the award plays a disproportionate role in shaping the future of the event.**

Decisions taken, or postponed, during this time influence governance stability, delivery pace, and

stakeholder confidence.

Experience across different major events suggests that this period is best understood as two distinct phases.

The first concerns the **creation of the delivery structure.** The second concerns the **early organisation of the work that such structure will need to perform.**





THE TRANSITION PHASE



The transition phase

FROM AWARD TO DELIVERY STRUCTURE

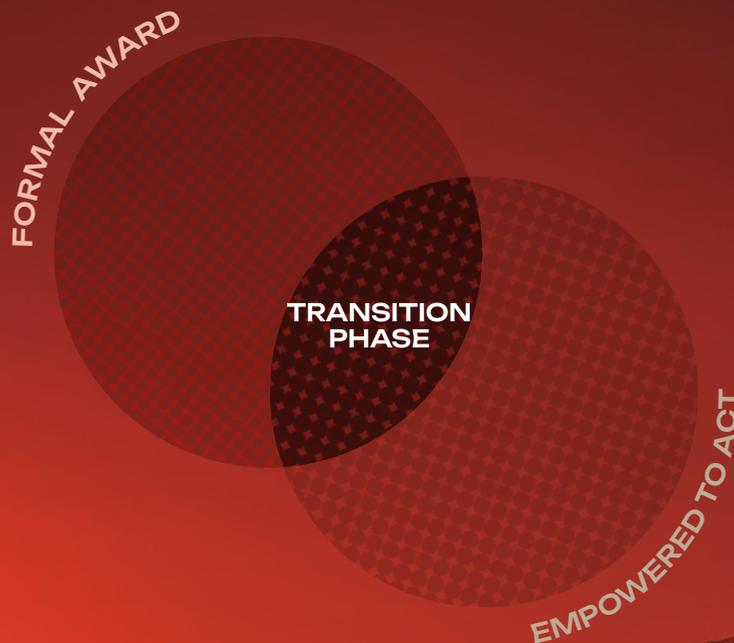
Transition begins with the formal award of the event and ends when the main delivery organisation is established and empowered to act. Its focus is institutional rather than operational.

During this phase, responsibilities shift from bid-focused entities to delivery-oriented bodies. Legal forms are defined,

governance arrangements are negotiated, and leadership roles are appointed. At the same time, the right-holder and international stakeholders expect reassurance that the host is progressing in a controlled and credible way.

One of the recurring risks observed in this phase is the loss of continuity between the bid

and delivery. Without deliberate effort, strategic intent can dissipate as political priorities evolve and new actors enter the process. Managing transition therefore requires both formal instruments and careful stewardship of institutional memory by actively protecting and passing on what has been developed and approved during the candidature phase.



TRANSITION IN THE EXPO CONTEXT

In the World Expo system, transition is structured through a formal and binding mechanism: the **Registration Dossier**.

Following the award of an Expo, the preparation of the Registration Dossier becomes the central task of the transition phase. Unlike the candidature file, which is designed to persuade, the Registration Dossier is designed to prove the viability of the project. Moreover, it must be approved by the BIE General Assembly before the Expo can fully enter its delivery phase.

This approval is not symbolic. It conditions the ability to formally invite participating countries, to launch structured engagement with international participants, and to advance site preparation works at full scale. In practice, it marks the point at which the Expo moves from a winning project to an authorised programme.

The Registration Dossier translates bid commitments into an executive framework covering organising committee legal status, thematic concept, masterplan and operations, communications, commercial strategy,

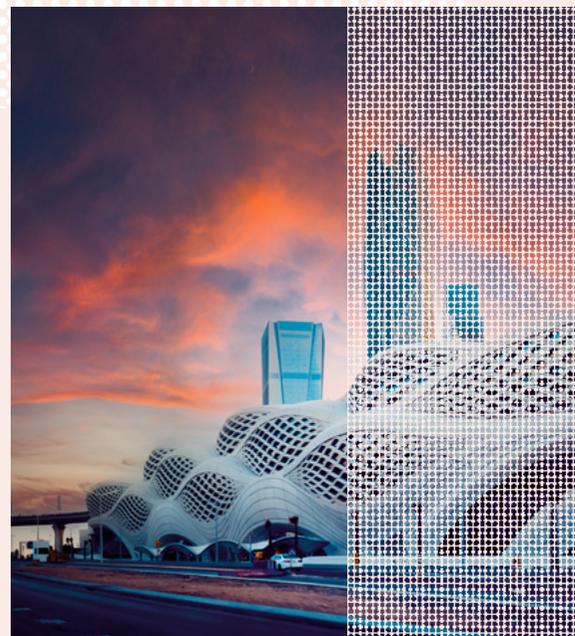
EXPO 2030 RIYADH EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Following the award of Expo Riyadh 2030 in November 2023, the Registration Dossier required a level of definition that went beyond narrative ambition. Governance structures, financial assumptions, and site development logic had to be articulated in a way that could withstand institutional scrutiny by BIE Member States.

The process forced early alignment across national institutions and brought forward decisions that, if postponed, would have re-emerged later with greater risk. Its approval on June 2025 marked the effective start of Expo 2030 delivery.

financial planning, and legacy.

In parallel, the host must establish the organising entity and define the delivery model, including whether a single body will be responsible for both site construction and event operations or whether these functions will be allocated to separate entities. This clarification of roles, responsibilities, and interfaces is an integral part of the transition process. Its purpose is to provide sufficient clarity and credibility to justify the shift from an awarded project to an implementable project, capable of entering full-scale delivery once authorisation is granted.



TRANSITION IN THE OLYMPIC CONTEXT

The Olympic and Paralympic Games follow a different transition logic. Upon awarding the Games, the International Olympic Committee defines a contractual timeline for the establishment of the Organising Committee. This step is mandatory and represents the formal conclusion of the transition phase.

In the case of Milano Cortina 2026, the candidature file had already articulated the key reasoning underpinning the governance framework of the Games, including the institutional logic and the entities to be represented within the Organising Committee's Executive Board.

As a result, the transition phase

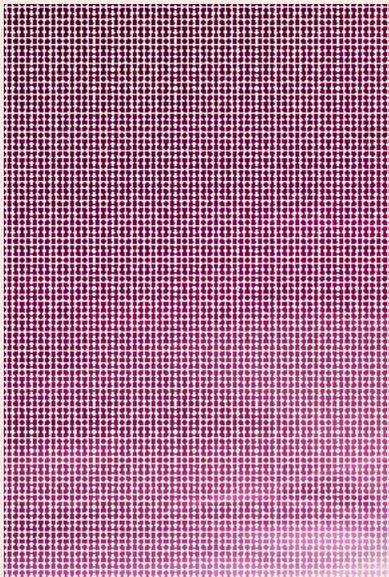
EXPO 2030 RIYADH EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Within this framework, the transition involved translating the agreed governance model into an operational organisation capable of functioning across a complex, polycentric context spanning multiple Regions and Autonomous Provinces, while ensuring clear and workable relationships with national government, regional authorities, and venue owners.

was less concerned with redefining governance principles and more focused on formalising the legal status of the OCOG, ultimately established as a Foundation.

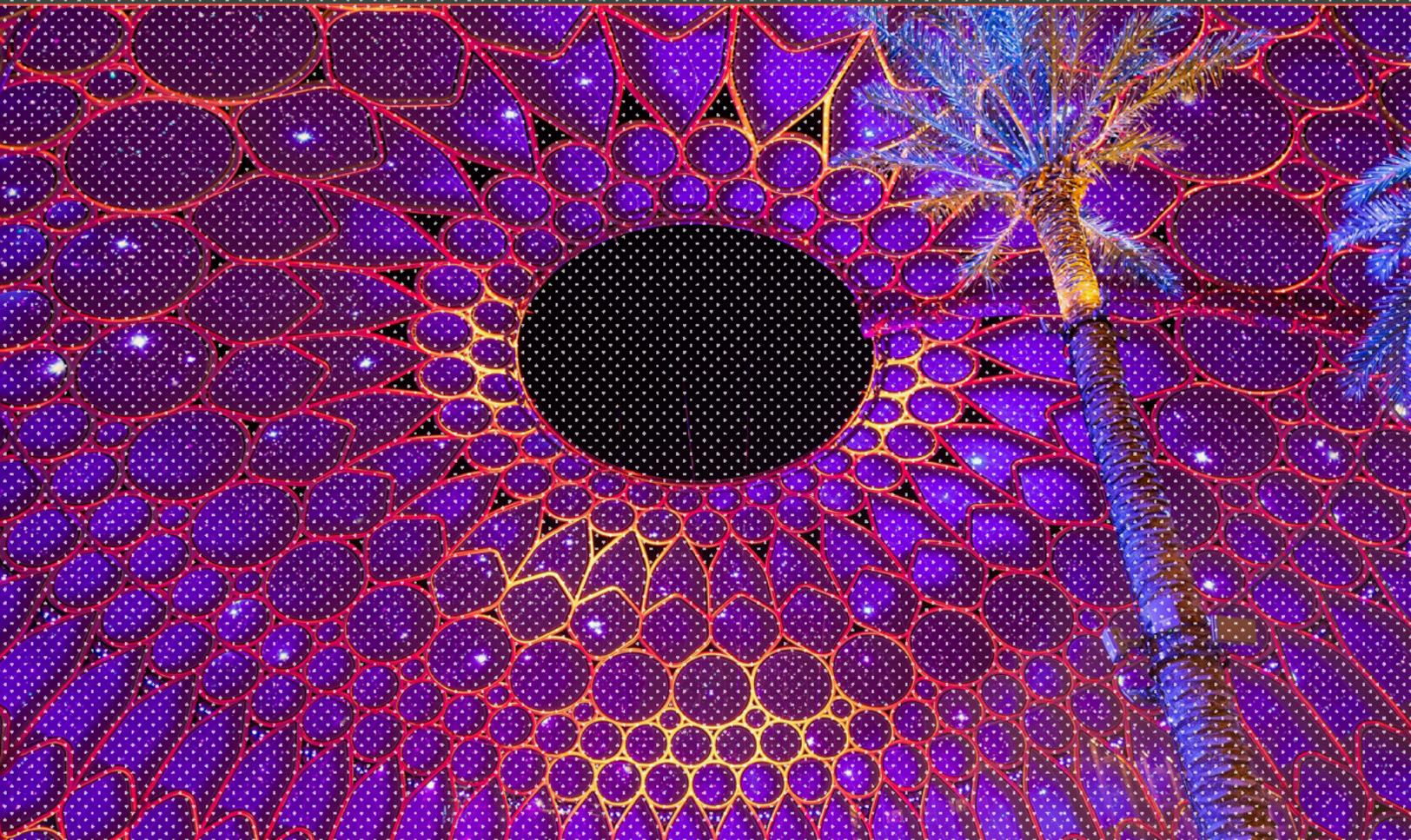
Unlike the Expo system, the Olympic framework does not require the approval of an

executive planning document before delivery can begin. Once the OCOG is established, it is empowered to start planning immediately. This places greater emphasis on the robustness of governance arrangements at the moment of establishment, as planning authority flows directly from organisational legitimacy.





EARLY PLANNING



Early planning

FROM ORGANISATION TO STRUCTURED DELIVERY

Early planning begins when the delivery organisation is in place and able to act. Its purpose is not to finalise all solutions, but to **provide structure to complexity.**

At this stage, organisers face a paradox. They must move quickly enough to demonstrate progress and maintain credibility, while avoiding decisions that are too detailed or rigid to accommodate future change. Early planning therefore focuses on direction, sequencing, and alignment. Across events, this

phase typically includes the definition of delivery roles, the articulation of strategic priorities, the development of high-level Master Schedules, and the first iterations of resource and staffing plans.

A further defining element of this phase is the establishment of a robust knowledge-transfer process, drawing on the experience of previous organisers and comparable events. This is typically supported through structured observer programmes

and other formal learning mechanisms promoted by right-holders. These initiatives allow delivery teams to benchmark established practices, understand critical risks and timelines, and observe how planning assumptions translate into operational reality.

When effectively integrated, knowledge transfer strengthens early planning by anchoring strategic frameworks in tested delivery experience and accelerating organisational learning at a formative stage of the event lifecycle.



EARLY PLANNING IN THE OLYMPIC CONTEXT

For the Olympic Games, early planning is structured around the development of the **Games Delivery Plan**: a document conceived as a **strategic reference covering the full lifecycle of the Games**, rather than as an operational manual.

The Games Delivery Plan articulates how the Organising Committee intend to deliver impact, engagement, and experience, while ensuring operational readiness through key enablers like governance, commercial strategy, procurement, financing, and risk management.

Its structure reflects the need to integrate strategic intent with delivery mechanics, providing a

common framework for both the OCOG and its delivery partners.

While the Games Delivery Plan is normally shared with the IOC and discussed with the IOC Executive Board, it is not binding in the way the Expo Registration Dossier is. Its value lay in its capacity to align stakeholders, structure internal decision-making, and provide a reference point against which progress could be assessed and adjusted over time.

In parallel, Olympic early planning usually includes the adaptation of the IOC's generic Master Schedule and Games Delivery Roadmap.

MILANO CORTINA 2026 EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

The Games Delivery Plan functioned as a strategic compass for all the entities involved in delivering the Games. Its authority derived from usefulness rather than regulation, supporting alignment while remaining adaptable.

On the other hand, the definition of the Milano Cortina 2026 Master Schedule required translating standard milestones into a context characterised by geographic dispersion and differentiated governance responsibilities.

The resulting schedule did not aim at detailed task management, but at creating visibility on interdependencies and critical paths across functional areas.



EARLY PLANNING IN THE EXPO CONTEXT

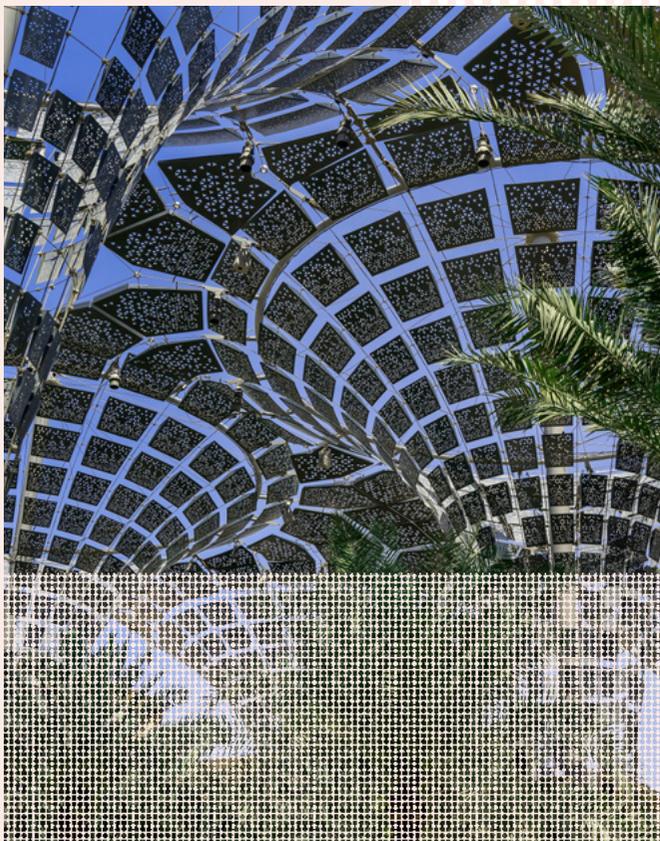
In the Expo system, once the Registration Dossier has been approved, organisers enter a delivery phase without a pre-defined, standardised planning framework equivalent to the Olympic master schedule. The experience demonstrates that, even in the absence of formal requirements from the right-holder, early planning tools can play a decisive role in structuring delivery and reducing uncertainty.

EXPO DUBAI 2020 EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

*For Expo 2020 Dubai, **the absence of a standard framework prepared by the right holder was addressed by developing an integrated master schedule inspired by the Olympic model.***

*This schedule, composed of **1,300 milestones across 37 Functional Areas**, provided a shared temporal structure across site development, operations, participant engagement, and readiness activities. It allowed early identification of critical paths and dependencies, and it created a common planning language across institutions and partners.*

The Expo 2020 Dubai Master Schedule did not aim at detailed control. Its primary function was to provide visibility and alignment, testing early assumptions and reducing uncertainty across delivery streams.





A DIFFERENT GOVERNANCE MODEL



**A DIFFERENT
GOVERNANCE LOGIC:
THE RYDER CUP
CASE STUDY**

The Ryder Cup represents a different organisational model where the right-holder is also the delivering body, while the host nation supports delivery through funding, infrastructure supervision, coordination with public authorities, and golf course upgrades to align with tournament specification.

For the Rome Ryder Cup 2022, host nation delivery support was led by the Italian Golf Federation in partnership with the golf course's owner, without the creation of a special-purpose vehicle. Instead, a dedicated internal department was established. In this context, early planning served primarily to clarify interfaces between the right-holder, national institutions, and local authorities.

RYDER CUP ROME
**EXPERIENCE
HIGHLIGHTS**

In the absence of a standalone organising committee, early planning tools played a key role in compensating for organisational simplicity by increasing clarity and coordination.

Our support to early planning focused on defining an preliminary event master schedule, revising the event budget, and supporting the staffing planning process.



Cross-cutting reflection

Across different event typologies, several patterns emerge. **Transition and early planning are distinct phases that require different tools and skills.** Formal thresholds, such as the approval of a Registration Dossier or the establishment of an Organising Committee, provide stability and legitimacy. Early planning instruments derive their effectiveness less from formal authority than from their ability to align stakeholders and structure complexity. Perhaps most importantly, these phases are cumulative. **Weaknesses in transition tend to resurface during early planning, while unclear early planning often amplifies risks later in delivery.**

Conclusion

Mega-events are not shaped only by what happens during operations. They are shaped by decisions taken years earlier, often in moments that attract limited attention.

By approaching transition and early planning as deliberate design phases, hosts and organisers can preserve the strategic intent of their bids while progressively introducing operational discipline.





*WePlan is a consulting boutique specialised in **mega-event candidatures, delivery planning, and legacy strategies**. Founded by **Roberto Daneo** and **Giorgio Re**, the firm has contributed to major international projects including **Expo 2030 Riyadh, Milano Cortina 2026, Expo 2020 Dubai, Matera European Capital of Culture 2019**, and the **Ryder Cup 2022**.*

*Beyond their advisory work, the founders have also held **managing roles within large-scale events**, gaining direct operational experience. Their previous positions include **Expo Milano**, where Roberto served as **Managing Director of the Bid Committee and Coordinator of City Operations**, while Giorgio was **Head of Finance of the Italian Pavilion**. Roberto also acted as **Managing Director for Authority Relations** during the **Torino 2006 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games**.*

This blend of strategic advisory and on-the-ground management gives WePlan a comprehensive understanding of how vision, governance, and delivery must align to achieve successful and sustainable mega-events.

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