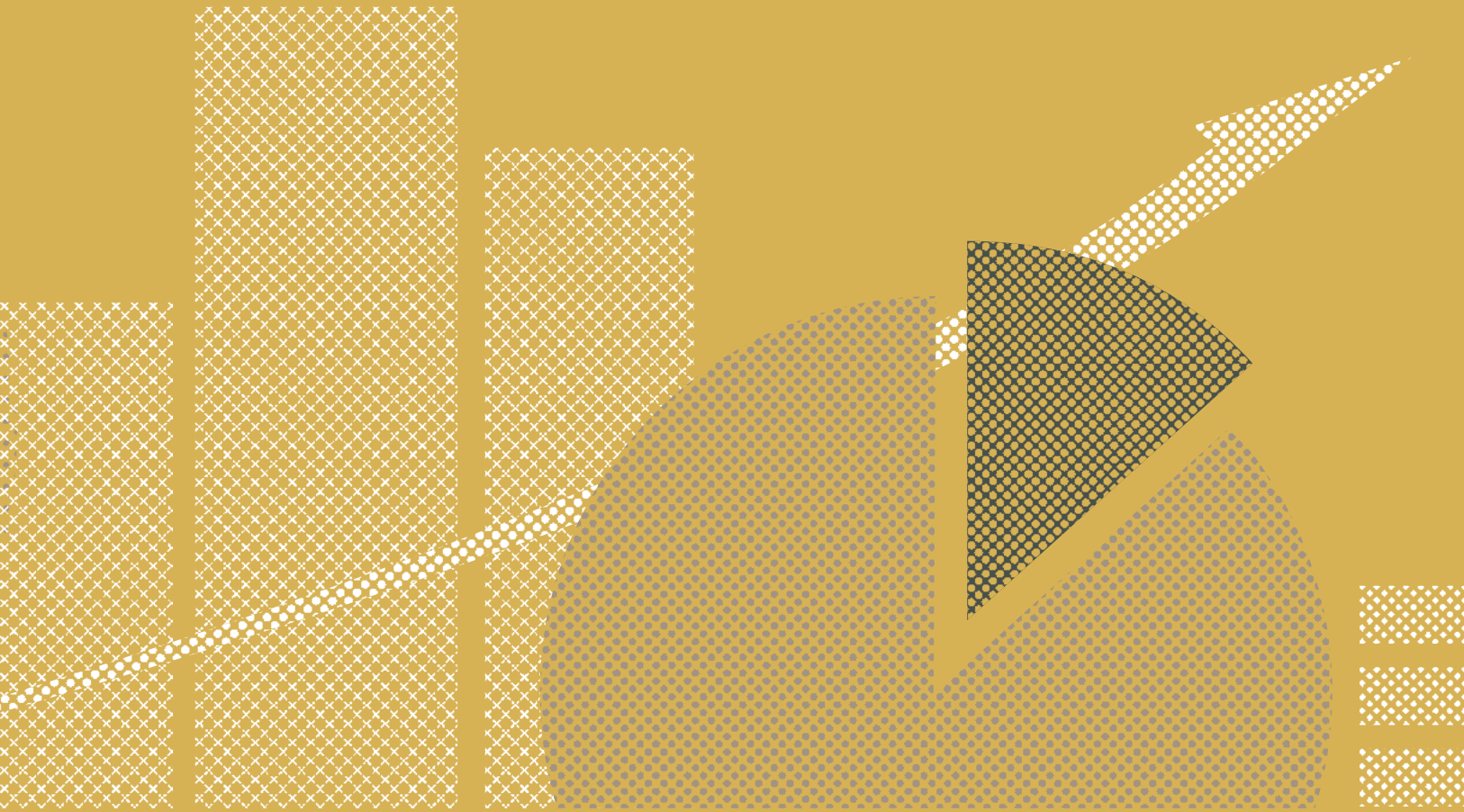


# #3 OPERATIONAL READINESS

From Planning  
to Performance



## Foreword

Major international events are increasingly complex programmes that extend far beyond venue preparation and event delivery. They require host territories to activate coordinated operational ecosystems capable of managing extraordinary demand, global visibility and heightened risk exposure.

While early lifecycle phases focus on strategic positioning, governance structuring and infrastructure planning, the true test of programme maturity emerges in the lead-up to operations. During this phase, **plans must prove their robustness, institutions must demonstrate their coordination capacity and operational concepts must translate into real-world performance.**

Drawing on its involvement in global mega-event programmes and territorial transformation initiatives, WePlan explores in this Knowledge Paper how structured operational readiness pathways can support both successful event delivery and long-term institutional strengthening.

**Roberto Daneo & Giorgio Re**

Founders, WePlan

**#3**  
**OPERATIONAL  
READINESS**  
From Planning  
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## Abstract

Operational readiness is the structured process through which host territories and delivery organisations prepare to operate effectively under peak event-time conditions.

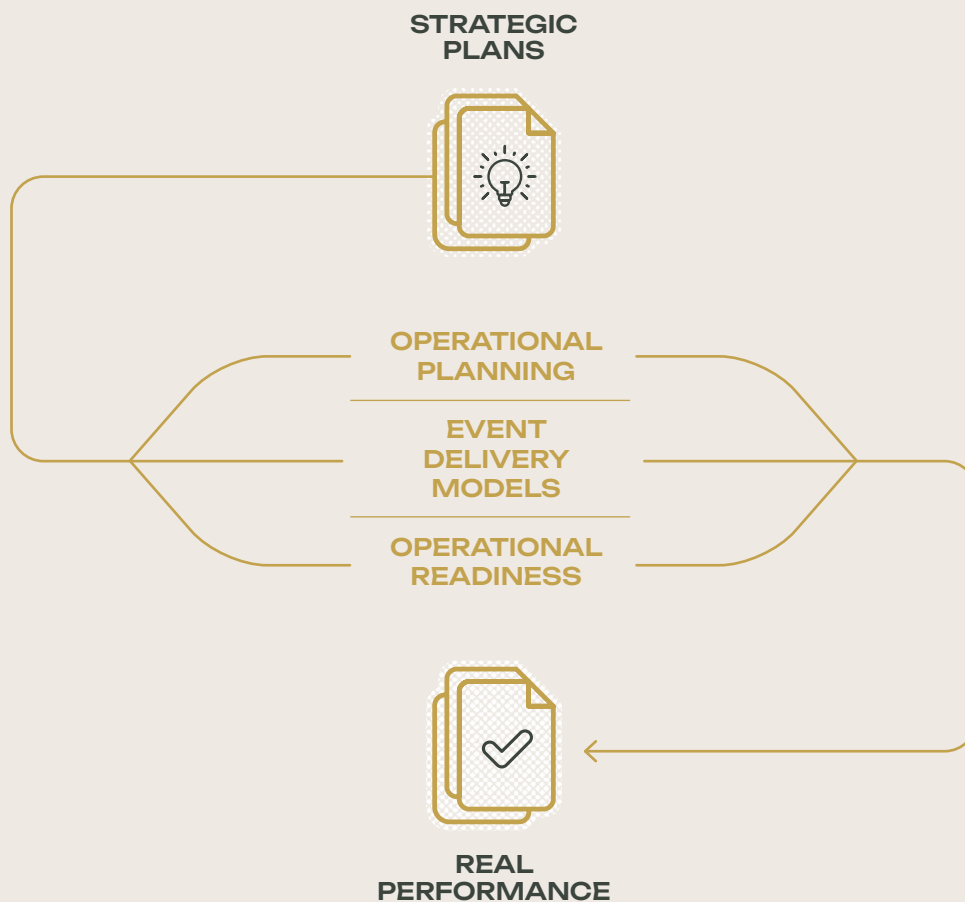
This paper examines how urban systems, governance arrangements and operational capabilities are progressively aligned

to transform strategic plans into executable delivery models.

Building on insights from major event delivery programmes such as Expo 2030 Riyadh and the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, it highlights the importance of holistic operational planning, early identification of

readiness gaps and systematic validation of operational assumptions.

The paper also reflects on emerging trends shaping future readiness approaches, including distributed event delivery models that require multi-territorial coordination and new forms of institutional collaboration.



## Introduction

The lifecycle of major international events is characterised by a progressive shift from conceptual planning and programme structuring towards operational execution.

In initial phases, stakeholders focus on defining strategic ambitions, establishing governance frameworks and launching infrastructure programmes.

As delivery timelines advance, attention increasingly turns to ensuring that complex organisational, urban and technological systems can function cohesively under the intense pressures of event-time operations.

Operational readiness represents a critical inflection point in this programme lifecycle. It is during this phase that **planning assumptions are tested, interdependencies become visible and the practical implications of earlier decisions begin to materialise.**

In this context, readiness processes focus on validating that operational plans can perform effectively under event-time pressure. Through simulations,



rehearsals and progressive testing activities, stakeholders verify coordination mechanisms, service capacity assumptions and decision-making structures, ensuring that planned solutions can function reliably in real operating conditions.

Readiness should therefore not be interpreted as a final compliance milestone or checklist exercise. Rather, it constitutes a continuous **capability building journey that supports**

**the evolution from planning outputs to integrated operational performance.**

Experience shows that **effective readiness depends on the simultaneous maturation of both host environments and event delivery organisations.**

Only through this parallel progression major events can be delivered successfully while maintaining the functionality and reputation of the territories that host them.



# CITY READINESS



## City Readiness

### PREPARING THE HOST ENVIRONMENT

City readiness concerns the preparedness of the broader urban ecosystem to sustain event-time operations.

While organising committees oversee venue delivery and event-specific services, **host territories remain responsible for ensuring continuity and performance across essential urban functions.** These include mobility systems, safety and emergency services, public space management, visitor services,

environmental operations and communication infrastructures.

Achieving readiness at this level requires the definition of a clear **City operations model**, capable of integrating temporary event requirements with permanent service provision, enabling coordinated responses to evolving operational conditions and addressing the additional demand generated by visitors on the host city.

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CITY OPERATIONS PLANNING

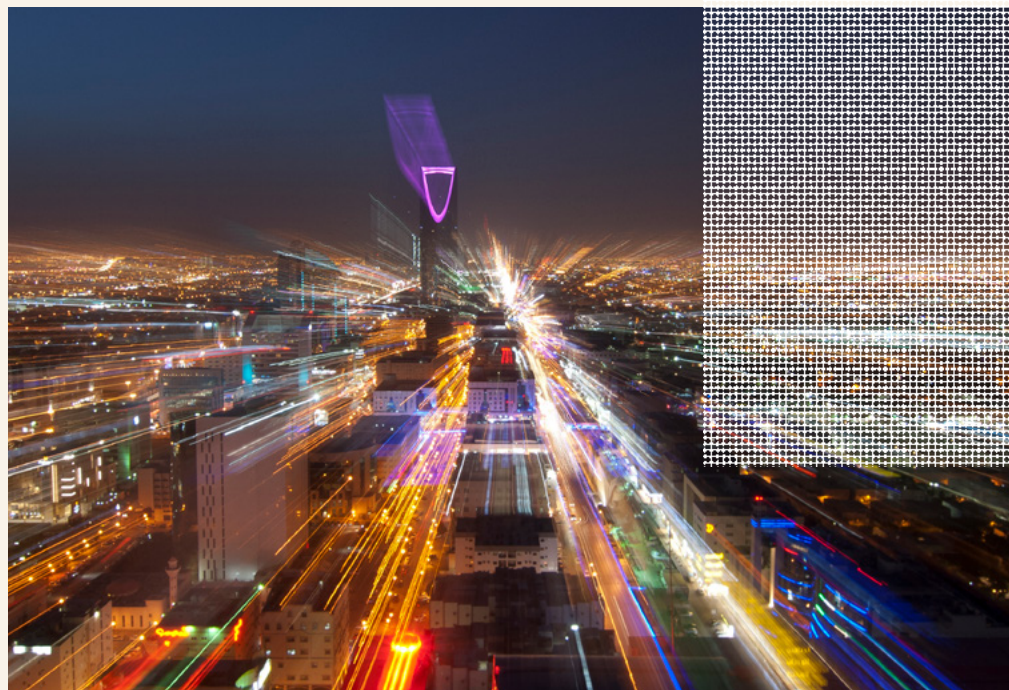
A defining feature of mature readiness programmes is their reliance on **holistic operational planning** approaches that are typically adopted in advance of the readiness phase, **enabling stakeholders to identify the full portfolio of initiatives required to support city operations during event-time.**

Successful host territories increasingly adopt structured methodologies to map functional domains, collect baseline performance data, define demand assumptions and assess gaps between existing service capacity and projected operational needs.

This enables stakeholders to move beyond conceptual discussions and establish an actionable **City Operations Programme**, translating the strategic City Operations Model into a coordinated portfolio of initiatives. This programme ensures that

enabling measures and operational enhancements, such as mobility adjustments, temporary services, workforce deployment strategies and command-and-control solutions, are developed in an integrated manner.

Maintaining a shared and continuously updated set of operational assumptions is equally critical. **This single source of truth** supports alignment across institutions and allows readiness strategies to evolve in response to programme developments.



## GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

As readiness activities intensify, City Operations initiatives identified earlier in the event lifecycle are progressively implemented through governance arrangements capable of coordinating the wide range of stakeholders involved in event-time operations.

Major international events mobilise multiple layers of public administration, transport operators, security agencies, utility providers and private service organisations. In this environment, readiness becomes as much an institutional and organisational challenge as it is a technical or planning exercise.

In practice, operational readiness relies on the establishment of structured coordination frameworks that support joint decision-making, ensure alignment of service standards and enable timely responses to evolving operational conditions. These frameworks typically include integrated operational governance models, shared escalation protocols, joint coordination platforms and

## EXPO 2030 RIYADH

*For Expo 2030 Riyadh, this involves contributing to the definition of a structured City Operations framework clarifying the operational interface between the Royal Commission for Riyadh City, Expo Riyadh Company and key urban service operators.*

*The work focuses on identifying the key operational domains including mobility, infrastructure and utilities, safety and security, workforce and volunteers mobilisation, communication, city offerings and regulatory facilitation.*

*This structured approach supports the progressive alignment of responsibilities, the prioritisation of readiness interventions and the strengthening of coordination across institutions responsible for city operations.*

*It also builds on the successful experience of Expo 2015 Milano, leveraging lessons learned and proven operational practices, during the successful management of the event.*

communication structures linking operational control centres across organisations.

Across multiple international event delivery contexts, WePlan

has supported host territories in structuring coordination approaches designed to translate City Operations Models and Programmes into operational reality.

Taken together, these experiences underline that **operational readiness requires sustained institutional engagement, clarity of operational roles and the gradual development of collaborative operating cultures capable of supporting integrated decision-making under event-time conditions.**

## MILANO CORTINA 2026

*In the context of the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, characterised by a regionalised model spanning multiple regions and territories, direct involvement in City Operations planning activities highlighted the importance of aligning municipalities, local operators and regional authorities around shared operational priorities.*

*Reinforcing coordination mechanisms and clarifying operational interfaces proved essential to supporting the progressive activation of readiness measures across territories and ensuring consistent operational performance during the Games.*

As mega-event delivery models continue to evolve, governance approaches must increasingly support coordination across multiple stakeholders, service environments and decision-making layers. Strengthening these institutional capabilities is essential to ensuring that operational readiness can be effectively translated into event-time performance.

## A NEW STANDARD OF COMPLEXITY: THE WIDESPREAD OLYMPIC THEATRE

Beyond institutional coordination challenges, recent mega-event programmes are also redefining the spatial nature of event delivery. Rather than concentrating activities within a single host city, competitions and event-related functions are increasingly distributed across wider territorial systems.

Milano Cortina 2026 illustrates this emerging operational

paradigm, described as a regionalised Olympic theatre, in which geographically distant locations must function as components of a unified event environment.

This configuration introduces additional readiness challenges, including the need to manage long-distance mobility corridors, harmonise service standards across diverse local contexts and ensure consistent

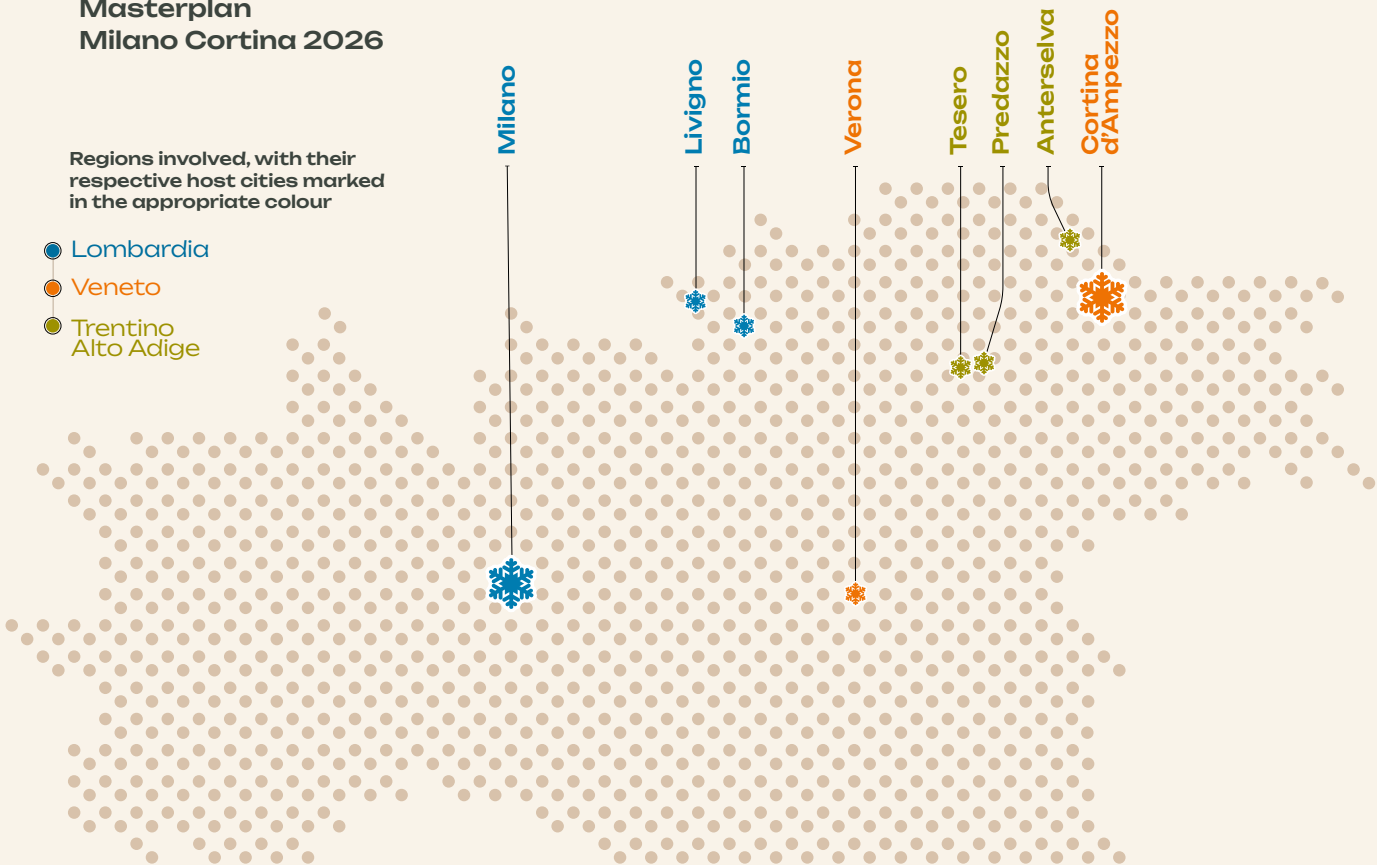
spectator experience across territories.

In such environments, city readiness evolves from preparing a single urban system to **activating a coordinated multi-territorial operational ecosystem**, requiring planning instruments and governance approaches capable of addressing spatial fragmentation and operational interdependencies at scale.

### Masterplan Milano Cortina 2026

Regions involved, with their respective host cities marked in the appropriate colour

- Lombardia
- Veneto
- Trentino Alto Adige





## EVENT READINESS



## EVENT READINESS

### PREPARING THE DELIVERY ORGANISATION

While city readiness focuses on preparing the broader operational environment, event readiness concerns the **capability of organising committees to execute event-time operations effectively.**

As programme timelines advance, readiness efforts increasingly concentrate **on verifying that operational concepts, procedures and coordination mechanisms can function reliably in realistic delivery conditions.** This involves translating planning outputs into executable operational arrangements and progressively building institutional confidence in their effectiveness.

Structured readiness programmes therefore include the development and progressive refinement of policies and procedures governing both routine service provision and potential operational disruptions. These frameworks clarify roles, responsibilities and response pathways across functional areas, enabling stakeholders to act in a coordinated manner as delivery complexity increases.

*“Operational Readiness is a fundamental piece of a lifecycle of complex event preparation because it brings plans, delivery models, and governance frameworks to life—before the event itself. By rehearsing and testing performance under event-time conditions, it provides a safe environment to identify gaps, learn from mistakes, and refine plans and resources—an essential step toward successful delivery.*”

*The Operational Readiness programme implemented for the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Games stands as a true testament to this approach.*

*Whether applied to infrastructure, technology, people, or processes, in MICO26 we effectively stress-tested the entire event ecosystem of the Games. We helped build individual, team, and collective competence and confidence that enabled successful management of both routine operations and expected or unexpected disruptions contributing to delivery of amazingly successful Winter Olympics and Paralympics”*

**Dragana Clarke**, subject matter expert and Director of Milano Cortina2026 Operational Readiness and Main Operations Center



## POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND WORKFORCE ACTIVATION

Operational policies and standard operating procedures provide a shared reference for delivery teams, supporting consistent responses across venues and functional domains. Their effectiveness depends not only on technical accuracy, but also on stakeholder familiarity and organisational ownership.

Given the scale and temporality of major event delivery ecosystems, readiness is closely linked to workforce activation. Capability frameworks, targeted training initiatives and operational handbooks support the mobilisation of large and often heterogeneous workforces, helping ensure alignment of service standards and coordination practices across organisational boundaries.



## TESTING OPERATIONAL SYSTEMS

A defining feature of mature readiness approaches is the structured testing of operational systems and coordination mechanisms.

Programmes typically implement progressive pathways that move from facilitated simulations and tabletop exercises to functional rehearsals and full-scale test events. These activities allow stakeholders to assess procedural robustness, verify communication flows and evaluate decision-making

processes under increasingly complex operational scenarios.

Testing environments also provide opportunities to identify gaps, refine service delivery concepts and strengthen shared understanding of operational priorities. In later stages, integrated operational trials enable delivery organisations to evaluate performance across multiple functions simultaneously, reinforcing operational confidence ahead of event-time.

## ESCALATION AND ISSUE RESOLUTION

Effective event readiness depends on clearly defined escalation and issue resolution frameworks capable of supporting timely and coordinated responses to operational challenges.

Major events require transparent mechanisms to determine how exceptional situations, issues and incidents are identified, how responsibilities are assigned and how decisions move across venue, functional and central coordination levels. Without structured escalation pathways, delivery systems risk delays in response, uncertainty regarding accountability and potential

inconsistencies in operational decision-making. Readiness activities therefore include the validation of escalation chains linking venue operations teams, functional command centres and central coordination structures, alongside the implementation of a tracking and monitoring system to ensure that all issues are logged, monitored and traced through to resolution. By rehearsing incident scenarios and testing communication protocols, stakeholders strengthen their ability to manage disruptions while maintaining service continuity and protecting the overall event experience.

## PROGRESSIVE ACTIVATION OF READINESS

Event readiness should be understood as a progressive transition from conceptual preparedness to demonstrated delivery capability.

Early readiness efforts often focus on familiarisation with procedures and validation of decision-making frameworks. As readiness intensifies, delivery organisations engage in more integrated rehearsals and system-wide operational trials that simulate the complexity of event-time environments. Through repeated testing cycles, organisations refine procedures, clarify interfaces and strengthen coordination arrangements, ultimately ensuring that event-time delivery can be conducted with resilience, consistency and



## Final Reflections

Operational readiness represents one of the most decisive phases in the lifecycle of major international events.

It is during this phase that **strategic ambition is confronted with operational reality, requiring institutions and delivery organisations to demonstrate adaptability, coordination and resilience.** Increasingly, readiness challenges extend beyond organisational boundaries, reflecting the growing territorial complexity of mega-event programmes.

When approached strategically, **readiness processes can strengthen institutional collaboration, enhance urban governance and continuity capacity.** They therefore represent not only a prerequisite for successful event delivery but also an opportunity for systemic improvement. As mega-events continue to evolve towards distributed formats and integrated territorial agendas, **readiness models will need to become more anticipatory, flexible and collaborative.**

## Strategic Takeaways

### **Operational readiness is a progressive capability-building journey.**

Effective programmes move beyond compliance-driven approaches and focus on strengthening coordination cultures, operational clarity and institutional confidence well before event-time.

### **City readiness is evolving towards multi-territorial operational ecosystems.**

Distributed event formats and complex governance environments require host territories to align service standards, regulatory frameworks and operational decision-making across jurisdictions.

### **Systematic testing is the bridge between planning and performance.**

Simulations, rehearsals and test events play a decisive role in validating assumptions, reducing delivery risk and enabling continuous operational improvement.



*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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