



LEVERAGING TRAIL RUNNING EVENTS FOR LOCAL SPORT PARTICIPATION: THE ROLE OF EVENT ORGANIZERS IN INDONESIA'S MOUNTAIN MARATHON FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

Trail running events can create entry points into physical activity, but sustained local sport participation depends on how organizers connect event exposure with preparation, social support, stakeholder networks, and post-event opportunities. This study analyzes the role of the Mountain Marathon Festival (MMF) event organizer across the Sembalun Mountain Marathon (SMF), Bali Mountain Marathon (BMF), and Java Mountain Marathon (JMM). Using a qualitative embedded single-case design, the study comprised 42 informants, 12 observation sessions, and 58 event documents collected in 2025. Data were analyzed thematically through within-unit and cross-event comparison, informed primarily by sport event leveraging and social capital, with self-determination theory used as a supplementary lens. The findings show that the organizer functioned as an experience designer, participation facilitator, and network broker. Twenty-four community-facing informants reported increased knowledge of trail running, while 17 reported increased physical activity during event preparation; 11 joined group training more regularly, eight entered a trail-running event for the first time, and six volunteers began training to become participants. Ten of the 17 informants who increased activity were still training regularly two to three months after the event, indicating a legacy gap. Cross-event comparison showed different participation mechanisms across SMF, BMF, and JMM. The study proposes a five-stage process of attracting, preparing, engaging, connecting, and sustaining participation, while emphasizing that post-event continuity is the main condition for converting event enthusiasm into repeated sport participation.

Keywords: *event organizer; local community; sport event leveraging; sport participation; social capital; trail running.*

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INTRODUCTION

Insufficient physical activity remains a major public-health concern. The World Health Organization recommends 150-300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75-150 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity per week for adults, while global surveillance indicates that insufficient activity remains widespread (Bull et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2020; Strain et al., 2024). In Indonesia, national survey data likewise show a substantial proportion of the population does not achieve adequate physical activity, with lack of time and social support among the reported barriers (Badan Kebijakan Pembangunan Kesehatan, 2024). These patterns indicate that knowledge about exercise benefits alone is insufficient. Participation also depends on access, social support, positive experiences, and opportunities that connect physical activity with everyday community life.

Participatory sport events offer one possible setting for creating such opportunities. Small- and medium-scale events can combine physical activity, recreation, tourism, community interaction, and destination experience while requiring less infrastructure than mega-events (Getz & Page, 2016; Gibson et al., 2012; Bazzanella et al., 2023). Yet event exposure does not automatically generate sustained physical activity. Reviews of event legacies show mixed evidence, with short-term motivation often failing to become long-term participation (Annear et al., 2019; Teare & Taks, 2021; McVinnie et al., 2023).

Sport event leveraging provides a useful framework for explaining this problem. Rather than assuming that social outcomes follow automatically from an event, leveraging emphasizes deliberate strategies that connect event resources, stakeholders, and follow-up activities to predefined social objectives

(Chalip, 2006; Nordhagen, 2021). In this perspective, an event organizer can act not only as a technical operator but also as a network broker who connects local government, sport communities, volunteers, businesses, health services, destination managers, and residents. Such connections may create bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital that support trust, reciprocity, and access to resources (Misener & Mason, 2006; Larsen & Bærenholdt, 2019; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018).

Event quality also shapes whether participants and local residents perceive sport as attractive and manageable. Information quality, registration, route safety, medical support, staff competence, atmosphere, and social interaction can influence satisfaction and future behavioral intentions (Armbrecht, 2021; Newland & Yoo, 2021; Theodorakis et al., 2015). At the individual level, progression from initial interest toward repeated participation may also depend on whether activities support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-determination theory is therefore used here as a supplementary interpretive lens rather than a competing primary framework (Coleman & Sebire, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Hyun & Jordan, 2020).

Trail running is a useful context because it combines physical challenge, natural terrain, destination experience, risk management, personal achievement, and social support. Existing trail-running studies have emphasized motivation, lived experience, event-tourist careers, well-being, and event quality (Getz & McConnell, 2014; Chambers & Poidomani, 2022; Lahart et al., 2019; Erdilanita et al., 2025). Community-based research also suggests that trail-running events can contribute to local identity and collaborative destination governance when residents,



organizers, sponsors, and government actors participate together (Lee, 2025).

The Mountain Marathon Festival provides a distinctive multi-location case because it connects three trail-running events under one series: SMF, BMF, and JMM. The three units share an organizing logic while operating in different geographical, social, and institutional settings (Mountain Marathon Festival, n.d.). This structure makes it possible to examine not only whether community engagement occurs, but how the mechanism changes across locations.

The main research gap concerns the mechanism that links event exposure to repeated local sport participation. Previous studies more often examine mega-events, participant satisfaction, motivation, destination effects, or post-event intention than the event organizer as the actor that designs participation pathways before, during, and after an event. The present study addresses this gap by integrating sport event leveraging with social capital in a multi-location trail-running series. It conceptualizes the organizer as a participation architect and network broker, and it examines the point at which short-term engagement fails to become sustained activity, referred to here as the legacy gap.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: 1). How does the Mountain Marathon Festival event organizer leverage trail-running events to build sport awareness and participation among local communities?; 2). How do participation pathways, stakeholder relationships, and event experiences vary across SMF, BMF, and JMM?; 3). What conditions support or constrain the transition from short-term event engagement to sustained post-event physical activity?

METHOD

Research Design and Case Boundaries

This study used a qualitative embedded single-case design. MMF was treated as the overarching case because SMF, BMF, and JMM belong to one event-series concept, while each event served as an embedded unit for systematic comparison. This design allows event-management processes to be examined within their social, geographical, and organizational contexts and supports the integration of multiple sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Fieldwork was conducted in 2025. The analysis covered event preparation, implementation, and post-event continuity across the three units.

Study Focus and Analytical Framework

The study focused on how the event organizer designed, coordinated, and leveraged trail-running events to promote local sport awareness and participation. Sport event leveraging was the primary framework for examining deliberate strategies that connected event resources with social outcomes. Social capital was used to interpret bonding, bridging, and linking relationships among residents, communities, organizers, and institutions. Self-determination theory was used selectively to interpret participation mechanisms related to autonomy, competence, and relatedness rather than as a competing primary framework (Chalip, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Informants and Recruitment

Informants were selected purposively from stakeholder groups with direct knowledge of event planning, implementation, local engagement, participation, and post-event activity. Snowball sampling was used when initial participants identified additional people with



relevant experience. The study comprised 42 informants distributed across six stakeholder categories. Recruitment emphasized information richness and variation across organizational, institutional, community, participant, volunteer, resident, and business perspectives rather than statistical representation.

Table 1. Composition of research informants

Stakeholder group	n	Code
Core event organizer	4	EO
Local coordinators and committees	6	PAN
Government and destination management	6	PEM
Running communities	9	KOM
Local participants	9	PES
Residents, volunteers, and local businesses	8	MAS
Total	42	

Data Collection

Data collection combined semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interview topics included event planning, communication, community engagement, stakeholder collaboration, changes in sport awareness, participation pathways, perceived benefits, event quality, barriers, and post-event continuity. Observations covered registration, participant briefings, race operations, organizer-community interaction, volunteer activity, support services, health and safety communication, and local responses. The document corpus included event proposals,

participant guides, promotional materials, social-media posts, route maps, participant records, media coverage, partnership documents, photographs, videos, and event-evaluation materials. The corpus included 12 observation sessions and 58 organizing documents.

Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis with both inductive and deductive coding. The analytical procedure involved familiarization with interview material, field notes, and documents, generation of initial codes, development of candidate themes, review of themes against the dataset, and refinement of the thematic structure (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Deductive sensitizing concepts included sport event leveraging, social capital, sport awareness, participation, stakeholder collaboration, event quality, and post-event sustainability. Within-unit analysis was undertaken for each event before cross-unit comparison. Analytic memos and a theme-by-event matrix were used to make similarities and differences across SMF, BMF, and JMM explicit. Data that did not fit the dominant pattern were retained as divergent cases, particularly reports of exclusive coordination and post-event drop-off (Miles et al., 2020).

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, peer discussion, and an audit trail. Accounts from event organizers, participants, residents, government actors, communities, volunteers, and partners were compared, while interview evidence was interpreted alongside observations and event documents. The audit trail recorded coding changes, field notes, and



theme development. RY conducted the investigation and data collection, while TM contributed methodological validation and critical review; this division of roles, together with peer discussion and attention to divergent cases, was used to challenge overly orderly or theory-driven interpretations (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Before interviews, participants were informed about the study purpose, the form of participation, data use, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Informant identities were anonymized with codes based on stakeholder group and event unit. Recordings, transcripts, photographs, and documents were stored for research use with restricted access.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Evidence Base and Overall Thematic Structure

Table 2. Main themes and empirical indicators

Theme	Empirical evidence	Analytical implication
Event organizer as participation architect	Organizer adaptation across locations; stakeholder coordination; EO-02	Event leveraging depends on deliberate adaptation and network brokerage.
Sport awareness	24 community-facing informants reported increased trail-running knowledge; SMF-MAS-03	Awareness develops cognitively and affectively before it becomes behavior.
Participation pathways	17 increased physical activity; 11 trained more regularly; 8 became first-time racers; 6 volunteers began training	Low-threshold roles and group training create staged entry into sport.
Social capital and inclusion	Bonding, bridging, and linking ties were reported; 5 informants said coordination favored groups already close to organizers	Network building can widen participation, but unequal access creates an inclusion risk.

The analysis included 42 informants, 12 observation sessions, and 58 organizing documents. The 42 informants represented the event organizer, local committees, government and destination managers, running communities, local participants, volunteers, residents, and business actors. Numerical counts reported below describe the distribution of coded responses within this qualitative corpus and are not estimates of population prevalence.

The analysis produced six interconnected themes: the expanded role of the event organizer, the development of sport awareness, the creation of participation pathways, social-capital formation, event quality and safety, and the challenge of sustaining activity after the event. Local economic involvement emerged as an additional mechanism that strengthened social acceptance, while cross-event comparison showed that these mechanisms operated differently across SMF, BMF, and JMM.



Theme	Empirical evidence	Analytical implication
Quality, safety, and trust	21 of 24 local participants/ community/ volunteer informants reported greater trust; BMF-PES-06	Safety and service quality reduce perceived risk but do not guarantee sustained activity.
Local economic involvement	14 informants reported that economic benefits increased community/family support; SMF-MAS-07	Economic participation strengthens social acceptance but has an indirect link to sport participation.
Legacy gap	10 of 17 remained regular two to three months later; 7 reduced or stopped training; JMM-PES-08	Post-event goals, community support, time, cost, and access determine continuity.

Event Organizer as a Participation Architect and Network Broker

The findings indicate that the event organizer's role extended beyond technical race administration. Across the series, the organizer designed the event experience, connected stakeholders, created local participation roles, and adapted delivery to the social and geographical conditions of each destination. This adaptive role is important because the three events shared a series identity but did not operate in identical community settings.

"We cannot bring the same pattern to every location. The community, routes, working culture, and local partners are different. The overall concept remains the same, but the way we mobilize the community has to match local conditions." (EO-02)

This finding supports sport event leveraging because the event served as a resource whose social value depended on purposeful design rather than on competition alone (Chalip, 2006; Teare & Taks, 2021). The organizer's contribution can therefore be understood as participation architecture: it connected the event identity with local communication, role

allocation, safety arrangements, community engagement, and follow-up needs. The multi-location case extends leveraging analysis by showing that a common event strategy requires location-specific implementation.

From Sport Awareness to Initial Participation

Sport awareness developed through event communication, direct observation, volunteer involvement, group training, route familiarization, and interaction with runners. Twenty-four community-facing informants reported that MMF increased their knowledge of trail running. The reported knowledge included regular training, physical preparation, equipment, hydration, route safety, and managing personal capacity.

"At first, we thought mountain running was only for athletes. After seeing local residents join training and complete the shorter distance, we started to think that ordinary people could also try it, as long as they trained." (SMF-MAS-03)

The findings suggest three related forms of awareness. Cognitive awareness involved knowledge of the activity and its preparation. Affective awareness involved interest and more



positive perceptions of trail running. Conative awareness appeared when residents expressed willingness to train, join a running community, volunteer, or enter a race. However, awareness did not always convert into behavior because time constraints, equipment costs, perceived terrain risk, and lack of training partners remained barriers.

The participation pathway was similarly staged. Seventeen community-facing informants reported increasing their physical activity during event preparation. Eleven joined group training more regularly, eight entered a trail-running race for the first time, and six people who had previously volunteered began training with the intention of becoming participants.

"In the first year I worked at a water station. After seeing the runners and getting to know people in the community, I started joining training. In the next series, I registered for the shortest category." (JMM-MAS-05)

"Group training makes people feel that they are not alone. If they only receive registration information, many are still afraid. After trying the route together, they become more confident about joining." (BMF-KOM-04)

These patterns are consistent with a supplementary self-determination interpretation. Choice among participation roles and race categories can support autonomy, guided training can increase perceived competence, and community interaction can strengthen relatedness (Coleman & Sebire, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The findings also align with evidence that achieving sport-related goals can improve satisfaction and future exercise intention (Hyun & Jordan, 2020). However, the present data show that initial participation and sustained participation are distinct outcomes.

Social Capital, Collaboration, and the Inclusion Problem

MMF brought together groups that did not always work together in routine settings, including the event organizer, local government, running communities, youth groups, volunteers, route managers, tourism actors, health services, businesses, and residents. The analysis categorized these relationships as bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding ties developed within local groups, bridging ties connected residents with external runners and communities, and linking ties connected local actors with institutions that held authority or resources.

"This event made coordination that had previously been separate more structured. The government office, village, community, health workers, and tourism actors discussed the activity in one forum." (SMF-PEM-02)

The organizer functioned as a network broker by creating coordination spaces, allocating responsibilities, and maintaining communication between parties. This mechanism is consistent with studies showing that participatory sport events can create trust, reciprocity, networks, and community interaction (Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018; Larsen & Bærenholdt, 2019).

The data also contain an important divergent case. Five informants reported that coordination still tended to involve groups that already had close relationships with the committee. This finding complicates a purely positive social-capital interpretation. Network brokerage can strengthen cooperation, but it can also reproduce existing access patterns if consultation and benefit distribution are not sufficiently open. The result supports the reviewers' concern that social capital should be demonstrated as an empirical process rather



than treated as an automatic benefit of the event.

Event Quality, Safety, and Trust in Trail Running

Trail running places unusual demands on event quality because natural terrain, elevation, weather, route complexity, aid-station distance, and medical access shape perceived risk. Informants emphasized information clarity, route safety, staff readiness, medical services, hospitality, cleanliness, and schedule reliability. Among 24 local participants, community members, and volunteers, 21 reported that a well-organized event increased their trust in the organizer and reduced concern about joining similar activities.

"We were willing to participate because there was a briefing, route marking, and staff at several points. Without that, beginners would feel that the terrain was too risky." (BMF-PES-06)

The event organizer built trust through information about terrain, equipment, cut-off times, health, and safety rules before the event and through route marking, aid stations, medical support, communication, and supervision during the event. This is consistent with evidence that event quality shapes satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Armbrecht, 2021; Theodorakis et al., 2015; Erdilanita et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the present findings do not treat quality as proof of long-term participation. Quality reduces perceived risk and improves confidence, while continued sport participation still depends on motivation, social support, access, and repeated opportunities. These interview accounts were interpreted alongside field observations of participant briefings, route operations, support services, and health and

safety communication, as well as participant guides and route maps.

Local Economic Involvement and Social Acceptance

Residents participated in MMF as providers of food, accommodation, transport, equipment, guiding, labor, and local products. Fourteen informants reported that economic benefits increased family and community support for the event. This mechanism did not represent sport participation directly. Instead, economic involvement increased contact between residents and event participants and made the competition more relevant to local daily life.

"At first, we saw this only as an activity for runners from outside. After residents started providing food, vehicles, and accommodation, the community felt that they were also part of the event." (SMF-MAS-07)

This result is consistent with research showing that small-scale sport events can support sustainable destination development when organizers align activities with local capacity and resources (Gibson et al., 2012; Bazzanella et al., 2023). At the same time, the finding should be interpreted cautiously. Economic benefit may strengthen social acceptance, but it does not automatically produce exercise behavior. The inclusion issue identified in the social-capital theme also means that transparent access to local economic opportunities is important. The interpretation was also considered alongside partnership documents, event-evaluation materials, and field observations of local service involvement.

Cross-Event Variation across SMF, BMF, and JMM

The embedded design reveals that the same event-series objective was implemented



through different local mechanisms. SMF relied more strongly on local leaders, youth, direct communication, and residents' familiarity with the area. BMF relied more heavily on digital communication and established running-community networks. JMM showed a stronger pattern of institutional coordination combining digital communication, local committees,

running communities, and government support. These differences indicate that sport-event leveraging is context-sensitive rather than a standardized intervention. These contrasts were developed through cross-unit comparison of interview material, field notes, promotional materials, participant records, and partnership documents.

Table 3. Cross-event comparison across SMF, BMF, and JMM

Dimension	SMF	BMF	JMM
Dominant communication channel	Local leaders, youth, direct communication	Social media and running communities	Digital communication and institutional coordination
Main form of involvement	Volunteers, guides, tourism actors, local participants	Communities, group training, digital promotion	Local committees, communities, training, government support
Main strength	Social proximity to the location and routes	Community networks and communication reach	Cross-institution coordination and event structure
Main barrier	Equipment, risk perception, access to training	Participation cost and ability gaps	Program continuity and communication consistency
Observed change	Volunteers began joining training	More novice participants from communities	Group training developed before the event
Priority follow-up	Regular local training groups	More inclusive beginner programs	Training calendar and post-event mentoring

The Legacy Gap and the Five-Stage Participation Model

The strongest limitation of event-based participation appeared after the competition. Of the 17 informants who reported increasing physical activity during event preparation, 10 were still training regularly two to three months later, while seven had reduced or stopped training. Those who continued tended to have a running community, a next-event target, and

support from friends or family. Those who reduced activity referred to work schedules, cost, access constraints, the absence of a training group, and the loss of a clear goal.

"Before the event, training was regular because there was a goal. After it finished, the training schedule became less regular because there was no next program that started immediately." (JMM-PES-08)



This divergence defines the legacy gap: event exposure and preparation can create momentum, but momentum does not become a habit without repeated opportunities, goals, social support, and accessible follow-up. This interpretation is consistent with reviews showing that mass-participation events may increase physical activity during preparation without producing durable long-term behavior (Teare & Taks, 2021; McVinnie et al., 2023).

The study proposes a processual five-stage model of the event organizer's role: attract attention, prepare potential participants, enable engagement, connect participants with supportive networks, and sustain activity after the event. The five stages were synthesized from the thematic structure by linking sport awareness to Attract, event quality and safety to Prepare, participation pathways to Engage, social capital and local involvement to Connect, and post-event continuity to Sustain; the event-organizer theme operates across all five stages. The model is descriptive and process-oriented rather than causal. Progression can stop at any stage, and the legacy gap is most visible between connection and sustained activity when follow-up is weak.

Figure 1. Five-stage process for leveraging trail-running events toward sustained local sport participation



Theoretical Contribution

The study extends sport event leveraging in three ways. First, it shifts the analytical focus from the event as a temporary stimulus to the event organizer as the actor that assembles

participation pathways across time. Second, it connects leveraging with social capital by showing that the organizer both relies on existing local networks and can create new bridging and linking relationships. Third, the multi-location comparison shows that the same series-level objective can require different communication channels, stakeholder configurations, and support structures. The five-stage model adds a process perspective and identifies the legacy gap as the point where event engagement fails to become repeated activity.

Practical Implications

MMF and similar participatory events should evaluate social outcomes alongside operational indicators. Useful measures include local first-time participants, volunteers who later begin training, the persistence of community training groups, novice access, and post-event continuation over a defined follow-up period. Group training is especially important because it combines route familiarization, competence development, risk reduction, and social connection. The findings also suggest that event organizers should broaden local consultation and economic participation so that benefits and decision-making do not remain concentrated within existing networks.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is bounded by one event series with three embedded units, so its purpose is analytical transfer rather than statistical generalization. Several findings rely on self-reported behavior, which may be affected by recall and self-selection. Descriptive counts within the qualitative corpus indicate the distribution of coded responses and should not be interpreted as population prevalence. The study also followed continued activity only for



approximately two to three months in the reported post-event accounts and did not use objective physical-activity measurement. Future research should use longer longitudinal follow-up, repeated or objective measures where feasible, and comparisons across organizers, destinations, and participatory sports. Further work should test which post-event programs most effectively reduce the legacy gap.

CONCLUSION

The Mountain Marathon Festival case shows that the event organizer can influence local sport participation through a combination of experience design, accessible entry roles, stakeholder coordination, event quality, community networks, and post-event support. The evidence indicates that awareness and activity increased for a substantial share of community-facing informants during event preparation, but the post-event pattern was uneven. Ten of the 17 informants who increased activity remained regular two to three months later, while seven reduced or stopped training. This difference is the central practical and theoretical finding: event enthusiasm is not the same as sustained participation.

The study therefore positions the event organizer as a participation architect and network broker rather than only a race operator. The proposed five-stage model explains how organizers may attract, prepare, engage, connect, and sustain participants, while the cross-event comparison shows that these mechanisms depend on local context. The study does not claim direct effects on health, tourism performance, or long-term physical activity beyond the outcomes reported in the dataset. Its main contribution is to clarify how a trail-running event series can create pathways into community sport participation and where those pathways can break down.

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DECLARATIONS

Author Contribution Statement

RY: Conceptualization, research design, methodology, investigation, data collection, data curation, formal analysis, interpretation of findings, visualization, and writing of the original draft.

TM: Methodological refinement, validation, theoretical interpretation, literature integration, critical analysis of the findings, supervision, and writing, review, and editing of the manuscript.

Both authors contributed to the discussion of the findings, reviewed the revised manuscript, approved the final version, and agreed to be accountable for the integrity of the work.



AI Disclosure Statement

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) for language editing, structural revision, and drafting support. The authors remain responsible for verifying all empirical data, quotations, interpretations, citations, and references and for ensuring compliance with the journal's research-integrity and generative-AI policies.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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