

## The governance of mountain resorts and their sport and tourism policies: a case study of Villars-sur-Ollon

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### Résumé

Cet article a pour but de comprendre le processus amenant à l'élaboration d'une nouvelle politique sportive inscrite dans une gouvernance qui doit composer avec des caractéristiques spécifiques (territoires bipolaires, péri-urbanité, évolution climatique). Cette recherche se base sur l'étude du cas de la station suisse de moyenne montagne de Villars-sur-Ollon. Elle montre comment la pérennisation d'une activité touristique peut se faire à travers le levier des activités sportives (pratiques, événements et équipements sportifs). Cet article analyse les difficultés de mise en synergies des acteurs publics, privés et associatifs, et vise à promouvoir de nouvelles formes de gouvernance basées sur des partenariats stratégiques pour y remédier.

### Mots clefs

Gouvernance locale, politique sportive, partenariat, réseaux d'acteurs, station touristique

### Abstract:

**The governance of mountain resorts and their sport and tourism policies: a case study of Villars-sur-Ollon**

Sports activities are a fundamental part of the tourism offer provided by mountain resorts, so it is essential for a resort to have an effective sport policy. Via a case study of a medium-altitude mountain resort (Villars-sur-Ollon) in the Swiss Alps, we examine the effect of governance on the construction of a new sport policy encompassing sports activities, events and facilities. In the case of Villars-sur-Ollon, a resort with two centers that is having to adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, poor relations between stakeholders and the preponderance of project-based partnerships are hindering the development of a coherent sport policy. We analyze the difficulties involved in creating synergies between public, private and nonprofit stakeholders and discuss how adopting a new form of governance based on strategic partnerships can help overcome these difficulties.

### Key words

Local governance, sport policy, project planning, actors network, touristic places

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## **1. Introduction**

It is impossible to consider the economic development of Alpine resorts and their host regions, their territories, without taking into account the contribution made by sport. The opportunity to enjoy outdoor sports, such as skiing, is one of the main attractions of mountain resorts and these sporting activities are often vital to a resort's economy. However, mountain resorts have had to face numerous problems in recent years (climate change, fluctuating demand, intense competition, etc.), with the result that they have begun seeking new ways of developing and steering their tourism and sport offers.

The stakeholders in mountain resorts include private, public and nonprofit organizations with disparate statuses, objectives and strategies that are only occasionally complementary. Governance modes tend to be complex and often involve key shareholders drawing up policies to meet their own objectives within the limits set by the means available. Sport policies are both sectorial and transversal because, in addition to their primary aim of developing one or more aspects of sport, they interact with social, cultural, educational, economic, sustainable development and, of course, tourism policies.

Although several authors have examined the governance of French mountain resorts (Achin and al. 2015, Boudières and al. 2004, Marcelpoil and Boudières 2006, Marcelpoil and François 2008, Richard and al. 2010), few such studies have been carried out in Switzerland (Clivaz 2006). Nevertheless, the issues surrounding the role of sports activities in municipalities comprising a town or village in the valley and a resort in the mountains, which we refer to as twin-centered territories, and in areas with several levels of administration (e.g., municipality, canton, region, tourism development partnerships) would seem to provide excellent opportunities for studying emerging forms of governance (Goncalves 2013, Rudaz 2009, Vlès 2012). Due to factors such as local council mergers, which may simplify or complicate local government, or the need to place sport at the heart of

development policies in order to reap the economic benefits it can bring, governance has become an increasingly important issue for many tourism centers in mountain areas. In fact, drawing up and implementing policies are complex tasks, whether these policies are aimed at local development, economic growth, image creation and projection, environmental protection or nature preservation.

Given these observations, we decided to investigate the governance of a sport policy in one mountain resort. Our case study focused on Villars-sur-Ollon, a twin-centered, medium-altitude resort in the Swiss Alps (Vaud canton) with a number of specific characteristics (e.g., mixture of rural and urban environments, need to adapt to climate change) that shape its governance system, which, in turn, determines the way its sport policy is constructed. Our observations, carried out between 2012 and 2015, highlighted the difficulty of creating synergies between the resort's private, public and nonprofit stakeholders and allowed us to consider how adopting a new form of governance based on strategic partnerships would enable the resort to overcome these difficulties. We also formulated a number of hypotheses that could be tested on other cases.

We describe our case study of Villars-sur-Ollon in three separate sections covering the theoretical concepts relating to our research question, the methodology we used and our analysis of our findings. The final section of the paper discusses ways in which the concept of strategic partnerships could be applied in order to help the resort improve its governance.

## **2. Theoretical concepts**

Our theoretical framework brings together the governance of mountain holiday resorts with the concept of public sport policies.

### **2.1 Holiday resort**

The holiday resort is the hub, the spatial unit, in which tourist facilities, tour operators and tourism development policies converge

(Knafo and al. 1997). These places where consumers (tourists) and venders (tourism service providers) come together are shaped by a combination of historical factors, the area's topography and regional development measures (Perret 1992). Holiday resorts' offers are not necessarily or uniquely based on their own, specific resources; they also develop generic resources in competition with other resorts. In fact, resorts are subject to the forces of economic globalization and therefore have to choose how to position themselves. In its simplest form, this positioning may involve deciding whether to focus on local attributes and local development or on trying to compete with other tourist towns with similar characteristics or resources. Many resorts achieve this competitiveness via their sport and, more generally, leisure and entertainment offers. In the case of twin-centered territories, the resort (at altitude) is the heart of the municipality's tourism strategy.

## 2.2 The concept of public sport policy

Sport policies can impact numerous domains (social, cultural, educational, economic, tourism, sustainable development) and be built on several levels. In order to facilitate analyses of public sport policies, Bayeux (2013) identified four levels within the policy construction process:

1. *Political* level: definition of the policy's objectives, based on ideological values and overall objectives;
2. *Strategic* level: conception of an ensemble of coordinated actions for achieving targets set with respect to the policy's objectives;
3. *Tactical* level: allocation and management of resources;
4. *Operational* level: implementation of the policy.

In Switzerland, municipal sport policies (political level) are shaped by the "National Concept for a Sport policy", drawn up by the federal government on the basis of a new

(2010) and wider conception of sport centered round five main objectives:

- Health (increase the number of people who regularly do a physical activity);
- Education (make use of the educational opportunities offered by sport);
- Performance (support young talent and elite sport);
- Economics (harness sport's economic potential);
- Sustainability (make sport a learning environment for social development).

Hence, sport is largely steered by public policies that are inspired by a national plan but adapted to suit local circumstances and to meet local political priorities. Local policies can be used to improve or maintain the competitiveness of a sport offer, which in the case of mountain resorts may be closely linked to the area's tourism offer. This is the case for mountain resorts, which, historically, have been linked to sports activities but whose economic strategies have evolved over the years. In fact, the political and economic environment in which mountain resorts operate has become more difficult over the last 30 years, due to the decline in the popularity of mountain holidays, reduced snow cover, the rationalization of public investment in tourism and the need to embrace sustainability, etc. Consequently, the governance of mountain resorts has become a fertile field of study, notably with respect to the increasing tendency for local authorities to try and channel sports activities (e.g., encouraging runners to follow signposted circuits, rather than choosing their own routes).

## 2.3 Governance of mountain resorts

In order to analyze the governance of mountain resorts it is necessary to examine the various degrees of involvement of a system's stakeholders, in terms of the balance between the public, private and nonprofit spheres, and evaluate the evolution of

decision-making processes (Lequin 2001). Hence, governance must be studied through the optic of the relationship between the private and public sectors. In fact, the role of politicians has evolved considerably over the last two decades or so due to increases in the number of stakeholders, changes in the stakeholders' social positions (Boudières and al. 2004, Gerbaux and al. 2004, Goncalves 2013) and, importantly, asymmetries between the different stakeholders' resources, that is, their power, relationships, knowledge, status and financial capital (Rey-Valette and al. 2011). Leloup and al. (2005) provided a similar definition of resources and noted that "local governance is primarily related to the issue of local development and set in a historic context of growth in local private, public and nonprofit stakeholders' involvement in development dynamics and in their ability to take initiatives". In this context, political stakeholders no longer hold enough resources to successfully implement a development project on their own. They can only do this by enlisting all the area's resources (Boudières and al., 2004).

Nevertheless, it is especially difficult for mountain resorts to combine every stakeholder's interests within a coherent public action (Offner 1999). Consequently, our objective was to use the notion of governance to identify "the formal and informal arrangements between private and public stakeholders, on the basis of which decisions are made and implemented" (Le Galès 1995, Le Galès and Lorrain 2003).

It is through these arrangements between private and public stakeholders, their behaviors and coordination modes (Larid 2010, Brullot, Maillefert and al. 2014), and, in some cases, their the social relations (Angeon and Lardon 2008) that the energies needed to construct a common development project are brought together. A mountain resort's governance processes have to take into account asymmetries in the relations between stakeholders (Lorrain 2002). Here, the constitutive dimension of politics refers to a restricted geographical area, because its exercise is linked to a local authority and to a

power that is subject to the constraint of legitimization (Duran 2010). Mountain resort governance tends to follow one of two main models (Gaïdo 2002): the *community model*, in which a resort "is the fruit of independent production units, specialized in services and operating within a decentralized approach, without a dominant power" (Boudières and al. 2004), and the *corporate model*, in which the focus is on profit and the resort is run like a "business corporation" (Flagestad and Hope 2001) with an integrated management system. Put simply, in the community model local authorities play a preeminent role as drivers and coordinators, whereas the corporate model prioritizes economic strategy and the selection of contractors and sub-contractors.

Gilly and Perrat (2003) recognized three main types of local governance depending on whether local coordination is dominated by private stakeholders (private governance), public stakeholders (institutional governance) or public-private partnerships (mixed governance).

Stakeholder partnerships can also be divided into three categories: strategic, institutional and project-based (Svensson and al., 2005). Strategic partnerships involve close coordination between stakeholders, based on mutual trust, in order to achieve long-term development. Institutional partnerships involve looser cooperation between public and private stakeholders, with each stakeholder having a degree of decision-making freedom and their own financial resources. Project-based partnerships involve short-term cooperation in order to achieve a specific objective. Clivaz (2006) proposed using these three types of partnership as a framework for analyzing the nature and evolution of a system's governance.

Given these models of power and types of partnership between public, private and nonprofit stakeholders, the orientation of a local governance system is determined by an objective or a local-development project dictated by the original body. This is a condition set by the literature for more effectively and, possibly, more efficiently

implementing a policy, in our case a tourism-sport policy.

Based on the theoretical concepts described above, we drew up a framework for analyzing the governance of Villars-sur-Ollon and the effects of this governance on the conception and implementation of a tourism-sport policy.

### 3. Analysis framework and methodology

We began by mapping all the stakeholders (Rey-Valette and al. 2014) involved in the resort's governance. We then analyzed the modalities of governance with respect to two key elements:

- *Stakeholder resources* (as defined by Rey-Valette and al. 2011). Here, we assessed the use of power (how is political power distributed?), the role of relations (links and interactions between stakeholders), knowledge (nature, utilization, quality and transparency of information), statuses (legal statute, shares and voting rights in companies) and the financial capital invested (by which stakeholders and what sums?).
- The resulting *forms of cooperation* can give rise to the three types of partnership described by Svensson and al. (2005).

**Table 1: The three types of partnership**

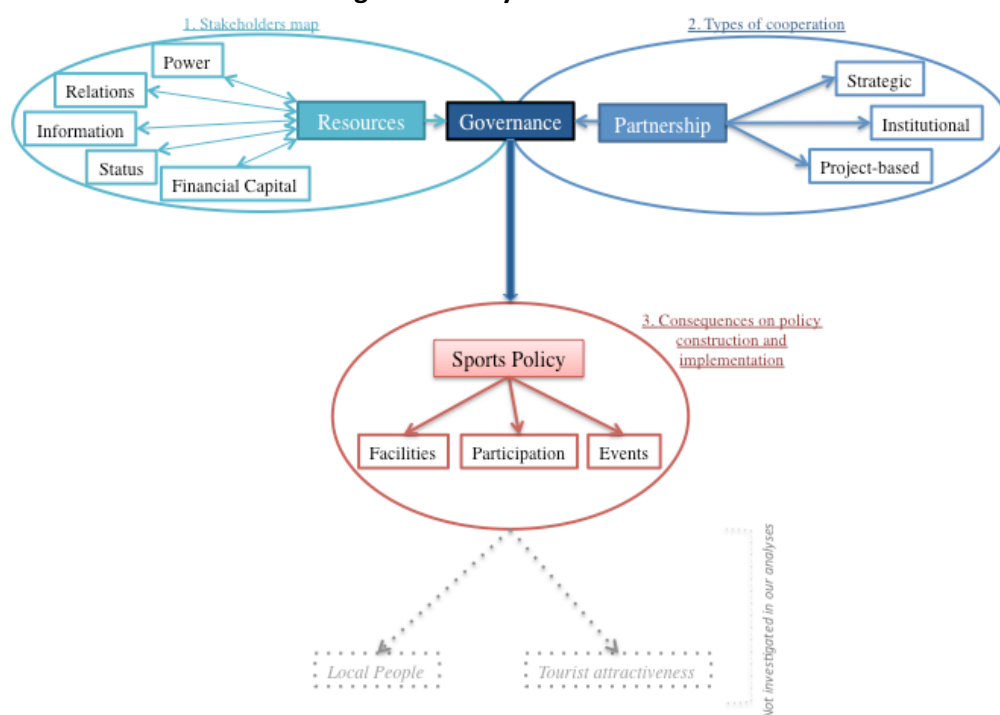
Types of partnership	Characteristics
Strategic partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Long-term effectiveness</li> <li>- Coordination between public and private stakeholders</li> <li>- Pooling of resources</li> <li>- Mutual trust</li> </ul>
Institutional partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cooperation between public and private stakeholders</li> <li>- Autonomy in decision-making and financial resources</li> </ul>
Project-based partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One-off cooperation</li> <li>- Limited duration</li> <li>- Specific objective</li> </ul>

(according to Svensson and al. 2005)

Although the five types of stakeholder resource defined by Rey-Valette and al. (2011) are structural, they can also be viewed from a dynamic perspective in order to examine how they evolve with respect to the production of information, conflict management and the distribution of resources between stakeholders. Analyzing local governance in terms of stakeholder resources, partnerships and cooperation revealed both the importance of coordination in situations where stakeholder resources are asymmetrical and the nature of the dynamic process mobilizing collective learning.

We then examined the effects of governance on three major components of the resort's sport policy: offer, facilities, events (Bayeux 2013). The following diagram summarizes our analysis framework and the four concepts we analyzed.

**Figure 1: Analysis framework**



*(Jaccard, Langenbach and Bayle, 2016)*

We based our case study on data collected between 2012 and 2015, mostly from documentary sources (minutes of meetings, press articles, etc.) and 11 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in drawing up and implementing the resort's sport and tourism policies (identity, career path, role, financial capital, legal status, relation with the other stakeholders, perception of current governance, relations between governance and the implementation of policies, perspectives for change).<sup>4</sup> These data were combined with information collected from relevant websites (municipality, resort,<sup>5</sup> other stakeholders). Analyses of studies and statistics relating to the resort were another important source of

secondary data.<sup>6</sup> The study period coincided with growing awareness by the different stakeholders that overcoming the challenges facing the resort would require a more partnership-oriented form of governance. The questions of how to build new strategic partnerships and improve cooperation between the public, private and nonprofit stakeholders inspired a more global reflection on the roles of the different stakeholders and the need to revise policies, including sport-tourism policies.

<sup>4</sup> Interviews carried out with private stakeholders: director of the Swiss Ski School in Villars, director of the resort's second ski school, "Villars Ski School", principal of a private school and representative of all the private schools, director of the TGV SA ski-lift company; nonprofit stakeholders: president of Villars Golf Club, president of Villars-Gryon Tennis Club, president of Villars Ski Club; public and public-private stakeholders: mayor of Ollon, director of

the tourist office, former-mayor, director of the sports center.

<sup>5</sup> Websites: [www.villars.ch](http://www.villars.ch); <http://www.ollon.ch/>

<sup>6</sup> Report by the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne EHL (2013). A development strategy for the municipality of Ollon on the cusp of 2016. Lausanne, Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, Swiss federal tourism statistics, CITAV report, etc.

#### 4. Governance of Villars-sur-Ollon's sport-tourism policy

Villars-sur-Ollon is a mountain resort in the Chablais region of the Swiss Alps (canton of Vaud). It lies at an altitude of 1250 m and is connected to the valley by road and by the Bex-Villars-Bretaye railway. The resort is part of the municipality of Ollon, whose main village is located 800 m lower, on a panoramic, south-facing plateau. The environment is ideal for tourism and all sorts of sports and leisure activities. Ollon is close to Geneva (1 hr 20 min by road, 2 hrs by train) and easy to reach from Paris (3 hrs 40 min by train). The resort of Villars has around 1,500 permanent residents, but its population can rise to 20,000 in peak season (Christmas/New Year holidays, February holidays), thanks to its 2,500 second homes and 19,000 tourist beds.<sup>7</sup> Winter tourism currently represents a much larger proportion of the resort's economy than summer tourism: *"a winter tourist spends four times as much as a summer tourist"*.<sup>8</sup>

Villars is also renowned for its schools, as, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been home to five private junior-high schools, including two of the most prestigious and expensive schools in the world (Collège Alpin Beau-Soleil, Aiglon College, Ecole Alpine Internationale, Ecole Internationale La Garenne, Ecole Internationale Pré Fleuri). The schools' alumni include many famous and wealthy people, who continue to educate their children at Villars (700 students during term time). Although many of these families own a chalet or apartment in the resort and spend part of the year there, they take little interest in local life.

The information we collected shows Villars to be a "family resort" with pretensions of being "discreetly upmarket". However, this self image is not always reflected in the resort's current development policies.

The municipality of Ollon has a wide range of sport and leisure facilities, divided between the mountain resort (Villars) and the main village (Ollon). The Villars-Gryon ski area (operated in conjunction with the municipality of Gryon) is linked to the Les Diablerets/Glacier 3000 ski area, thereby enabling the resort to offer its clients a total of 125 km of downhill ski trails. A further 50 km of trails are groomed for cross-country skiing. An extensive network of waymarked hiking trails is accessible in both summer and winter. Villars's sports offer also includes an ice rink, outdoor and indoor swimming pools (currently undergoing renovation), indoor and outdoor tennis courts and an 18-hole golf course.

##### 4.1 Stakeholders: identity, resources and forms of cooperation

Numerous private, public, commercial and nonprofit stakeholders are involved in sport and leisure. The municipality has seven sports clubs and associations, covering football, golf, tennis, ice hockey, ice skating and skiing. Several sportspeople and teams from these clubs have represented the resort in national and international competitions. Sport involves numerous private stakeholders, many of which (private schools, hotel keepers, restaurant owners, second-home owners, shopkeepers/tradespeople) have grouped together in order to promote their interests through a single but more powerful voice. Tél-Villars-Gryon SA (TVG), which owns and operates the resort's ski lifts, is a key player, partly due to the nature of its business, the number of people it employs and its substantial economic weight (the company has generated a profit since it merged with Gryon), but also because of its involvement in organizing events (especially skiing events). Ollon and Gryon councils own 30% of the company; the rest belongs to private shareholders. The larger of the resort's two ski schools, the Villars Swiss Ski School (ESS Villars), is the second biggest ski school in

<sup>7</sup> Source: Email exchange with the council secretary

<sup>8</sup> Source: Interview with the former director of the tourist office (January 2014)

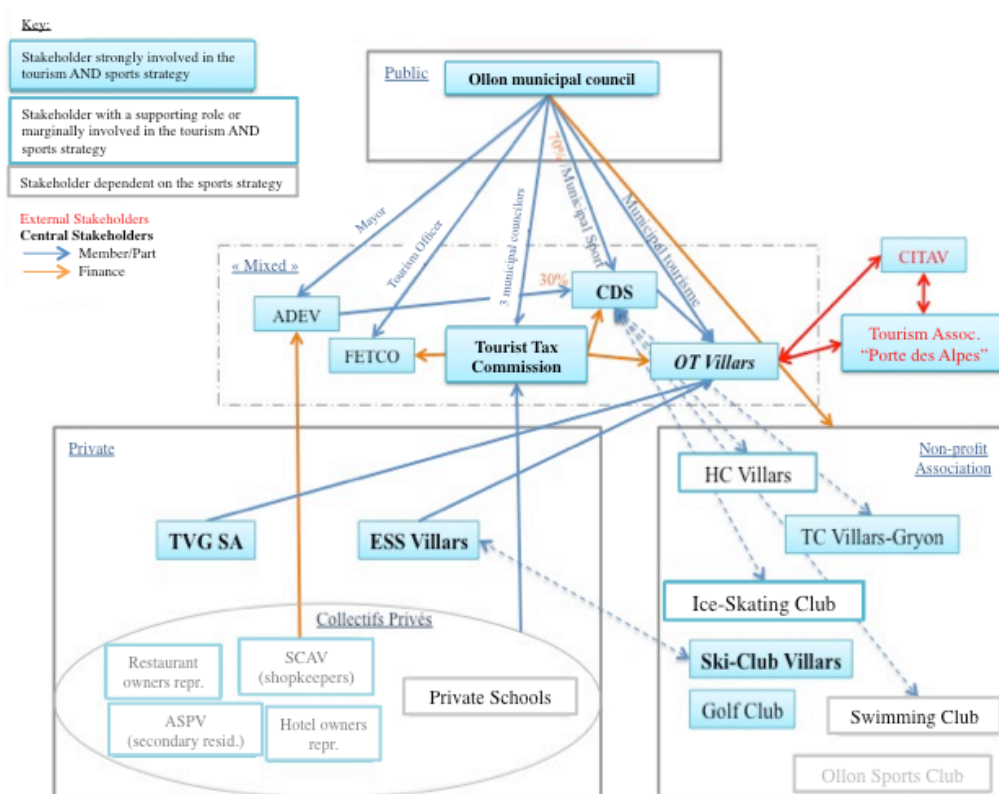


Switzerland. It employs 270 ski instructors in the high season and works closely with the resort's ski club. Other stakeholders include nonprofit and public-private development bodies such as the Villars Economic Development Association (ADEV), the Fund for Municipal Tourism Facilities (FETCO), the Tourist Tax Commission, the Community for Developing Tourism in the Vaud Alps (CITAV) and the "Porte des Alpes" (Gateway to the Alps) tourist office, which has an office in Villars.

Income from the tourist tax, collected by accommodation providers on behalf of the Tourist Tax Commission, is an essential source of finance that depends on the number of tourist bed nights. As well as covering the cost

of administering the tax, it finances FETCO, the tourist office, events and the Free Access Card,<sup>9</sup> and helps finance the Sports Center (CDS). Although the CDS is run as an independent company, it is jointly owned by ADEV (30%) and the municipality (70%). In addition, it is dependent on public money to finance renovation work and to cover any operating losses it may incur. The municipality owns some facilities (tennis courts, sports halls, etc.) and finances renovation and maintenance work for other facilities that are owned by the CDS (ice rink, swimming pool). Hence, the municipality's ability to finance investment and its legal, political and relational involvement in the governance of the sport and tourism system makes it a powerful stakeholder.

**Figure 2: Map of stakeholders and their networks**



(according to Rey-Valette and al., 2011))

<sup>9</sup> Free Access Card: card providing the holder with free access to sports and cultural activities provided by the scheme's partners (introduction to golf, swimming pool, guided heritage walks, etc.) and to public transportation (cable cars, cog railway,

buses, etc.). It is provided free of charge to visitors who spend at least one night in the resort and to all children under the age of nine. Other visitors can buy the card from the tourist office for CHF10 per day or CHF55 for the season.



The links between these stakeholders are complex. Many stakeholders are involved on several fronts and through several organizations. Sometimes it is difficult to separate the organization from the person, who may be a member of a board in a private capacity (e.g., the director of the ESS is also a municipal councilor). A stakeholder may be a director, president or manager of several organizations at the same time, as is the case for the director of the ESS and the mayor. Some people wear several different hats within the field of sport and tourism. For example the director of the CDS, appointed in 2013, is also chair of the Villars tourist office board (since the end of 2014), while retaining close links to the municipal council. The mayor is also head of sport for the municipality, chair of the CDS, a vice-chair of TVG SA and a board member at the ADEV. Hence, political resources and power are held by a small number of people and stakeholders are strongly interdependent.

The relations between stakeholders impact the alliances and partnerships, of varying durations, individuals enter into, sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly. These relations can also be non-negligible obstacles to progress, as disagreements arising from personal interests and interpersonal conflicts can impede efficiency or even result in some projects being abandoned. In such cases, control is often along clannish or family lines (e.g., a member of the Daetwyler family was mayor for many years, as well as director of the ESS, president of the ski club, chair of the tourist office board and owner of a sports shop in the resort). Several stakeholders noted that information is sometimes produced without consultation and not always shared with everyone concerned: *“we would like to be able to discuss the opening and closing dates for the lifts”; “weather conditions led to the ski area being closed for a day during the school holidays and, as no one was told, all the other*

*facilities were also closed because it was a public holiday. What could we do with our clients?”; “because the event policy is unclear, everyone does their own thing...”<sup>10</sup>*). Interactions between local actors are very common. These interactions influence decisions, alliances, partnerships and, in the end, the governance of the resort. The following table summarizes the resources of the main stakeholders in the resort’s governance.

<sup>10</sup> Sources: Interviews with commercial stakeholders

**Table 2: Key stakeholders and resources**

Resources					
Main stakeholders	Power	Relations	Knowledge	Financial capital	Summary
Director of TVG	Economic/marketing; skiing infrastructure; planning (chooses the opening and closing dates for the ski season)	Tourism; skiing; other resorts in the Vaud Alps	Strong internal and external influence for 20 years; stakeholder with local roots	Company with substantial financial power due to its ability to finance and organize ski events	At the heart of the resort's development (obstacle or driver, depending on the project and the people involved)
Mayor	Political credentials	Multiple hats (Mayor, president of the CDS, vice-president of TVG)	A focal point for information and political decision-making with respect to the local economy and tourism	Through the municipality, holder of 20% of the shares in TVG and 70% of the shares in the CDS (+investments and covering losses)	Major stakeholder in the governance system
New sports center manager (2013) + new chair of the tourist office board (end 2014)	Sporting credentials (former sporting champion); neutrality (recruited from outside)	Links with many sportspeople in the Vaud and throughout Switzerland (Olympic silver medallist)	A focal point for operational and strategic information with respect to sport policy and sports events	Structurally loss making: depends on the municipality's investment choices	New stakeholder looking to innovate and prove his legitimacy: close advisor to the mayor
Tourist office director (until end 2014)	Technical and strategic credentials but no local credentials (foreigner)	No local roots and incapable of working with TVG (clash with the director)	Control over the official promotion and communication channel		Tried to make the TO a key player in rejuvenating the resort's economy and in media relations (but ousted at the end of 2014)
Director of the Swiss Ski School	Technical credentials (at the head of a strong, symbolic and powerful organization since 1992)	Member of the municipal council and of the tourist office board	Strong internal and external influence for 20 years; stakeholder with local roots	Provides significant unpaid technical and logistical help and support.	At the heart of the resort's development
Representatives of private schools	Economic and symbolic power	Parents of students (property owners and tourists) are important contributors to the local economy	Substantial indirect influence	Non-negligible financial potential via expenditure by student's families and via the construction and renovation of facilities (schools' own funds and patronage by rich parents)	Each school tends to be run independently. Little collaboration with other stakeholders

*(Jaccard, Langenbach and Bayle, 2016)*

The stakeholders' resources feed interactions, which, depending on the quality of the relationships between the stakeholders, can lead them to facilitate, obstruct or derail project-based partnerships. For example, personal animosity may lead a stakeholder to thwart a project that is being driven by a less powerful stakeholder, especially if the project is not in the first stakeholder's interests. We observed several examples of this, including the cancellation of the Villars Night Show in

2013 (sound and light show that had been held every year for 20 years), the suspension of projects to create play areas and treetop adventure courses, and the sacking of the director of the tourist office in 2014 (key stakeholder in the local economy). By analyzing governance through the prism of resources, we were able to determine the resort's ability to define and implement a sport policy.

Power is derived essentially from a stakeholder's technical and sporting credentials, followed by his or her political credentials, while the key factors in the creation of networks are a shared background in winter sports and long-established roots in the local political system. Knowledge is a resource that the stakeholders use internally within their own organizations and externally within local collective bodies (mostly management boards). It allows them to justify their status, which often depends on political choices. The financial capital needed to run the resort is mostly in the hands of the municipality, which is both a stakeholder in the resort's largest two companies (CDS and TVG) and the body responsible for financing renovation work or covering losses by the CDS.

#### 4.2 Fragmented and poorly coordinated partnership-based governance

The data presented above reveal the types of partnership at work in this governance system. With the exception of the Free Access Card, these partnerships are institutional and project-based (table 3).

**Table 3: Types of partnership**

Types of partnership	Examples
Strategic partnership	Free Access Card
Institutional partnership	OT, ADEV, FETCO, etc.
Project-based partnership	Most sports event projects aimed at tourists: depend on interpersonal relations but also many individual initiatives with no strategic coherence.

(Jaccard, Langenbach and Bayle, 2016)

Although the resort's governance can be considered partnership-based (Gilly and Perrat 2003), it is fragmented and poorly

coordinated. As one key stakeholder admitted: *"the resort's governance lacks clarity"*.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to impacting understanding and cooperation *between stakeholders*, this poor coordination affects the overall sport offer. Many stakeholders referred to a lack of consultation and information when making important decisions (e.g., to renovate the swimming pool): *"We (all the area's stakeholders) need to get together to determine priorities when it comes to renovating or building facilities"*;<sup>12</sup> *"There is a lack of cooperation between clubs and associations representing different sports"*;<sup>13</sup> *"No one knows how long the renovation of the swimming pool will take"*; *"We never know in advance when the ski area is going to open and close. We need to set dates so we can advertise them"*.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, some sports facilities (e.g., the golf course) are poorly integrated into the overall tourist offer. Nevertheless, the recently introduced Free Access Card for summer visitors, financed by the tourist tax collected all year round, is a positive development and illustrates the stakeholders' awareness of the need to work together in order to provide comprehensive offers.

All the resort's facilities are managed by different people through different bodies with different legal structures, thereby complicating coordination and impeding the creation of the global vision needed to design and provide the offers the resort's internal (local people and private schools) and external (tourists) clients expect. The presence of stakeholders on every front engenders conflicts of interest and personality clashes that can hinder the resort's development. Stakeholder relations, whether they are shaped by local customs or previous dealings, are particularly important in local governance, as they can limit dialogue to discussions of specific and often deeply anchored projects, and restrict the resort's ability to innovate

<sup>11</sup> Source: interview with a governance stakeholder.

<sup>12</sup> Source: interview with a strong private stakeholder

<sup>13</sup> Source: interview with a nonprofit stakeholder

<sup>14</sup> Source: interview with a private stakeholder (retail trader)

(provide new facilities, organize different events, develop a novel tourism or sport strategy) and adapt in response to an increasingly competitive market. Currently, Villars-sur-Ollon's sport and tourism policies appear to be fragmented, uncoordinated and non-transversal, which impacts the use of facilities and the organization of events.

#### **4.3 Consequences of the current sport policy's three pillars: participation in sport, facilities and events**

Nonprofit stakeholders and a handful of large private stakeholders (Swiss Ski School, CDS, Villars Ski School) account for most of Villars' sport offer. A few small private companies provide complementary activities such as paragliding, scuba diving and dance lessons. Although most of the activities on offer are aimed at tourists, as would be expected given the importance of tourism to Villars' economy, they are not targeted exclusively at non-locals. However, the number of outdoor activities on offer during the summer season, and especially in the spring and autumn, is quite low. Classic winter sports (skiing, snowboarding, ice skating, etc.) are still the resort's most important activities, but they depend on the opening and closure dates decided by TGV. There are few activities available to non-skiers or for bad weather days, even though the resort has a number of indoor facilities. The CDS has recently taken over the maintenance of the cross-country ski trails and the short sledging run so they remain operational.

Together, the mountain resort of Villars and the neighboring municipality of Gryon have a wide range of sports facilities (courts for racket sports, golf course, swimming pool, ice rink, fitness room and sports hall). These facilities illustrate a desire to serve both the resort's visitors and local people. They can be integrated into tourism products and used for a wide range of sports, but some, such as the

athletics track and the playing fields (for soccer, rugby, etc.), are down in the valley, at Ollon. Villars itself has two playing fields, but they are antiquated and only useable for short periods of the year when the ground is dry. The area's playing fields include both public facilities, run by Ollon Council, and private facilities belonging to the area's schools. In fact, these schools have extensive sports facilities (climbing wall, sports hall, etc.), but access to them is restricted, so tour operators and local sports clubs cannot use them for their activities, even though they are vacant for part of the year. A new approach to managing the sport policy and a more innovative way of integrating existing facilities into the tourism offer could reduce the need for municipal funding and thereby increase the budget available for much-needed renovation work on the ice rink and sports hall, for example.

All the resort's stakeholders contribute, directly or indirectly, to organizing sports events, but their contributions are uncoordinated. The resort holds around 30 regular or one-off events throughout the year, although there is a strong imbalance in favor of the winter season (>20 events) compared with the summer season (≈10 events).<sup>15</sup> These figures highlight the fact that downhill skiing and snow sports are one of the main vectors of the resort's activity; therefore, winter is seen as the best time for organizing events and attracting spectators. The sports events held at Villars cover several categories, including elite and sport-for-all competitions (e.g., Rivella Family Contest, Ski Cross, Jumping Villars Gryon), non-competitive activities (encouragement to do a sport, e.g., introductory sessions for different sports, sometimes associated with cultural events, such as the Winter Golf Experience, Villars Rando Festival), and sports shows (sport as entertainment, e.g., Villars on Ice). The strategic and marketing reasons underlying

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<sup>15</sup> These figures do not include smaller events that are held regularly or occasionally by local sports clubs and associations (e.g., internal competitions and matches organized by the Ski Club, Tennis Club

or Hockey Club) or by commercial companies (themed hikes organized by Villars Ski School or the ESS during the summer season, torchlight descents held by the ESS, etc.)

the choice of these events are unclear, even though their organizers emphasize the fact that most of them are aimed at families and amateur sport. This lack of coherence is due to poor/non-existent consultation between stakeholders/organizers, who sometimes develop projects on their own initiative without considering how they might integrate into an overall offer or tourism strategy.

In summary, Villars' sport policy appears to be dynamic but eclectic. It is the fruit of disparate initiatives, most of which are not based on clear partnerships. These actions reveal the stakeholders' willingness to innovate, their work ethic and their active involvement in the life of the resort. However, individual stakeholders tend to run their own projects and actions without overall coordination. Even though the resort's resources are relatively transversal and well used by the stakeholders, better coordination would give a new impetus that would benefit all the area's stakeholders.

## 5. Discussion and perspectives

The case study described above clearly illustrates the complexity of the tourism and sport governance of a Swiss mountain resort in relation to each stakeholder's resources. In the case of Villars-sur-Ollon, this complexity is compounded by a lack of cohesion and coherence in the resort's governance. The following sections suggest ways in which Villars' sports facilities could be better integrated into the resort's tourism offer and discuss the advantages to be gained by embracing a new form of governance centered round strategic partnerships.

### 5.1 Towards strategic partnerships: bring together offers and resources to develop tourism all year round

According to most of the stakeholders, the resort's sport policy should be "clearly

connected to its tourism policy", because "sport, events and facilities should be a driving force for tourism, for bed nights and, more generally, for the attractiveness of Villars for tourists".<sup>16</sup> In fact, the resort's sport policy needs to define clearer targets that will contribute to achieving the policy's objectives. Although the private schools currently operate as a closed system, they could share their facilities and resources with other sports stakeholders and, inversely, make use of the facilities available within the resort in order to diversify their sport offer. The resort and schools could share access to the golf course, tennis courts and other sports facilities, with this shared offer being extended to other activities (e.g., rock climbing, via-ferrata, tree-top adventure course) if new facilities are developed. The new swimming pool will give the CDS a major boost when it opens at the end of 2016. With its wellness center and indoor and outdoor pools, it will attract visitors of all ages (families, couples, seniors) and provide a similar level of facilities to the water parks in many competitor resorts in both Switzerland and abroad. Combined with the resort's outdoor ice rink (open almost all year round and which could later be refurbished), tennis courts, sports halls and 18-hole golf course, this new complex will not only be popular with visitors, it will help stakeholders develop their offers. Having a comprehensive range of facilities will enable the resort to provide a high quality and varied sport offer throughout the year, enhancing the range of outdoor sports available in summer and providing indoor alternatives to winter sports when the weather is poor.

Furthermore, it would be worthwhile extending the outdoor sports offer, as many other Swiss (and Austrian and Italian) resorts have done,<sup>17</sup> in order to develop tourism throughout the year and to give local people and the private schools access to other leisure

<sup>16</sup> Source: several private stakeholders

<sup>17</sup> Source: Benchmarking study of 1 Italian resort, 2 Austrian resorts and 7 Swiss resorts carried out in 2014

activities. An illustration of this approach is provided by the link between using sports events to attract tourists at specific times of the year and organizing events throughout the year in order to develop tourism during all four seasons, which is an essential goal for medium-altitude resorts if they are to ensure their long-term futures.

In contrast with the resort of Crans-Montana (Clivaz 2006), it would appear that the long-term development of tourism and sport at Villars would be best served by having one, sufficiently strong stakeholder, the municipal council, to steer policy. This system would replace the current project-based partnership approach to development. As the *ad hoc* operator, Ollon Council would set the tempo for developing facilities, events and even relationships with key sport stakeholders. Until now, it has made its contribution through the CDS and the tourist office, where it plays a central role in their administration and in creating strategic partnerships.

## **5.2 The conditions for a successful strategic partnership**

Introducing strategic partnerships into governance requires real cooperation between stakeholders, the pooling of resources and mutual trust (Svensson and al. 2005). This means entrusting one stakeholder, most logically the municipal council, with developing a collaborative system of management (see figure 3).

In the case of Villars, the key aspects of a strategic partnership would be:

- a) **Clarify who is responsible for steering, implementing and monitoring projects** by drawing up a new governance chart affirming the municipal sports department's responsibility for coordinating sport policy and the tourist office's responsibility for coordinating strategy;
- b) **Decide on a medium- to long-term strategy**;
- c) **Include a regional-scale strategic outlook** that takes into account the

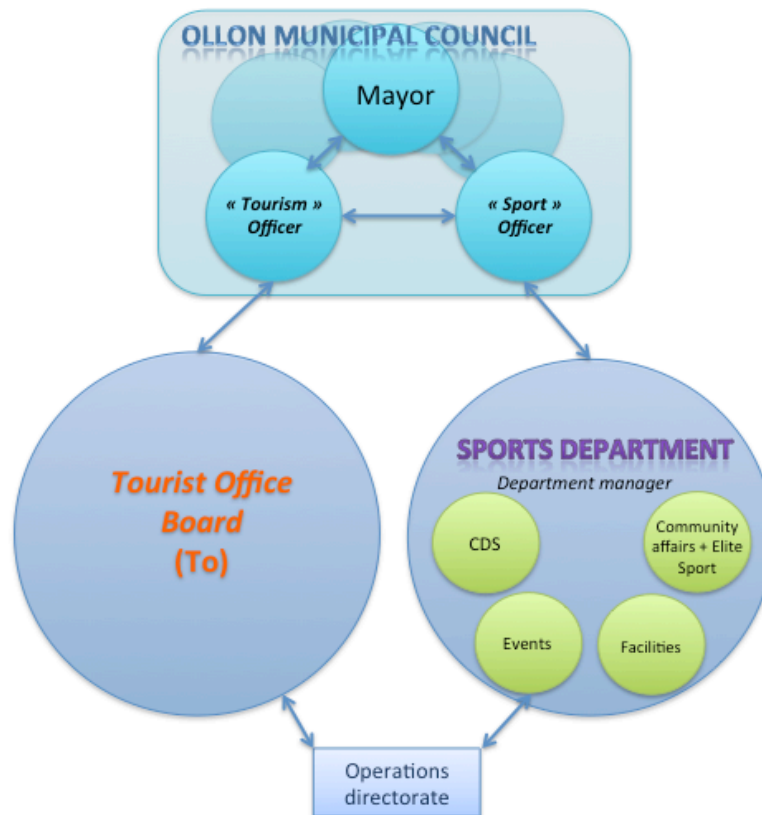
different levels of local administration and types of area.

The governance of the municipality's and CDS's sport policy needs to be clarified. A **sports department**, or similar body, could be created to steer and coordinate sport policy and its interactions with tourism policy. Most similar-sized municipalities in Switzerland (e.g., Champéry, Leysin) have such a department with its own manager. Villars' CDS does not have this role, as it merely manages and operates the facilities placed under its responsibility.

Reaffirming the strategic role of the **tourist office board** would allow it to contribute actively to building and validating the municipality's sport policy. It could also take responsibility for monitoring the resources used and the achievement of objectives (monitoring results, scorecards of key indicators, such as visitor numbers, to determine how actual results compare with forecasts). The new board would consist of representatives of the resort's key stakeholders (directors of the main companies and nonprofit associations, representatives of the private schools) and coordinated by a politically independent president with expertise in this field. In addition, an **operations directorate**, consisting of the heads of the tourist office, sports department and TGV SA, could also be set up in order to supervise implementation of the sport and leisure policy and to report back to the tourist office board.

The following diagram summarizes our proposed changes to the resort's governance.

**Figure 3: Proposal for a new form of tourism and sport governance for mountain resorts:  
the case of Ollon and the resort of Villars**



*(Jaccard, Langenbach et Bayle, 2016)*

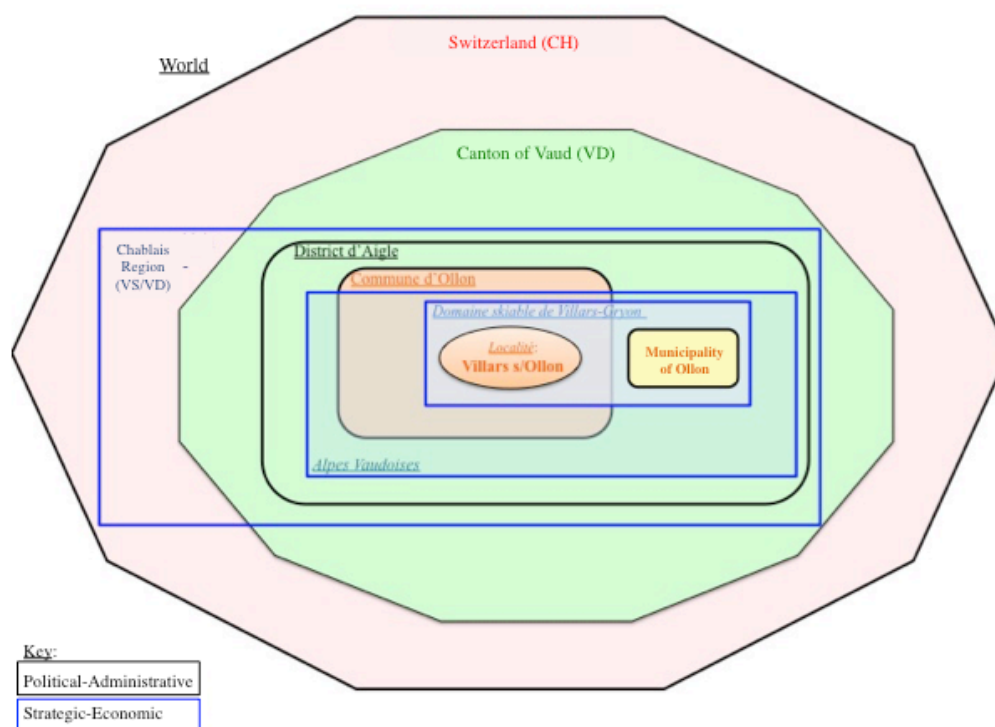
In this case, and given the difficulty of getting the stakeholders to collaborate, drawing up a medium- to long-term master plan, associated with annual action plans, would help ensure the sport policy was implemented successfully. The tourist office would be responsible for promoting the resort on small, large and very large scales by advertising the resort's sport offer and sports events. It would also coordinate actions to advertise and promote tourism and sports activities. The sports department would be in charge of the sports event policy, which would be implemented and promoted by the tourist office.

Furthermore, the new system of governance should fit into the wider context of cantonal, regional and national development policies. By

ensuring governance takes into account the larger development picture, and not just the micro scale observed here, it is possible to prevent competition between local development policies, ensure local resources are used in the best possible way and choose strategies that are suited to the scale in question. It is also important to ensure the area is competitive, both nationally and internationally, and that its development will be durable. The following diagram summarizes the types (political-administrative and strategic-economic) and levels (from national to local) of territorial governance.



**Figure 4: Nested of levels of territorial governance**



*(Jaccard, Langenbach et Bayle, 2016)*

Switzerland is divided into political-administrative units (locality, municipality, district, canton, confederation) and, in many areas, strategic-economic “projects” (ski area and municipality; Vaud Alps; Chablais Region, which combines areas of the Vaud and Valais cantons; Geneva Region). Hence, local policies for developing sport and tourism must take into account the principle of subsidiarity.

Sport policies must be drawn up in the light of initiatives being undertaken at higher political-administrative echelons, whereas economic or tourism policies, for example, are often defined with respect to new strategic territories. Hence, appropriate policies for developing tourism through sport must take into account what is being done on a global or macro level, as well as what appears to be required on a local or micro level. For example, the Chablais Region, which includes the municipality of Villars-sur-Ollon, is currently trying to coordinate investments in order to create both national-standard (as described in this paper) and international-standard (e.g. World Cycling Center in Aigle) sports facilities.

Consequently, when local governance is built on strategic partnerships, these partnerships must take into account the complexity of the policies being pursued on each territorial level and the different domains involved in developing tourism and sport, while ensuring the area becomes/remains competitive with other areas with similar characteristics and standing. Basing local governance on strategic partnerships, as proposed here, requires convincing local stakeholders to unite around a shared and precisely defined objective and to work within a complex but clearly understood context.

## **6. Conclusion**

Our case study analyzed the governance and steering of a sport policy by a moderate-altitude mountain resort facing a number of challenges to its future development. Current governance practices, centered round project-based partnerships, have produced a highly splintered and uncoordinated approach to development. As a result, we propose

adopting a new form of governance based on strategic partnerships between stakeholders, brought together to achieve a precisely defined common goal. This new approach would improve trust and coordination between the resort's stakeholders and the institutional stakeholders involved in developing sport and tourism on a wider scale. Similarly, investment in sport and initiatives to increase the resort's sports activity and sports event offers should be incorporated into a more global policy, especially at the canton level, or integrated into a wider territorial development project. In addition, a holiday resort's development strategy cannot ignore competition and must take into account the area's history, its surrounding area and links with neighboring or comparable resorts through exchanges of information, knowledge, etc., or organizational or cognitive similarities (Marcelpoil and François 2008, Plumecocq 2012).

It would be interesting to compare the results of our study of Villars-sur-Ollon with the situation at other Swiss or European resorts with different approaches to sport policy and governance. No such comparative study has yet been carried out.

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