

FLANDERS, WHERE CHAMPIONS ARE BORN



18 - 26 september 2021, Vlaanderen

Maatschappelijke impact
en legacy:

EVALUATIE 2021 UCI ROAD WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

SUMMARY

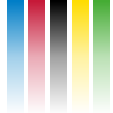
From Saturday 18 to Sunday 26 September Flanders was the proud regional host of the 2021 UCI Road World Championships (the WC 2021). It was a festive occasion, as in 2021 the UCI and the sport of cycling were celebrating the centenary of the world championships road bicycle racing. Belgium had hosted the world championships 9 times in the last 100 years, six of those in Flanders. The task of organising the event fell to the LOC Flanders 2021, a partnership between Flanders Classics and Golazo. The LOC Flanders 2021 received Flemish government support and guidance through EventFlanders and Sport Vlaanderen. In addition, the candidacy, planning and execution relied on the collaboration and expertise of Belgian Cycling, Cycling Vlaanderen and the four host cities of the WC 2021 as main stakeholders. A course for the time trials was set out between Knokke-Heist and Bruges. The road races were held between Antwerp and Leuven.

Besides hosting a cutting edge, state-of-the-art world championships, the government of Flanders aimed to achieve a number of (societal) goals through the organisation of the WC 2021. They hoped to put Flanders on the international map as a (cycling) destination, and to promote road bicycle racing and cycling in the broadest sense. In the first place the government of Flanders greeted the award of the WC 2021 to Flanders as a catalyst to incorporate events of this magnitude in a broader strategy to attain social (policy) objectives. Harnessing an event's momentum to achieve goals (by accelerated action) is an important step in the strategic management of top events, and it presupposes a shift from impact to leverage.

The societal value (short-term impact, long-term legacy) of the WC 2021 was investigated by means of a qualitative and quantitative sub-study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 stakeholders who were involved in the organisation of the WC 2021. These stakeholders were representatives of organisations such as the LOC Flanders 2021, the host cities, EventFlanders and Sport Vlaanderen. Interviews were also conducted with representatives from Belgian Cycling, Cycling Vlaanderen and the UCI, and from several Flemish government services, cycling policy, mobility and other partners. Additionally, through a closed questionnaire, data (N = 2359) were collected from residents of the four host cities: Knokke-Heist, Bruges, Antwerp and Leuven.

Despite the negative effects of COVID-19 on the planning and organisation of activities leading up to the WC 2021, the LOC Flanders 2021 managed to stage a vast and ambitious run-up of activities in partnership with the host cities as well as other stakeholders with expertise in cycle racing and sports in general. The activities and campaigns ensured visibility and promotion of a number of societal themes such as sustainability (non-smoking WC 2021), sports participation (Flanders 2021 Roadshow), accessibility (Para-Cycling Race) and innovation (Innovation Hub). Due to the attention and public support for the event, these activities and campaigns caught the attention of the general public. The present report describes the activities in the run-up to the event, as well as the learning outcomes.





It was decided that an event legacy, in terms of cycling policy, should be created for Flanders and its residents through the organisation of the WC 2021. In April 2021 'De Grote Versnelling' (The Big Acceleration) was introduced, an initiative from the government of Flanders, the Flemish provinces and the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), supported by the centre of expertise Fietsberaad Vlaanderen. De Grote Versnelling is a network organisation, set up to unite stakeholders (authorities, centres of expertise, interest groups, businesses, associations, etc.) across a variety of policy areas (mobility and traffic safety, environment, sport, education, health, tourism, economy) with a view to lifting cycling policy to a higher level. It will be another few years before we can assess the true impact of De Grote Versnelling, and thus the legacy planned for the WC 2021. De Grote Versnelling aims to set up cycle deals in partnership with authorities, businesses, schools and associations. One of the successful cycle deals organised in the run-up to the WC 2021 was Bike for Life, a campaign to stimulate commuters to travel by bicycle. The campaign was successful in terms of the numbers of business participants and sponsored bike rides, and in terms of the revenues collected for the cause. We can conclude that public support for these campaigns is high, with over a quarter of residents surveyed in the host cities reporting that they had heard of the campaign. The Big Acceleration programme is in its growth phase, and the desire is to increase not only the number of cycle deals, but also the number of parties engaged from various domains.

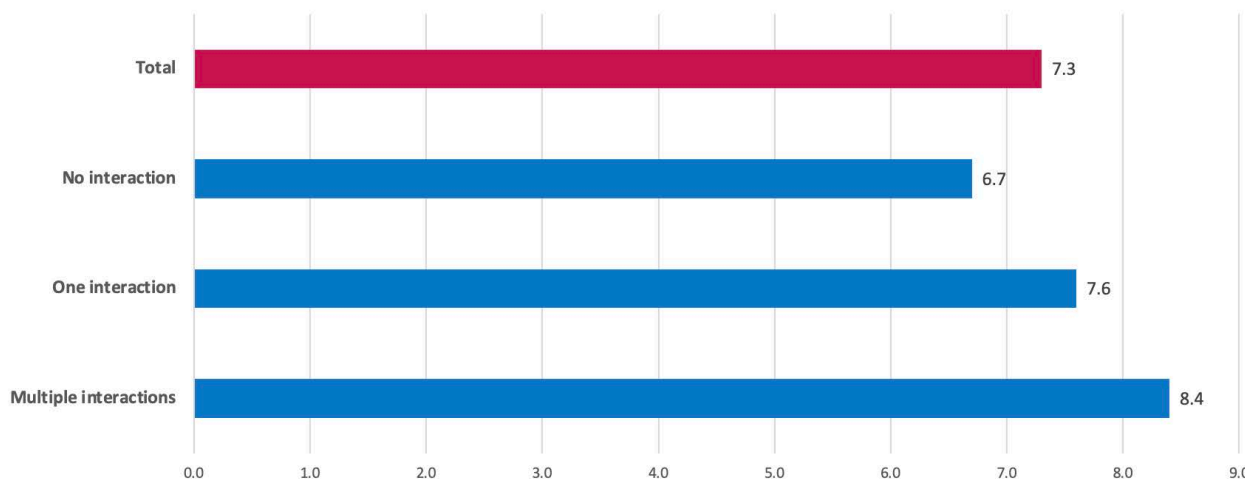
In the organisation of the WC 2021, the government of Flanders aimed to blaze a trail in sustainability. It was an important legacy theme, involving the development and implementation of a sustainability plan and sustainability framework (Deloitte sustainability report) that would provide inspiration for future events. The sustainability report gives authorities and future sporting event organisers a framework

of reference by which to set sustainability goals and assess the outcomes. During the WC 2021, a local action plan on sustainability was developed and sustainability campaigns were set up in the host cities. More than half of the residents surveyed think that it is important to organise large (top) sporting events in Flanders. The residents also ask event organisers to pay attention to sustainability, to promote sports and exercise, and to not cause mobility issues. When it comes to attracting large top events, these societal themes must be incorporated as part of the Flemish government's overall vision.

The organisation of the WC 2021 has also led to new alliances, which together make up an unplanned event legacy. Alliances which have come into being at various levels. In the host cities the organisation of the WC 2021 has improved cooperation between municipal services, and among local organisations such as clubs, associations and hospitality businesses. There is also talk of better cooperation among the host cities and between the host cities and the government of Flanders, made possible by the coordinating efforts of EventFlanders. Finally, there is also better cooperation among the various services of the Flemish government. For example, in the network of De Grote Versnelling, services such as sports, tourism and mobility will continue to work together systematically in the future to bring about a quantum leap in cycling policy and bring sportive and recreational cycling more in line with the functional use of the bicycle.

We can say that residents in the host cities look back on the WC 2021 in a positive light. The residents appreciate that the event was held and award it, on average, 7.3 on a scale of 1 to 10 (see figure 1). Among residents who had multiple interactions with the event, that appreciation rises to 8.4 out of 10.

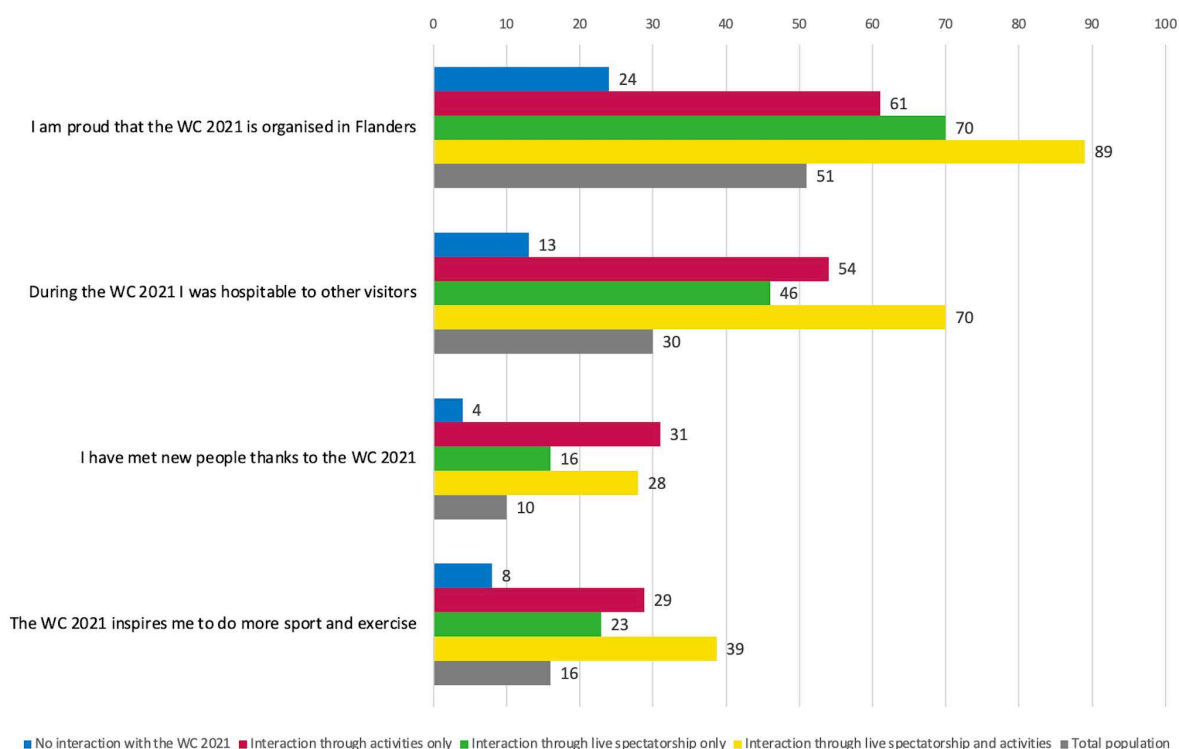
Figure 1. Appreciation of the WC 2021, in average report grade.



Roughly half of the inhabitants are proud that the WC 2021 was held in Flanders (see figure 2). As with appreciation, the residents' sense of pride rises the more they interact with the event and/or its run-up activities. About a third of the residents surveyed attended the WC 2021 live, either at the start or finish line in one of the host cities or somewhere else along the race route. The added societal value of the WC 2021 is the highest among residents who attended the event live and participated in one or more activities

in the run-up. About 7 in 10 residents who had multiple interactions with the WC 2021 showed hospitality towards other visitors during the event. Organised events also give residents the opportunity to meet new people. Embedding the event locally through an accessible range of sporting, cultural or social activities that are promoted actively in the run-up to the event is therefore a challenge that cannot be underestimated. The WC 2021 has enabled the parties involved to gain an incredible amount of knowledge about

Figure 2. Added social value of the WC 2021 by type of interaction, in percentages.



Although the (long-term) effect on sport participation or bicycle use among residents in the host cities could not yet be investigated, it was possible to show the intentions to cycle or play sports/engage in exercise. About 15% of the residents surveyed felt inspired by the WC 2021 to engage (more) in cycling, sports/exercise. The organisation of activities and involvement of the public in those activities does tend to have an 'inspiration effect'. Residents who took part in activities and/or attended the race(s) live, consistently reported a higher level of inspiration. The creation of an accessible range of activities in the context of the WC 2021 can help inspire residents to engage more in cycling, sports/exercise. In this respect, it is important to continue local actions in partnership with organisations such as local (sports) clubs, schools and businesses. Further research is needed to establish whether that inspiration leads to a change in behaviour, and whether the effects are lasting.



stakeholder involvement and engagement in the planning, execution and evaluation of a top event. Due to its supportive and guiding role in the WC 2021, EventFlanders was identified as the ideal organisation to bank this knowledge by the stakeholder interviewees. Thus, in years to come, EventFlanders could play an advisory role when aiming for impact and legacy through other major (sporting) events in Flanders. Aiming for impact and legacy is a process, and

the learning outcomes of the WC 2021 process could be of value when planning other (top) events. It is important to define societal goals with clarity from the outset, and it is best for all stakeholders to be involved while setting clear roles. The formulation of shared goals can contribute to greater (financial) engagement on the part of stakeholders and a more targeted use of resources.

