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Decoding the hidden currents of event management in sport research: A bibliometric odyssey

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Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of sports event research from 2015 to 2024, leveraging data from the Web of Science database. The study explores key trends, influential publications, prolific authors, and prevailing themes within the domain. Through meticulously examining citation networks, co-authorship collaborations, and keyword co-occurrence patterns, the research underscores core focus areas, particularly in sports event management, sustainability, and economic impact.

In terms of sports event management, the analysis sheds light on the critical components such as strategic planning, risk management, operational logistics, and marketing strategies essential for the successful execution of sporting events. This includes a focus on stakeholder engagement, sponsorship acquisition, and the use of advanced technology to optimize event operations and enhance both athlete and spectator experiences. Additionally, the study addresses the growing importance of digital tools for managing large-scale events, from ticketing platforms to real-time data analytics for audience interaction and event performance evaluation.

The findings offer in-depth insights for academics and practitioners interested in advancing knowledge across various facets of sport event planning, management, and legacy development. Specifically, the study highlights how events are now positioned as platforms for community engagement, urban development, and branding, all while balancing economic goals with environmental sustainability and post-event legacy considerations. By revealing emerging trends and critical areas for future research, this analysis serves as a foundational guide for improving practices in organizing impactful and sustainable sports events at both local and global levels.

Keywords: Event, sports, tourism, bibliometric, trend

1. Introduction

Sports event management has emerged as a specialized field that encompasses the planning, organizing, and execution of sports events, ranging from local amateur competitions to global mega-events. With the increasing complexity of sports events, sports event management now requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating principles from business, logistics, marketing, finance, law, and risk management. The goal is to create successful events that not only meet the entertainment and sporting expectations of fans and participants but also deliver tangible economic, social, and environmental benefits to the host cities and stakeholders.

Key aspects of sports event management include logistical coordination, venue management, athlete and spectator services, sponsorship acquisition, media relations, and risk management. Event managers must also focus on marketing and promotional strategies to attract large audiences, both in-person and through global broadcasting networks. Increasingly, digital technologies, including live streaming, social media, and mobile applications, have become crucial tools in enhancing fan engagement and delivering immersive experiences.

One of the primary challenges in sports event management is the high level of financial and logistical risk associated with hosting large-scale events. Event organizers must carefully manage budgets, allocate resources, and coordinate with multiple stakeholders to ensure the smooth execution of the event. Unforeseen challenges, such as weather disruptions, security threats, and public health crises (as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic), can further complicate event planning and require contingency strategies to mitigate risks).

Another challenge lies in maintaining the balance between commercialization and preserving the integrity of the sport. While sponsorship and media rights are critical for financing large

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events, excessive commercialization can lead to criticism if it detracts from the athlete experience or fan engagement. Event managers must navigate these tensions to deliver events that align with the values of sportsmanship while also satisfying the financial and promotional needs of sponsors and broadcasters.

In response to growing concerns about environmental and social sustainability, sports event managers are increasingly focusing on strategic approaches to ensure that their events leave a positive legacy. Sustainable sports event management practices include minimizing the environmental footprint of events, such as reducing energy consumption, managing waste, and promoting sustainable transportation options for athletes and spectators. Additionally, event managers are working toward inclusivity by ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, promoting diversity and gender equality, and engaging local communities in event planning and execution (Chalip, 2018) [12].

To achieve long-term success, sports event managers are incorporating legacy planning into their strategies. Legacy planning focuses on ensuring that the event leaves behind lasting benefits for the host community, such as improved infrastructure, increased tourism, enhanced international reputation, and heightened levels of physical activity among local populations. This focus on sustainability and legacy is now a fundamental criterion in the bidding process for hosting mega-events, with cities and organizers expected to demonstrate how their event will contribute to social, economic, and environmental goals (Müller, 2015) [15].

The integration of technology has revolutionized the field of sports event management, enabling more efficient planning and enhanced audience engagement. Technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality have reshaped how events are managed and experienced. For instance, data analytics allows event managers to analyze audience preferences, optimize ticket pricing, and predict crowd behavior, thus improving operational efficiency and fan experience.

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies are transforming the fan experience by offering immersive viewing options, virtual tours of event venues, and interactive experiences during the event. These technologies, along with advancements in live streaming and social media integration, have expanded the global reach of sports events, allowing fans from around the world to participate in real-time, even if they are not physically present at the venue.

In light of the growing complexity and significance of sports event management, this study aims to explore the intellectual landscape of the field through a bibliometric analysis. The analysis will focus on identifying key research areas and trends related to sports event management, including sustainability, commercialization, technology, and legacy planning. Using data from the Web of Science database, the study will investigate the most influential authors, institutions, and collaborative networks contributing to the field from 2015 to 2023. By providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of sports event management research, this study will offer valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers interested in advancing the strategic planning and sustainable management of sports events, particularly in areas such as economic impact, inclusivity, and legacy development.

2. Methodology

This bibliometric analysis utilized data from the Web of Science Core Collection, which provides an extensive index of peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings. The search was conducted using the phrase "sports event" for the time frame from 2015 to 2024. After applying specific inclusion criteria, 1,817 publications were selected for further analysis.

The analysis employed VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2014) [9], a specialized tool for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks. This software facilitated the visualization of keyword co-occurrence, which is crucial for understanding the thematic landscape of the literature.

A key component of the bibliometric analysis was the examination of keyword co-occurrence within the dataset. Keywords act as vital indicators of the main themes and topics present in a body of literature. By analyzing co-occurrence, the study revealed relationships between different research topics and identified themes that are emerging or gaining prominence over time.

The keyword co-occurrence network was built, where individual keywords are represented as nodes and their co-occurrences within the same publication are illustrated as edges. Clusters of frequently appearing keywords provide insights into the major research themes in the field of sports event studies. This clustering method allows for a clearer understanding of how various topics are interconnected within the domain.

Furthermore, the analysis explored collaboration patterns among authors, institutions, and countries. Co-authorship networks were generated using VOSviewer, which enabled the identification of leading authors and institutions in the field. These networks shed light on the geographic distribution of research activity and the degree of collaboration among different regions.

Through this extensive analysis, several collaboration patterns and emerging themes were visualized and examined. Noteworthy clusters related to sustainability, sports tourism, economic impacts, and event management were identified, signifying these areas as crucial focal points in contemporary sports event research. This comprehensive approach not only enhances the understanding of the current research landscape but also highlights potential future research directions in the field.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed a number of leading journals in the realm of sports event research, with Event Management, Sustainability, and European Sports Management Quarterly standing out as the top contributors in terms of article output (see Figure 1). These journals play a pivotal role in advancing knowledge within the field, serving as platforms for high-quality research that addresses critical issues in sports events.

Event Management focuses on the strategic and operational aspects of planning and executing sports events, emphasizing practical applications and case studies that benefit both practitioners and academics. Its articles often explore topics such as event marketing, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, making it an essential resource for those involved in the organization of sports events.

Sustainability has emerged as a vital journal that integrates environmental considerations into sports event discourse. It publishes research that examines the sustainability practices

within the industry, including the ecological impact of mega-events, sustainable resource management, and social responsibility initiatives. By fostering an interdisciplinary approach, this journal attracts submissions from diverse fields, including environmental science and social sciences, thereby enriching the dialogue around sustainable practices in sports events.

European Sports Management Quarterly provides a comprehensive view of sports management research, emphasizing both theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. Its focus on the European context allows for the exploration of unique challenges and opportunities in sports management, including policy implications and cultural considerations that influence event management practices

across different countries.

These prominent journals not only contribute significantly to the dissemination of knowledge in sports event research but also attract high-quality submissions from various disciplines, such as tourism studies, management, urban studies, and environmental science. The interdisciplinary nature of these contributions highlights the multifaceted impact of sports events on society and emphasizes the importance of collaborative research efforts in addressing the complex challenges faced by the industry. By facilitating the exchange of ideas and best practices, these journals are instrumental in shaping the future of sports event research and management.

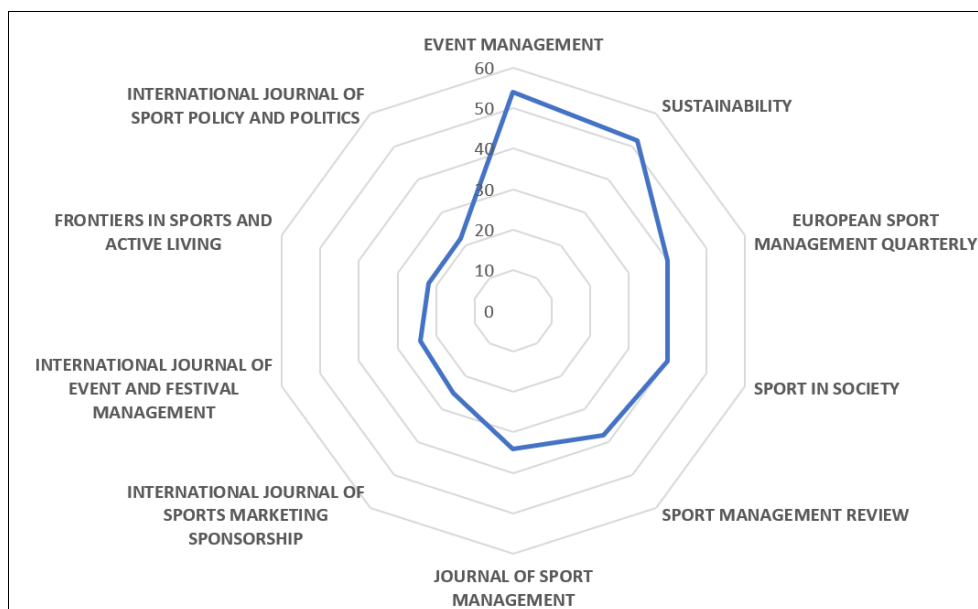


Fig 1: Top journals

3.2 Most Influential Authors, Institutions and Countries

The data analysis underscored the prominent authors and institutions that have made significant contributions to the field of sports event research (see Figure 2). Notably, M.M. Parent and D. McGillivray emerged as leading scholars, distinguished by their considerable publication output and high citation metrics. Their extensive body of work often centers on critical themes such as the economic impacts of sports events, sustainability practices within the industry, and the long-term legacies associated with mega-events.

Parent's research frequently explores the intersection of economic development and sports, examining how large-scale events can stimulate local economies while also considering the potential risks and costs involved. This dual focus is crucial, as it provides a nuanced understanding of the economic implications of hosting significant sporting events, which can influence policy decisions and funding strategies.

Similarly, McGillivray's scholarship emphasizes the importance of sustainability in sports event management. His work investigates best practices for ensuring that mega-events are not only economically viable but also environmentally responsible and socially equitable. This alignment with broader sustainability goals reflects a growing recognition in the field that the long-term benefits

of sports events must be weighed against their ecological and social impacts.

Both authors contribute to the discourse on the legacy of mega-events, addressing how the outcomes of these large-scale gatherings can affect communities long after the events have concluded. This focus on legacy is particularly relevant in discussions about urban regeneration, community displacement, and the utilization of sports infrastructure post-event. Their findings contribute significantly to the existing literature, offering valuable insights that can guide future research and inform best practices in sports event management.

In addition to their individual contributions, the high citation counts of Parent and McGillivray signal their influence within the academic community, positioning them as key thought leaders in the field. Their work has inspired subsequent research and dialogue among scholars and practitioners alike, reinforcing the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with sports events. The ongoing exploration of economic impacts, sustainability, and legacy in sports event research not only enhances academic understanding but also provides practical frameworks that can aid stakeholders in making informed decisions regarding event planning and management.

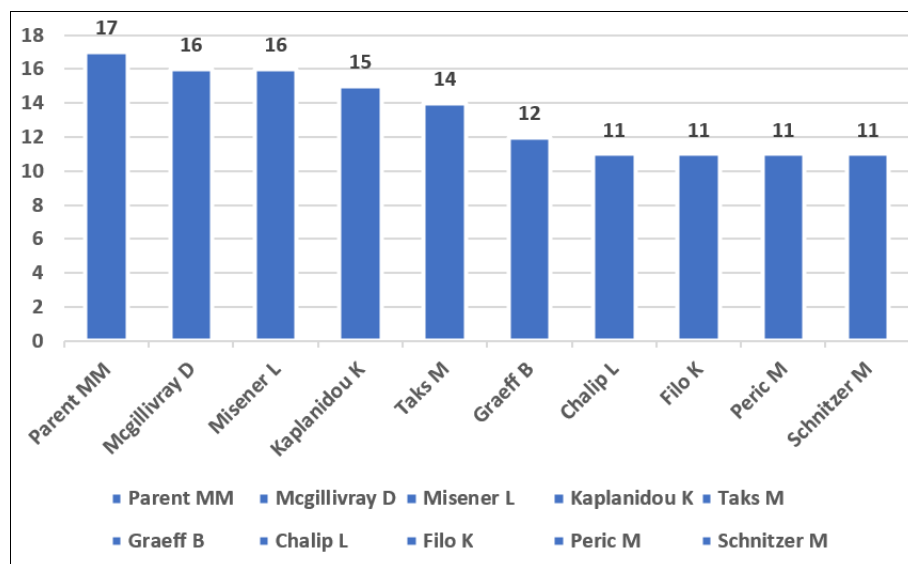


Fig 2: Author efficiency

The countries efficiency is illustrated in Figure 3. The United States stands out as the leading contributor to sports event research, accounting for 19.97% of total publications. This dominance highlights the nation's strong academic infrastructure and its status as a hub for mega-sports events and research institutions. Notable universities, such as [insert top universities], have played a crucial role in shaping discussions around sports event management, economic impacts, and sports tourism, solidifying the U.S.'s leadership in this field. Thus, the extensive body of research produced in the U.S. underscores its influence and commitment to advancing knowledge in this area.

China follows as the second-largest contributor, with 13.83% of publications, driven by its growing investment in research and the hosting of significant sports events. The emphasis on mega-events, including the Beijing Olympics, has spurred scholarly interest in their economic, social, and cultural effects. Institutions like [insert top universities in China] are significantly advancing research in urban regeneration and tourism. This trajectory indicates that China is rapidly emerging as a significant player in the academic discourse surrounding sports events.

England ranks third, contributing 12.39% of publications. Leading universities such as [insert top institutions] are recognized for their research on sports management and legacy, shaped by the nation's history of hosting major events like the London 2012 Olympics. Consequently, the contributions from English institutions reflect a deep-seated understanding of the interplay between sports events and societal impacts.

Australia and Spain are also significant contributors, with 8.91% and 7.00% of publications, respectively. Australia's cultural engagement with sports has informed research on tourism and sustainability (Smith, 2009) ^[7], while Spain focuses on the economic and tourism impacts of hosting events, illustrating how these activities can foster local development. These findings indicate that both countries are leveraging their unique contexts to contribute valuable

insights to the field.

Emerging markets like Brazil (3.70%) and South Korea (4.11%) are gaining traction in sports event research, fueled by their hosting of major global events, including the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games. This has led to increased academic interest in the social, economic, and cultural ramifications of these mega-events. Such developments underscore the potential of these nations to influence future research directions.

Countries such as Canada, Germany, and Japan also contribute meaningfully to the field, with publication rates ranging from 3.47% to 6.19%. Their robust academic networks and experiences in hosting significant sports events enrich the diverse literature in sports event studies. This diversity fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the various dimensions associated with sports events.

The global distribution of research reveals the pivotal role played by the USA, China, and England in shaping academic discourse. Their leadership can be attributed to institutional strengths and their capabilities in hosting large-scale events, alongside a rising demand for research on their impacts. Thus, their contributions serve as a foundation for ongoing scholarly exploration in this field.

However, the increasing contributions from emerging markets like Brazil and South Korea signify a shift in the research landscape, reflecting their evolving roles as hosts of mega-events and their interest in the broader implications of such gatherings. This shift may encourage greater collaboration and knowledge exchange between established and emerging research communities.

While the USA, China, and England continue to dominate, enhancing collaboration between scholars from developed and emerging markets is essential for diversifying perspectives in sports event research. Such collaborative efforts will enable a richer dialogue and a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding sports events across different cultural and economic contexts.

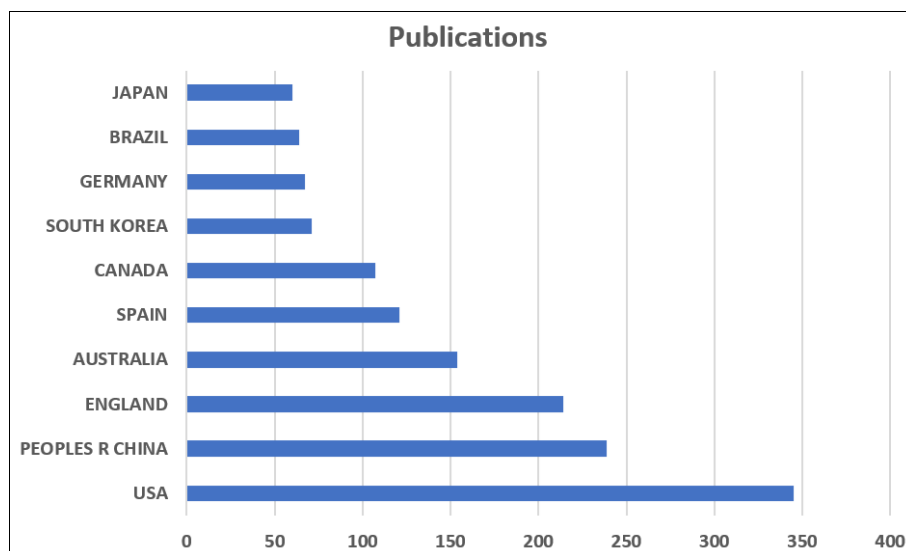


Fig 3: Country development

3.3 Keyword Co-occurrence and Research Themes

The keyword co-occurrence analysis provided significant insights into the evolving themes within sports event

research (Figure 4). Utilizing VOSviewer, researchers identified five key clusters that encapsulate the primary areas of focus in this field.

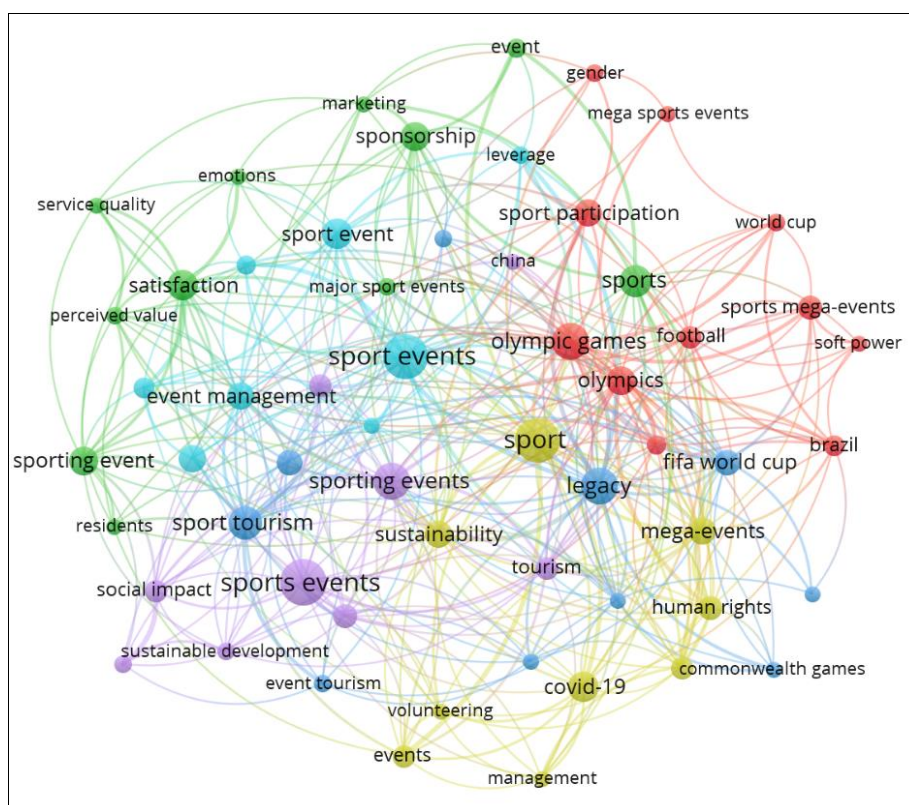


Fig 4: Keyword analysis

3.4 Cluster 1 (Yellow): "Sustainable Practices and Event Legacy"

This cluster emphasizes the increasing importance of sustainability in sports event management. Prominent terms such as "sustainability," "legacy," "carbon footprint," and "environmental impact" reflect a growing concern for the ecological consequences of hosting large-scale events. Research in this area seeks to explore how sports events can reduce their environmental impact while also creating a lasting positive legacy for host communities (Müller, 2015) [5]. This trend aligns with a global movement toward

responsible event planning, showcasing the necessity of integrating environmental objectives into the framework of major sports activities. Such an approach is crucial, as stakeholders increasingly demand that sports organizations adopt sustainable practices.

3.5 Cluster 2 (Blue): "Economic Development through Sports Tourism"

The second cluster focuses on the intersection of sports tourism and its economic effects. Key phrases like "sports tourism," "economic impact," "tourism development," and

"urban regeneration" dominate this area of research. Studies here analyze how sports events can drive tourism and stimulate local economies, generating substantial long-term benefits for host cities (Chalip, 2018) ^[2]. This insight indicates a growing recognition of sports events as vital instruments for economic development and marketing of destinations. As such, leveraging sports events strategically has become essential for enhancing local economic growth.

3.6 Cluster 3 (Red): "Strategic Event Management and Stakeholder Satisfaction"

This cluster centers on the effective management of sports events, with key terms such as "satisfaction," "behavior," "event management," "marketing," and "motivation." Research in this area underscores the importance of careful strategic planning, strong branding, and engaging stakeholders to ensure the success of sports events (Smith, 2009) ^[7]. With growing competition among cities and nations to host major events, employing efficient management and marketing strategies is crucial to enhancing participant satisfaction and ensuring positive experiences. This, in turn, helps to secure future opportunities and maintain a competitive advantage.

3.7 Cluster 4 (Purple): "Social Impact and Community Engagement"

This cluster highlights the broader social effects of sports events, with prevalent keywords such as "social impact," "community engagement," "volunteerism," and "social inclusion." Research focuses on how sports events can foster community involvement, encourage volunteerism, and promote social inclusion (Preuss, 2019) ^[6]. These studies demonstrate the power of sports events to unite communities, improve social cohesion, and address societal inequalities. This positions sports events as catalysts for social change and community building.

3.8 Cluster 5 (Green): "Health Promotion and Well-Being through Sports"

The final cluster explores the connection between sports events and public health, with key terms like "well-being," "physical activity," and "health promotion." Research in this area examines how mass participation events, such as marathons, contribute to public health initiatives by promoting physical activity and healthier lifestyles (Solberg & Preuss, 2021) ^[8]. These findings suggest that sports events serve a dual purpose, improving community health and individual well-being, thereby making them essential to public health discussions.

4. Conclusion

The bibliometric analysis of sports event research from 2014 to 2023 highlights significant growth, scope, and emerging trends in the field. The steady rise in publications indicates increased academic and practical interest in sports events, particularly due to the hosting of mega-events and their notable economic, social, and cultural impacts. The USA, China, and Canada lead in contributions, with the USA benefiting from a strong academic framework and frequent major events. Additionally, emerging markets like Brazil and South Korea are drawing scholarly attention as they host high-profile events.

The analysis shows that research is diversifying beyond traditional academic centers, reflecting the globalization of

sports event studies. This trend emphasizes the need for collaboration among scholars from various regions to enrich perspectives and methodologies in the field.

Key themes identified include sustainability, sports tourism, event management, social impact, and health and well-being. These themes suggest that future research will likely continue to focus on how sports events promote sustainability, drive economic and tourism development, enhance event management practices, and encourage community engagement. The increasing emphasis on health and well-being, particularly concerning mass participation events, indicates a shift toward recognizing the social benefits of sports beyond economic factors.

Overall, the findings highlight the evolving nature of sports event research, shaped by changing scholarly interests and a dynamic global landscape. Future studies should address emerging challenges and opportunities, particularly around sustainability, social inclusion, and the long-term effects of sports events on host communities.

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