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From Mega-Events to Sustainable Destinations: A Decade Scoping Review of Sport Event Legacies

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ABSTRACT

The organization of sporting events is no longer judged solely by operational success during the competition itself, but also by the long-term legacy left for the host. This scoping review aims to map and synthesize the most highly cited literature over the past decade (2017–2026). The study adopted the PRISMA protocol and ten articles with the highest number of citations in the SCOPUS database (representing one top article for each year) were extracted and analyzed thematically. The findings indicate a fundamental paradigm shift, from a focus on physical infrastructure development toward the development of intangible legacies. Key findings highlight that small-scale sports events (minor events) are often more effective in fostering social cohesion and sustainable tourism than mega-events. Furthermore, the integration of a sports event portfolio and responsive risk management has proven to be a critical factor in maintaining tourist loyalty and destination reputation amid global uncertainty. This study concludes that meaningful tourism legacies can only be achieved through policies that align long-term goals with the empowerment of local communities. Through this, the resulting synergy will serve as a strategic roadmap for practitioners and academics in designing future-oriented sports events.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, hosting large-scale sporting events cannot be viewed merely as a competitive spectacle (Alshikhy et al., 2025). In recent years, the global paradigm has shifted, and organizers' primary focus lies on what remains after the athletes and spectators have left (Xu & Sato, 2025). This phenomenon extends to a deeper level, how a region can transform itself into a socially and economically resilient destination (Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Demands regarding the sustainability of sports competitions have forced organizers to think more deeply. The public is now more critical of massive (state-led) projects that often leave a financial burden on local residents (Duan et al., 2020). In the context of tourism, the challenge lies in whether competition management can create a positive destination image without sacrificing local resources (Avloniti et al., 2025). This makes it crucial for sports management to begin synergizing with strategies for sustainable tourism destination development (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023).

Developments in the research over the past decade indicate that the dynamics of management research in sports competitions or events have been massive (Conti et al., 2025). Research shows how this field has evolved from the golden age of mega-events to the impact of the global crisis, which has forced the emergence of new innovations (Christodimitropoulou et al., 2025; Gupta & McCarthy, 2021). However, the sheer volume of information creates confusion regarding what is effective and what is not. Research must synthesize these various findings to evaluate the overarching patterns shaping the future of sports tourism.

Therefore, this study aims to synthesize ten key articles representing annual research trends over the past decade. The focus is on how sports event management strategies have adapted to create a sustainable tourism legacy. Through this literature review, it is hoped that we will obtain a clear roadmap for sports practitioners in designing sports events that are not only visually spectacular but also meaningful for the future sustainability of destinations (Brennan et al., 2025).

METHODS

This study employs a scoping review design to map the development of the literature on sports event management and tourism legacy. This design allows the researcher to identify various types of studies conducted over the past decade. To ensure the transparency and integrity of the selection process, this study follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flowchart.

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Procedure

A literature search was conducted using the SCOPUS database to identify articles of international standard quality. The keywords used in the search process were (*"sport* event*" OR "mega-event*" OR "mega event*" AND "management" OR "organize*" OR "plan*" AND "legacy" OR "tourism impact*" OR "destination"*), and data collection was conducted on March 29, 2026. The established inclusion criteria are research documents published as articles between 2017 and 2026 and written in English. Additionally, to support the synthesis process, 10 articles with the highest number of citations (one article per year) were selected. The exclusion criteria are documents not published as articles between 2017 and 2026 and not written in English.

The screening results will yield a final set of 10 research articles with the highest number of citations and relevant to this study's topic. Subsequently, these articles will be comprehensively reviewed by two researchers. The review process will be conducted independently, mapping out the study's objectives, sample, design, and results. The findings from this review will be analyzed and synthesized in accordance with the objectives of this study.

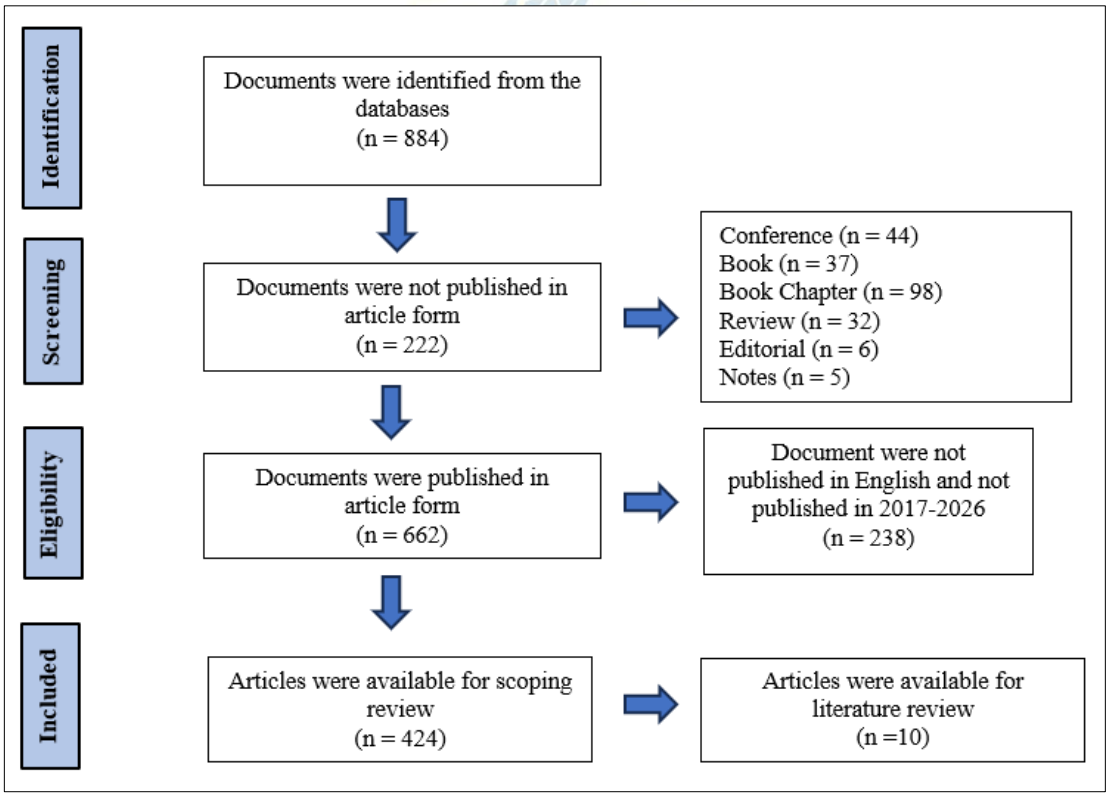


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

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RESULTS

Based on the results of the mapping conducted in accordance with research procedures, the 10 articles with the highest number of citations for each year were identified. Research focus over the past decade has demonstrated a diversity of methodologies, ranging from qualitative studies with in-depth analysis and bibliometric analysis to large-scale quantitative survey approaches. The context of the sporting events studied also varies, ranging from mega-events such as the Olympics and the Asian Games to smaller-scale sporting events such as local marathons.

Table 1. Literature Review

Author	Research Purposes	Participants	Study Design	Results
(Chalip et al., 2017)	To evaluate the obstacles, opportunities, and potential of utilising sporting events to increase local sport participation.	12 Canadian specialists from several organizations	A Dialectical Inquiry Process	The findings are consistent with sport development outcomes from the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. It is concluded that sport events can be leveraged to enhance sport participation if the necessary alliances among sport organisations, event organisers and non-sport stakeholders are forged to integrate each event into the marketing mix of sport organisations.
(Malchrowicz-Mośko & Poczta, 2018)	To investigate the correlation between the ranking of a sporting event, the advancement of tourism, and the effect on the host city's reputation.	A total of 2098 participants engaged in the study, comprising sports tourists and resident hosts involved in the examined events.	Empirical Study	Minor sporting events, such as half-marathons, demonstrate a more significant positive influence compared to major commercial events. Participants and their advocates are the most engaged in tourist activities and provide the highest evaluations of the city's image. For host communities, these events cultivate pride

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				and social cohesion, rendering them a more efficacious option for promoting sustainable tourism development in a region.
(Schnitzer & Haizinger, 2019)	To examines the significance of the Olympic Agenda for the future of the Olympic Games.	15 experts from different institution	Qualitative Interviews	The 2026 WOG hosts intend to diminish the funding allocated for the organization and infrastructural expenses in the host regions. Consequently, the quantity and characteristics of the sites and venues, together with the distances separating them, will expand. This indicates that the future Olympic legacy (OH) may be less centred on famous structures and more on the endeavour to achieve the city's long-term objectives.
(Jiménez-García et al., 2020)	Use bibliometric methods to examine research trends with sports tourism and sustainability.	A total of 214 publications from journals indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) were analysed.	Blibiometric Analysis	Since 2002, research on sports tourism and sustainability has proliferated, propelled by the Sustainable Development Goals and significant athletic events. The primary emphasis is on the quality of life for local residents and the satisfaction of tourists. Despite its ongoing expansion, the field remains disjointed. Future study must enhance the database and quantify concrete socioeconomic effects to promote a more

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				sustainable tourism paradigm.
(Morgan et al., 2021)	To clarify the brand ramifications for both the sporting event and the host locale.	5,684 Twitter posts analysed spanning three temporal phases (pre-crisis, during crisis, post-crisis) during the span of one calendar year.	Explanatory Study	This study demonstrates that co-branding techniques between athletic events and locations are substantially affected by social media mood, especially during crises. A prompt reaction from organizers emphasizing safety can preserve the event's favourable reputation, despite the venue being influenced by adverse perceptions. Collaborative synergy, open risk management, and oversight of user-generated material are essential for professionals to rehabilitate brand reputation in critical circumstances.
(Dergaa et al., 2022)	To present a concise summary of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games within the framework of the COVID-19 epidemic, and underscore the prospective problems and opportunities inherent in hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022.	An analysis was conducted on the organization, public health regulations, and preventative procedures of the postponed 2020 Olympic/Paralympic Games (Tokyo July-August 2021), the infection rates during the event, and the forthcoming WC2022 along with its associated	Qualitative Study	The implementation of stringent health regulations and the bubble system effectively mitigated the transmission of Covid-19 during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. This result provides a crucial lesson for forthcoming significant events, such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, regarding the formulation of infection control plans. By implementing strategic modifications

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		preparations and obstacles.		to risk management and healthcare services, large-scale sporting events (mega-events) can be conducted safely for participants.
(Ziakas, 2023)	To examine and integrate relevant literature on sports events and tourism management to establish a foundation for constructing a policy framework that optimizes event portfolios and enhances the tourism product of the host destination.	-	Theoretical Synthesis	This new methodology provides a methodical strategy for optimizing event portfolios to maximize the advantages of sustainable tourism. By employing cross-leverage techniques and synergies across diverse event categories (sports, cultural, and business), locations can enhance their brand image and mitigate seasonal issues. The efficacy of this approach relies on the formation of regional networks and inclusive government, yet necessitates additional empirical validation.
(An & Yamashita, 2024)	To develop a conceptual framework for event brand image in distance running events and to investigate how international sport tourists' perceptions of event brand image foster loyalty towards both the event and the place.	International participants (N = 441) in the 36th Reykjavik Marathon in 2019. Among the respondents, 52.6% were male, 73.3% were aged between 30 and 59 years, and 84.6% possessed a bachelor's degree or above. A majority of the	Survey	Three attributes (course, structure, and atmosphere) and two benefits (achievement and escape) exhibited a positive correlation with participants' attitudes toward the event. The attitude towards the event was immediately and positively correlated with event loyalty, destination image, and destination loyalty.

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		responders (91.2%) originated from Europe and North America.		Ultimately, destination image facilitated the connections between event attitude and event loyalty, as well as between event attitude and destination loyalty.
(Öğretmenoğlu et al., 2025)	To investigate the interconnections between football fans' travel motivations (FFTMs), their satisfaction (SAT), their perceived destination image (PDI), and their behavioural intentions (BIs).	277 applicable surveys	Quantitative Approach	This study demonstrates a substantial positive correlation among football travel motives (FFTMs), satisfaction (SAT), destination image (PDI), and behavioural intentions (BIs). The findings suggest that satisfaction serves as a mediator between motivations and image concerning the intention to revisit. These findings offer strategic insights for tourism marketers to comprehend the behaviour of football visitors by incorporating the theory of planned behaviour.
(Della Sala, 2026)	to utilise the 2018 Asian Games to foster infrastructure and urban legacies, enhance athlete development and sports science frameworks, and solidify its regional diplomatic standing.	Official planning documents, policy reports, and secondary scholarly sources.	Case Study Triangulation	Infrastructure, athlete development, and diplomacy are conceived as an integrated, mutually reinforcing strategic initiative (a virtuous circle). This article illustrates that multi-sport events in Asia serve not only as typical competitions but also as strategic tools for regional

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	advancement and the enhancement of worldwide stature. This cohesive strategy is essential for establishing a legacy and promoting sustainable development outcomes.

From Physical Legacy to Social Legacy

Sports management has undergone a significant paradigm shift, moving from a focus on physical infrastructure development toward the development of social capital and the well-being of local communities. Research conducted by Malchrowicz-Mośko & Poczta (2018) demonstrates that small-scale sporting events (minor events) are often more effective in fostering a sense of pride among residents and strengthening social bonds than large-scale sporting events. This is also consistent with research by Schnitzer & Haizinger (2019) and Jiménez-García et al. (2020), which notes that the objectives of future Olympic Games are beginning to limit infrastructure funding. These objectives are being redirected toward long-term goals and a stronger commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on research into the quality of life of local residents as the primary indicator of success.

Management Resilience and Crisis Mitigation Strategies

The global crisis has demonstrated that the sustainability of tourism legacy depends on risk management capabilities. Recent literature by Morgan et al. (2021) demonstrates that the reputation of destinations and events can be maintained through rapid responses from organizers who manage risks, particularly in addressing sentiment on social media. Furthermore, the implementation of strict health regulations, such as the bubble system described in the study by Dergaa et al. (2022), has become a crucial operational standard to ensure that mega-events can be held safely for all participants.

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Synergy Between Destination Image and Tourism Loyalty

Destination reputation management in sports events is now recognized as a key driver of tourist loyalty. Findings from the literature by An & Yamashita (2024) confirm that positive attitudes toward an event are directly correlated with destination image, which ultimately impacts dual loyalty toward both the event and the destination. On the other hand, Öğretmenoğlu et al. (2025) suggest that tourist satisfaction acts as a crucial mediator between their initial motivation to travel and their behavioral intention to revisit the destination in the future (revisit intention).

Policy Integration through Portfolios and Stakeholder

The full impact of a sporting event cannot be achieved if it is managed in isolation without involving the surrounding community. Chalip et al. (2017) note that efforts to increase local-level sports participation require strategic collaboration between organizers and various stakeholders. In terms of policy generalization, according to Ziakas (2023), hosts need to optimize their sports event portfolios by synergizing culture and business with the aim of reducing seasonal tourism. Additionally, multi-sport events can be conceptualized as integrated instruments to drive regional progress, strengthen diplomatic networks, and achieve regional development outcomes.

DISCUSSION

A review of the most-cited literature from 2017 to 2026 confirms a significant theoretical evolution in sports event management and its impact on tourism. The ten articles analyzed collectively demonstrate that the success of a sports event is not measured solely by the grandeur of its infrastructure and short-term profitability. Sports events now focus on creating an intangible legacy rooted in social sustainability, resilience, and integrated portfolio strategies.

Findings regarding the effectiveness of small-scale sports events (minor events) directly challenge traditional assumptions. These assumptions have long prioritized mega-events as the primary drivers of tourism. In fact, community-organized sports events are capable of generating superior social cohesion and sustainable tourism (Malchrowicz-Mośko & Poczta, 2018). This indicates that the social engagement of local residents serves as a more stable foundation for a destination's image than merely promoting the event through global media (Jia et al., 2025). This shift is further reinforced by the future Olympic agenda, which prioritizes alignment with urban planning and the city's long-term goals, and places greater emphasis on the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Campillo-Sánchez et al., 2025).

In addition to greater attention to the SDGs, research dynamics over the past decade highlight how vulnerable the image of sports events and tourism is to global crises and public sentiment (Morgan et al., 2021). Findings regarding risk management and the implementation of the "bubble system" confirm that the core competencies of modern event organizers no longer lie solely in material management but also in communication and public assurance (Dergaa et al., 2022). A destination's reputation is highly sensitive to issue management (Zhou

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et al., 2023). Swift and transparent mitigation responses have proven effective in protecting a tourist destination's image during sports events (Duan & Wu, 2024).

The implications of this research illustrate a shift in how tourism policymakers operate. Destination image acts as a critical bridge between sports events and tourist loyalty. Therefore, promotional strategies cannot be implemented in isolation. Organizers must build a portfolio of sports events that synergizes sports, cultural, and business assets to ensure a consistent flow of tourists throughout the year. Additionally, formulating an appropriate portfolio will position these sports events as tools for regional diplomacy. Tourist satisfaction must be managed holistically, as it is the most crucial mediator for ensuring repeat visits (revisit intention).

This study has several limitations in its research process. Selecting only the 10 most highly cited articles (one for each year) provides an overview of the most dominant literature but risks overlooking newer articles that have not yet accumulated many citations. Furthermore, the use of a single database SCOPUS, means other documents examining the dynamics of sports event management at the local level may exist. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of the database and empirically explore a comparative analysis of sustainability metrics between mega-events and minor events on a large and expansive scale.

CONCLUSION

An in-depth review of the 10 most-cited articles over the past decade (2017–2026) reveals that sports event management has entered a new era that is far more conscious of long-term impacts. The synthesis of these ten articles confirms that the success of a sports event is no longer measured solely by its fleeting excitement or grandeur. Such success can be derived from the depth of the intangible legacy it leaves behind. Furthermore, the current focus in sports event management places greater value on small-scale events rooted in the community and integrated with various stakeholders, thereby fostering an atmosphere that prioritizes long-term sustainability (SDGs).

This study concludes that a strong tourism legacy is created when sports event management can synergize with various sectors, such as the government, industry, and local communities. Destination image has proven to be an emotional bridge that transforms the viewing experience into visitor loyalty. Innovations in risk management and regional diplomacy further strengthen the position of sports events as strategic instruments for regional development. By understanding the roadmap that has taken shape over the past decade, event organizers and policymakers are expected to design sports events that not only inspire on the field but also provide opportunities for the development of the industry's economic aspects and the harmonization of surrounding communities in the future.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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