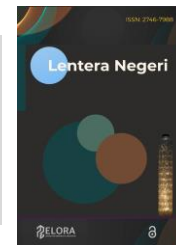




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Community-led sport and cultural events as levers for sustainable local development: a systematic review of mechanisms and conditions

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ABSTRACT

Community-led sport and cultural events, defined here as events initiated, organised or co-governed by local residents, civil-society groups or small local businesses, are increasingly used as community development tools, yet how and under what conditions they contribute to sustainability remains unclear. Guided by event leverage theory, social exchange theory and the community capitals framework, this systematic review aimed to identify the social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts of these events, to explain the mechanisms that generate them, and to compare how event type, scale and setting condition them. Following PRISMA 2020, a Scopus search (TITLE-ABS-KEY, 2021–2026) yielded 238 records. Eligible studies were English-language journal articles or reviews in which a sport, cultural or hybrid event was the unit of analysis and outcomes related to community or sustainable local development. Two reviewers independently screened records and appraised quality with the FICO checklist (minimum 5 of 8 points); disagreements were resolved by discussion. Eighty-three studies were retained and analysed through descriptive bibliometrics, keyword co-occurrence mapping and Thomas and Harden's three-stage thematic synthesis. Pride, cohesion, well-being and resident support were the most consistent social outcomes, although participation rarely produced durable social capital. Cultural festivals and traditional sports helped preserve heritage and identity but risked commodification. Economic returns depended on deliberate leveraging and local supply linkages, whereas the environmental dimension was the least studied and mostly reported as a pressure. Community ownership, participatory governance, cross-sector partnerships and strategic leverage emerged as the main mechanisms, moderated by event scale, setting and environmental sensitivity. Because most evidence is cross-sectional and perception-based, these relationships are associations rather than causal effects. The review proposes a mechanism-oriented framework and design principles for organisers and local governments, and calls for longitudinal, comparative mixed-methods designs with direct environmental measurement.



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Introduction

The shift to a sustainable development model has led to a focus at grassroots level where local governments, civil society organisations and residents need help turning general targets that have no direct effect on daily life into concrete improvements in the quality of life, social bonds and protection of the environment. During this process sport and culture have been identified not only as sources of fun but also as ways of achieving development. In the field of sports events and sustainability we have been seeing an increasing number of

publications since the setting of the UN Global Sustainability Goals (Sustainable Development Goals) (Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023). On the other hand, the literature covering festivals shows festivals as a means for identity through which local heritage is being kept alive while at the same time festivals provide the opportunity to attract visitors (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021; Topler, 2021). Thus events are at the crossroads of multiple policy areas, such as public health, tourism, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, the promotion of social cohesion and climate action, a position long recognised in foundational event-tourism scholarship (Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2016). They have short durations but at the same time their capacity to gather people, draw in public attention and focus resources on a single place can make them very appealing to local officials looking for visible and relatively low budget actions that will generate the best results. Nevertheless, the very aspects that make events appealing their brevity, the high concentration of people, and the temporary mobilisation of resources are also the same that challenge our understanding of whether such gatherings lasting but a short time could lead to the kinds of change that are long-lasting, fairly shared and environmentally responsible. In the post-pandemic period, as communities come to terms with the lasting consequences of COVID-19, this question has become even more pressing (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Colombo et al., 2026).

The phenomenon looked at in detail by the authors is a community sport or cultural event. It is typically an event organized locally or with a strong community focus like a running event where people actually run, a village football championship, a traditional sport match, a neighbourhood festival or a heritage celebration whose goal not only is to entertain but also to empower the local hosts. This kind of event differs from mega-events on several levels such as size, way of running, and how it gets integrated into the life of the community. These events are frequently organized by the people themselves, local groups and smaller businesses while the international rights holders hardly have any role (Li et al., 2021), they happen every year and build up meaning specific to places (Zhang et al., 2025), in most cases, they stem from traditional customs and local wisdom (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Nofrizal et al., 2023). Still, the demarcation line between community events and major events is not very clear. Indeed, small towns can attract world-class sporting competitions (Wang et al., 2024), rural fairs get crowds from the capital (Nkunzi & Nyikana, 2025), and even indigenous festivals are being embraced internationally (Aleshinloye et al., 2025). Therefore, if we are to get a good insight into how a community-based event brings about local sustainability, it is essential to address the size and the owner issues as well as the connections the locals, event management, and officials have among themselves. In this review, a community-based (community-led) event is operationally defined as an event that local residents, civil-society organisations or small local enterprises initiate, organise or co-govern, and whose host community is the primary intended beneficiary; externally owned major events were retained only when their community-level outcomes were examined. Sport and cultural events are examined jointly rather than in separate reviews because, at community level, they share the same delivery structures (volunteers, local organising committees and municipal support), are frequently combined in hybrid formats such as festivals that feature traditional games, and are assessed against the same sustainability outcomes; separating them would hide hybrid events and prevent the comparison of mechanisms across event types.

The research carried out so far on these phenomena has offered different angles of view. One line of resident-based survey research using the social exchange model has shown that when people think the host country will receive positive benefits, they support the event hosting; but they withdraw their support when they find negative consequences or costs (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). Event leverage research studies the ways in which host cities and event organisers plan to extract the most benefits before, during and after the event (Chalip, 2006; Kennelly, 2022; Martins, Mascarenhas, & Pereira, 2024). Festival literature has made connections between visitor interaction and cultural and social legacies (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021), as well as through the preservation of heritage and identity (Kurniawan et al., 2026). Research into traditional sporting games has regarded these games as emotional gatherings that keep shared meanings alive (Costes et al., 2021), and recent studies have found relationships between local sports and games and the social, environmental, and economic aspects of sustainable development (Prabucki & Rozmiarek, 2025). In contrast, critical analysis has revealed that huge events are linked to displacement (Rocha & Xiao, 2022), and that events rely heavily on the resources of their hosts (Duignan et al., 2023). Hence these authors remind us not to take for granted the supposedly beneficial effects of hosting events. Community festival research has likewise shown that power relations among organisers, local authorities and residents shape whose interests an event ultimately serves (Clarke & Jepson, 2011).

Three recent developments can be identified based on present trends. One, sustainability is emerging as a core organisational element of event management. For instance, the deployment of ISO 20121 and the adoption of circular-economy ideas have greatly increased (Desbordes & d'Ettorre, 2026). Two, the research methodology has been enriched in its designs. For example, besides the use of SEM for resident support of

events (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025) and for green-event perceptions (Chen et al., 2026), recent works are more action-research oriented, co-designing leverage strategies together with stakeholders (Martins, Mascarenhas, & Pereira, 2024). Three, people begin to look at governance and ownership of events which include the role of the local government, partnership across sectors and the emergence of community-led arrangements (Lu & Misener, 2023; Gúdel et al., 2025; Meera & Vinodan, 2025). We understand from these trends that the area of event impact studies has become more mature and the focus has changed from mere impact measurement to exploring the mechanism of how and why events lead to their impacts. Despite this, it seems the literature is scattered across the areas of sport management, tourism, heritage studies, urban planning and anthropology with very weak inter-referencing. Therefore, a holistic picture would need to be presented so as to integrate these different strands and, in that way, to link them closely with the multidimensional idea of sustainable local development.

The first gap deals with a lack of consideration for the scale and type of events. Event sustainability research has mainly focused on mega-events and major international competitions, with economic and infrastructural results taking the main focus (Al-Muhannadi et al., 2024; Sumarni et al., 2026). Ulloa-Hernández et al. (2023) in their comprehensive review categorized different event forms, though they missed including cultural festivals. In a similar way, the literature on festivals has been mostly separate from sport. Because of these limitations, event-type hybrid ones that involve combining sport, ritual, music, and heritage through events such as the Arctic Winter Games featuring indigenous sports and cultural exchange (Fuchs, 2023) or festivals incorporating traditional sports (Widen et al., 2024) are difficult to analytically locate. Community-based events that are smaller-sized and more available to local governments for hosting than the mega-events have not got adequate consideration in integrated terms in relation to their potential role in policy. Without being able to put into dialogue findings from different areas (i.e. sport and culture), it is quite difficult to assess, for instance, whether resident support or leverage identified for one type of event also applies to other event types.

The second gap lies both in theoretical and methodological areas. The most dominant explanatory frame social exchange theory sees people residing in a place as just calculators of costs and benefits. Nevertheless, recent work suggests that people residing in a place should be seen as active stakeholders whose knowledge systems and relationships influence the governance and planning of a festival and event (Aleshinloye et al., 2025; Kennelly, 2022). Environmental outcomes rarely get the direct measuring attention; instead, they are often perceived or just described qualitatively (Akçakese et al., 2026; Intason et al., 2021). Research on social capital is similarly inconclusive, some findings point towards the idea that brief interactions at events are not enough to create durable networks (Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2023). In terms of methods, most of the time cross-sectional surveys or, at best, a single case study are used thereby greatly restricting the possibility for causal and comparative analyses across settings (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023). Limitation like these, however, hinder the entire discipline's capability in not only determining but describing the mechanisms and the boundary conditions.

The need to perform the review has become very clear given the increasing number of publications and also a policy demand. Governments at the local as well as regional levels in both developed and underdeveloped regions are spending more money on events as ways of developing a place. For instance, these could be a means of making small towns that are dying or declining to live again (Hwang & Lee, 2025), rural economies that could then be diversified further through festivals (Nkunzi & Nyikana, 2025) or even a way to enhance urban character and make a city more resilient to external shocks or internal threats (Koutrou & Kohe, 2025). At the very same time, the problems that are being raised include concerns about commodifying heritage (Sakyi et al., 2026), pressure on ecologically sensitive locations (Hossain et al., 2026), and inequitable sharing of the benefits that an event may bring. Over half of the relevant Scopus documents discovered in this review were published during 2025 and 2026, suggesting that the base of evidence is changing fairly rapidly. Conducting a transparent and replicable synthesis that adheres to established guidelines (Page et al., 2021; Tranfield et al., 2003) is therefore both timely and necessary.

To move beyond cataloguing impacts, this review adopts an integrative theoretical lens. Event leverage theory (Chalip, 2006) explains how outcomes are produced through deliberate strategies before, during and after an event; social exchange theory explains why residents support or resist events according to perceived benefits and costs (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025); and the community capitals framework (Emery & Flora, 2006) specifies the outcome space as changes in the social, cultural, human, financial, built, political and natural capitals of a host community. Combining these lenses, the review treats the event (its type, scale, setting and governance arrangement) as the independent construct, leverage and participation processes as the mediating mechanisms, and change in community capitals across the social, cultural,

economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable local development as the dependent construct. The knowledge gap addressed is therefore threefold: no previous review has (a) synthesised sport, cultural and hybrid community events within a single evidence base, (b) explained, rather than enumerated, the mechanisms that link these events to sustainability outcomes, or (c) mapped the conditions under which those mechanisms succeed or fail. Existing reviews have instead focused on sport events alone (Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023), on mega-events (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Al-Muhannadi et al., 2024; Sumarni et al., 2026) or on traditional games alone (Prabucki & Rozmiarek, 2025).

Accordingly, the objectives of this review were (1) to identify and classify the positive and negative social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts reported for community-based sport and cultural events; (2) to explain the mechanisms through which these impacts are generated and to compare how event type, scale, setting and governance condition them; and (3) to assess the trade-offs, evidence gaps and methodological limitations of the literature and to derive evidence-based design principles. These objectives were translated into three research questions.

RQ1: What social, cultural, economic and environmental influences of community-based sport and cultural events on sustainable local development are mentioned in recent sources, and the negative effects and consequences that are undesirable and recorded also?

Answering RQ1 has offered an integrated picture or outcome space in which the two factors of "sport and culture" have been included at one go, allowing for the study of the two at the same time. Benefits and costs of both factors have been covered in a balanced way, so that one will never be able to forget the costs just by thinking of the benefits. It is also useful as it lets researchers know how much evidence exists to each part or dimension which in fact can be a way of knowing the degree of maturity of the different factors, since the social and economic aspects could take up the spotlight so that environmental and cultural sustainability aspects are forgotten (Al-Muhannadi et al., 2024; Desbordes & d'Ettorre, 2026). The whole idea is that, when the outcomes are put together, they may reveal certain patterns of association or link between different factors like resident support and cultural pride in general or ecological damage related to the increase in the number of visitors (Bama et al., 2026; Hossain et al., 2026).

RQ2: What are the channels and in what conditions (different types and scales of events, urban or rural environment, development context, governance and community participation) do community-led sport and cultural events lead to sustainable local development outcomes?

One of the things RQ2 contributed is that it goes a step further than simple enumeration to actually describe and explain the processes and mechanisms leading to certain effects. Research to date has mostly highlighted planning and use of the leverage as one, community involvement as another, volunteerism as next, and finally the creation of partnerships among different sectors (Dickson et al., 2021; Lu & Misener, 2023; Li et al., 2021) as the key elements, but there isn't any comprehensive comparison of these mechanisms across event types and geographical contexts. After collecting data from three event types (sport, culture, and a mixture of the two) in various regions (developed and developing countries), this question answers how in similar events the outcomes are not uniform and the determining factors behind this.

RQ3: What trade-offs, evidence gaps and methodological limitations define this literature, and what lessons can we learn from them with regard to the design of inclusive, resilient and sustainable community-based events?

RQ3 provides a critical overview of the field along with a number of design principles that are based on evidence. It discusses issues which are often opposing like economic development vs environmental challenges, tourism growth vs cultural preservation, and event development vs community displacement (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Sakyi et al., 2026; Intason et al., 2021). In terms of newness, the paper stands out on three counts: It brings together different types of sport and cultural festivals such as traditional and blended festivals under one umbrella, it looks at not only each of the four social, cultural, economic and environmental facets but also their interactions, trade-offs, and other complexities, and it integrates a bibliometric analysis with a narrative review to uncover a process-oriented explanatory framework of how the local community can use a community-based festival event as a lever for sustainable development.

Method

The research paper employed a systematic literature review design due to the fact that the research questions required the clear identification, appraisal and synthesis of a body of evidence that are scattered and cover different disciplines. Systematic reviews minimize the impact of selection bias and enhance reproducibility over narrative reviews mainly because the procedures for searching, selecting and synthesizing are specified beforehand (Tranfield et al., 2003). The article adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) 2020 guideline, a document which updates the older PRISMA guidance and its Explanation and Elaboration (Liberati et al., 2009) documents with better reporting of search strategies, selection processes and synthesis methods (Page et al., 2021). Since the included studies differ in their designs, measurements and results, the use of statistical metaanalysis was not suitable, therefore the review integrated descriptive bibliometric analyses with qualitative thematic synthesis. The study is therefore a systematic review with descriptive bibliometric mapping and qualitative thematic synthesis; it is neither a scoping review nor a statistical meta-analysis.

The search string was a combination of four conceptual areas that covered the keywords relevant to this review: (a) event type, (b) community and local orientation, (c) sustainability and development, and (d) impact dimensions. Within each conceptual area, different terms were separated with OR, and the conceptual areas themselves were combined with AND. This search string was limited to the fields of 'titles', 'abstracts' and 'keywords' through the field code TITLE-ABS-KEY. The use of (*) to cover different variations (morphs) of words like event/events or sustainable/sustainability was also a part the string. The complete search string, executed verbatim in Scopus, was:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (("sport* event*" OR "sporting event*" OR "community sport*" OR "traditional sport*" OR "cultural event*" OR "cultural festival*" OR festival* OR "sport tourism" OR "event tourism") AND (communit* OR local OR resident* OR rural OR urban OR regional) AND (sustainab* OR "sustainable development" OR "local development" OR "community development") AND ("social impact*" OR "cultural impact*" OR "economic impact*" OR "environmental impact*" OR "social capital" OR "social cohesion" OR "cultural heritage" OR "cultural identity" OR "local economy" OR "environmental awareness" OR legacy OR leverag*)) AND PUBYEAR > 2020

The publication-year limiter restricted the search to studies published from 2021 onwards, capturing post-pandemic research and the period in which sustainability became a mainstream organisational practice in event management (Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023). No subject-area limiter was applied at the search stage, so that relevant work from the arts and humanities, business and the social sciences would not be lost; document type and language were applied only during screening.

Only Scopus was used as information source because of its high number of sport management, tourism, event studies, cultural studies and sustainability science peer-reviewed journals included, and because of its data output capabilities that provide metadata arranged into standardized form that is suitable for bibliometric analysis. The query was done and the results were exported on September 28, 2026. The file comprised 238 entries holding, in addition to the main references, also author abstracts, abstracts, keywords and author affiliations. The search covered records published from 1 January 2021 to the date of the search; no other databases, registers or grey-literature sources were searched, which is acknowledged as a limitation.

Eligibility criteria for the study were set beforehand, and the eligibility of studies was determined mainly on the basis of the fact that the analysis was carried out on the basis of a sport, cultural or combination sports and cultural event. Also included in this category were festivals, traditional sport competitions and the like, events that involved participants. Studies were only considered if they discussed the social, cultural, economic or environmental impact of such events on the hosting community or sustainable local development. Review papers were kept since they show the current level of understanding and what remains unknown. On the other hand, studies in which events were mentioned only incidentally, as one of many tourism products offered or even as a background for some unrelated market study, were discarded.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Document type	Journal article; review	Book chapter; book; conference paper; editorial; note; letter
Publication period	2021–2026 (search limiter PUBYEAR > 2020)	Before 2021

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Subject area	Sport management, event and festival studies, tourism, heritage and cultural studies, community development, sustainability science and related social sciences	Disciplines unrelated to events and local development (e.g., construction, clinical or engineering studies)
Accessibility	Full text or sufficiently detailed record available	Record not retrievable
Relevance	Sport, cultural or hybrid event is the unit of analysis and outcomes relate to community or sustainable local development	Events mentioned only tangentially; event used solely as a context for unrelated questions
Study design	Empirical (qualitative, quantitative, mixed), review or substantive conceptual study	Descriptive commentary without empirical or review design

Selection took three steps. In the first stage, all 238 records were checked if they were relevant types of documents or languages. The screening led to the exclusion of 85 records that were either chapters of books (n=50), conference papers (n=21), books (n=10), editorials (n=2), notes (n=1) or letters (n=1) and eight articles in foreign languages. The absence of duplicates was verified by means of matching DOIs and normalised titles. In the second screening stage, the remaining 145 documents were subjected to title and abstract screening for relevance. Those not dealing in any ways with sport or cultural events in relation to community or local sustainable development were excluded. So were the studies focused on food policy innovation, construction business models, remittances or nature-based river management. Thus, 52 records are excluded, leaving 93 full-text articles and reports. Lastly, third stage of 93 papers was reviewed completely for their suitability, and ten were excluded because the event was not at the heart (n=7), because the article or report was nothing more than descriptions commenting without empirical evidence or a review (n=2), or because the full text could not be retrieved (n=1). Decisions made during the screening and the reasons why a document was rejected were noted at each stage. Title–abstract and full-text screening were conducted independently by two reviewers using a screening form that was piloted on 20 records. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and, where consensus could not be reached, by a third reviewer.

Methodological quality was judged by the FICO framework, which looks at four aspects. Focus is a measure of how the research problem, the community in the case study and the sustainability context are clearly defined in the study. Information is a measure of the degree to which the sources, the sampling, and the analytical procedures are transparently described. Context is a measure of whether the geographic, socio-economic, and governance characteristics of the community are explained sufficiently to enable transferability. Outcome is a measure of how explicitly the paper's findings are connected to the social, cultural, economic or environmental impacts they are claiming, and that the findings are supported by the data. Each criterion was rated 0 (not achieved), 1 (partially achieved), or 2 (fully achieved) so that the overall maximum score was 8. A score of 5 at the very least, with all scores above zero, was the condition for the study to be included in the review. Conceptual papers and reviews were evaluated in terms of their ability to present well-thought-out arguments and their source material being clearly identified and transparently presented. The two methodological reports that were rejected during the full-text phase of selection failed to meet this condition; all of the remaining 83 studies met the threshold. It has to be said that their overall quality varied, and quite often qualitative papers scored low mainly on the Information criterion because they usually described the sampling in a very limited way. Quality appraisal was carried out independently by two reviewers, and differences in scores were resolved by consensus before inclusion decisions were finalised.

The structured extraction form was used to record for each included study: Author(s), year, journal, countries of the event (can also be one country), type of event (sport, cultural or sport-cultural hybrid), scale of the event (community or small-scale, medium or recurring, major or mega, multiple or unspecified), research design and methods, sample or data sources, theoretical framework, the sustainability dimensions addressed, reported positive and negative impacts, identified mechanisms and conditions in the context, stated limitations. Bibliographic fields were taken directly from the Scopus export, whereas substantive fields were coded from the titles, abstracts, keywords and full texts. Initially, the form was piloted on ten studies by two reviewers and refined before full extraction; extracted data were then cross-checked by a second reviewer.

For the 83 studies chosen for the analysis, various descriptive bibliometric features were calculated: publication counts on a year-by-year basis, types of documents, the name and number of source journals, and the countries of affiliation of the first author. Then a keyword co-occurrence network was made from the keywords of the author, and it serves the goal of conceptually mapping out the field in question.

Keywords were harmonized and standardized so that singular and plural forms and synonyms were counted as one keyword. Keywords that were used by at least two studies were considered. When two keywords came at once, a co-occurrence link was put in, and the clusters of the keywords were found by finding communities through modularity. This method of analysis basically follows the principles of VOSviewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010) that allows the creation of visual maps. In those maps a node size represents keyword frequency while the size of a link represents the frequency of co-occurrence for that pair of keywords. The analysis aim was to point out the clusters which had similar content or themes. These clusters can act as a guideline (not replacement!) for the thematic synthesis.

The qualitative evidence was interpreted using a thematic synthesis which is divided into three key phases (Thomas & Harden, 2008): First, each piece of qualitative data is broken down into different thematic elements, then grouped into different categories, and finally new ideas emerge beyond the initial research that can address different aspects of the research review. At first, the coding was based on the four sustainability aspects and the contextual factors that were outlined in the review protocol through a deductive approach; coding was later also done inductively based on patterns emerged in the studies. Then, the themes were categorized under the three questions of the study. In order to form analytical themes, the authors looked up differences and similarities between the findings of the study and events of a different types, scales, and settings. Coding followed a codebook that combined deductive codes (the four sustainability dimensions, event type, scale, setting, governance arrangement and mechanism) with inductive codes added when new patterns emerged; the codebook was refined after the pilot of ten studies. Two reviewers coded the studies and resolved discrepancies by consensus, and coding was considered saturated when additional studies produced no new descriptive themes. The analytical themes were triangulated against the keyword clusters of the bibliometric analysis and checked across event types, scales and settings.

This review has been conducted in line with the PRISMA 2020 checklist (Page et al., 2021). The selection process, including the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility and included, together with the reasons for exclusion at each stage, is depicted in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Figure 1). Data extraction forms, the code list and keyword co-occurrence matrix were kept to increase transparency and facilitate reuse.

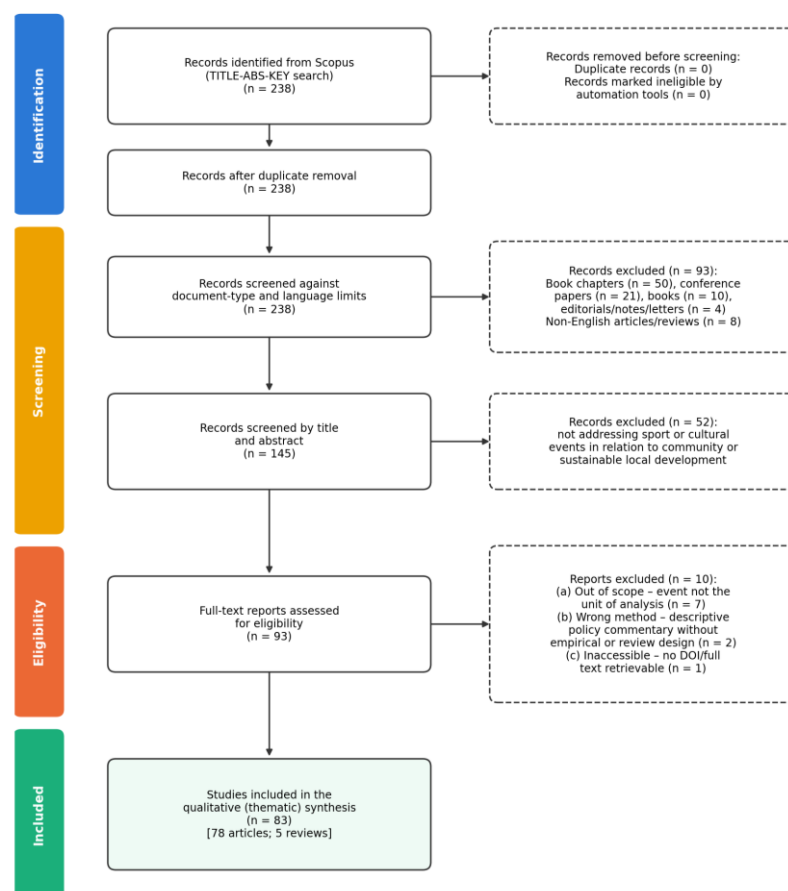


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process.

Results and Discussions

We started our search with Scopus and found 238 records. Since no duplicates were found, we continued with all 238 records. When we applied the document type and language criteria, we eliminated 93 records: 50 book chapters, 21 conference papers, 10 books, four editorials, notes or letters, and eight non-English articles or reviews. We examined the titles and abstracts of the rest 145 records, and we excluded 52 of them based on the ground level that they don't look into sport or cultural events in relation to community or local sustainable development. We did a full text check over 93 reports and ten were excluded: seven were outside the scope as the event unit of analysis was not mentioned, two do not present the empirical or review designs at all, and one report was unavailable. As a result, the final group of papers for in-depth literature review consisted of 83 papers, comprising 69 empirical studies and 14 reviews or conceptual papers (Figure 1).

The 83 studies included in this systematic review were published between 2021 and 2026. A noticeable speeding up in the publishing rate was observed during the last two years of this period: one study published in 2021, 2 in 2022, 3 in 2023, 5 in 2024, 11 in 2025, and 12 in 2026. Sport events were the focus of 49 studies; cultural events or festivals of 38 studies; 16 studies dealt with hybrid sport, cultural or traditional sport events only. By scale: 33 of the studies dealt with community or small-scale events; 25 with medium-sized or recurring events; 33 with major or mega-events; and only three studies addressed multiple/unspecified scales. Qualitative design is the most prevalent method of choice (42 studies), followed by the quantitative method used in 24 studies and the reviews and conceptual studies with 14 papers. Only three studies were mixed methods. Different studies were published in different journals: 7 in Sustainability; 6 in the International Journal of Event and Festival Management; 4 in Frontiers in Sports and Active Living; and 3 in Event Management. The countries from which the studies originated varied greatly from 36 different countries (first-author affiliation), with the three most cited being Spain (13), China (9), and Indonesia (7). Table 2 is an overview of ten representative studies selected to represent different event types, scales, locations, and methodologies. Table 3 classifies a further 35 included studies cited in this review according to their main themes and research methods.

Table 2. Summary of included studies (ten representative studies).

Title	Author(s)	Year	Country	Method	Key Findings
Contribution of supportive local communities to sustainable event tourism	Li, Kim, & Lee	2021	South Korea	Qualitative case study (Chuncheon Puppet Festival)	Festival planned by residents and local small firms rather than government or large corporations; resident-chosen timing and community support underpin long-term sustainability.
Analysis of the contribution of sport events to sustainable development: Impacts, support and resident's perception	Parra-Camacho, González-Serrano, Alguacil Jiménez, & Jiménez	2023	Spain	Survey (n = 2,049); structural equation modelling	Perceived positive and negative impacts explain perceived contribution to sustainable urban development, which predicts support for hosting sport events.
Sustainable development of non-mega international sports events in a small town: Social impacts, residents' attitudes, and leveraging role of local government	Wang, Qiao, & Lu	2024	New Zealand	Case study; social exchange theory	Residents of Cambridge support non-mega events and associate them with improved well-being; local authority plays a key planning and leverage role.
Exploring strategic multi-leveraging of sport tourism events: An action-research study	Martins, Mascarenhas, & Pereira	2024	Portugal	Action research (nominal groups, observation, interviews, documents)	Strategic multi-leverage of open water swimming events integrated economic, social, environmental, partner and sport dimensions through stakeholder co-design.

Title	Author(s)	Year	Country	Method	Key Findings
Host communities, event leveraging, and participatory sport events	Kennelly	2022	United Kingdom	Qualitative; 22 in-depth interviews with organisers	Organisers value host-community relationships and see beneficial outcomes as key to support; for-profit organisers treat stakeholder interaction instrumentally.
The impact of recurring non-mega sport events on residents' support intention	Zhang, Hou, & Matsuoka	2025	China	Survey (n = 592); SEM and multi-group analysis	Positive social impacts raise and negative impacts reduce support intention; community identity and sport participation moderate these effects.
The development, implementation and challenges to water-saving practices in a water-stressed destination: A case study of the Songkran Festival, Thailand	Intason, Coetzee, & Lee	2021	Thailand	Document analysis and participant observation	Water-splashing tradition conflicts with water scarcity; water-saving practices face cultural and practical obstacles, requiring balance between tradition and responsibility.
Leveraging rural festivals for sustainable community development	Nkunzi & Nyikana	2025	South Africa	Survey of residents (n = 326)	A home-grown rural festival contributes to community development through tourism, marketing and economic opportunities and supports progress on the SDGs.
Festivals as adaptive governance systems: Deriving a nano-scale framework for sustainability and crisis management from Thrissur Pooram, India	Meera & Vinodan	2025	India	Qualitative case study (ethnography, interviews, documents)	Traditional governance and participatory planning enable sustainability and crisis management; proposes the Nano-Scale Assessment Model for festival sustainability.
"Money? Not much. But we will continue": How cultural festivals stimulate resilience in rural communities. The case of Gejia Village Art Festival	Rega & Gimbut	2025	China	Qualitative case study (interviews, participant observation)	Rural festivals strengthen resilience when they simultaneously build social, cultural and human capital and are embedded in the local socio-cultural context; financial returns are modest.

Note. Country refers to the setting of the event studied. Studies were selected to represent different event types, scales, regions and research designs; the full set of 83 included studies is described in the bibliometric results below.

Table 3. Study classification by theme and method (other included studies cited in this review).

Author(s)	Year	Country	Research Design	Theme/Focus	Event/Intervention	Outcome
Daniels & Tichaawa	2021	South Africa	Critical literature and policy review	Post-COVID-19 recovery	Sport tourism events	Recovery policies and frameworks can restore sport event tourism as a driver of employment
Dickson, Darcy, & Walker	2021	Canada	Prospective longitudinal case study	Legacy leverage; inclusion	Vancouver 2010 / Whistler Adaptive Sports	Disability sport tourism legacy built on policies, local vision and volunteers
Rocha & Xiao	2022	Multi-country	Systematic review (PRISMA; 22 studies)	Displacement	Olympic Games	Resident displacement documented mainly for recent Olympic Games

Author(s)	Year	Country	Research Design	Theme/Focus	Event/Intervention	Outcome
Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Asaad	2021	United Kingdom	Survey (n = 1,335); cluster and mediation analysis	Engagement and legacy	National cultural festival	Engagement and joyful emotions drive cultural and social legacy intentions
Ulloa-Hernández, Fariás-Torbidoni, & Seguí-Urbaneja	2023	Multi-country	Systematic review (224 records)	Sustainability in sport events	Sport events (1964–2020)	Steady growth of sustainability research in sport event organisation
Šagovnović, Pivac, & Kovačić	2022	Serbia	Survey (n = 303)	Resident support	European Capital of Culture, Novi Sad	Perceived sustainability, emotional solidarity, attachment and brand trust predict support
Lu & Misener	2023	Canada	Qualitative case (documents; 8 interviews)	Post-event partnership	Provincial Parasport Collective	Institutional, community and organisational conditions sustain collaboration
Costes et al.	2021	Spain	Documentary analysis of 503 games; classification trees	Traditional sporting games; emotional community	Traditional games (Catalan-speaking regions)	Games construct emotional communities and shared cultural meanings
Martins, Pereira, & Mascarenhas	2024	Portugal	Action research	Environmental leverage	Sintra PRO 2022 bodyboarding event	Local resources and partners enabled environmental actions; communication gaps constrained them
Topler	2021	Slovenia	Qualitative case study	Rural cultural tourism	Cultural events in Sevnica	Cultural events support sustainable rural tourism when locals are involved
Koutrou & Kohe	2025	Greece	Qualitative key-informant study	Resilience; social innovation	Athens Marathon	Volunteer and civil-society practices strengthen sustainability and the urban commons
Fuchs	2023	Greenland	Ethnography (archives, interviews)	Indigenous sport and culture	Arctic Winter Games 2016	Games act as levers of social, cultural and educational development
Duignan, Carlini, & McGillivray	2023	Australia	Case study (interviews, documents, observation)	Resource dependence	Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games	Events depend on host resources ('parasitic' events)
Aidoo et al.	2024	Ghana	Survey; PLS-SEM	Place branding; community engagement	Cultural festival, Takoradi	Place branding and engagement foster sustainable development; environmental awareness moderates
Widen et al.	2024	Indonesia	Ethnography	Local wisdom; tourism model	Isen Mulang Cultural Festival	Community involvement, institutional capacity and creative economy drive sustainable tourism

Author(s)	Year	Country	Research Design	Theme/Focus	Event/Intervention	Outcome
Zhou & Kaplanidou	2023	United States	Survey (n = 301); SEM	Social capital; quality of life	Running events	Participation has limited effect on durable social capital
Lopez, Djaballah, & Charrier	2024	France	Qualitative interviews	Collaborative local sport policy	2018 Ryder Cup	Short-term alignment but weak long-term local sport development
Nofrizal et al.	2023	Indonesia	Qualitative interviews (n = 10) and observation	Traditional sport heritage	Tual sagu and golek sagu	Traditional sports valued as heritage; require government support
Kurniawan et al.	2026	Indonesia	Ethnography	Heritage; identity; tourism	Gendang Beleg, Lombok	Cohesion, cultural pride, intergenerational transmission and economic opportunity
Hwang & Lee	2025	South Korea	Qualitative (interviews, archives, observation)	Festival-led revitalisation	Tongyeong International Music Festival	Gatekeepers link local buzz and global pipelines to revitalise a declining city
Aleshinloye et al.	2025	Nigeria	Qualitative stakeholder study	Globalisation of indigenous festivals	Osun Osogbo festival	Residents marginalised in planning; stakeholder framework proposed
Gkarane et al.	2025	Greece	Interviews with 25 organisers	Supply-side sustainability	Small-scale running events	Organisers' decisions shape economic, social and environmental practices
Wu	2022	Taiwan	Ethnography	Community resource management	Mackerel festival, Nanfang'ao	Festival expresses collective response to overexploitation
Gúdel et al.	2025	Japan	Multiple-case study with Data Envelopment Analysis	Ownership and intangible heritage	Football events and festival tournaments	Participatory and hybrid ownership best sustain cultural heritage
Ramos-Ruiz et al.	2025	Spain	Survey (n = 1,529); EFA and k-means	Resident perceptions; TBL	Rally Sierra Morena	Sceptic, pragmatist and enthusiast resident clusters
Akçakese et al.	2026	Turkey	Qualitative interviews (n = 22)	Sustainable behaviour; place attachment	Konya Half Marathon	Strong environmental values but limited sustainable planning
Hossain, Hossain, & Shohel	2026	Bangladesh	Qualitative interviews (n = 27)	Cohesion vs conservation	Rash Mela, Sundarbans	Interfaith cohesion alongside ecological strain
Sakyi et al.	2026	Ghana	Qualitative interviews (n = 20)	Lifecycle; authenticity	Chale Wote Street Art Festival	Commercial success threatens grassroots authenticity
Bama, Hemmonsbe, & Abrahams	2026	South Africa	Survey over two years (n = 1,214)	Socio-cultural impacts	Cape Town Carnival	Inclusion, belonging and cultural diversity
Al-Muhammadi et al.	2024	Qatar / global	Bibliometric literature review	Destination sustainability	Mega-sport events; FIFA 2022	Economic impacts dominate; environmental and socio-cultural understudied

Author(s)	Year	Country	Research Design	Theme/Focus	Event/Intervention	Outcome
Colombo, Wilson, & Lamas-Abraira	2026	Spain	Qualitative analysis of nine festivals	Reclaiming public space	Barcelona neighbourhood festivals	Social capital and communities; unequal access and funding barriers
Desbordes & d'Ettorre	2026	Multi-country	Review, interviews and case studies	Environmental management	Major sport events (e.g., Qatar 2022, Paris 2024)	ISO 20121 and circular economy need leadership and cultural change
Chen, Zhang, & Wu	2026	China	Survey (n = 823); PLS-SEM	Green authenticity; well-being	Hangzhou 2023 Asian Games	Green authenticity enhances well-being via value co-creation
Prabucki & Rozmiarek	2025	Multi-country	Narrative review	Traditional sports and sustainability	Traditional sports and games	Links to three pillars identified; research remains limited
Sumarni, Sucipto, & Purnamasari	2026	Multi-country	Systematic review (PRISMA)	Football tourism legacy; SDGs	Football mega-events	Tourism legacy forms mapped to the SDGs

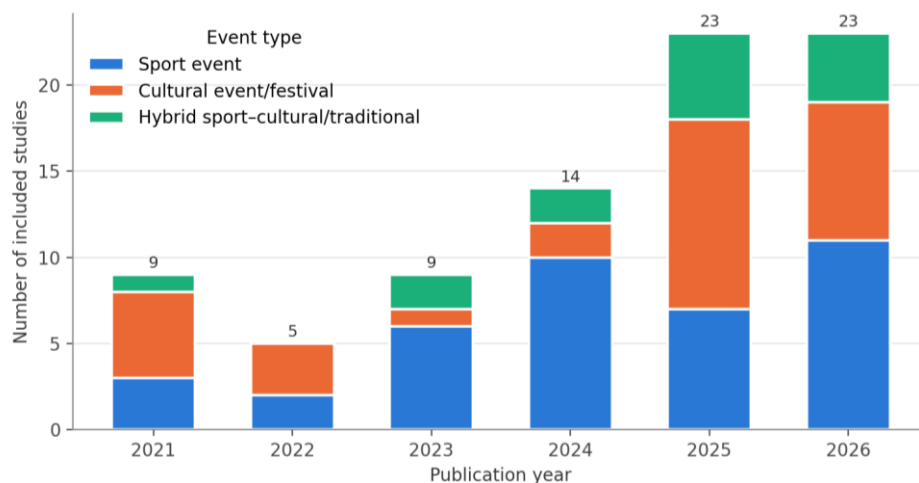


Figure 2. Publication trend of included studies by year and event type (n = 83).

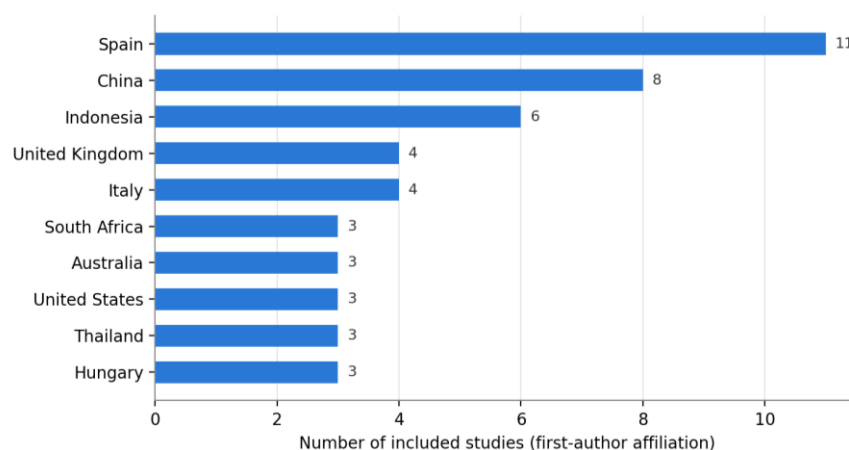


Figure 3. Top 10 contributing countries based on first-author affiliation.

The keyword co-occurrence network (Figure 4) contained 28 keywords that each occurred two or more times, resulting in 58 links and 3 major clusters. The first cluster, focused on sport event, brought together social impact, event leverage, community participation, tourism, running events, social capital and the Sustainable Development Goals, indicating that the study of sports events' social outcomes and leverage was central to this cluster. The second cluster, which was focused on sustainability, connected legacy, mega-event, environmental and social sustainability, sport tourism, strategic planning and traditional sports, signifying the sustainability and legacy agenda. The third cluster, which was mainly about festival, brought

about community engagement, community development, cultural event, cultural tourism and sustainable tourism, reflecting the festival and heritage field. The relatively few lines connecting the festival cluster with sport clusters suggest that there is still some separation between these two bodies of work and that there is still a justification for the integrative character of this review.

These descriptive patterns are themselves informative when interpreted against earlier reviews. The predominance of qualitative designs (42 of 83 studies, about 51%) is consistent with the observation that event studies have long relied on case-based inquiry (Getz & Page, 2016), and it reflects the nature of community events, which are small, place-specific and difficult to sample for large surveys, as well as the anthropological and heritage traditions from which festival research has grown. The scarcity of mixed-methods designs (three studies) indicates that the field is still divided into a qualitative festival tradition and a quantitative sport-event survey tradition, which mirrors the weak links between the festival and sport clusters in Figure 4. Whereas earlier reviews were dominated by mega-events (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023; Al-Muhannadi et al., 2024; Sumarni et al., 2026), one in three studies here concerned community or small-scale events. This shift could partly be an artefact of the community-oriented search terms; however, because an equal number of studies on major or mega-events was also retained, it more plausibly reflects growing scholarly interest in non-mega and recurring events (Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025). This methodological homogeneity has consequences for validity: outcomes are largely self-reported, common-method bias cannot be excluded, and causal inference is limited. The thematic findings that follow should therefore be read as evidence of associations and mechanisms rather than of demonstrated causal effects.

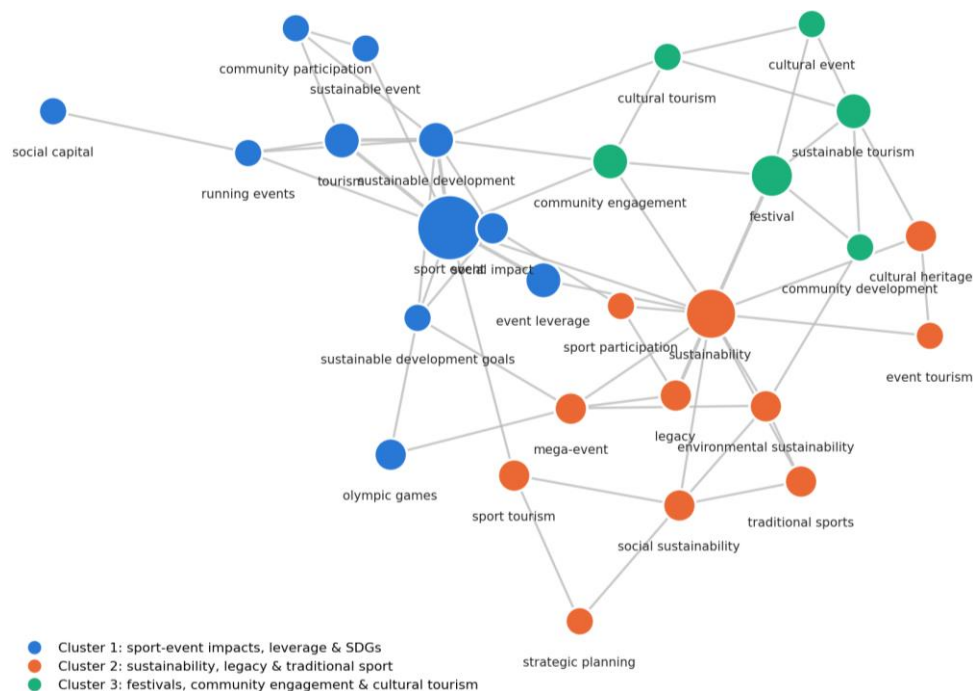


Figure 4. Author-keyword co-occurrence network and thematic clusters of the included studies.

Social effects have been thoroughly studied, but they have perhaps received more attention as outcomes. Residents and participants in both sport and cultural events always mention feeling a sense of community pride, delight, belonging and wellness. In Cambridge (New Zealand), citizens gave their backing to smaller-than-Mega international sports events since they thought it would make them happy as a community (Wang et al., 2024), while in the Valencian Community the residents' assessments of the positive and negative impacts of the event determined their judgment of event's contribution to sustainable urban development, which in turn predicted support (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023). The Cape Town Carnival led to the feelings of social inclusion and sense of belonging plus being aware of cultural diversity among 1, 214 individuals at the event (Bama et al., 2026), and the neighborhoods in festivals in Barcelona empowered residents to revive and repurpose public venues and, at the same time, created new types of social capital and *communitas* post-pandemic (Colombo et al., 2026). The Gejia Village Art Festival in mountainous village communities in Guizhou, China brought social and cultural capital and human capital into a network which is the very basis of communal resilience (Rega & Gimbut, 2025). The green programs at the Hangzhou Asian Games

improved local people's well-being through value co-creation (Chen et al., 2026). It looks as if positive social change can be the result of bigger events, too.

Still, social evidence remains delicate. Zhou and Kaplanidou's 2023 research revealed that running events only minimally contributed to an increase of participants' social networks, as temporary interactions during events could not sustain networks even if social capital, once generated, led to both behavioural and psychological advantages. Moreover, resident support may also be conditioned. For example, at Rongjiang County, China, perceived negative social impacts negatively affected the residents' supportive intentions, and the impact of that was contingent on community identity and sport participation of the person (Zhang et al., 2025). Also, in a town where European Rally Championship event takes place, residents became either sceptics, pragmatists, or enthusiasts in a distinctive way with sceptics mainly being those who thought economic and environmental costs of holding such an event far outweighed the benefits (Ramos-Ruiz et al., 2025). On a more severe note, mega-events have also been linked to the displacement of host residents, such as in the case of the Olympic Games (Rocha & Xiao, 2022). Therefore, it would be social benefits of the events that are dependent on how often and deeply these events are embedded, as well as the cost distribution, rather than simply that some event took place.

Culturally, the main impacts are on identity, the way culture is passed down from one generation to another, and cultural pride. The ethnographic studies have shown that the traditional musical instruments in Lombok (i.e., *Gendang Beleg*) of the Sasak people have sustained the Sasak identity and facilitated the interplay between generations through sharing the same body of knowledge and social harmony. Apart from these, economic opportunities through responsible tourism have arisen (Kurniawan et al., 2026). In addition, the Isen Mulang Festival is showcasing local Dayak wisdom by means of traditional performances, games, and food (Widen et al., 2024). Traditional sporting games in the Meranti Archipelago are not merely entertainment, but rather cultural heritage and hence the community values it highly. Still, without governmental support, the sports may eventually disappear (Nofrizal et al., 2023). The study of traditional sporting games in Catalano-speaking regions over five centuries found that through games, communities of people with similar emotional connections are created (Costes et al., 2021). The Arctic Winter Games encourage indigenous youth sports and cultural exchanges among circumpolar youth (Fuchs, 2023). The extent of involvement in a cultural festival by tourists was found to be related positively to post-festival cultural and social behaviour as long as emotions were cheerful (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021). On the other hand, residents of Osogbo were barely involved in the organization of the Osun Osogbo Festival despite the fact that it was a festival rooted in their culture (Aleshinloye et al., 2025). On another front, commercial success has threatened the grassroots identity of Chale Wote Street Art Festival of the Gallerists of Accra (Sakyi et al., 2026).

The majority of economic impacts are presented as visitor spending, business opportunities, employment and destination image. Residents of rural Keiskammahoek perceived the Music and Art Festival as bringing about development in various forms including through tourism, marketing and economic opportunities (Nkunzi & Nyikana, 2025), and a world music festival brought a small city, which was going downhill, back to life in South Korea (Hwang & Lee, 2025). A case study showed that cultural tourism at a festival in a rural district led to sustainable socio-cultural development and local brand promotion through community participation and place branding (Aidoo et al., 2024), whereas the impact of hosting sport mega events on the local economy through the generation of employment were observed during and after the pandemic in South Africa (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021). However, the magnitude of economic gains from tourism largely depends on the degree of local economic and resource development. A critical analysis of mega-event literature reveals that economic impacts are the most frequently examined research subject but actual outcomes versus projected benefits remain uncertain. The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games exemplified how a host event can be dependent on the resources of the local population to a such extent that one might call it "parasitic" without the locals it may never survive (Duignan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the coordinators of an art festival in a Chinese village agreed that the profits made from the festival were low compared to the growth in the village's social and cultural capital (Rega & Gimbut, 2025).

Environmental effects are the underdeveloped aspect and generally they are mentioned as pressures rather than benefits. For example, while a religious gathering at the mouth of Sundarbans mangrove forest was a great success of mutual cooperation among different religions, it resulted in serious environmental degradation to a protected area (Hossain et al., 2026). Also, Thailand's Songkran Festival of water throwing clashed with water shortage problem, bringing about the launch of water-saving campaigns which had to fight cultural and practical obstacles before being implemented (Intason et al., 2021). Despite displaying high concern for the environment, marathon participants in Konya saw no signs of sustainable planning such as

proper waste management and recycling (Akçakese et al., 2026). The most rewarding environmental changes usually happen as a deliberate effort to do so, for instance, a bodyboarding event in Sintra had a very successful environmental aspect because it combined it with subculture of the sport through an environmental youth organization (Martins, Pereira, & Mascarenhas, 2024). Moreover, green initiatives that are perceived by locals at major events can also improve quality of life if they are seen as authentic (Chen et al., 2026). Different systems like ISO 12121 and principles of the circular economy at manager level are very promising however they are based on leadership and a cultural shift within organizations (Desbordes & d'Ettorre, 2026). Stewardship values in cultural festivals organized by the local communities are another option and a good example is a fishing community in Taiwan where, during their mackerel festival, it was shown the whole community care and concern about depletion of this resource (Wu, 2022).

Four main methods of how local initiatives get support in one form or another were commonly mentioned in the case studies we examined. No 1 was community involvement and shared governance through decision-making. The Chuncheon Puppet Festival has kept coming back for the last several decades not only because of the fact that it is prepared mostly by the residents and the smaller businesses in the area instead of being the work of local authorities or big corporations but also the fact that the people selected the festival period themselves (Li et al., 2021). Thrissur Pooram which is a big festival in Kerala has the capacity to handle environmental and safety issues while still maintaining traditional activities through a combination of traditional organizations and people working on the ground to make decisions as per need (Meera & Vinodan, 2025). When it comes to Japan soccer occasions, it has been pointed out that those with community and hybrid ownership were better than others at raising resources that sustain intangible cultural heritage (Gúdel et al., 2025). As residents in Osogbo have been gradually shifting ownership toward the state or external actors, they lose their power and cultural meanings can be side lined (Aleshinloye et al., 2025).

The second mechanism is strategic leverage. Event leverage research points out that benefits do not just appear but have to be created by means of planned actions that involve stakeholders beyond the event. For instance, Whistler Adaptive Sports turned the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games into a legacy of disability sport tourism at the local level, by means of a web of supportive policies, a shared vision, and a cadre of volunteer helpers who had been part of the community for more than 10 years (Dickson et al., 2021). Studies on open water swimming events in Portugal have demonstrated yet another possibility that event leverage offers to simultaneously involve different aspects, such as economic, social, environmental, sport, and other factors at partner level when stakeholders jointly design actions (Martins, Mascarenhas, & Pereira, 2024). In the UK, sports participants event organisers considered relations with host communities as crucial, although profit-oriented organisations approached them only as a means (Kennelly, 2022). In Greece, running event organiser small-scale ones attributed their decisions as most contributing factor in implementing sustainability practices economically and environmentally (Gkarane et al., 2025).

The third method involves the establishment of cross-sector partnering and local government capacity. Local authorities have always been the driving force for the successful planning and execution of non-mega events in small towns (Wang et al., 2024), and a provincial parasport community continued to work together after the event through a mixture of institutional, community, and organisational conditions (Lu & Misener, 2023). However partnership created solely to host events can become fragile as the case with collaboration between French Golf Federation and a local community for the 2018 Ryder Cup only resulted in alignment of interests in the short run and failed to stimulate sport at the local level in the long run (Lopez et al., 2024). Athens Marathon shows what kinds of volunteer and civil-society practice, together with effective stakeholder relationships, can contribute to resilient and innovative societal practices surrounding a recurrent event (Koutrou & Kohe, 2025). Tongyeong's music festival provides an example that local promoters who bridge the gap between local and global pipelines can bring a small city's cultural economy under a new era (Hwang & Lee, 2025).

The fourth strategy is identifying and involving local residents. According to the study of the sustainability of the European Capital of Culture project (Šagovnović et al., 2022) the residents support of the project was a result of a combination of factors such as residents' perception of sustainability of the project, solidarity with outsiders, attachment to the community and brand trust in Novi Sad. In rural China community identity was a mediator between support and perceived impacts (Zhang et al., 2025) and the cultural heritage of an event was predicted by the visitors' level of engagement during the festival (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021). These results indicate that besides material costs and benefits, sustainability outcomes are also influenced by residents' and visitors attachment to the event.

These mechanisms, however, can be influenced to a great extent by contextual factors such as place and size. It turns out that scale is very important here: small towns and villages with their regular community

activities are much better at developing a sense of ownership and community ties whereas megaevents, while bringing in a bigger volume of money, are also quite displacing, cause dependence on outside resources and make local control weaker. (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Duignan et al., 2023). Rural places hold great possibilities for festival-led development and being more resilient in the times of change. Yet, they encounter limitations related to availability of funds, infrastructure and human resources. (Nkunzi & Nyikana, 2025; Rega & Gimbut, 2025; Topler, 2021) For example, if cultural festivals are closely interwoven with tourism and the state in poorer areas, they can be used to both promote and change traditional ways of life. (Widen et al., 2024; Aleshinloye et al., 2025) When the environmental impact of the host site is a problem, for example as with mangrove forests or in water-scarce cities, the implementation of environmental management measures turns out to be a pre-condition for sustaining the environment rather than merely a supplementary option. (Hossain et al., 2026; Intason et al., 2021).

The study highlights three main compromises. The first is the balance between economic growth and environmental impact. For example, festivals that draw large crowds generate much revenue and, at the same time, also create more waste, higher water usage and increase pressure on the ecosystem. Songkran and Rash Mela are good examples of these situations (Intason et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2026). The second is the tension between tourism development and cultural authenticity. When festivals expand and become global phenomena, it is likely that tourism-related benefits (like higher visibility and financial returns) will overshadow or even replace the festival's grassroots origins and meanings. This has also been the sad fate of festivals like Chale Wote and Osun Osogbo (Sakyi et al., 2026; Aleshinloye et al., 2025). The final is a compromise between event growth and community wellbeing, at its worst manifested in the removal of community members from the host areas (Rocha & Xiao, 2022), while at best it may be just the feeling among some people that the negative impact of the event is greater than any benefits (Ramos-Ruiz et al., 2025).

These trade-offs are not necessarily the price one has to pay. In fact, several studies have revealed that with proper planning, the different elements can easily be brought into a happy medium. Residents' wellbeing could be greatly enhanced through genuinely green initiatives (Chen et al., 2026), local-based actions to protect the environment, which also relied on available assets and established networks (Martins, Pereira, & Mascarenhas, 2024), as well as how sustainability and managing the risks from crisis were actually integrated by traditional forms of governance into the operations of festivals (Meera & Vinodan, 2025). The fact that the majority of community events is cyclical means that learning over time is quite a possibility, and the volunteerism as well as civil society involvement create additional resilience (Koutrou & Kohe, 2025). The fundamental difference seems to be between events where the community-anchored governance is guiding the growth of the events and events where the growth is actually driven primarily by the market or political logic external.

On the basis of this analysis there are also clear evidence of the lack of work that has been done thus far. Environmental aspects are not usually measured by any of the objective indicators such as: emission levels, amount of waste or water volumes; majority of the researches are based on the respondents' opinions (Akçakese et al., 2026; Desbordes & d'Ettorre, 2026). Tracking results over a long period is not common and Whistler Adaptive Sports longitudinal prospective study of that is an almost unique example (Dickson et al., 2021). Sports and traditional games have been studied very little in the area of sustainability though they integrate social, environmental and economic aspects (Prabucki & Rozmiarek, 2025; Nofrizal et al., 2023). It is quite strange since they have great potential to serve society, environment and economy at the same time. Another issue is that very few studies look into differences between events or regions which makes it difficult to generalize the results.

Qualitative studies, namely case studies, ethnography and interview-based research on organisers and stakeholders were the most used designs in 42 out of 83 studies. These methods have resulted in elaborate descriptions of understanding, rules and systems, especially from cultural festivals in Asia and Africa (Kurniawan et al., 2026; Hossain et al., 2026; Sakyi et al., 2026). The quantitative designs ($n = 24$) mostly entailed cross-sectional surveys of residents, participants or visitors, and these were mostly analysed through structural equation modelling, such as studies of resident support (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025; Šagovnović et al., 2022) and of festival visitors (Aidoo et al., 2024; Bama et al., 2026). There are very few mixed-methods designs ($n = 3$), and reviews as well as conceptual papers ($n = 14$) have focused largely on mega-events (Rocha & Xiao, 2022; Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023; Al-Muhannadi et al., 2024; Sumarni et al., 2026).

In this article we show a methodology that reflects the increasing diversity within the field. The co-designing of actions research with stakeholders (Martins, Mascarenhas, & Pereira, 2024), techniques that

identify the variation within residents' perception (Ramos-Ruiz et al., 2025), the resource-based analyses of ownership structures (Gúdel et al., 2025), and multi-phase qualitative coding with software support (Hossain et al., 2026) have all been introduced since 2024. Still, three fundamental issues remain: the limitation that cross-sectional designs impose upon the ability to determine the persistence of impacts through time; transferability being restricted by single-case studies; and the outcome measurement being heavily dependent on self-reported perceptions. Investigations into economic impact almost never apply input, output or expenditure tracking methods; and analyses into social capital hardly ever use network measures, which could be the reason for conflicting findings (Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2023). Designs with little use in the studies reviewed are the following: longitudinal panels, quasi-experimental comparisons of host and non-host communities, participatory and indigenous methodologies, and objective environmental audits.

Overall, the investigation points to the fact that community-based sports and culture events mainly play a role in local development in a sustainable way through the social and cultural avenues. On the economic and environmental sides, the contributions are more contingent. Social and cultural benefits are brought about by sharing a common experience, identity, pride, which are at their highest point when the events are regular, locally controlled and meaningful to the local people (Li et al., 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2026). The degree of economic gains depends upon the extent of the financial leverage effect and upon whether the expenditures are kept within the local community (Nkunzi & Nyikana, 2025; Duignan et al., 2023). Environmental outcomes rely upon the deliberate management of these events. If no such management is being carried out, then the outcomes at environmental level are going to be negative (Intason et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2026). Such a situation implies, that community-based events should be primarily interpreted as social infrastructures that can be economically leveraged and environmentally managed rather than economic engines with social side-effects. Because most of the included studies are cross-sectional and perception-based, these patterns describe associations and plausible mechanisms rather than demonstrated causal effects.

The authors expand social exchange theory into identity, emotional bonds, and community attachment that, they claim, not only help but also hinder residents' rational thinking and decision-making processes when it comes to the benefits and costs of exchanges. Additionally, they add substance to the event leverage theory concept with the illustration of how the different forms of leverage may co-create by collaborating with the local stakeholders and post-event partnerships will demand certain governance structures and leadership styles (Duignan et al., 2023; Lu & Misener, 2023). The insights gained from this research regarding the festival governance are quite consistent with events as adaptive social-ecological systems (Meera & Vinodan, 2025) and the research from the resource-dependency angle has reminded one of the fact that events not only generate values but they also take away or exploit resources (Lu & Misener, 2023; Duignan et al., 2023). Finally, from different theories we have a consolidated model suggesting that community ownership, strategic leverage, cross-sectoral partnership and a high degree of resident's involvement in identification are the mechanisms which through scale, setting and governance get moderated thereby outcomes get affected in four mutually interdependent dimensions. Expressed in terms of the community capitals framework (Emery & Flora, 2006), events mainly build social, cultural and human capital, convert into financial capital only when leverage and local supply linkages are in place, and draw down natural capital unless environmental management is deliberate.

For event organisers and local Governments the evidence suggests several practical principles on the implementation. The first aspect to address is that events should involve a planning process that gives residents a say and also that they become the main owners of an event, as a community (Li et al., 2021; Gúdel et al., 2025). Leverage plan is a document containing all the details about resources allocation (Martins, Mascarenhas, & Pereira, 2024; Dickson et al., 2021). It should be prepared well before a large event and its scope should be wide and not limited to a single event. It should include, among others, the social, environmental, cultural, and economic objectives of the event. Environmental management is one of the most important areas, and should set quantifiable targets on waste, use of water, and number of cars, with standards like ISO 20121 serving as a base (Desbordes & d'Ettorre, 2026). Another area worth highlighting is the role of culture. Cultural programming can help preserve heritage by keeping custodians of traditional culture involved in decision-making, which was a finding from multiple studies as Sakyi et al. (2026) and Aleshinloye et al. (2025). Local authorities should also think of spending resources on building the ability of people as well as partnerships that outlive one single event (Wang et al., 2024; Lopez et al., 2024); and the sport development agencies should regard traditional sports as something worth preserving and also encouraging as a form of sporting activity. (Nofrizal et al., 2023).

Earlier studies mainly showed the growth of sustainability research on sport events (Ulloa-Hernández et al., 2023), displacement problems caused by mega events (Rocha & Xiao, 2022), economic focus of mega event research literature (Al-Muhannadi et al., 2024), football tourism legacy linked to the SDGs (Sumarni et al., 2026), and sustainability potential of traditional sports and games (Prabucki & Rozmiarek, 2025). This review paper has similarities with those cited papers: it also points out that the findings based environmental research and mostly rely on perceptions through questionnaire surveys. However, it differentiates by merging discussions on sport and cultural events, by highlighting the community aspect, and by describing the reasons that lead to outcomes instead of listing them.

Opposing evidence can be found in three different ways. First, certain studies have shown that events can help develop strong social capital and a sense of belonging (Colombo et al., 2026; Bama et al., 2026), whereas other studies have come to the contrary that participants do not have significant social capital gains from such events (Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2023). One possible explanation is the fact that community events where people remain embedded vs. one-off event where new people join can lead to different results, similar to residents who are part of that community and people who just come to enjoy the event. Next, major events are shown to be both catalysts in collaborative local policy making and as short-term alliances that do not get sustained (Dickson et al., 2021; Lopez et al., 2024). This difference in the outcome very probably comes down to the state of pre-existing local networks and post event commitments. Lastly, the festival growth is said to have brought about revitalisation (Hwang & Lee, 2025) as well as loss of authenticity (Sakyi et al., 2026). This would entirely rest on whether local people keep in their hands the curatorial and spatial decisions.

A minimum of four gaps need attention. To start with, there is very little objective data about how community events affect the environment. In addition, there is limited longitudinal evidence that social, cultural and economic outcomes between editions of the event are sustained. Thirdly, traditional sports and hybrid sport, cultural events in particular in the Global South and indigenous contexts are much less present in literature compared to their cultural and developmental relevance. Fourthly, the distribution of benefits and costs among different social groups such as women, youth, minorities and low, income residents is almost never studied.

Nevertheless, acknowledging several limitations is quite important. In the first, the search was limited only to Scopus, which means that the relevant studies from Web of Science and other regional databases or grey literature may have been overlooked. Secondly, the constraint to English-language journal articles and reviews has resulted in excluding book chapters, conference papers, and non-English studies that might have come from Latin America, Europe, and parts of Asia underrepresented in the English language literature. Third, the period from 2021 to 2026 will highlight developments but miss earlier foundational works, and papers from 2026 reflect just a segment of that year's publications. Fourth, due to the variety of study designs and outcome measures, a meta-analysis was not possible; coding of dimensions and mechanisms was also subject to interpretive judgement of the researchers.

Four main lines for further research could be identified: a) a longitudinal and panel design is required for tracking a recurring event in a community over several years as a way to determine whether social capital, cultural transmission and economic advantages are building or not. b) Environmental effects can be quantified objectively by means of carbon footprints, waste audits and water-usage monitoring, and connected with how people feel about the changes. c) Cross-site analyses can use mixed techniques as well as, where possible, quasi-experimental comparison to explore if the results are influenced by size, a rural/urban environment and management system. d) Studies based on traditional sport and festival research will require community-led and indigenous approaches which will involve local people, their cultural knowledge holders and a focus on benefit sharing and fairness.

In regard to the question RQ1, it is confirmed that community based sport and cultural events repeatedly offer social benefits such as pride and sense of belonging, community harmony, and good health as well as heritage transmission and identity as cultural benefits while the economic benefits depend on factors and environmental outcomes get negative quite often unless the impacts are being well managed. The recorded negative outcomes include displacement of people, commercialization, reliance on certain resources, and environmental strain. As to RQ2, community ownership and participation through governance, strategic multi-lever use, cooperation across sectors with a competent local government, resident identification and engagement are ways through which outcome is generated, with event size, location (rural or urban), development context, environmental sensitivity acting as moderators. Concerning RQ3, we know that the literature is largely about compromising between environmental issues and growth, authenticity and tourism, expanding, and community welfare. These studies are mainly cross-sectional, are based on individual views,

and single-case only. The recommended practice is to involve local community as a major partner in making decisions about the events, have all dimensions of the model well planned before and the use of environmental controls is done through measures rather than just statements, cultural safeguarding of local traditions is also very important through the concept where people are the guardians of the particular cultural traditions.

Conclusions

This systematic review of 83 studies indicates that community-led sport and cultural events are associated with sustainable local development mainly through social and cultural pathways, whereas their economic and environmental contributions are contingent on how the events are designed and governed. Its central contribution is a mechanism-oriented framework that integrates sport, cultural and hybrid events: four mechanisms (community ownership and participatory decision-making, strategic multi-dimensional leverage, durable cross-sector partnerships, and residents' identification with the event) convert the shared experience of an event into changes in community capitals, while event scale, rural or urban setting, development context and environmental sensitivity moderate how strongly these mechanisms operate. Within this framework, the conditions under which economic gains occurred can be specified operationally as the existence of a pre-event leverage plan, the involvement of local businesses in the event supply chain, and the retention of visitor spending within the host community; likewise, conscious environmental management refers to measurable targets for waste, water use and transport, monitored against standards such as ISO 20121, without which environmental outcomes were predominantly negative. Because the evidence base is dominated by cross-sectional, perception-based and single-case designs, these relationships should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. For practice, the findings support co-designing recurring events that are owned by local people, preparing leverage plans that span all four sustainability dimensions, and setting measurable environmental targets. The review is limited by its reliance on a single database, English-language journal articles and recent publications; future research should employ longitudinal, comparative and mixed-methods designs, measure environmental outcomes objectively, and give greater voice to rural, indigenous and Global South communities.

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