



What, Why and How are Sport Event Tourism Important? Analysis of Two Decades of Scientific Activity in This Field

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ABSTRACT

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Objective: This article examines the evolution and scientific impact of sport event tourism publications from 2004 to 2024, highlighting key trends in publication volume and citation patterns.

Methods: This analysis utilized the Scopus citation database as the primary tool for data collection. Scimago Graphica software and Excel were also used for data analysis.

Results: The findings indicate variations in annual publication rates. RJ Buning has been identified as the most prolific author, while the University of Florida and the University of North Texas are recognized for their significant institutional contributions. The *Journal of Sports Tourism* stands out as the leading publication in the field, underscoring its critical role in disseminating research. Geographically, the United States of America is the foremost contributor, with notable input from Australia, South Korea, and various European nations, although several regions remain underrepresented. An investigation into international collaborations positions the United States as a scholarly frontrunner, forging partnerships with diverse countries. Additionally, a concurrent network analysis has revealed five grate research clusters that address a range of topics related to sport event tourism, such as sustainability and destination imagery.

Conclusion: These insights illuminate publication trends, the rise of open access publishing, and the continuous development of research in this vibrant field. They underscore the necessity for ongoing collaboration and highlight the opportunities for expansion in underrepresented areas.

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Introduction

Sport tourism has increasingly gained attention as a key component of the tourism industry (Radicchi, 2013). This type of tourism refers to individuals who travel to various destinations specifically to attend or watch sporting events (Abdul Ghani et al., 2023). The phenomenon encompasses a wide range of activities, from attending mega sport events to participating in local competitions. Direct expenditure on sport-related travel was reported to reach \$39.7 billion in 2021, generating an estimated \$92 billion in economic impact and creating 635,000 jobs, while accounting for \$13 billion in total tax revenue (Sport ETA, 2021). This trend highlights the growing importance of sporting events as key factors in attracting tourists, driving economic development, and facilitating cultural exchange. Events such as the Olympics and the World Cup not only draw global media and audience attention but also play a crucial role in the sports industry (Elahi et al., 2021; Gholampour et al., 2023). These events have become a significant source of international business investments in local communities (Gholampour et al., 2024). Moreover, hosting these events can greatly enhance the destination's profile and attract more visitors (Swart et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be concluded that these events have substantial economic and social impacts beyond their sporting aspects.

The need for this research is underscored by the increasing popularity of mega sport events like the Olympics and the World Cup, which attract millions of visitors from around the globe. While these events can serve as catalysts for urban development and infrastructure improvements, they may also strain local resources and exacerbate issues such as congestion and pollution (Chalip, 2006). To better understand sport event tourism, an interdisciplinary approach is required to provide valuable insights from various studies. As a powerful method for quantifying and visualizing academic research in this field, scientometrics analysis can reveal trends, gaps, and opportunities for future inquiry (Gholampour et al., 2020). Therefore, this scientometrics study aims to address existing knowledge gaps by analyzing the literature related to sport event tourism. This study employs quantitative methods to assess trends, themes, and research outputs in this field, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of sport event tourism.

Literature Review

In recent decades, scientometric and bibliometric research on subject areas has garnered significant scholarly attention. This is exemplified by the work of Jiménez-García et al. (2020), who employed bibliometric techniques to analyze prevailing research trends in the field of sports tourism and sustainability. Their study underscored the increasing interest in sustainable practices within the sports tourism sector over the past four years. Yüksel and Ön (2024) conducted a quantitative analysis of sporting events in the hospitality and tourism industry, utilizing bibliometric methods to reveal patterns and shifts in research focus. Similarly, Gholampour et al.

(2023) undertook a comprehensive scientometric analysis of major events over the past seven decades, identifying leading researchers and pioneering countries in the field. They also examined environmental, tourism, economic, social, political, and cultural aspects. Additionally, Arici et al. (2023) contributed to this thematic area by reviewing the existing literature on sports tourism, identifying key themes, significant scientific advancements, and potential future research directions.

Additionally, numerous scientometric studies have focused on the scientific legacies of prominent scientists and their contributions to relevant fields. Nawaz et al. (2024) offer an in-depth analysis of the work of Saeed-Ul Hassan, a winner of the Eugene Garfield Award. This study not only highlights Hassan's influential research in the scientific community but also elucidates how his individual contributions and collective knowledge have been shaped. Similarly, Elahi et al. (2021) examine the scientific productivity of Daniel Funk, providing insights into the patterns and impacts of his research activities. Gholampour and Noruzi (2021) analyze the scientific legacy of Wolfgang Glänzel, a distinguished professor of quantitative studies of science. Their study not only assesses Glänzel academic output but also situates his work within the broader context of scientific inquiry and the interconnectedness of his research efforts over time. In another study, Noruzi et al. (2022) focus on the scientometrics of Professor Mauro Guerrini, who specialist in knowledge organization and cataloguing. Their research provides a comprehensive overview of Guerrini scholarly impact and employs various criteria to assess his contributions and evolution in the field.

In addition to reviewing individual researchers, several studies have also adopted a scientometric approach to the analysis of academic journals. Moradi et al. (2023) examined the trajectory of the *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, analyzing its past, present, and future within the context of academic publishing. This study emphasizes the importance of journals as platforms for publishing research and shaping discourse in specific fields. Elahi et al. (2019) also conducted a scientometric analysis of the *Journal of Applied Research of Sport Management*, with their findings providing valuable insights into publication patterns, citation dynamics, and the overall impact of the journal's articles.

Research on highly cited paper from scientometric and altmetric perspectives is also expanding. Gholampour et al. (2022) identified the conceptual structure of highly cited paper in the field of sport sciences, elucidating key themes and trends. Their work enhances our understanding of highly cited articles and highlights the importance of citation analysis in mapping the evolution of research topics. Furthermore, Gholampour et al. (2024) conducted an altmetric analysis of highly cited articles in the field of marketing, specifically from a social media perspective. This innovative approach explores the relationship between social media

engagement and academic impact, providing a contemporary perspective on the publication and reception of research in an increasingly digital landscape.

Materials and Methods

Selecting the appropriate database and search method is crucial, as improper choices can jeopardize data interpretation and lead to errors. The methodology comprises two main components: data retrieval and data analysis. For this research, the Scopus citation database was utilized, which offers broader coverage than the Web of Science and indexes a greater number of journals. As one of the largest citation indexes globally, it is a valuable resource for researchers conducting bibliometric studies due to its extensive resources and analytical capabilities (Noruzi et al., 2023).

Data Retrieval

The advanced search feature of the Scopus database was employed to locate relevant sources. Specific phrases ("Sport* Event* Tourism" OR "Sport* Event* Tourist" OR "Sport* Event* Tour" OR "Sport* Event* Travel*" OR "Sport* Event* Trip" OR "Sport* Event* journey") were searched within the titles, abstracts, and keywords of authors, with restrictions applied for language and document type to focus on research and review articles. This process yielded a total of 101 documents. Data in CSV format was extracted from this database on January 14, 2025.

Data Analysis

Selecting the right tools for data analysis is just as vital as choosing the search method. For this purpose, Scimago Graphica and Excel software were utilized for analysis and graphical representation. Scimago Graphica, developed by Scimago Labs, is particularly effective for both data visualization and exploratory data analysis (Hassan-Montero et al., 2022).

Results

Performance Analysis

Figure 1 presents the annual distribution of publications and the scientific impact of the field of sport event tourism from 2004 to 2024. Data analysis reveals a fluctuating trend in the number of publications, with notable peaks in 2005, 2010, 2020, and 2023. It is particularly noteworthy that 2020 stands out as the year with the highest volume of publications, totaling 13 articles. The years 2023 and 2024, with 11 and 10 publications respectively, indicate a sustained interest in this field. However, the citation patterns, illustrated by the lines in the graph, exhibit a more irregular trajectory. Significant jumps in citations were observed in 2005, with 313 citations, and in 2010, with 279 citations. These figures suggest that the works published in those years garnered considerable attention from the scientific community, leading to an increase in citation levels. In

contrast, despite the prolific output in 2020, the number of citations received that year was relatively low, totaling only 127. It is important to note that the novelty of the 2020 publications may have contributed to their lower visibility and recognition within the scientific community, resulting in fewer citations. This implies that newly published works may require some time to attract the attention of researchers. Furthermore, the years 2005 and 2010, which had fewer publications, benefited from a significant number of citations, thereby underscoring the idea that quality and impact can sometimes outweigh quantity in scientific publications. The higher the quality and longevity of publications within the scientific community, the more citations they are likely to accumulate.

Table 1 effectively illustrates the scientific productivity of authors, institutions, and journals in the field of sport event tourism. In terms of publications, RJ Buning is recognized as the most productive author, with four articles, establishing him as a significant contributor to the field. Other authors also made notable contributions, each with 3 publications, indicating a collaborative effort among researchers to advance knowledge in this area. Notably, the data reveal that the University of Florida and the University of North Texas exhibit the highest scientific productivity, with 10 articles each. The University of Innsbruck closely follows with six articles, confirming its position as the third most productive institution in the field. Additionally, several other institutions, including the University of Bucharest and the University of Texas at Austin, each published five papers, contributing to a diverse perspective on scientific productivity in this domain. When examining scientific productivity across journals, the *Journal of Sport Tourism* emerges as the primary contributor, with 21 published papers. This high output underscores the journal's pivotal role in disseminating research in this field, as well as the significant interest and engagement of researchers with the topics it covers. The prominence of the journal establishes it as a vital platform for sharing research findings, thereby positioning it as a leading journal in terms of productivity in this area.

Table 1. Leading Authors, University and Journals in the Field of Sport Event Tourism.

Authors	Count	Universities	Count	Journals	Count
Kim YH	6	University of Florida	10	J. Sport Tour.	21
Buning RJ	4	University of North Texas	10	Sustainability	6
Daniels T	3	University of Innsbruck	6	J. Sport Manage.	5
Kaplanidou K	3	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	5	Sport in Soc.	4
Lyu SO	3	Texas Tech University	5	Afr. J. Hosp. Tour. Leis.	3
Nauright J	3	University of Bucharest	5	Int. J. Event Festiv. Manage.	3
Tichaawa TM	3	University of Johannesburg	5	J. Convent. Event Tour.	3
		University of Rijeka	5	Tour. Manage. Perspect.	3
		University of Texas at Austin	5		

Figure 2 Global shows the geographical distribution of knowledge production in the field of sports tourism, as determined by the level of participation of countries. The color scale, from light to dark blue, indicates the number of documents produced, with darker colors indicating greater participation (Gholampour et al., 2022). The United States (U.S.) emerges as the dominant contributor, shown in the darkest blue, producing up to 37 documents, far above the rest. Several other countries, including Australia, South Korea, and South Africa, are highlighted in medium blue, indicating moderate levels of participation. Many European countries, such as Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands, also show significant participation, albeit at lower levels compared to the leaders. A significant portion of the world, including regions in Africa, South America, and parts of Asia, Europe, and Oceania, remains uncolored, indicating no participation in this field. This distribution emphasizes the concentration of academic and research activities in sport event tourism in developed countries, reflecting differences in global knowledge production and highlighting potential areas for growth and collaboration in underrepresented regions.

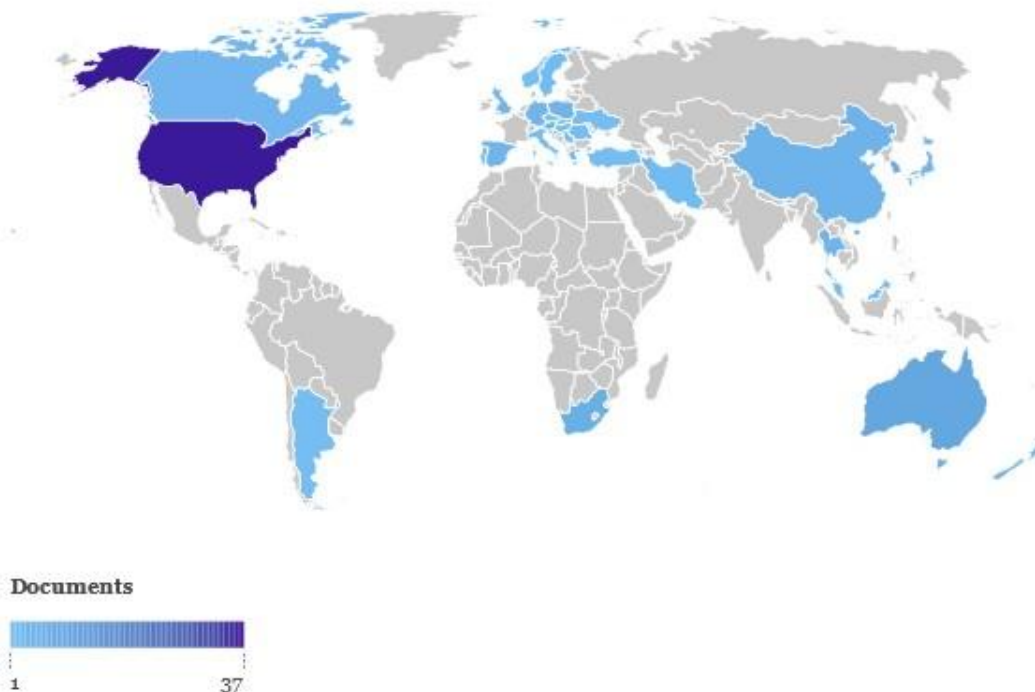


Figure 2. Geographical map countries collaboration in the Field of Sport Event Tourism.

Figure 3 and Table 2 illustrates the status of international cooperation among countries in the realm of sport event tourism utilizing a chord diagram. Each segment along the circle's perimeter represents a country, with its size reflecting the level of international collaboration. The arcs or chords that connect these segments depict the nature of these partnerships. Notably, the thickness of the connections corresponds to the degree of cooperation, particularly highlighting countries like the U.S., Poland, Australia, China, and Canada, which feature wider arcs and thicker chords.

The diagram underscores a substantial number of communication links originating from the U.S., highlighting its critical role in fostering cooperation in this domain, as well as its scientific leadership and influence. Countries such as South Korea, Australia, and Japan exhibit significant scientific collaboration with the U.S., as evidenced by the connecting arcs leading to it. In contrast, Poland maintains strong ties with New Zealand, Spain, and the Czech Republic, while China shows considerable cooperation with New Zealand and Spain. Canada collaborates with Sweden and the U.S., and Australia is connected with New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. Additionally, smaller yet notable connections involving countries like Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Greece, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Turkey, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand illustrate varying degrees of international cooperation in this sector. Overall, the diagram captures a dynamic network of international collaboration, reflecting the strengths and diversity present in the sport event tourism industry.

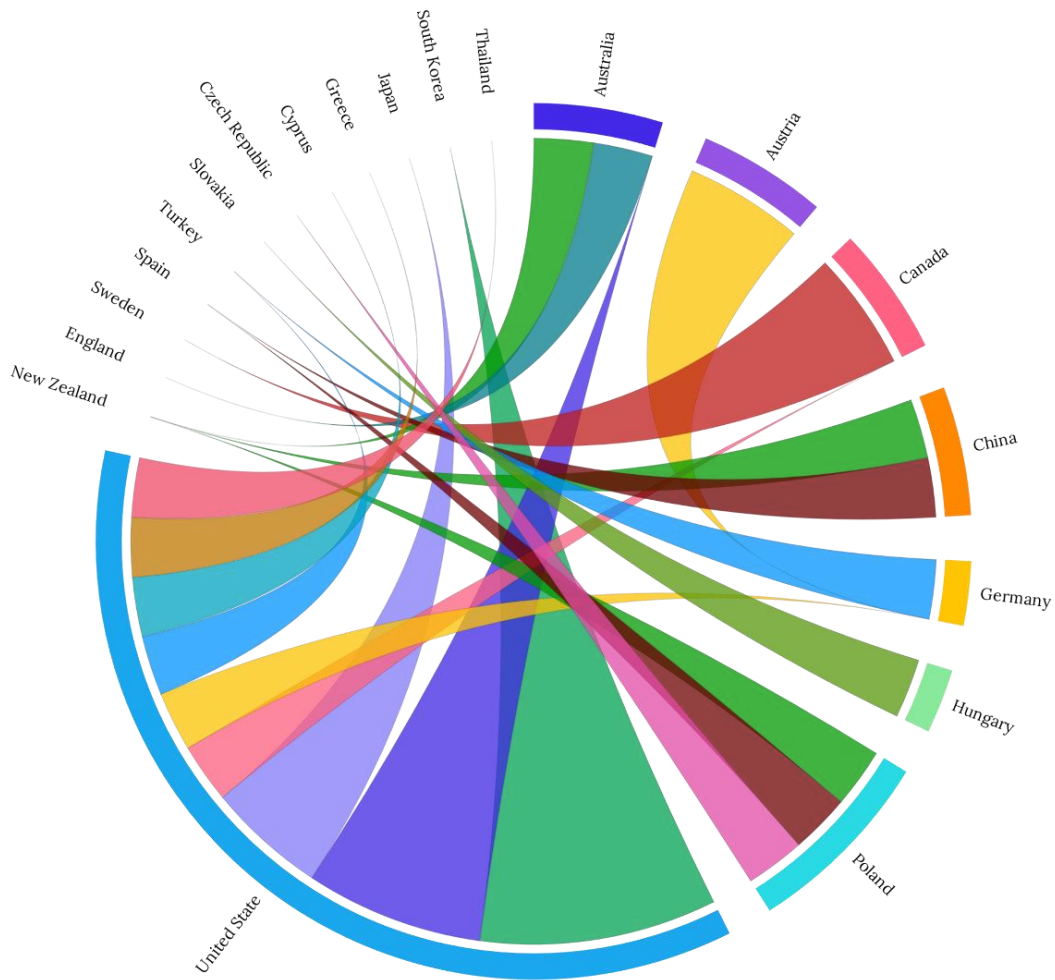


Figure 3. Scientific Collaboration Network of Countries in the Field of Sport Event Tourism Based on the Chords Diagram

Table 2. Scientific Collaboration between Countries in the Field of Sport Event Tourism

From	To	Collaboration
Australia	England	1
Austria	Germany	2
Canada	Sweden	2
China	New Zealand	1
China	Spain	1
Germany	Turkey	1
Hungary	Slovakia	1
Poland	Czech Republic	1
Poland	New Zealand	1
Poland	Spain	1
U.S.	Australia	3
U.S.	Canada	1
U.S.	Cyprus	1
U.S.	Germany	1
U.S.	Greece	1
U.S.	Japan	2
U.S.	South Korea	4
U.S.	Thailand	1
U.S.	Turkey	1

Figure 4 provides a comparative overview of countries based on two key metrics the number of publications and citations in the area of sport event tourism. Notably, the U.S. far outpaces other nations in both the volume of publications and their impact, with Australia following at a considerable distance. In contrast, most other countries exhibit much lower levels of academic engagement in this field, with the majority contributing fewer than six scholarly articles and garnering fewer than two hundred citations. This is clearly illustrated in the green and reddish yellow in the lower left corner of Figure 4.

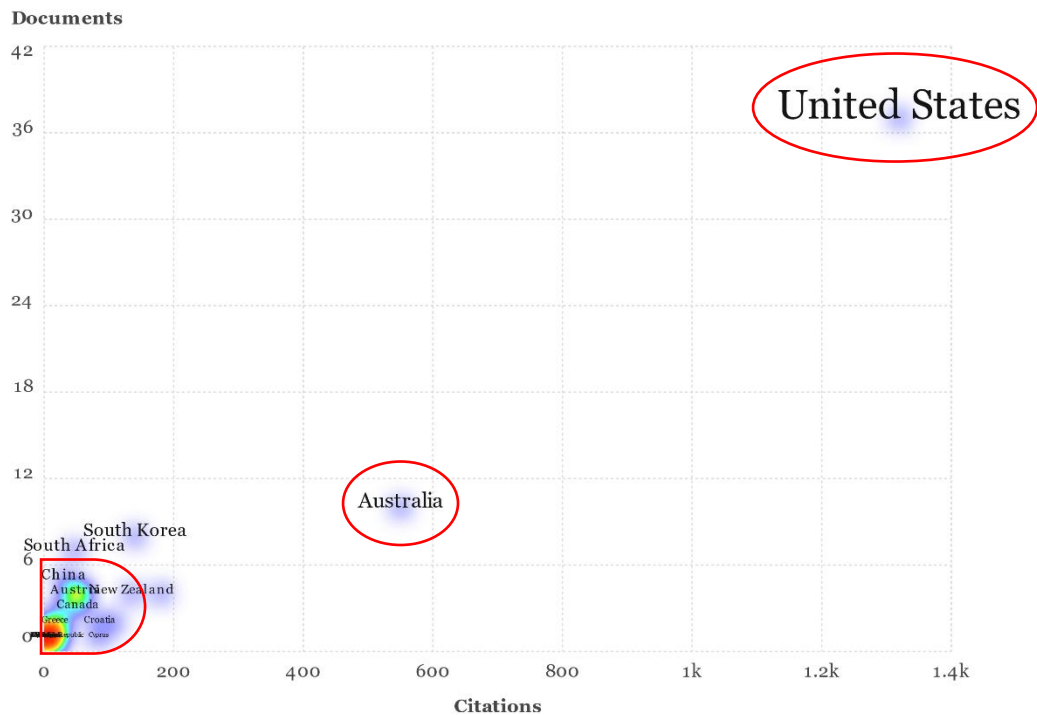


Figure 4. Leading and Influential Countries in the Field of Sport Event Tourism.

This timeline plot Figure 5 illustrates the contributions of various publishers in the field of sport event tourism. It emphasizes both the quantity of scholarly output and the years in which publications occurred. Notably, Routledge demonstrates considerable engagement, especially from 2016 to 2024, underscoring its substantial role in recent years. Following Routledge, MDPI and Emerald also exhibit significant activity, with MDPI's publications ranging from 2019 to 2024 and Emerald's extending from 2010 to 2024, indicating a longer publication history. In contrast, Springer, Taylor & Francis, Africa Journals, and Cognizant Communication Corporation display limited involvement. This analysis reveals both historical patterns and current leaders in the publication of research within this domain.

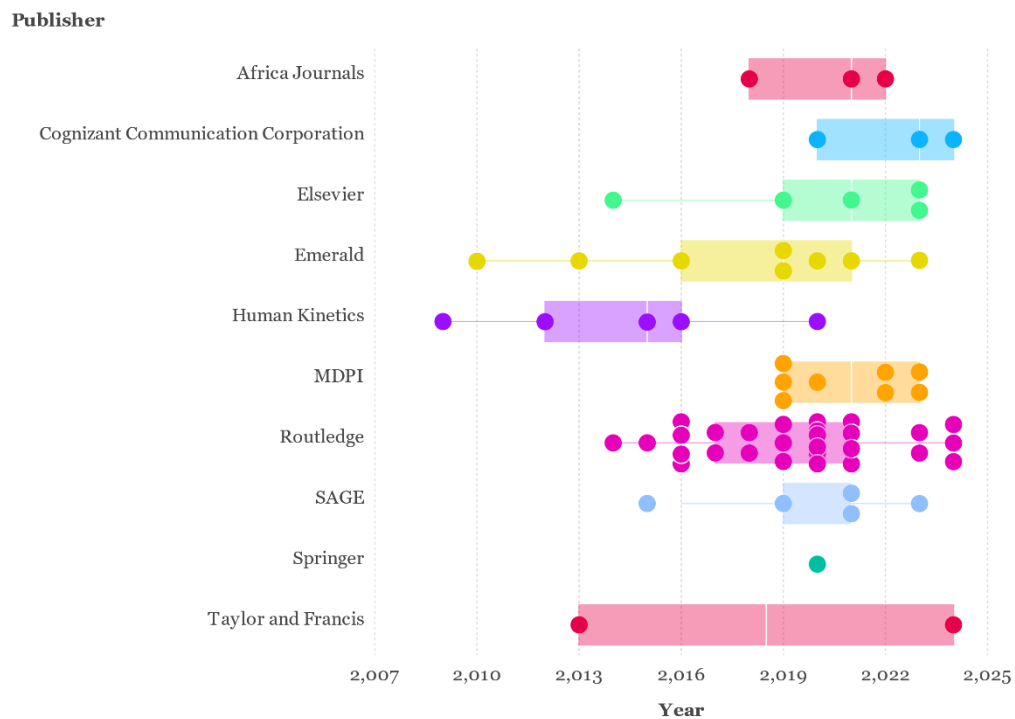


Figure 5. Leading and Influential Publisher in the Field of Sport Event Tourism.

Figure 6 represents the trends in different publication forms Closed Access, Hybrid Gold Open Access, Gold Open Access, Green Open Access, and Bronze Open Access over time, from 2004 to 2024. Each line connects a publication form to a specific year, with notable clustering and shifts. Closed Access remains prominent and consistently represented across the years, as shown by the dense network of red lines spanning the timeline. Gold Open Access and Green Open Access are increasingly utilized, particularly after 2010, indicated by growing intersections of yellow and green lines in later years. Hybrid Gold Open Access shows a less consistent pattern, with its purple lines peaking around 2019 and tapering off. Bronze Open Access, though present, appears less frequent with fewer connections overall. The visualization emphasizes the persistent dominance of Closed Access while also showcasing the gradual rise of Open Access models, reflecting a shift towards more accessible publication formats in recent years.

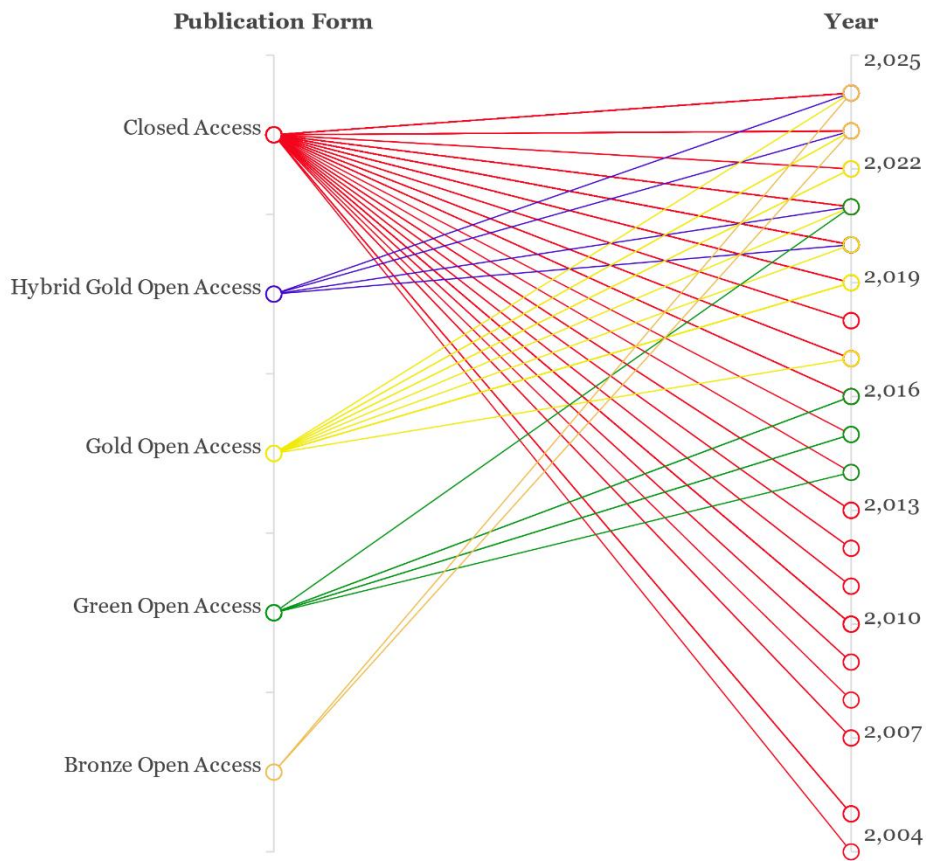


Figure 6. The Most Influential Forms of Publications in the Field of Sport Event Tourism by Year.

Thematic Analysis

The co-occurrence network of author keywords in sport event tourism, illustrated in Figure 7, reveals a complex structure comprising 10 distinct clusters, with five of these clusters identified as particularly significant and influential within the network. This analysis delineates the conceptual framework in which nodes represent keywords or concepts pertinent to sports tourism, while the connections between these nodes signify the frequency of co-occurrence in academic literature. The size of each node correlates with its frequency of use, highlighting the prominence of certain terms, whereas the thickness of the links reflects the strength of the relationships between these concepts.

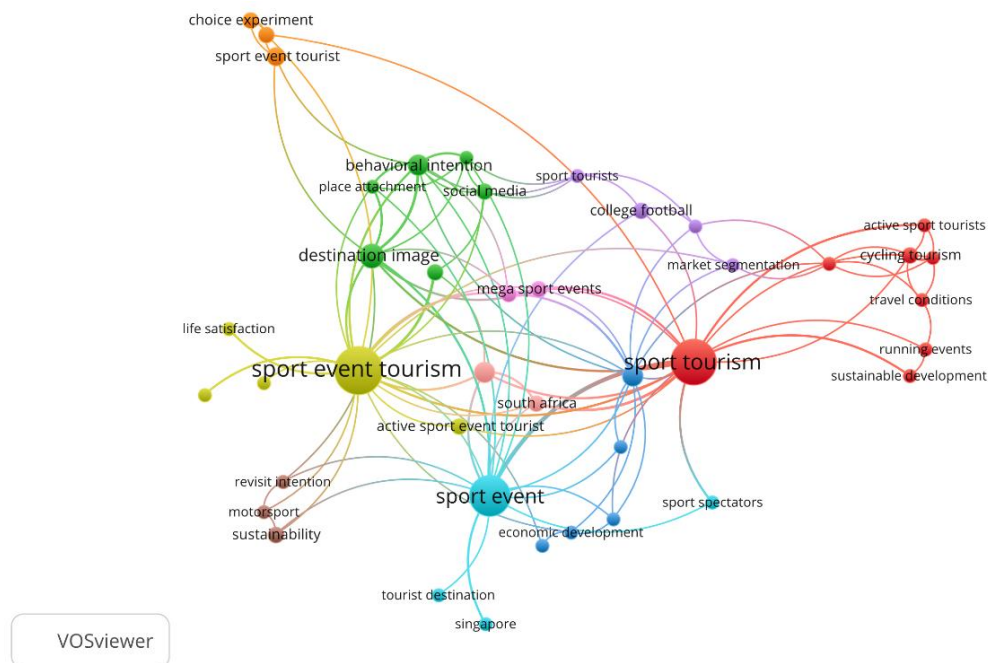


Figure 7. Visualization of the clusters created based on the analysis of author keywords co-occurrences in the field of sport event tourism

Cluster 1: Sport Tourism (Red)

At the core of the network lies the "sport tourism" node, which serves as a pivotal element connecting a diverse array of related terms. This extensive linkage indicates the considerable importance of sport tourism within the broader academic discourse. Prominent keywords such as "active sport tourists", "cycling tourism", "travel conditions", "running events", and "sustainable development" are integral to this cluster. The presence of these terms suggests that the focus of research in this area encompasses the multifaceted impacts of sport tourism, particularly its economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Cluster 2: Sport Event Tourism (Yellow)

This cluster hones in on a specialized domain of sport tourism, specifically pertaining to attendance at sporting events. Central to this cluster are key terms such as "sport event tourism", "active sport tourism", "life satisfaction", etc. The emphasis here likely centers on the motivations, behaviors, and experiential aspects of tourists who attend these significant events. This suggests that researchers are keen to investigate the underlying factors that compel individuals to participate in such events, the nature of their travel behaviors, and the qualitative aspects of their experiences during these sporting occasions.

Cluster 3: Sport Event (Turquoise)

Differentiating itself from previous clusters, this segment emphasizes the events themselves rather than the tourists. Key terms such as "sport event", "economic development", "tourist

destination", and "sport spectators" are central here, suggesting a focus on the economic implications and management practices associated with sporting events. This cluster likely investigates the interplay between event organization, revenue generation, and the role of spectators in enhancing the economic viability of these activities.

Cluster 4: Destination Image (Green)

This section emphasizes the destination image. Keywords such as "behavioral intention", "location-based", "social media", and "crisis management" are central here, indicating a focus on the perceptions and reputations related to sporting events. This cluster examines potential visitors' intent to return and their overall experience during events.

Cluster 5: Sustainability (brown)

The final cluster underscores the environmental and social sustainability dimensions of sport tourism. Prominent terms include "sustainability," "revisit intention," and "motorsport." This cluster likely engages with the environmental repercussions of sport tourism, addressing issues such as carbon emissions and waste management, as well as the social consequences for host communities. Additionally, it may explore strategies to promote sustainable practices within the tourism sector, reflecting an increasing awareness of the need for responsible tourism in the context of sporting events.

Discussion

The analysis of publication trends and citation patterns in the field of sport event tourism reveals several critical insights into the evolution and current state of this academic domain. The fluctuating annual distribution of publications, with peaks in 2005, 2010, 2020, and 2023, indicates a dynamic interest in the field, with 2020 marking a notable high in volume but a relatively low citation count. This discrepancy highlights the complex relationship between publication quantity and academic impact, suggesting that newly published works may require time to gain recognition and citations within the scholarly community. The substantial citation spikes in earlier years (2005 and 2010) imply that seminal works from those periods have established foundational knowledge that continues to influence contemporary research. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Gholampour et al. (2023) and Gholampour et al. (2024) in the upward trend section of publications.

Furthermore, the productivity metrics reveal a concentrated effort among a few authors and institutions, with RJ Buning emerging as the leading contributor. The dominance of the University of Florida and the University of North Texas in terms of research output underscores the importance of institutional support and collaboration in advancing knowledge in this area. The Journal of Sport Tourism role as the primary outlet for research publications emphasizes its significance in shaping the academic discourse surrounding sport event tourism.

Geographically, the U.S. stands out as the leading contributor to the literature, which suggests a concentration of resources, expertise, and interest in sport event tourism within developed countries. The lack of participation from many regions, particularly in Africa and South America, highlights the need for increased collaboration and knowledge sharing to promote a more global understanding of the field. The analysis of international cooperation through the chord diagram further emphasizes the U.S.' pivotal role in fostering research partnerships, with several countries exhibiting significant collaboration. This interconnectedness suggests an opportunity for cross-pollination of ideas and methodologies across borders. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Gholampour et al. (2023) and Gholampour et al. (2024) in the U.S. scientific leadership in research section.

The examination of keyword co-occurrence networks reveals the thematic landscape of the field, with clusters focusing on sport tourism, event attendance, destination image, economic development, and sustainability. The prominence of sustainability as a key theme speaks to the growing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of sports tourism. This trend is critical for researchers, policymakers in the field of sport event tourism and environmental activists alike, as it underscores the importance of responsible tourism practices that consider both the ecological footprint and the socio-economic dynamics involved in hosting sporting events.

Lastly, the trends in publication models indicate a gradual shift toward more open-access formats, reflecting a growing demand for accessible research outputs. While closed access remains prevalent, the rise of Gold and Green Open Access points to a changing landscape that prioritizes disseminating knowledge to broader audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the field of sport event tourism is marked by both growth and complexity, as evidenced by the fluctuating publication trends and citation patterns. The data suggests that while the quantity of research output has increased, particularly in recent years, the impact and visibility of this work are influenced by factors such as novelty and the established reputation of earlier publications. The concentration of research activity in the U.S., coupled with the collaborative networks that extend internationally, highlights the importance of fostering global partnerships to enrich the academic dialogue and knowledge exchange in this field. The thematic analysis of keywords reveals essential areas for future research, particularly in sustainability, which must be prioritized as the industry evolves. Additionally, the shift towards open-access publication formats underscores the need for greater accessibility to research findings, enabling wider dissemination and application of knowledge.

Implications

Researchers have the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive analysis by exploring additional databases, and they may also consider undertaking a separate study to investigate the impacts of sports tourism through a scientometric perspective. Furthermore, there is potential for in-depth examination of the current state of scientific collaboration within this field.

Limitations

Every study has its limitations, and it is impossible to find one that is entirely free from them. In our research, we focused on publications from the Scopus citation database, exclusively including articles and papers published in English, and cited only those referenced in our search strategy. However, this has limitations, such as excluding valuable studies published in other languages and ignoring important studies available in databases or indexed journals outside of Scopus.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.G., and S.G.; methodology, B.G., and S.G.; software, B.G., and S.G.; validation, B.G., and S.G.; formal analysis, B.G., and S.G.; investigation, B.G., and S.G.; resources, B.G. and S.G.; data curation, B.G., and S.G.; writing—original draft preparation, B.G., and S.G.; writing—review and editing, B.G., and S.G.; visualization, B.G., and S.G.; supervision, B.G., and S.G.; project administration, B.G., and S.G.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article.

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Ethical considerations

No ethical approval is required as the study did not involve any human participants.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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