

Impact of sports mega-events on host countries: a systematic literature review using PRISMA method.

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Abstract

The organization of large-scale international sports events is currently generating significant interest among the scientific community, given their importance and the multiple economic, social, political, and cultural issues they generate. The present systematic literature review aims to rigorously analyzing the factual impacts of these events, particularly the FIFA World Cups, on the host countries. This research revealed various limitations within the existing literature, specifically in the context of developing countries, which opens up prospects for future research, both *ex ante* and *ex post*. In this regard, depending on a methodology complying with the PRISMA protocol, the selection of studies was conducted on three main databases, namely: (WoS, Scopus, and Google Scholar) covering the period from 2004 to 2024, among which 21 publications were selected for in-depth analysis. The collected results highlight the establishment of a progressive scientific consensus: the direct economic impact tends to be overestimated while the actual benefits reside mostly in intangible effects, such as social cohesion, improved international image, and a sense of collective well-being. Moreover, this study attempts to provide decision-makers and organizers of sports mega-events with a rigorous synthesis of research conducted over the past twenty years, through establishing a scientific basis to inform their strategic decisions.

Keywords: sports mega-events; impact; host countries; World Cup; PRISMA

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, sports mega-events, such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games of the International Olympic Committee, have frequently been perceived as opportunities generating significant economic, social, and cultural benefits for the host countries. By their scale, these sports events reflect both the globalization of the sports economy and the international marketing of sports. (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). These specific events are characterized by their global nature and scope, public interest, substantial financial investments, extensive media coverage, and significant tourist attraction (Roberts, 2004; Getz, 2007; Müller, 2015). Beyond their sporting breadth, these mega-events are perceived as potential levers for territorial, urban, economic and symbolic development for host countries, leading to increased scholarly interest in these multifaceted effects (Preuss, 2013; Müller, 2015).

Since the 2000s, this dynamic has gradually become more apparent due to an increasing openness of applications to emerging countries. Historically, practically all Olympic Games and World Cups have taken place in industrialized nations in Europe, North America, or East Asia. It was only from the 2000s onward that the organization of these sporting competitions extended to new spaces (Mexico 1968 aside). Since then, there has been a trend toward the "globalization" of hosts: China hosted the 2008 Olympics, South Africa the 2010 World Cup, Brazil the 2016 Olympics and the 2014 World Cup, Russia the 2014 Winter Olympics and the 2018 World Cup, Qatar the 2022 World Cup. More recently, Morocco will co-host the 2030 World Cup with Spain and Portugal.

This evolution illustrates a strategic intention of developing countries to use these events as instruments of international legitimation and internal modernization. Nevertheless, this evolution also raises serious questions about the relevance of these decisions in contexts where significant societal needs remain persistent. On one hand, supporters highlight the benefits of these mega-events in term of investment, tourism, infrastructure, as well as international image. On the other hand, critical voices are increasing to denounce the priority of public spending allocated to shows at the expense of more important development objectives (Chappelet, 2004; Cornelissen et al., 2011).

In the case of Morocco, the candidacy for the 2030 World Cup succeeded after multiple failed attempts successively in 1994, 1998, 2006, 2010, and 2026, which reflects a national strategy aimed at positioning Morocco on geopolitical and economic level through sports. However, like other Southern countries, this decision is not unanimous among the various stakeholders, which reflects a significant tension between aspirations and uncertainties. Indeed, a number of stakeholders believe that the resources mobilized for the implementation of these events should be directed toward sectors deemed more prioritized; other stakeholders, on the other hand, consider this initiative as a means to enhance national competitiveness

and improve its international image. This highlights the complexity of the issues related to the organization and hosting of mega-sporting events in emerging economies.

At the scientific level, research focused on analyzing the impact of mega-events in developing countries is still rare and sporadic. Moreover, the existing literature highlight both the variety of economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits and the ambivalence of the results depending on the contexts and methodology applied (Baade & Matheson, 2016; Flyvjerg et al., 2021; Mair et al. 2023). In this sense, the analyzes conducted before the event, often sponsored by supporters, tend to overestimate the multiplier impacts on growth, tourism, and employment, while post-event studies reveal more modest or even negative outcomes due to budget overruns, an increase in public debt, or limited use of infrastructure (Lenskyj, 2012; Minnaeret, 2012; Peeters et al. 2014). Moreover, the social and environmental effects are gradually being taken into account, specifically in the face of sustainability and territorial inclusion challenges (Collins et al., 2009; Trendafilova & Babiak, 2013).

In this context, analyzing the impact of sports mega-events on host countries, and more particularly on emerging economies raises a dual interest that is both strategic and academic. Indeed, this study allows for a critical assessment of the economic, social and environmental benefits perceived in the various hosting cases. It also allows for the determination of the conditions under which these events can be a real benefit to the sustainable development of the host country.

From this perspective, despite the existence of several studies addressing the effects of sports mega-events, comprehensive information and knowledge in this field remain insufficient. As a result, systematic research can help synthesize all the knowledge in this topic.

This systematic review aims to address this gap by collecting the data from existing literature in an organized manner to give a thorough analysis of the multidimensional impact of sports mega-events, particularly the World Cup and the Olympic Games. It aims to provide a framework for analysis for researchers to understand and evaluate these complex phenomena. Thus, it can also contribute to decision-making by public authorities managing the sports sector, particularly in emerging countries.

By synthesizing existing studies, the objective of this systematic literature review is to identify convergences and divergences related to the effects of sports mega-events on host countries. By comparing empirical results from various contexts, we aim to answer the following central question:

Can hosting a sport mega-event serve as a lever for development for the host country?

The present study is organized into three parts: the first part presents the PRISMA methodological protocol adopted for the systematic review as well as a summary table describing the studies selected for analysis. The second part presents the results of the thematic analysis conducted. The last part will delve into an in-depth discussion of the results, drawing conclusions related to hosting mega-sporting events in developing countries.

2. Methodology

2.1. Search Strategy

As noted previously, this research is a systematic literature review conducted based on the collection of previous scientific studies. To answer our research question, we opted for a systematic literature review. This review “*aims to bring evidence together to answer a pre-defined research question. This involves the identification of all primary research relevant to the defined review question, the critical appraisal of this research, and the synthesis of the findings*” (Pollock & Berge, 2018. p. 4). To structure this literature review, we followed the steps outlined in the PRISMA protocol (the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses). This method involves inclusion and exclusion criteria, exhaustive literature research, and a selection procedure to identify relevant studies.

2.2. Eligibility Criteria

Table N°1: selection process and data extraction

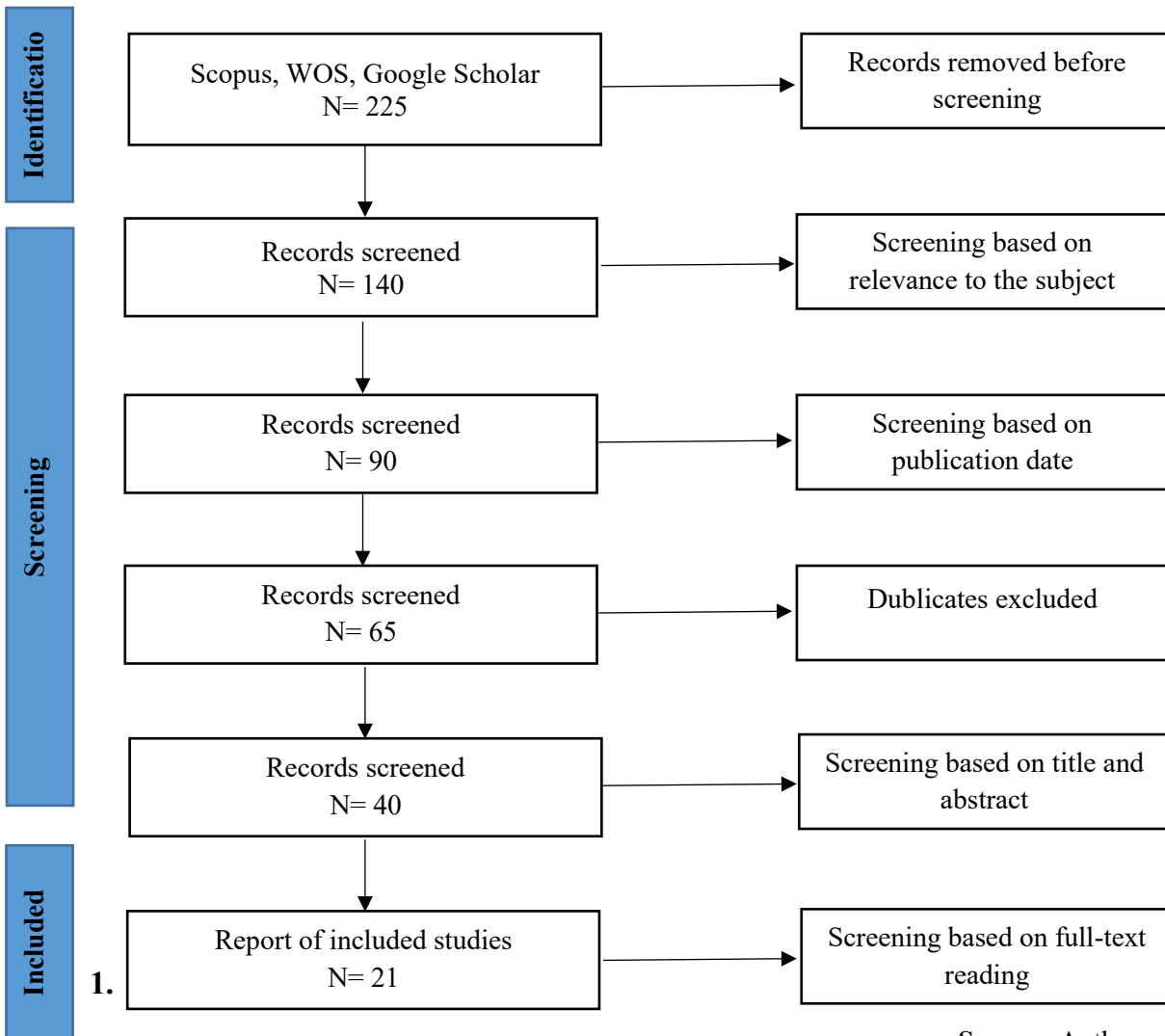
Elements	Description
Research sources	The data was collected from Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar using English keywords combining the concepts: (“ <i>sport mega-event</i> ” OR “ <i>FIFA World Cup</i> ” OR “ <i>Olympics</i> ”) AND (“ <i>impact</i> ” OR “ <i>legacy</i> ”) AND “ <i>Host Country</i> ”.
Publication period	The articles must be published between 2008 and 2024, within the last 15 years, which corresponds to the period of advancement of counties of the Global South in terms of hosting sports events and the extension of the sport for development program.
Inclusion criteria	The selected articles must be published in scientific journals and discuss at least one measurable impact of a mega sporting country. They may present a predictive analysis before the event or empirical observations after the event.
Exclusion criteria	Any study that examines only individual impacts or is not related to the host country. Nonacademic papers and duplicates are rejected.
Selection process	The initial database search returned 225 articles. After removing duplicates and screening for relevance and publication date, 65 papers remained. Title and abstract screening reduced the set to 40 articles. Following full-text review, 21 articles were included.

Source: Authors

2.3. PRISMA Flow Diagram

The following diagram illustrates the selection process followed by this systematic review

Figure N°1: PRISMA Flowchart



Source: Authors

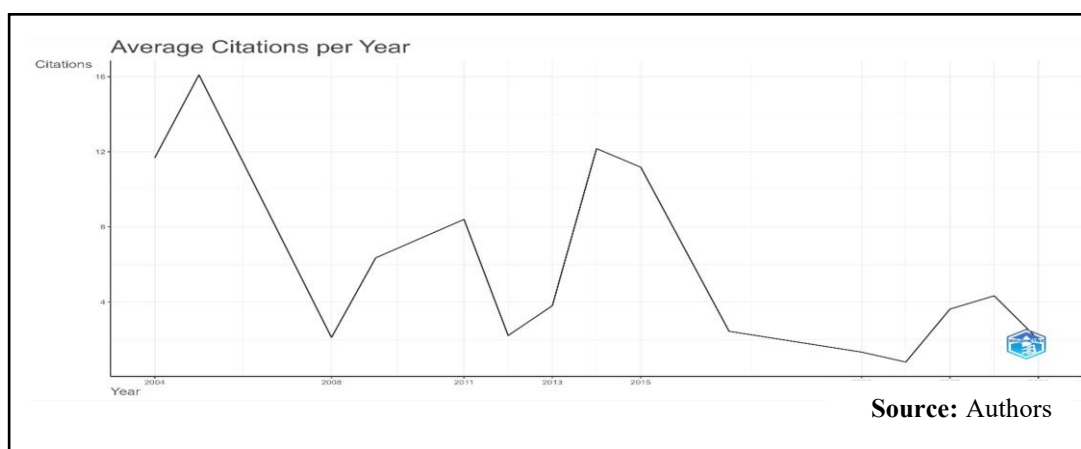
2.4. Descriptive Statistics

The set of articles selected (21) for examination presents significant diversity in terms geographical contexts, the hosted event, and the adopted methodologies. This reflects the multidimensional complexity of the effects of sports mega-events. The selected corpus covers several editions of the FIFA World Cup: South Korea (2002), Germany (2006), South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), and Qatar (2022). This corpus consequently emphasizes varied economic, political, and cultural context stretching from advanced economies to developing countries. From a methodological point, the approaches adopted are varied between quantitative ex-post studies, using econometric models to measure economic and sectoral impacts (e.g., Lee & Taylor, 2005; Feddersen & Maennig, 2012), qualitative or mixed studies, focused on social perception, brand image, or symbolic legacy (e.g., Gison et al., 2014; Knott et al., 2015; Hajjaj et al., 2024). Furthermore, other research such as the study by Lohmann et al. (2015), adopts a

comparative approach between citizens and international tourists. As for other studies, they opt for an exploratory study of the medium-term effects, particularly those conducted in South Africa or Qatar. The corpus of our study was subjected to a bibliometric analysis covering the period from 2004 to 2024, representing two decades of scientific research dedicated to the study of mega sporting events and their impact on host countries. This time frame indicates a consistent yet discontinuous interest in research, frequently associated with the cyclical organization of the World Cup or the Olympic Games. The corpus consists of 21 scientific papers with an average age of 9.76 years. The age of the publications shows that the majority of the studies are part of an already established body of literature, while also revealing recent work that reactivates the debate in light of recent events. Finally, the average of 79.18 citations per publication highlights the high visibility and academic value of the works surveyed. This confirms that the topic of the impacts of mega-sporting events is a mature and influential area of research in international literature.

The annual production curve shows an irregular trend in research over the period studied. Between 2004 and 2010, publications were sporadic, but they grew significantly between 2012 and 2015, reaching a peak in 2014, the year marked by the organization of the FIFA World Cup in Brazil. This coincidence confirms the link between major global sports events and the stimulation of academic research on their economic, social, and tourism impacts. After 2016, production stabilized at a moderate level, with a slight upturn in 2022, probably linked to the organization of the World Cup in Qatar, which sparked a renewed interest in scientific research. Globally, this dynamic reflects a research cycle that responds to global sports events, with each major international competition acting as a catalyst for publications.

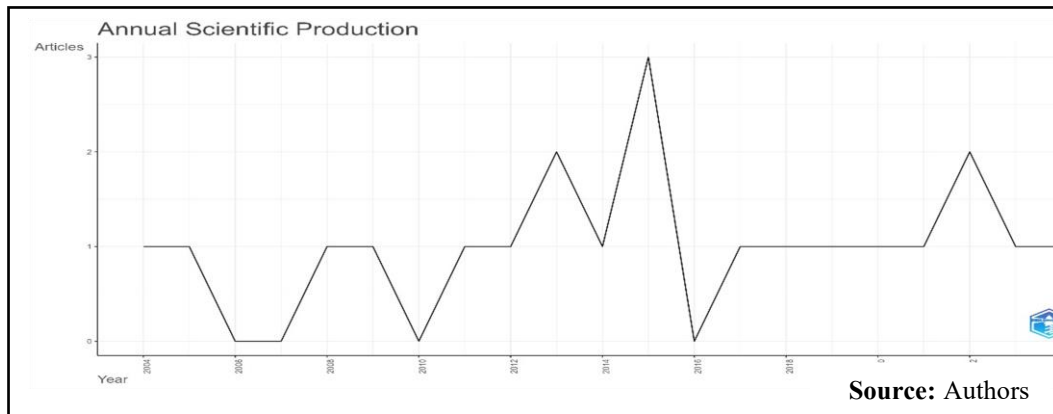
Figure N°2: The diagram below presents the Average citations per year



The increase in the average number of citations per year reveals significant evolutions in 2004, 2013, and 2015, reflecting periods of high production and diffusion of important work. After 2016, a gradual

decline was observed, which could be explained by the thematic dispersion of research and the publication of new studies that are still recent and therefore less cited. Although the recovery after 2022 is slight and moderate, it reflects a renewal and refreshment of academic interest in studies on Qatar 2022 and the prospects for analyzing the delayed impacts of mega-events. These fluctuations confirm that the scientific visibility of the field depends on the international competition calendar and the ability of researchers to produce rigorous and comparative post-event analyses.

Figure N°2: The following diagram illustrates the Annual Scientific Production



2.5. Synthesis of included studies

Table N°2: Overview of the 21 Selected Articles

Titles	Authors	Research objectives	Theory/ methodology	Findings	Research Limitations
<i>Can a sport mega-event support hosting city's economic, socio-cultural and political development ?</i>	Caiazza, R., & Audretsch, D. (2015).	Evaluate the perception of Naples residents of the economic, sociocultural, and political impact of mega-event (case of the Giro Italy) before and after its organization.	The social representations theory	These events may contribute to local development demonstrated by the significant variances between residents' expectations and their perceptions after the event, which enhanced the city's image and confirmed their sense of positive impact	Sample is limited to 80 responders. The study is restricted to a single case in Naples and only considers the immediate consequences ignoring the long-term consequences.

especially at a social level.

<p><i>Economic impacts of the FIFA World Cups in France 1998, German 2006 and outlook for South Africa 2010.</i></p>	<p>Allmers, S., & Maennig, W. (2009)</p>	<p>Analyze the economic impact of the 1998 World Cup in France and the 2006 World Cup in Germany. Anticipate for 2010 World Cup in South Africa.</p>	<p>A comparative empirical economic analysis. Evaluation of macroeconomic indicators before and after the event. Conceptual framework: perceived impact on well-being, impacts on image</p>	<p>The economic impact of the World Cup varies between France (1998) and Germany (2006). In France, no measurable impact was detected. On the other hand, in Germany, positive short-term touristic benefits were observed, but the country's image and social cohesion seemed more important. The World Cup in South Africa (2010) could leave a legacy in infrastructure and improvement in the national image, which may promote tourism and future investments.</p>	<p>Short period of analysis. Anticipations for 2010 are based on assumptions and do not examine societal implications beyond perceived well-being.</p>
<p><i>The Private Benefit of Public</i></p>	<p>Szymanski, S. & Drut, B. (2020)</p>	<p>Examine if hosting a big international</p>	<p>Economic analysis</p>	<p>Significant increases in attendance</p>	<p>The study focuses primarily on</p>

<p>Funding: <i>The FIFA World Cup, UEFA European Championship and attendance at Host Country League Soccer.</i></p>		<p>football competition generates a consistent increase in attendance at national league matches. Examine if associated private benefits are sufficient to justify the public costs incurred.</p>	<p>of stadium attendance data before and after the event.</p>	<p>were observed after the event (about +16% comparing five seasons before and after the event) For other clubs in the country, a minor increase in attendance was noted, but it does not regularly exceed pre-existing trends. The study also emphasizes that some competitions may have a limited impact on long-term attendance.</p>	<p>football clubs, which results in a limited scope. The influx was examined without taking into consideration other economic sectors or intangible benefits such as national pride. Heterogeneous findings in a specific context, which limits generalization</p>
<p><i>The Quest for the Cup : Assessing the economic impact of the World Cup</i></p>	<p>Baade, R.A., & Matheson, V.A. (2004)</p>	<p>Determine if the economic benefits of the FIFA World Cup are sufficient to justify the expenses of the host countries.</p>	<p>Statistical analysis of the measurable real economic impacts of a global mega-event (USA, 1994) on host cities compared to pre-event forecasts. A retrospective cost analysis of the</p>	<p>Negative economic impact. The host cities would have incurred cumulative economic losses. Thus, hosting a mega-event like the World Cup might be a financial burden rather than motivator.</p>	<p>Only one case study, which limits the generalization of results. The study does not take account socio-cultural aspects. The study does not quantify certain long-term benefits.</p>

			1994 event.		
<i>Predicting the economic impact of the 2010 FIFA World Cup on South Africa</i>	Bohlmann, H.R., & Van Heerden, J.H. (2008).	Anticipate the macroeconomic impacts of the 2010 World Cup on the GDP and employment while taking into consideration infrastructure financing and the expected visitor flow.	Computable general equilibrium model. Theoretical framework related to impact assessment.	The economic impact of the World Cup is limited in the short term. The outcome can be favorable if a mixed strategy combining tax increases and future revenue from growth and private investments mitigates the negative impacts of depts. and allows for a minor increase in GDP.	The study was based on sensitive hypotheses, which leads to significant uncertainty and limits the reliability of the predictions. The study was conducted before 2010, which prohibits the model from being validated.
<i>The effects of hosting mega sporting events on local stock markets and sustainable growth.</i>	Ferris, S. P., Koo, S., Park, K., & Yi, D. T. (2022)	Examine the economic impact of mega-sporting events on host countries, particularly on the GDP and the stock markets.	Quantitative economic approach	Positive short-term effect: increase in stock market indexes of the host country. For developed countries, no impact is detected. An initial increase in GDP during the event but quickly decreases after the event.	The study does not take into consideration the social or local impacts. The growth is only examined over a few years after the event.
<i>Critical reflections on the economic impact assessment of a mega-event: the</i>	Lee, C.K. & Taylor, T (2005)	Determine how to measure the economic impact of the 2002 World Cup in South Korea.	Input-output models. Survey of event visitors and analysis	The real economic impact of the 2002 World Cup was significant. The measured impact better	L'étude se limite à l'impact à court terme sans prendre en considération les effets

<i>case of 2002 World Cup</i>			of economic benefits from net direct expenditures.	reflects the net contribution of the competition, demonstrating that while the advantages exist, they are more modest.	d'aversion li les variables intangibles tels que la fierté nationale ou l'image du pays
<i>Sectoral labor market effects of the FIFA World Cup</i>	Feddersen, A & Maennig, W. (2012)	Evaluate the impact of the 2006 World Cup in Germany on employment by identifying the effects depending on sectors and regions	Quasi experimental analysis	No significant effect on overall employment has been observed. The local economic effect remains limited and ephemeral.	No analysis of tourist income or expenses. Short-term observation in a developed economy where the relative impact is difficult to identify on a national scale.
<i>Psychic income and social capital among host nation residents : a pre post analysis of the FIFA World Cup in South Africa</i>	Gibson, H. J., Walker, M., Thapa, B., Kaplanidou, K., Geldenhuys, S., & Coetzee, W. (2014)	Examine the impact of 2010 World Cup in South Africa on psychic income and social capital of residents. As well as the evolution before and after the event	A longitudinal survey of residents in five big South African cities. Measuring the evolution of perception indicators	The incident improved the psychic income of south-Africans, including particularly high pride for black people. On the other hand, no improvement in social capital was observed. The study underlines that the feeling of well-being exists but remains ephemeral	Limitations related to its design as a partial measure of social capital and a very short observation period to identify real and permanent social changes.
<i>Analysis of Tourists perception</i>	Lohmann, P. B., Virkki, K. B., Cardoso, G.	Analyze the perceptions of national and	Quantitative approach	Positive perceptions although	The absence of post-event

<i>During 2014 World Cup in Brazil</i>	D. L., Zouain, D. M., & da Silva Pacheco, T. (2015)	international tourists on impacts of 2014 World Cup on tourism in the host cities	(Questionnaire)	tarnished by criticism: logistical challenges for foreigners and contradictions related to public spending for Brazilians.	follow-up and measurable indicators of attendance or expenditure.
<i>The power of sport to unite a nation: The social value of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.</i>	Heere, B., Walker, M., Gibson, H., Thapa, B., Geldenhuys, S., & Coetzee, W. (2013)	Verify empirically the impact of the World Cup on national cohesion and social capital.	Social identity theory and social capital theory Quantitative approach	National identity offers a modest prediction of social capital. The event had a minimal impact on the national identity of the residents. The impact of the event is ephemeral.	Social capital was studied using limited and short-term indicators.
<i>The urban and economic impacts of mega-events: mechanisms of change in global games.</i>	Wolfe, S. D., Gogishvili, D., Chappelet, J. L., & Müller, M. (2022)	Summarize the mechanisms that lead to transformations in the host cities of a mega-event as well as the socio-economic changes generated.	Theoretical and transversal approach	The impact of mega-events is at different level. It depends on the social and cultural context. Mega-events are recognized as factor of urban transformations	The comments are general.
<i>The nation branding opportunities provided by a sport mega event : South Africa and the FIFA World Cup</i>	Knott, B., Fyall, A., & Jones, I. (2015)	Analyze how 2010 World Cup offered to the host country an opportunity for nation branding Analyze the stakeholder's perception of the country's	Qualitative approach	The event improved the country's international image as a tourist destination instead of a country capable of organizing a mega-event.	The study is limited to its qualitative and subjective nature without validation of quantitative measures.

		international image.		However, this positive impact occasionally proves to be ephemeral and requires further actions to maintain the sustainability of the effect.	Short-term analysis.
<i>Qatar's FIFA World Cup odyssey : A quest for legacy transforming a small nation into a global destination</i>	Hajjaj, M., Borodin, V., Perçicas, D. C., & Florea, A. G. (2024).	Explore how the organization of the World Cup in Qatar fits within a legacy-building strategy aimed at making the country into a recognizable global destination.	Qualitative approach	The World Cup was used as a strategic weapon to enhance the country's international visibility, diversify its economy and develop its infrastructure. However, these gains still depend on the country's ability to turn this momentum into a lasting legacy at the tourism, social and geopolitical levels.	The study is limited to the analysis of secondary sources and institutional discourses. The study is limited to short-term perceptions without taking into consideration the real sustainability of the legacy.
<i>Building a white elephant ? The case of the Cape Town Stadium</i>	Drummond, R., & Cronje, J. (2019)	Explore if the construction of the city's stadium for the 2010 World Cup constitutes a "White Elephant" by examining its economic benefits, post event usage, and impact on the city.	Qualitative approach	The stadium improved the city's image but after the event, it remained underused and has become a financial burden and a typical example of a "White Elephant"	A unique case which limits the generalization of the results to other contexts
<i>Towards redefining</i>	Cornelissen, S., Bob, U., &	Redefining the concept of	Conceptual and	There is an unduly	Conceptual approach

<i>the concept of legacy in relation to sport mega-event : Insights from the 2010 FIFA World Cup</i>	Swart, K. (2011)	legacy from mega-sporting events based on lessons learnt from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.	theoretic al analysis of the notion of legacy of mega-events. Qualitati ve approach	restricted understanding of legacy. It focuses on infrastructure and economic factors, but does not integrate social, cultural, symbolic and political factors.	without large-scale empirical validation, which limits the generalizati on of the results.
<i>Local residents' perceptions of the 2010 FIFA World Cup</i>	Hermann, U. P., Du Plessis, L., Coetzee, W. J., & Geldenhuys, S. (2013).	Analyze the perceptions of local residents regarding 2010 World Cup organization Evaluate their vision regarding the positive and negative impacts on their daily lives	Quantitat ive approach (question naire)	Residents perceive the event as bringing opportunities in terms of image, tourism and national pride.	Study focused on certain cities, which reduces national representati veness. Absence of longitudinal follow- up to track perceptions after the event.
<i>Do poor citizens benefit from Mega-events? Sao Paulo's Street Vendors and the 2014 FIFA World Cup</i>	Hummel, C.,(2018)	Examine the benefits for poor citizens, particularly street sellers during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.	Qualitati ve approach	Instead of benefiting from the World Cup, the sellers were significantly marginalized. Legal and police restrictions have limited their activity, which has exacerbated their socioeconomic vulnerability.	The study is limited to its local anchoring, focusing on the sellers of Sao Paulo Street, which limits the generalizati on of results.
<i>Nexus between FDI, infrastructure investment, Tourism revenues and</i>	Alalawneh, M. M., Mammadov, J., & Alqasem, A. (2021)	Analyze the influence of organizing a mega-event on investment dynamics by	Econome tric analysis.	A mega-event can stimulate short-term infrastructure investments; attract more	Neglect of the social, cultural and political dimensions of heritage.

Economic growth : Mega-event Evidence		studying the relationship between foreign direct investments, infrastructure investments, tourism revenues and economic growth.		foreign investments, and increase tourism revenue. This remains uneven and tends to fade in the absence of follow-up policies.	Lack of availability and reliability of macroeconomic data. Difficulty in distinguishing the specific impact of the mega event among other influencing factors.
Qatar resident's perceptions of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Projections for future co-hosting countries	Ishac, W., Swart, K., & Mollazehi, M. (2022)	Explore the perception of Qatar residents regarding the organization of the 2022 World Cup and draw lessons from it.	Quantitative approach	Positive perceptions regarding modern infrastructure, national pride and international image. However, concerns have been raised regarding high costs and uncertainties in terms of sustainable benefits.	The study is limited to self-reported data that may be biased by the euphoric context of the event. Absence of the follow-up after the event.
Sports tourism and perceived socio-economic impact in Kenya: The case of Machakos County.	Muiruri Njoroge, J., Atieno, L., & Vieira Do Nascimento, D. (2017).	Evaluate the impact of sports tourism on socioeconomic development in Kenya	Qualitative and quantitative approach	Positive impact: local economic growth, collective pride Negative impact: pollution, traffic...	Absence of official economic data Case study, which limits generalization.

Source: Authors

3. Study results

3.1. Thematic Analysis of Identified Impacts

The thematic analysis of the selected papers allowed for the identification of six categories of themes involving the implications of planning a mega-event on the host country. The following table presents them.

Table N°3: Thematic axes generated by the literature

Thematic Axes	References
Economic impact: macroeconomic impact/ financial fallout employment, GDP	Bohlmann & Van Heerden (2008) ; Ferris et al. (2023) ; Allmers & Maennig (2009) ; Baade & Matheson (2004) ; Lee & Taylor (2005) ; Feddersen & Maennig (2012) ; Hermann et al. (2013) ; Njoroge et al. (2017) ; Cornelissen et al. (2023) ; Hummel (2018) ; Alalawneh et al. (2021) ; Wolfe et al. (2022) ; Caiazza & Audretsch (2015) ; Szymanski, S. & Drut, B. (2020)
Social and societal impact: pride, social national identity, social capital, resident's well-being	Heere et al. (2013) ; Caiazza & Audretsch (2015) ; Njoroge et al. (2017) ; Gibson et al. (2014) ; Knott et al. (2015) ; Hummel (2018) ; Ishac et al. (2022) ; Drummond & Cronje (2018) ; Cornelissen et al. (2011) ; Wolfe et al. (2022) ; Bob & Swart (2010) ; Allmers & Maennig (2009)
Political impact: country image/ legacy/ post public policies	Cornelissen et al. (2011) ; Heere et al. (2013) ; Wolfe et al. (2022) ; Njoroge et al. (2017) ; Drummond & Cronje (2018) ; Hummel (2018) ; Ishac et al. (2022)
Spatial and urban impact: infrastructure/ sports equipment/ urban renovation/ transportation	Njoroge et al. (2017) ; Cornelissen et al. (2011) ; Drummond & Cronje (2018) ; Wolfe et al. (2022) ; Heere et al. (2013) ; Ferris et al. (2023) ; Alalawneh et al. (2021) ; Feddersen & Maennig (2012) ; Lohmann et al. (2015) ; Hajjaj et al. (2024) ; Lee & Taylor (2005) ; Allmers & Maennig (2009) ; Baade & Matheson (2004)
Symbolic and Tourism impact: country brand/ nation branding/ international image.	Hajjaj et al. (2024) ; Lee & Taylor (2005) ; Gibson et al. (2014) ; Knott et al. (2015) ; Allmers & Maennig (2009) ; Ferris et al. (2023) ; Wolfe et al. (2022) ; Ishac et al. (2022) ; Cornelissen et al. (2011) ; Heere et al. (2013) ; Caiazza & Audretsch (2015)

Source : Authors

3.2. Thematic Synthesis

This systematic review of the selected articles allows for the extraction of several significant overarching lessons concerning the impacts of sports mega-events on host countries.

Theme 1: Economic Impact of Sports Mega-events

At the economic level, the examined research largely supports the notion that sports mega-events have a minimal economic impact on host countries. According to Baade & Matheson (2004), the 1994 World Cup resulted in losses for the host cities. In this regard, Allmers & Maennig (2009) attest to an absence of notable impact after the 1998 World Cup in France and after the 2006 World Cup in Germany, with the expectation of a temporary increase in tourism in Germany. This is corroborated by studies cited in Ferris et al. (2023), where the authors did not identify any significant impact either on job creation or on the sustainable economy. In the same way, the selected studies reveal that tangible economic benefits such as GDP and employment are often below expectations and promotional speech during requests for mega events. (Lee & Taylor, 2005; Feddersen & Maennig, 2012; Lohmann et al. 2015).

Moreover, according to Bohlman & Van Heerdan (2008), without adequate finance, the impact of mega-events on GDP can be practically negligible. On the other hand, Szymanski & Drut (2020) demonstrate that private benefits such as clubs, sponsors, and hoteliers are insignificant compared to the massive public costs. This finding is shared with Bob & Swart (2010) from the perspective of local communities. Drummond & Cronje (2018) attest to this imbalance by citing the example of the Cup Town Stadium and highlighting that the investment was significant, with a large budget for construction and preservation for very limited use after the event. On the other side, Heer et al. (2013) emphasize the opportunity cost associated with other social expenditures. Regarding the South African case (2010), despite USD 6.4 billion in public investment, no obvious economic or social benefits were identified. Nevertheless, several nuances have been observed. According to Alalwneh et al. (2021), investments in infrastructure, tourism, and foreign direct investment have long-term beneficial effects in Germany (2006). They indicate that these benefits depend on the original economic conditions and the strategic integration of the event.

Ultimately, most of the studies examined corroborate that these sports mega-events have little or no significant immediate and permanent economic impact. However, these events can serve as a showcase and catalyst for multiple other goals beyond simply financial return on investment, such as the country's image, diplomacy, social cohesion, and infrastructure.

Theme 2: Social Impact of Sports Mega-events

The articles selected for examination attest that even though the economic benefits are generally modest, sports mega-events produce socio-cultural impacts that are both significant and undeniable. Several studies highlight the notion of the "feel-good factor" or the effect of well-being during and after the event. In this regard, Allmers & Maennig (2009) underline that the 2010 World Cup promoted a sense of national pride among South Africans. Caiazza & Audretsch (2015), in turn, illustrate that in Naples,

the organization of a stage of Giro reinforced a sense of pride and social solidarity, even if the economic benefits remain minimal.

Therefore, the feeling of pride or national unity and social cohesiveness around the organization of a sports mega-event cannot be measured in GDP but remains important and is called a “psychic income”, especially in countries where the event serves as a promoter for confidence in the future.

In the same perspective, Cornelissen et al. (2011) reveal in their study that during the 2010 World Cup, the effect of well-being was extremely high, especially among women who visited the “Fan-Park”. They appreciated the festive and collective atmosphere. Furthermore, Gibson et al. (2014) notice a large increase in national pride after 2010. Indeed, a successful strategy of a mega-event can increase the collective confidence of the residents. Knott et al. (2015) prove this, demonstrating that the excitement of South African citizens promoted a good image of themselves.

On the other hand, the same study also emphasizes that social capital has not progressed, indicating a beneficial but non-lasting impact. Heer et al. (2013) confirm this constraint by proving that sports do not succeed in permanently unifying countries. Indeed, the sense of cohesiveness quickly disappears and does not compensate for structural differences, particularly with the absence of social benefits programs or efforts related to the event. In the same line, Ishac et al. (2022) note that significant pre-event enthusiasm is visible in Qatar, which increases the sense of community and national pride in hosting people from around the world.

However, the reviewed literature highlights that these intangible impacts are generally short-lived and temporary. Indeed, the effect of national unity tends to fade fast after the event, and it is restricted in time and extent. Finally, Ferris and his colleagues (2023) emphasize that the benefits of image and international attraction are not fairly dispersed. Indeed, they seem more advantageous for emerging countries working toward recognition, such as South Africa in 2010 or Qatar in 2022, compared to previously established economies, where the impact remains restricted.

In summary, the literature shows that one event does not change a society. In truth, it is capable of temporarily generating a collective movement, but structural socio-economic problems inevitably reappear. Thus, the social impact is favorable when it leads to collective pride and engagement, but it is potentially negative if it exacerbates the resentments of specific social categories, such as those excluded from the celebration or those experiencing exclusions due to advancements.

Theme 3: Political Impact of Sport Mega-events

The studies examined reveal that the political aspect of organizing sports mega-events is both a benefit and a major challenge, particularly involving governance and the management of their benefits. According to Cornelissen et al. (2011), the 2010 World Cup in South Africa was an instrument of

diplomacy and geopolitical repositioning for the African continent. Contrary to the research conducted by Heere et al. (2013), this effect remains restricted and does not eliminate deep political divisions.

In terms of governance, the study by Wolf and his colleagues (2022) attests that organizing a sports mega-event generally relies on an exceptional implementation of regulations such as the creation of free zones, the strengthening of police powers, and the development of partnerships in the public and private sectors. These benefits allow for the centralization of power between sports federations on one hand and economic elites on the other, which can lead to abuses such as corruption and opaque contracts or even prioritization of the interests of those elites, countering the usual democratic process. In the same perspective, Drummond & Cronje (2018) underline that transparency and citizen involvement are absent in the planning process of the Cap Town Stadium, which leads to distrust and marginalization.

Moreover, Hummel (2018) illustrates this disparity by using the example of street sellers in São Paolo who were displaced while the political and financial benefits accrue to the elites and patrons. In the same sense, the study by Njorge and al. (2017) indicates that political leaders often turn to this type of event to increase their symbolic capital and defend their infrastructure projects even if they are uncertain about their social benefits. This study indicates that sports federations, large companies, and politicians are generally the main beneficiaries of organizing mega sporting events. During this period, marginalized communities suffer hardships such as the confiscation of their property, the rising cost of living, and the reduction of their informal income. Finally, Ishac et al. (2022) underline that the 2022 World Cup in Qatar was considered a method to foster unity and internal consolidation as well as the country's international reputation.

Thus, the reviewed literature suggests that sporting mega-events can function as substantial political tools for national promotion and soft power. However, this positive impact and international exposure can generate internal inequities, discontent, challenging governance, and political legitimacy if residents do not benefit from any real advantages.

Theme 4: Spatial and Urban Impact of Sport Mega-Events

According to the examined papers, sports mega-events generally generate a transformation (stadiums, transportation, housing, public spaces), which permanently alters the spaces. As a result, if these investments are supported by a well-defined urban strategy, they can encourage long-term sustainable development, including improving transit capacity, reviving districts, and developing new centralities. Otherwise, these investments incur enormous expenditures and generate a white elephant, as proven by the study by Drummond & Cronje (2018).

Several studies suggest that the organization of mega-events can have an accelerating function in urban projects. In this vein, Cornelissen et al. (2011) and Njoroge et al. (2017) highlight that the improvements made during the World Cup or Olympic Games contribute to a complete transformation of certain

neighborhoods, the optimization of transportation means, as well as the international harmonization of infrastructure, which has helped to enhance tourist and economic attractiveness.

In favorable contexts, these investments contribute to a dynamic of sustainable growth. Indeed, Alalawneh et al. (2021), for example, demonstrate that the 2006 World Cup in Germany had lasting benefits due to infrastructure improvements and the development of tourism and foreign direct investment. Nevertheless, many empirical investigations seem more conservative. Baade & Matheson (2004) as well as Allmers & Maennig (2009) show that urban heritage proves to be costly and problematic in cases where infrastructures are too vast or poorly adapted to local needs. This leads to mainly underused infrastructure after the event, which substantially affects the municipal budget (Drummond & Cronje, 2018). In the same spirit, Feddersen & Maennig (2012) and Lohmann et al. (2015) assert that transportation means built to manage the enormous influx of visitors are typically excessive compared to the actual need following the event, resulting in an imbalance between costs and benefits.

Finally, studies highlight the importance of considering the spatial and urban context amenities. From this perspective, Hajjaj et al. (2024) propose building versatile and modular infrastructures that can be used for varied activities to minimize single-use. Lee and Taylor (2005), in turn, underline that it is important to adapt infrastructures for long-term optimization by integrating them into everyday habits to transform them into an efficient urban asset.

In summary, the analysis of the studies reveals that mega sporting events are likely to promote urban redevelopment and infrastructure renovation. However, these impacts are not automatic. Indeed, if the strategy is deficient, the positive impacts remain limited, or even absent, due to high costs and minimal infrastructure utilization. For a spatial legacy to truly contribute to sustainable urban development, it is therefore essential to focus on the variety of infrastructures and their adaptation to local needs.

Theme 5: Symbolic and Tourism Impact of Sports Mega-Events

The reviewed literature reveals that hosting a sports mega-event offers the host country international visibility and global recognition that would be difficult to acquire otherwise. According to Cornelissen et al. (2011), the 2010 World Cup in South Africa serves as a means of national promotion and geopolitical redefinition in order to change negative prejudices associated with creating the image of a “performing Africa.” Allmers & Maennig (2009) confirm this role of an international showcase, considering that the great advantage of the 2006 World Cup for Germany was not economic, but rather symbolic, highlighting the development of the country’s impression abroad as well as the pride felt by its citizens.

However, the work of Ferris and his Colleagues (2023) indicates that in industrialized countries that are already globally recognizable, the impact of mega-events on the host country’s image can be negligible.

They also emphasize that the symbolic stake is particularly crucial for emerging countries seeking global recognition.

From the same viewpoint, the studies by Hajjaj et al. (2024) and Lee & Taylor (2005) demonstrate the crucial role of enduring symbolic heritage, specifically the implementation of structural and inclusive policies. In other words, the international perspective can only be credible and beneficial if it is based on concrete reforms relating to sustainable urban planning, social inclusion, or investments that are beneficial for residents. If this is not the case, the symbolic impact could turn into disillusionment and criticism once the event is over.

In summary, sports mega-events offer host countries the opportunity to reconfigure their brand and increase their soft power. Nonetheless, this symbolic legacy remains unstable and depends on two factors: the effectiveness of the event's organization as well as its ability to translate the event into tangible and inclusive progress for the country.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Through this literature review, we aimed to analyze the impacts of sports mega-events on host countries. This review reveals a contrasting perception that is both rich and critical, as well a multifaceted lesson on these repercussions. Sports mega-events amplify not only the strengths of host countries but also their weaknesses.

A first major observation is that the tangible economic benefits (GDP, employment) are often generally lower than the speeches and promises that accompany bids to host mega-events. This corroborates a tendency consistently observed by researchers in sports economics. Indeed, *ex ante* studies commissioned by organizers generally tend to overlook substitution effects, such as avoided tourist spending or residents fleeing the crowds, as well as resorting to general multipliers, while making overvalued estimates. On the other hand, rigorous subsequent analyzes demonstrate, on the contrary, neutral or very modest effects on growth.

The interest in these events is oriented toward other aspirations due to their low direct economic return: if States continue to invest in them, it is because they are pursuing other objectives than immediate revenues. Indeed, their motivations are more related to prestige, diplomacy, the advancement of infrastructure projects, or even social mobilization. In other words, the "return on investment" of a significant event related more on these externalities than on any net financial benefits.

In other words, the majority of the studies examined offer somewhat uncertain outcomes. Indeed, aspirations for GDP growth, job creation, or tourism growth are rarely achieved to the extent anticipated. Moreover, the direct impacts are often modest or even unfavorable for public finances when massive investments do not generate sufficient benefits.

On the other hand, this literature review reveals that the most notable impacts on the residents of the host country are generally intangible. The intangible and symbolic benefits prove to be more tangible and concrete, especially national pride, international visibility, prestige, as well as the collective sense of achievement. These goods, although they exist, are often ephemeral and their effect is short-term and do not necessarily lead to enduring changes both economically and socially. The pride of showing one's country to the world, the collective pride around sports, the feeling of belonging to a united community during the event. Certainly, these effects are temporary; they can leave a positive psychological legacy. Moreover, strengthening the country's image on an international scale can be an asset that a country can benefit from in the long term, by attracting, for example, more investments or tourists.

Nevertheless, a recurring theme is the necessity to implement strategies as levers to transform these intangible impacts into sustainable gains. It is therefore essential to capitalize on the event, before, during, and after, to optimize the positive outcomes rather than passively waiting for them. For example, organizing targeted promotion campaigns during the event (to encourage visitors to return), investing in sports or cultural initiatives to maintain community momentum, or planning the reconversion of facilities to serve the population. Thus, countries adopting these approaches have a better chance of achieving their goal. According to Knott et al. (2022), Qatar seems to adhere to this approach (integration into a national development framework), whereas South Africa failed due to insufficient monitoring after 2010.

In this perspective, a crucial lesson resides in the necessity of strategic planning and legacy forecasting. It is therefore essential to implement policies for infrastructure conversion, post-event tourism promotion, or support for spectator sports in order to maximize benefits and avoid the "white elephant" phenomenon. Moreover, the national context is important in developed countries where the mega-event primarily serves as a means of communication and prestige rather than a lever for growth. As for developing countries, it represents an opportunity to reposition themselves and accelerate investments, but these risks increasing expenses.

Moreover, the impact of a sport mega-event on the host country is not uniform; it strongly depends on the context of the host country. Indeed, the benefits in terms of image and national confidence can be considerable in a developing or lesser-known country (like South Africa or Qatar), whereas in a developed or already well-known country (like Germany), these benefits will be more negligible. Moreover, expenses can vary significantly depending on the country: a wealthy country like Qatar can easily bear high costs. Whereas a less wealthy or poor country would feel the impact of the budgetary choice more.

Thus, each hosting case is unique, which complicates generalization and explains some of the divergence

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