

Doctoral Thesis



INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL SCHOOL

Doctoral Program in Sport Science

SPORT TOURISM AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Author:

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Director:

Dr. Domenico Cherubini

Murcia, September 2025

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AUTHORIZATION OF THE SUPERVISOR OF THE THESIS FOR SUBMISSION

Prof. Dr. Domenico Cherubini as the supervisor of the Doctoral Thesis **“Sport Tourism and Regional Economic Development”** by Giovanni Raso in the Programa de Doctorado en Ciencias del Deporte, **authorize for submission** since it has the conditions necessary for its defense.

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ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Sports tourism is a growing sector that significantly contributes to regional economic and social development. This study examines the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism on Italy's territorial growth, focusing on regional disparities, community perceptions, and sustainable practices. By combining theoretical and empirical approaches, the dissertation explores the potential of sports tourism as a tool for fostering regional development while addressing its associated challenges. The main aim of this dissertation is to assess the economic, social, and cultural impacts of sports tourism, investigate regional variations, analyze residents' perceptions, and identify strategies to maximize its benefits while mitigating negative effects. Specific attention is given to understanding how small-scale and large-scale events influence local economies, infrastructure development, and community engagement.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, comprising a systematic literature review, surveys targeting residents across Italy, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and a scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. Data were analyzed using quantitative methods for survey responses and thematic analysis for qualitative interviews. The findings were integrated to address the research hypotheses and provide actionable insights. The results reveal that sports tourism positively impacts Italy's regional economies through job creation, tourism expenditure, and infrastructure development, though these benefits are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas. Community pride and social cohesion were identified as significant social benefits, while environmental concerns and perceptions of inequity emerged as challenges. Regional disparities and underutilization of infrastructure in rural areas were recurring issues. The scenario-based analysis highlighted valuable lessons, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices, equitable distribution of resources, and long-term infrastructure utility.

This study validates the potential of sports tourism to drive regional growth in Italy while highlighting critical challenges that must be addressed. Strategic investments in sustainable infrastructure, inclusive engagement, and tailored policies for underdeveloped regions are essential. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on sports tourism and offer practical recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders.

Keywords

Sports tourism, socioeconomic impacts, regional development, community perceptions, infrastructure investment.

Thesaurus Terms

Tourism economics, regional planning, public perceptions, sports events management, community development, local business impact.

RESUMEN

El turismo deportivo es un sector en crecimiento que contribuye significativamente al desarrollo económico y social regional. Este estudio examina los impactos socioeconómicos del turismo deportivo en el crecimiento territorial de Italia, enfocándose en las disparidades regionales, las percepciones de las comunidades y las prácticas sostenibles. Al combinar enfoques teóricos y empíricos, la investigación explora el potencial del turismo deportivo como una herramienta para fomentar el desarrollo regional mientras aborda los desafíos asociados.

El objetivo principal de esta tesis es evaluar los impactos económicos, sociales y culturales del turismo deportivo, investigar las variaciones regionales, analizar las percepciones de los residentes e identificar estrategias para maximizar sus beneficios mientras se mitigan los efectos negativos. Se presta especial atención a comprender cómo los eventos de pequeña y gran escala influyen en las economías locales, el desarrollo de infraestructuras y la participación comunitaria.

Se utilizó un enfoque de métodos mixtos que incluyó una revisión sistemática de la literatura, encuestas dirigidas a residentes en toda Italia, entrevistas semiestructuradas con actores clave y un análisis basado en escenarios de la Copa Mundial de la FIFA 2010 en Sudáfrica. Los datos se analizaron mediante métodos cuantitativos para las respuestas de las encuestas y análisis temático para las entrevistas cualitativas. Los hallazgos se integraron para abordar las hipótesis de investigación y proporcionar ideas prácticas.

Los resultados revelan que el turismo deportivo impacta positivamente las economías regionales de Italia mediante la creación de empleos, el gasto turístico y el desarrollo de infraestructuras, aunque estos beneficios están desproporcionadamente concentrados en áreas urbanas. El orgullo comunitario y la cohesión social fueron identificados como beneficios sociales significativos, mientras que las preocupaciones ambientales y las percepciones de inequidad surgieron como desafíos. Las disparidades regionales y la infrautilización de infraestructuras en áreas rurales fueron problemas recurrentes. El análisis basado en escenarios destacó lecciones valiosas, enfatizando la necesidad de prácticas sostenibles, una distribución equitativa de recursos y la utilidad a largo plazo de las infraestructuras.

Este estudio valida el potencial del turismo deportivo para impulsar el crecimiento regional en Italia, destacando a la vez los desafíos críticos que deben abordarse. Las inversiones estratégicas en infraestructuras sostenibles, la participación inclusiva y políticas adaptadas para regiones subdesarrolladas son esenciales. Los hallazgos contribuyen al discurso más amplio sobre el turismo deportivo y ofrecen recomendaciones prácticas para los responsables políticos y las partes interesadas.

Palabras Clave

Turismo deportivo, impactos socioeconómicos, desarrollo regional, percepciones comunitarias, inversión en infraestructura.

Términos del Tesauro

Economía del turismo, planificación regional, percepciones públicas, gestión de eventos deportivos, desarrollo comunitario, impacto en los negocios locales.

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“The only limit to our realization of
tomorrow is our doubts of today.”

-Franklin D. Roosevelt

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

B2B: Business-to-Business

B2C: Business-to-Consumer

DSR: Design Science Research

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

LDC: Least Developed Countries

NPO: Non-Profit Organization

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OSMI: Online Sensory Marketing Index

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

RQ: Research Question

SH: Specific Hypothesis

SLR: Systematic Literature Review

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization

WHO: World Health Organization

Event-Specific Acronyms

FIFA: Fédération Internationale de Football Association

IOC: International Olympic Committee

Statistical and Analytical Abbreviations

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

JASP: Jeffreys Amazing Statistical Package

CAGR- Compound Annual Growth Rate

Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and precision, it is essential to define key terms used throughout this thesis. This section provides explicit definitions for central terms to the research ensuring a shared understanding among readers.

Key Term	Definition
<i>Sport tourism</i>	Sports tourism refers to the travel, activities, and experiences undertaken by individuals and groups for the purpose of participating in or spectating sports events
<i>Regional Economic Development</i>	Regional economic development pertains to the sustained growth and improvement of economic factors within a specific geographic area.
<i>Residents' Perceptions</i>	Residents' perceptions refer to the attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of individuals living in regions that host sporting events.
<i>Economic Impact</i>	Economic impact refers to the direct and indirect effects of sports tourism on the economy of a specific region
<i>Systematic Literature Review</i>	A systematic literature review is a structured and rigorous method of collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing existing scholarly research on a particular topic
<i>Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)</i>	The Tourism Area Life Cycle is a conceptual framework developed by Richard Butler to explain the stages of development that tourist destinations undergo over time.
<i>Sustainable Economic Development</i>	Sustainable economic development refers to a balanced and enduring approach to economic growth that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
<i>Community Engagement</i>	Community engagement involves the active involvement and participation of local residents in decision-making processes, initiatives, and activities related to sports tourism.
<i>Social Capital</i>	Social capital refers to the networks, relationships, and social connections within a community.

<i>Event Impact Theory</i>	Event Impact Theory explores the multifaceted effects of events, including sporting events, on host communities.
<i>Sustainable Tourism</i>	Sustainable tourism involves practices that minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local cultures while maximizing the benefits for host communities.
<i>Event Legacy</i>	Event legacy refers to the lasting effects and benefits (both positive and negative) of hosting a sports event on a region. It includes long-term impacts on infrastructure, tourism, and community development.
<i>Stakeholders</i>	Stakeholders are individuals or groups who have an interest or stake in the outcomes of sports tourism initiatives.
<i>Economic Multiplier</i>	Economic multipliers represent the ripple effect of spending within an economy.
<i>Niche Tourism</i>	Niche tourism focuses on specialized interests or activities within the broader tourism industry.
<i>Branding</i>	Branding involves the development and promotion of a distinct identity for a region, highlighting its unique features and attractions
<i>Destination image</i>	Destination image refers to the mental representation or perception that individuals hold about a destination.
<i>Event Bid Process</i>	The event bid process involves the submission of proposals by destinations to host sporting events.
<i>Resilience</i>	Resilience refers to the ability of a community to adapt and recover from challenges, shocks, or disruptions.
<i>Small-scale sporting events</i>	Small-scale sporting events are local or regional competitions that involve fewer participants and spectators compared to mega sporting events. These events typically have a more limited scope and budget, and they focus on community engagement and promoting local sports activities.
<i>Mega sporting events</i>	Mega sporting events are large-scale, internationally recognized sports competitions that attract significant media coverage, large audiences, and substantial economic and social impacts. Examples include the

<i>JASP software</i>	Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and Super Bowl. JASP (Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program) is an open-source statistical software designed to facilitate easy and intuitive statistical analysis. It provides a user-friendly interface for conducting a wide range of statistical tests, including t-tests, ANOVA, regression, and Bayesian analysis.
<i>Google Module</i>	The Google Module questionnaire is a survey tool provided by Google to collect and analyze data through customizable forms. Often part of Google Forms, it allows users to create questionnaires with various types of questions, including multiple choice, short answer, and scales.

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I. INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background Information

Sports tourism has emerged as a vibrant and fast-growing segment of the global tourism industry, characterized by travel centered on sports-related activities. It encompasses a wide spectrum of experiences, ranging from active participation in sports to the enthusiastic observation of events. Sports tourism can be broadly defined as the act of traveling to participate in, watch, or experience sporting events and activities (Weed & Bull, 2012). It combines two significant industries—sports and tourism—offering travelers the opportunity to engage with sports either as spectators or participants. According to Higham and Hinch (2018), sports tourism encompasses three main types: active sports tourism, where individuals travel to take part in sports activities such as marathons, cycling tours, or skiing; event sports tourism, where travelers attend organized sporting events like the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, or regional tournaments; and nostalgia sports tourism, where tourists visit locations or museums with a connection to sporting history or events, such as visiting famous stadiums or the halls of fame. The definition of sports tourism highlights the multifaceted nature of the sector, as it does not only involve elite-level or professional sports (Gozalova et al., 2014). It includes recreational sports, adventure activities, and other outdoor leisure pursuits. This makes it accessible to a wide range of individuals, from professional athletes to casual participants, and offers diverse experiences that appeal to different interests and demographics.

What sets apart sports tourism from the general tourism in that it involves travel specifically driven by a passion for sports, with the sport itself serving as the main motivation for travel (Gammon & Kurtzman, 2002; Gibson et al. 2012; Higham, 2005; Hinch & Higham, 2011; Hudson, 2002). This form of tourism can encompass a range of activities, from attending major international sporting events to visiting lesser-known regional competitions or engaging in personal physical activity. As per Higham (2005), the field has grown substantially in recent decades as global sporting events have become more commercialized and accessible, with cities and regions increasingly leveraging sports to promote tourism, economic growth, and cultural exchange. One of the key dimensions of sports tourism is the

economic dimension, broadly categorized, sports tourism includes active participation tourism, event-based tourism, and heritage sports tourism. Active participation involves individuals traveling to engage in sports activities such as skiing, hiking, or marathons. Event-based tourism focuses on attending sports competitions and mega-events like the FIFA World Cup, the Olympics, or Wimbledon. Meanwhile, heritage sports tourism centers on visits to historically or culturally significant sports locations, such as iconic stadiums, halls of fame, or museums dedicated to sporting legends. This sector's appeal lies in its unique capacity to blend physical activity, entertainment, and cultural exploration, providing enriching experiences for tourists while fostering economic opportunities for host regions.

Drawing on insights from literature review, Table 1 presents a synthesized typology of sports tourism. This categorization, elaborated by the author, integrates definitions and descriptions from multiple scholarly contributions to highlight the diversity of forms within sports tourism:

Table 1:
Types and description of sports tourism

Type of Sport Tourism	Characteristics	Examples	Potential Impacts
Active Participation	Travelers engage in sports activities for recreation, fitness, or competition.	- Skiing in the Alps - Marathon participation in Boston - Surfing in Bali	- Promotes physical health - Generates revenue for equipment rentals, coaching, and local businesses
Event Based	Focuses on attending sports events, from local tournaments to international mega-events.	- FIFA World Cup - Olympics - Wimbledon	- Boosts local economies through ticket sales, lodging, and merchandise - Enhances global visibility for host cities
Heritage Sport Tourism	Involves visiting sites of historical or cultural significance in sports.	- Tour of Lord's Cricket Ground - Visit to the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport - Barcelona's Camp Nou Stadium	- Preserves sports culture and history - Promotes educational tourism - Supports local economies through heritage conservation efforts

Note. Compiled and elaborated by the author using insights from the literature review to categorize and describe the main types of sports tourism.

1.2. Evolution of Sports Tourism

Sports tourism, the intersection of sports and tourism, has gained increasing attention in recent years due to its potential impact on regional economies and communities since the mid-1990s, there has been a growing focus on sport tourism from both the sport and tourism industries as well as academia (Bazzanella et al., 2023). While travel for the purpose of participating in or spectating sports is not a

recent phenomenon, the term "sport tourism" has gained increased prominence over the past decade.

The evolution of sports tourism can be traced back to ancient times, where sports were linked to cultural and religious practices. Over time, the nature of sports tourism has transformed significantly, moving from early forms of travel associated with sporting events to a global industry that has become one of the fastest-growing sectors in tourism (Zauhar, 2004). One of the earliest and most well-known examples is the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece, first held in 776 BCE. These games attracted spectators and participants from various city-states, necessitating travel and contributing to early forms of sports-related tourism. Similarly, according to Gocharova (2021), the gladiatorial contests of ancient Rome and the chariot races of the Byzantine era also attracted large crowds, spurring travel for the purpose of viewing these events. In the Middle Ages, sports such as jousting, archery, and hunting became popular, especially among European nobility. Although these sports were often local in nature, they attracted spectators and participants from different regions, creating early networks of sports tourism (Zauhar, 2004). Travel for sporting purposes during this time was often limited to the elite classes who had the resources and time to engage in leisure activities and attend major sporting events. A 2004 study by Zauhar reveals that the evolution of sports tourism gained momentum with the Industrial Revolution (18th and 19th centuries), which significantly transformed the social and economic structures of Europe and North America.

The rise of the middle class, improved transportation infrastructure (such as railways and steamships), and the reduction of work hours for the working class led to the emergence of leisure time and disposable income (Zarotis, 2019). This shift allowed more people to participate in and spectate sports, leading to the growth of sports-related travel. According to Higgins (2013), the development of organized sports leagues during this period, such as professional football (soccer) leagues in England and baseball leagues in the United States, further encouraged travel for sports purposes. Spectators began traveling to watch their favorite teams compete, and sporting events became more formalized with rules, teams, and championships, creating a structured sports tourism economy (Taleghani & Ghafary, 2014). The 20th century marked the emergence of mega sporting events

that would have a profound and lasting impact on the development of sports tourism. Events like the modern Olympic Games (revived in 1896) and the FIFA World Cup (first held in 1930) began to attract international audiences, making sports tourism a global phenomenon (Hu et al., 2024). These events created an environment where sports tourism could flourish, as people traveled long distances to participate in or spectate high-profile competitions. The rise of air travel after World War II significantly boosted the capacity for sports tourism to grow globally. The advent of commercial aviation made it possible for spectators and athletes to travel internationally with greater ease and speed, contributing to the growing appeal of events like the Olympics, World Cups, and other international sporting competitions (Ritchie & Adair, 2002). By the latter half of the 20th century, sports tourism had become a more accessible and integral part of global tourism trends.

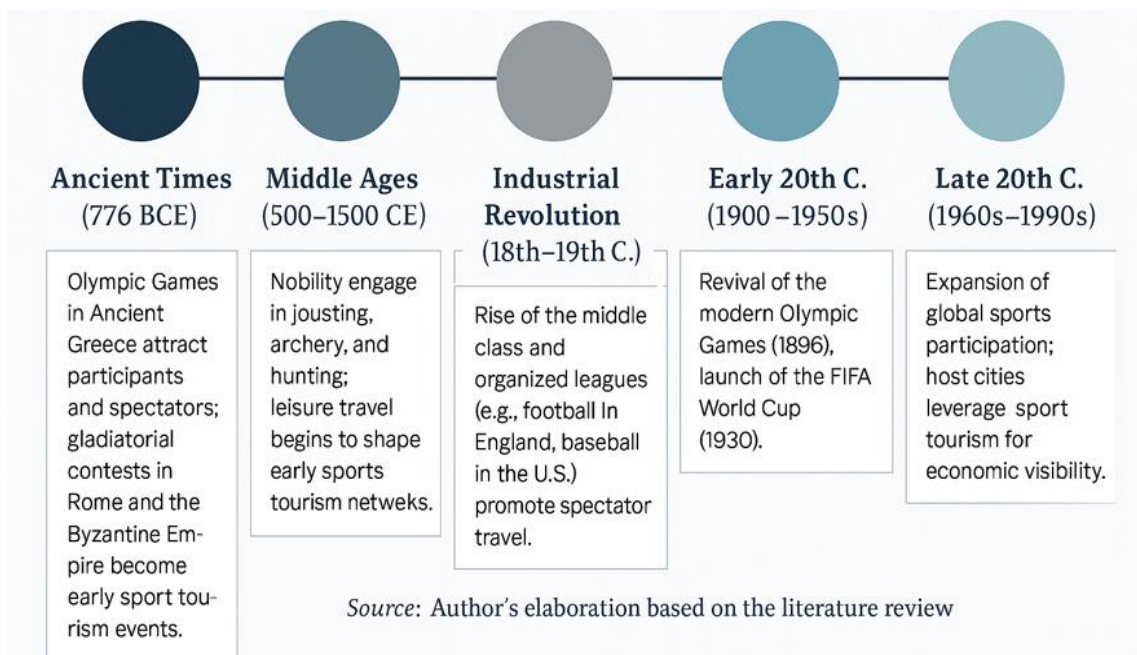
In the 21st century, sports tourism has reached new heights, driven by globalization, commercialization, and advancements in technology. According to Bonakdarchyan & Nazari (2021), the commercialization of sports, particularly through corporate sponsorship, broadcasting rights, and merchandise sales, has made major sporting events even more economically lucrative. Cities and regions now compete to host these events, which can bring significant economic benefits in terms of tourism revenue, infrastructure investment, and global visibility. Digital media, social networks, and global broadcasting have also expanded the reach of sports tourism. Fans can now follow events in real-time, sparking greater interest in attending events in person. This is evident in the rise of travel packages centered around major events such as the Super Bowl, Rugby World Cup, or Formula 1 races, where travelers can book experiences that include event tickets, accommodations, and cultural tours (Makowiec & Ostrowski, 2015). Moreover, the availability of digital platforms for event planning and ticketing has streamlined the process for tourists to engage in sports tourism.

The diagram below represents a chronological depiction of the evolution of sports tourism, illustrating key milestones and transformative periods from ancient times to the modern era. It highlights the significant events and societal changes that shaped sports tourism, beginning with its origins in ancient Greece, where

events such as the Olympic Games laid the foundation for travel motivated by sports.

Figure 1:

Key Milestones in the development of sports tourism: Source: Author's elaboration based on the literature review



As depicted, the timeline progresses through the Middle Ages, characterized by regional sports activities like jousting and hunting, and continues into the Industrial Revolution, where improved transportation infrastructure and organized sports leagues fostered the growth of spectator sports and associated travel.

The diagram further illustrates the impact of the 20th century, marked by the emergence of mega-events such as the modern Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, which elevated sports tourism to a global phenomenon. Finally, the timeline captures the advancements of the 21st century, where globalization, technological innovation, and commercialization have driven sports tourism to unprecedented heights.

1.3. Global Trends in Sports Tourism

Sports tourism, which represents the dynamic intersection of sports and travel, has increasingly asserted itself as a prominent and fast-growing segment within the global tourism industry. This multifaceted sector includes travel undertaken for the purpose of participating in or spectating at sporting events, as well as visiting sites of historical and cultural significance in the sporting world, such as stadiums, sports museums, training academies, and the birthplaces of renowned athletes. As a result of its hybrid nature, sports tourism not only contributes to the economic vitality of host destinations but also intersects with broader sociocultural and health-oriented trends.

In the past two decades, sports tourism has grown markedly due to several interrelated global phenomena. First, rising levels of disposable income across both developed and emerging economies have empowered more individuals to engage in leisure travel, including for the purpose of sports (Gibson, 2012). Second, globalization and improvements in transportation infrastructure have made international travel more accessible and affordable, thus facilitating attendance at large-scale global sporting events such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, and the Commonwealth Games (Higham & Hinch, 2018). These mega-events often draw millions of international spectators and generate significant tourism revenue, infrastructural development, and media exposure for host cities.

Moreover, the increasing societal emphasis on health, fitness, and active lifestyles has also contributed to the proliferation of *active sports tourism*, wherein travelers seek destinations that offer opportunities for personal participation in recreational or competitive sports, such as skiing, golf, hiking, or marathon running (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). This trend aligns with a broader shift toward experiential travel, where tourists prioritize meaningful and physically engaging experiences over traditional sightseeing.

Technological advancements have further catalyzed the global expansion of sports tourism. The rise of digital platforms, including social media, online booking systems, and virtual event marketing, has enhanced the visibility of sporting events and simplified travel planning processes for international sports tourists. Social media in particular has amplified the aspirational and community aspects of attending or participating in sports events, encouraging a wider demographic of tourists to engage with sports-based travel (Trendafilova et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted sports tourism on a global scale, as lockdowns and travel restrictions led to the postponement or cancellation of many major sporting events. However, the post-pandemic recovery has been characterized by a renewed surge in demand, with evidence suggesting that the resumption of sports competitions has reignited public interest and contributed to the revitalization of the tourism industry as a whole (Keshkar & Karegar., 2022). Hybrid formats and digital innovations, such as virtual races and fan engagement technologies, have also expanded the scope of what constitutes sports tourism in the modern era.

As nations increasingly recognize the socioeconomic potential of sports tourism, strategic investments in sports infrastructure, international event bidding, and destination marketing are becoming central to national and regional development agendas. Thus, sports tourism is not only a reflection of global consumer trends but also a strategic economic and cultural lever for host destinations worldwide.

Key Growth Drivers

1. **Rising Disposable Income:** As global economies expand, more individuals have the financial means to invest in leisure and travel. A study by Zhou et al. (2023) reveals that middle-class growth in emerging markets, particularly in Asia and South America, has fueled demand for international sporting events and sports-related travel. This trend is evident in the increasing attendance at events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics, which attract tourists from around the globe (Gibson et al., 2012).
2. **Enhanced Global Connectivity:** A 2022 report by Knott & Tinaz (2022) shows that the advent of low-cost airlines and improved transport infrastructure has made international travel more affordable and convenient. These developments allow sports enthusiasts to attend events across continents, boosting global participation in sports tourism. Digital platforms, including booking apps and online travel agencies, further simplify travel planning for sporting events.
3. **Health and Wellness Trends:** The global shift toward health-conscious lifestyles has spurred interest in sports and active tourism (Araújo Vila

et al., 2019). Travelers increasingly seek experiences that combine physical activity with leisure, such as marathon tourism, cycling tours, or yoga retreats. These trends not only promote individual well-being but also position sports tourism as an integral part of wellness tourism.

4. **Popularity of Mega-Sporting Events:** Mega-events like the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic Games, and the UEFA Champions League continue to drive global sports tourism (Javani & Ghasemi, 2022). These events attract millions of spectators and participants, creating opportunities for host nations to showcase their culture and infrastructure while generating substantial economic benefits. Smaller-scale events, such as regional tournaments, have also gained popularity, fostering localized growth in the sector (Peric, 2018).
5. **Technological Advancements:** Technology plays a crucial role in the growth of sports tourism. According to Hu et al. (2024), virtual ticketing, real-time updates, and virtual reality experiences enable fans to engage with sporting events more conveniently. Additionally, advancements in sports analytics and social media have increased fan engagement, motivating spectators to travel for live experiences.

1.4. Market Growth and Economic Impact

The global sports tourism market has experienced substantial growth in recent years, driven by heightened interest in international sporting events, rising disposable incomes, and strategic investments in tourism infrastructure. In 2023, the market was valued at approximately USD 618.69 billion and is projected to reach USD 2,089.58 billion by 2030, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 17.5% over the forecast period (Grand View Research, 2024).

Other analyses suggest even more robust growth trajectories. For instance, Market.us (2024) reports that the market was valued at USD 598.2 billion in 2023 and is expected to reach USD 2,826.7 billion by 2033, representing a CAGR of 16.8%. Similarly, Fortune Business Insights (2024) estimates the market size at USD 544.38 billion in 2023, with projections reaching USD 2,089.58 billion by 2032, indicating a CAGR of 16.43%.

These upward trends underscore sports tourism's transformation from a niche travel category into a major economic driver. According to the Sports Events and Tourism Association (2024), the U.S. sports tourism sector alone generated a direct spending impact of USD 52.2 billion in 2023, contributing to a total economic impact of USD 128 billion. This growth is attributed to increased participation in sports events, enhanced facilities, and the global appeal of major sporting events such as the Olympics and FIFA World Cup (Grand View Research, 2024).

To better understand this growth, the following formula is used to calculate CAGR: (Romer, 2008)

$$CARG = \left(\frac{V_f}{V_i} \right)^{\frac{1}{n}} - 1$$

Where:

- V_f = USD 2,327 billion (final market value)
- V_i = USD 598 billion (initial market value)
- n = 9 years

$$CARG = \left(\frac{2327}{598} \right)^{\frac{1}{9}} - 1 \approx 0.168 \text{ or } 16.8\%$$

Several factors contribute to the burgeoning sports tourism industry:

- **Mega Sporting Events:** Global events such as the Olympics, FIFA World Cup, and Super Bowl attract millions of spectators worldwide, significantly boosting tourism in host cities. The 2023 FIFA World Cup, for example, garnered a cumulative viewership of almost two billion, underscoring the massive appeal of such events.
- **Increased Participation in Sports Activities:** There is a growing trend of individuals traveling to engage in sports themselves, such as marathon running, skiing, or golf, contributing to the active sports tourism segment (Gibson, 1998).
- **Rising Popularity of Women's Sports:** According to Brice et al. (2022), events like the Women's Rugby World Cup and Women's Cricket World Cup are gaining traction, attracting significant audiences and offering new opportunities for tourism growth.

1.4.1. Regional Insights on Sport Tourism

The growth of sports tourism is not uniform across regions. Developed economies with established sports infrastructures, such as Europe and North America, have traditionally dominated the market (Gibson et al., 2012). However, emerging economies in Asia-Pacific and the Middle East are increasingly investing in sports facilities and bidding to host major events, aiming to capitalize on the economic benefits associated with sports tourism (Gibson et al., 2012). Despite its promising outlook, the sports tourism industry faces challenges:

- **Sustainability Concerns:** The environmental impact of large-scale sporting events and the carbon footprint associated with travel are under scrutiny, prompting a push towards more sustainable practices within the industry (Baloch et al., 2023).
- **Economic Disparities:** As per Ferris et al. (2022), while mega-events can boost local economies, there is debate over the long-term benefits for host communities, particularly concerning the utilization of infrastructure post-event.

1.4.2. Future Outlook

The sports tourism market is experiencing significant momentum and is poised for sustained expansion in the coming years. According to projections, the market is expected to reach a valuation of USD 2,089.58 billion by 2032, up from USD 618.69 billion in 2022 (Javani & Ghasemi, 2022). This impressive growth trajectory is being fueled by several key factors. First, rapid technological advancements are revolutionizing the way fans engage with sports events—through immersive digital experiences, mobile apps, and real-time data access—which in turn enhances the appeal of attending live events. Second, there has been a marked increase in global investments in sports infrastructure, including stadiums, training facilities, and transportation networks, making destinations more attractive and accessible to international tourists. Finally, the expansion of the global middle class, particularly in emerging economies, has led to greater levels of disposable income, enabling more people to travel for leisure and participate in sports-related experiences. Together, these trends are creating a fertile environment for the continued evolution and prosperity of the sports tourism sector.

1.5. Niche Markets in Modern Sports Tourism

In recent decades, the rise of niche sports tourism markets has diversified the landscape of the industry. Beyond mega-events like the Olympics and World Cup, there is increasing interest in smaller, more specialized sporting events. According to a study by Liberto et al. (2020), these niche markets cater to various types of travelers, including:

- **Adventure sports tourism** – Activities such as mountain climbing, white-water rafting, surfing, and skiing attract tourists seeking physical challenges in scenic natural settings. Destinations like the Italian Alps, known for skiing and snowboarding, have become hubs for adventure sports tourism.
- **Endurance Sports Tourism** – Events like marathons, triathlons, and cycling races draw participants and spectators who travel specifically for these competitions. Events such as the Ironman Triathlon series, as well as the Tour de France, have spurred sports tourism in host locations.
- **Sports heritage Tourism** – This form of sports tourism involves travel to historic sports venues, museums, and events that celebrate the heritage of sports. Examples include visits to places like the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, or attending events like the Palio di Siena horse race, which combines sports and cultural history.
- **Wellness and fitness Tourism** – This segment of sports tourism focuses on health and well-being, with tourists seeking destinations that offer fitness retreats, yoga camps, or wellness sports such as hiking and cycling. Italy's Tuscany and Amalfi Coast regions have become popular for wellness sports tourism, combining scenic landscapes with physical activities like hiking and cycling.

1.6. The Role of Technology and Media in Modern Sports Tourism

The integration of technology and media has significantly transformed the landscape of sports tourism, making it more accessible, engaging, and dynamic for both event organizers and sports tourists. In the digital age, sports consumption has expanded beyond physical attendance, as fans can now engage with events through a variety of technological channels. As noted by Qi et al. (2024), digital

platforms such as social media, streaming services, and event-specific mobile apps have reshaped how individuals experience and participate in sports tourism.

One of the most significant advancements is the availability of instant live broadcasts, which enable sports fans from around the world to watch events in real-time, regardless of their location. For potential sports tourists, this increased access serves as a powerful marketing tool, enticing viewers to consider traveling for future events (Gaffar et al., 2016). Online ticket purchasing platforms have streamlined the booking process, reducing barriers to attendance and increasing ticket sales. Furthermore, real-time updates on travel, event schedules, and match outcomes are delivered directly to smartphones, enhancing the overall experience for attendees.

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies are also gaining traction in the sports tourism industry. These immersive technologies allow fans to explore sports venues, interact with virtual representations of athletes, and experience events from unique perspectives, even before arriving at the destination (Qi et al., 2024). For example, VR tours of famous stadiums or AR-enhanced event apps can create excitement and provide practical information to prospective visitors. The use of these technologies is particularly beneficial for promoting lesser-known sports destinations, as it enables potential tourists to visualize and plan their trips with greater confidence.

Technology has also facilitated the rise of new types of sports tourism, most notably eSports tourism (Yan & Huan, 2024). As competitive video gaming has grown into a global phenomenon, fans increasingly travel to attend major tournaments and competitions. This emerging segment of sports tourism blends the traditional appeal of live events with the digital world, attracting younger, tech-savvy audiences. Cities like Milan and Rome have recognized this trend and have begun hosting large-scale eSports events, contributing to Italy's evolving sports tourism landscape (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017). The convergence of digital and physical experiences in eSports tourism highlights the dynamic and inclusive nature of modern sports tourism.

Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping the perceptions and decisions of sports tourists (Yan & Huan, 20224). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and

Twitter are filled with user-generated content, including photos, reviews, and travel tips from sports events. This content serves as both a source of inspiration and a practical guide for future tourists. Influencers and content creators further amplify the appeal of sports tourism by sharing their experiences in real-time, often in collaboration with event organizers or tourism boards.

From the perspective of event organizers and destination marketers, data analytics enabled by technology offers valuable insights into visitor behavior and preferences. By analyzing online interactions, ticket sales patterns, and social media engagement, stakeholders can tailor their marketing strategies and event offerings to better meet the needs of sports tourists. Personalization, driven by data analytics, has become a key trend in enhancing the customer experience.

1.7. Background Information on Impact of Sport Tourism

Since the main issue that this dissertation seek to address is the impact of sport tourism as an economic and social developer, this part forms a vital part into understanding the information that already exists in the literature. The economic impact of sports tourism extends far beyond simple revenue generation, encompassing a wide range of tangible and intangible benefits that contribute to regional development and prosperity. According to Gibson (2013), one of the most significant economic advantages of sports tourism is its capacity to stimulate local economies through increased tourism expenditure. When sporting events attract visitors from outside the region, they inject new money into the localeconomy through spending on accommodations, dining, transportation, retail, and entertainment. This influx of tourist dollars not only supports businesses directly associated with the event but also creates a ripple effect throughout the broader supply chain, benefiting a diverse range of sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and retail (Muiruri Njoroge, 2017).

Moreover, sports tourism serves as a catalyst for job creation, providing employment opportunities across various sectors and skill levels. From event organizers and venue staff to hoteliers, restaurateurs, and tour guides, sporting events generate a multitude of temporary and permanent jobs, helping to reduce unemployment rates and improve livelihoods within host communities. These employment opportunities not only offer economic benefits but also contribute to

social inclusion and community development by providing individuals with meaningful work and income.

In addition to revenue generation and job creation, sports tourism often drives investment in infrastructure development, including sports facilities, transportation networks, and accommodation options (Gibson et al., 2005; Muiruri Njoroge et al., 2017). Host cities and regions frequently undertake infrastructure upgrades and expansions to accommodate the needs of sporting events and enhance the visitor experience. These investments not only support the successful staging of the event but also leave a lasting legacy of improved amenities and facilities that benefit residents and tourists alike long after the event has concluded.

To illustrate the economic benefits of sports tourism, we can examine various case studies from around the world that showcase successful examples of hosting sporting events at the regional level. For instance, the Ironman Triathlon series, which features endurance races in locations worldwide, has been credited with revitalizing local economies and promoting tourism in host communities (Miller, 2013). In cities like Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Cairns, Australia, hosting Ironman events has led to substantial increases in visitor spending, hotel occupancy rates, and business revenues, demonstrating the economic potential of endurance and active sports tourism beyond traditional mega-events (Miller, 2013).

Similarly, smaller-scale sporting events such as marathons, cycling races, and golf tournaments have been shown to generate significant economic returns for host regions. For example, the annual Tour de Yorkshire cycling race in England has boosted tourism and generated millions of pounds in economic impact for Yorkshire's local economy, supporting businesses and creating jobs in the region (Ennis & Ennis, 2020). These case studies highlight the diverse economic benefits that sports tourism can bring to regions of all sizes, underscoring its role as a driver of sustainable economic growth and development.

Beyond its economic impact, sports tourism plays a crucial role in shaping sociocultural dynamics within host communities, fostering a sense of identity, belonging, and pride among residents while promoting cultural exchange and intercultural understanding (Herbold et al., 2020). Sporting events serve as powerful platforms for cultural celebration, providing opportunities for communities to showcase their unique heritage, traditions, and values to a global audience. Whether it's through traditional ceremonies, music, dance, or cuisine,

host regions often infuse their cultural identity into the fabric of sporting events, creating memorable experiences that resonate with participants and spectators alike.

Moreover, sporting events have the capacity to foster social cohesion and solidarity within communities by bringing people together across diverse backgrounds, ages, and interests (Meir & Fletcher, 2019). As residents and visitors gather to celebrate athletic achievements and share in the excitement of competition, bonds are formed, friendships are forged, and a sense of collective belonging is strengthened. According to Meir & Fletcher (2019), sporting events often transcend cultural and social barriers, uniting individuals in a common passion for sport and creating opportunities for meaningful interaction and dialogue.

Intercultural exchange is another hallmark of sports tourism, as participants and spectators from different regions and countries come together to share their love of sport and learn from one another (Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). Whether it's through friendly competition on the field, cultural exchanges off the field, or mutual appreciation of sporting traditions, these interactions foster greater understanding, respect, and appreciation for diverse perspectives and experiences. Sporting events serve as catalysts for cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration, breaking down stereotypes and fostering a spirit of global citizenship and cooperation (Meir & Fletcher, 2019). Furthermore, the social and cultural benefits of sports tourism extend beyond the duration of the event itself, leaving a lasting legacy of positive community engagement and well-being. Hosting a successful sporting event can instill a sense of pride and accomplishment among residents, bolstering community spirit and civic pride. Moreover, the infrastructure and amenities developed for sporting events often serve as valuable community assets long after the event has ended, providing opportunities for recreation, fitness, and social interaction that contribute to the overall quality of life for residents.

While hosting sporting events offers numerous economic, social, and cultural benefits, it also presents a range of challenges that must be carefully managed to ensure positive outcomes for host communities. Among the foremost challenges associated with hosting sporting events are the considerable infrastructure costs involved in preparing venues, accommodations, transportation, and other facilities to accommodate participants and spectators (Sterken, 2013). These costs can place

a significant financial burden on host cities and regions, requiring careful budgeting and resource allocation to ensure that investments yield long-term benefits. Environmental concerns represent another critical challenge facing host communities, as sporting events often have significant ecological footprints due to factors such as transportation emissions, waste generation, and habitat disruption (Poczta et al. 2020). Ensuring environmental sustainability requires proactive measures to minimize the environmental impact of events, such as promoting sustainable transportation options, reducing single-use plastics, implementing waste management strategies, and preserving natural habitats and green spaces. Additionally, the results of the study by Sterken (2013), which was based on studying the impact of mega-events confirms that hosting sporting events specifically mega sporting events- can potentially lead to social disruptions within host communities, including traffic congestion, noise pollution, overcrowding, and displacement of residents. These disruptions can strain local resources, infringe upon residents' quality of life, and exacerbate social inequalities (Poczta et al., 2013). Effective planning and coordination are essential to mitigate these challenges, involving comprehensive stakeholder engagement, community consultation, and transparent communication to address concerns, build consensus, and foster community resilience.

Despite these challenges, hosting sporting events also presents valuable opportunities for host communities to showcase their strengths, enhance their reputation, and attract investment and tourism. Amponsah et al. (2018) recommends adopting sustainable management practices and leveraging stakeholder partnerships citing that host cities and regions can maximize the positive impacts of sports tourism while minimizing potential negative consequences. This requires a holistic approach that balances economic development with environmental protection, social equity, and cultural preservation.

Effective planning is essential to optimize the benefits of sporting events while minimizing risks and mitigating potential negative impacts. As per Amponsah et al. (2018), this includes conducting thorough risk assessments, developing contingency plans, and implementing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress and address emerging challenges. By prioritizing sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience, host communities can harness the full

potential of sports tourism to promote long-term prosperity, well-being, and harmony for residents and visitors alike.

As it has been previously discussed, one of the primary motivations for this study is to explore the economic impacts of sports tourism on Italy's regional development. According to Crompton (1995), the economic impact of sports tourism can be expressed through the following equation by:

$$TEI = DTE \times M$$

Where:

- TEI = *Total Economic Impact*
- DTE = *Direct Tourism Expenditure (spending on tickets, accommodations, transportation)*
- M = *Regional Tourism Multiplier*

By applying this equation, policymakers can estimate the total economic benefits derived from sports tourism events. For example, if direct tourism expenditure in a region amounts to USD 50 million and the regional tourism multiplier is 1.8, the total economic impact would be:

$$TEI = 50 \times 1.8 = 90 \text{ million USD}$$

1.8. Perceptions and Resident Engagement in Sports Tourism

The success of sports tourism initiatives often hinges on the perceptions and engagement of local residents, who are among the primary stakeholders in tourism development. According to Gursoy and Kendall (2006), resident support for tourism activities is influenced by their perceived economic, social, and environmental impacts. Engaged and supportive communities are more likely to contribute to the success of sports events, while negative perceptions may lead to resistance and diminished community involvement. This study underscores the importance of understanding and incorporating resident perspectives to foster inclusive and sustainable sports tourism strategies in Italy.

Economic benefits are among the most frequently cited factors shaping residents' perceptions of sports tourism. Positive economic impacts, such as job

creation, increased tourism revenue, and the development of local infrastructure, often bolster community support for sports events (Preuss, 2006). For instance, residents in regions that host large-scale events, such as the Giro d'Italia cycling race, have reported increased business activity and enhanced tourism visibility. However, disparities in the distribution of economic benefits can lead to dissatisfaction, particularly among residents in rural areas who may feel excluded from event-related opportunities (Gibson et al. 2012).

Research by Waitt (2003) highlights that residents' perceptions are often influenced by the scale and frequency of events. While large-scale events generate substantial short-term economic benefits, small-scale, recurring events provide more sustainable and evenly distributed economic gains. The present study aligns with these findings, emphasizing the need for Italy to leverage both types of events to promote regional development and reduce economic disparities.

Beyond economic considerations, sports tourism has significant social and cultural implications. Community pride, cultural exchange, and social cohesion are often cited as positive outcomes of hosting sports events (Bama & Tichaawa, 2015). Residents frequently view sports events as opportunities to showcase their cultural heritage and engage in collective celebrations, fostering a sense of community identity. In Italy, where regional cultural identities are deeply rooted, sports events can serve as platforms for cultural expression and inter-regional collaboration.

However, the social impacts of sports tourism are not universally positive. Studies by Fredline and Faulkner (2000) suggest that disruptions caused by large-scale events, such as traffic congestion, noise pollution, and increased living costs, can lead to negative perceptions among residents. The present study found similar concerns among Italian respondents, particularly in urban areas where event-related disruptions are more pronounced.

Environmental considerations also influence residents' perceptions of sports tourism. Large-scale events often have significant environmental impacts, including waste generation, resource consumption, and carbon emissions (Collins & Flynn, 2008). Residents who prioritize environmental sustainability may view

such events negatively if adequate measures are not taken to mitigate their environmental footprint.

In contrast, smaller, community-focused events tend to have a lower environmental impact and are often perceived more favorably by residents. The findings from this study suggest that Italian sports tourism stakeholders should prioritize sustainable practices, such as waste reduction, renewable energy use, and green infrastructure development, to enhance resident support and promote long-term environmental stewardship.

Engaging residents in the planning and execution of sports tourism initiatives is essential for fostering positive perceptions and long-term support. Research by Gursoy et al. (2002) emphasizes that participatory planning processes not only enhance community satisfaction but also lead to more effective and inclusive tourism strategies. Residents who are actively involved in decision-making processes are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and pride in sports events, which contributes to their overall success.

The present study revealed that resident engagement in sports tourism planning in Italy is limited. Many respondents expressed a desire for greater involvement in decision-making processes, including event selection, resource allocation, and sustainability planning. This finding aligns with previous research by Tichaawa and Swart (2010), who advocate for the establishment of community advisory boards and transparent communication channels to facilitate resident participation.

The thesis also examines resident perceptions of sports tourism's impact using survey data analyzed through Likert scale weighted averages:

$$WA = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i \cdot x_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i}$$

Where:

- WA = Weighted Average
- w_i = Weight of response option i
- x_i = Number of responses for option i

- n = Total number of response options

This formula allows for the aggregation of residents' responses to key survey questions, providing a quantitative measure of community sentiment toward sports tourism. Analyzing these perceptions is crucial for identifying areas where stakeholder engagement can be improved and ensuring that tourism initiatives align with local community interests.

1.9. Economic Impact of Small-Scale vs. Major Sports Events: A Comparative Debate

The debate surrounding the economic impacts of small-scale and major sports events has been a focal point in sports tourism research. Scholars, policymakers, and industry stakeholders have long grappled with the question of which type of event yields more sustainable and equitable economic benefits for host regions. While major sports events, such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics, are often lauded for their ability to attract global attention and generate substantial economic inflows, small-scale sports events have emerged as a more sustainable and inclusive alternative, particularly for rural and suburban regions. This section explores the contrasting economic impacts of these event types, drawing on existing literature and empirical evidence to highlight their respective advantages and challenges.

Major sports events are characterized by their large scale, international audience, and significant infrastructure requirements. Proponents argue that these events serve as powerful economic catalysts, generating billions of dollars in revenue through ticket sales, sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and visitor spending (Preuss, 2006). Additionally, they provide host regions with a unique opportunity to enhance their global visibility and attract future tourism and investment.

Research by Cornelissen et al. (2011) on the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa illustrates the substantial economic impact of major sports events. The tournament generated an estimated USD 3.6 billion in direct and indirect economic activity, with over 300,000 international visitors contributing to the local economy. Similar findings have been reported for other mega-events, such as the 2012

London Olympics, which stimulated significant infrastructure development and job creation.

However, critics argue that the economic benefits of major sports events are often overstated and unevenly distributed. One of the primary concerns is the high cost of event organization and infrastructure development, which frequently exceeds initial projections. For example, the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil faced criticism for its budget overruns, with billions spent on stadiums that later became underutilized "white elephants." Moreover, studies by Baade and Matheson (2004) highlight that the economic gains from mega-events tend to be concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural and less-developed regions with limited benefits.

The temporary nature of employment opportunities and the displacement of local businesses during event periods further compound the challenges associated with major sports events. These criticisms have prompted calls for more transparent cost-benefit analyses and long-term planning to ensure that mega-events deliver meaningful and lasting economic contributions.

In contrast to major events, small-scale sports events are typically local or regional in nature, with lower attendance and infrastructure requirements. Examples include community sports tournaments, amateur competitions, and regional cycling races. While these events may not generate the same level of immediate economic impact as their larger counterparts, they offer distinct advantages in terms of sustainability and inclusivity.

Gibson et al. (2012) argues that small-scale sports events often have a more localized economic impact, benefiting small businesses, hotels, and restaurants in the host region. These events are less resource-intensive and can be hosted more frequently, providing a steady stream of revenue for local economies. Furthermore, they are less likely to result in the environmental degradation and social displacement commonly associated with mega-events.

Stakeholder interviews conducted as part of this study revealed that small-scale events are particularly valuable for rural and suburban regions in Italy, where large-scale events are less feasible. Participants emphasized that these events foster community engagement, enhance regional branding, and provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Additionally, the lower cost of hosting small-scale events makes them a more viable option for regions with limited financial resources.

Research by Duglio and Beltramo (2017) on small-scale sports events in the Italian Alps supports these findings, demonstrating that such events can stimulate tourism and create employment opportunities without the need for extensive infrastructure investments. The study also highlighted the importance of community involvement in planning and executing these events, which contributes to their social and economic success.

The debate over the economic impact of small-scale versus major sports events underscores the need for a balanced and context-specific approach to sports tourism planning. While major events can deliver significant short-term economic gains and enhance global visibility, their high costs and potential for negative social and environmental impacts make them a less sustainable option for many regions. In contrast, small-scale events offer a more sustainable and inclusive alternative, particularly for rural and suburban areas.

For Italy, the findings from this study suggest that a hybrid strategy may be most effective. By hosting a mix of large-scale and small-scale events, the country can leverage the global appeal of major events while ensuring that smaller regions also benefit from sports tourism activities. Policymakers should prioritize investments in multi-purpose infrastructure, foster community involvement, and develop tailored marketing strategies to maximize the economic potential of both event types. The table below provides a summarized comparison between major and small-scale sports events, compiled by the author based on insights from the literature. This comparison is intended to illustrate the distinct characteristics, opportunities, and challenges associated with each type of event.

Table 2:

Summarized comparison between major and small-scale sports events (elaborated by the author from literature review)

Category	Major Sports Events	Small-Scale Sports Events
Economic Impact	High immediate revenue from tickets, sponsorships, and media (Cornelissen, 2010)	Moderate but consistent local spending (Gibson, 2012)
Tourist attraction	Significant international and national visitor influx	Primarily local and regional visitors
Infrastructure requirements	High investments in stadiums, roads, and accommodations	Minimal or use of existing facilities
Employment Opportunities	Temporary jobs for construction and event management	Stable seasonal employment for small businesses
Sustainability	Risk of "white elephant" infrastructure post-event	Higher sustainability through recurring, low-cost events
Community Engagement	Limited due to top-down decision-making (Waite, 2003)	High due to grassroots involvement (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017)
Social Impact	Community pride but potential social displacement	Strong community cohesion and social engagement
Financial viability	Expensive with risk of budget overruns	Cost-effective and easier to organize
Long-term Economic Benefits	Variable, dependent on post-event strategies	More predictable and sustained benefits

Note. Elaborated by the author using findings from the literature review to compare major sports events with small-scale sports events.

1.10. Theoretical Framework: Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, originally proposed by Butler (1980), provides a structured framework for analyzing the development trajectory of tourism destinations. This model is particularly relevant to sports tourism because it captures the evolutionary stages that destinations undergo as they grow, mature, and potentially decline or rejuvenate (Kubickova & Martin, 2020). The model divides the development of tourism destinations into six stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either decline or rejuvenation.

In the context of sports tourism, applying the TALC framework allows for a dynamic analysis of how sports events influence a destination's development and sustainability. Sports tourism destinations, particularly those hosting mega-events, may rapidly move through these stages, with significant impacts on their economic, social, and environmental landscapes. For example, a region initially in the exploration stage might transition to the development or consolidation stage after hosting a series of sports events that attract increased tourist interest and investments. However, without proper planning, these destinations may face stagnation or decline due to underutilized infrastructure, environmental degradation, or diminished tourist interest (Heuwinkel & Venter, 2018).

The framework is important for this study as it provides a theoretical lens through which to examine the long-term impacts of sports tourism on regional development in Italy. By situating sports tourism activities within the stages of the TALC model, this research can identify patterns and trends that inform sustainable tourism practices. For example, understanding which factors contribute to stagnation or decline can help policymakers and stakeholders implement proactive measures to sustain growth and avoid common pitfalls associated with sports tourism development.

Moreover, the TALC framework emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and strategic planning at each stage of destination development. This aligns with the study's focus on the perspectives of residents, policymakers, and business owners, providing a holistic understanding of how sports tourism affects

regional economies. By integrating the TALC model, this research not only contributes to academic discourse but also offers practical insights for developing resilient and adaptive sports tourism strategies that promote long-term growth and community well-being.

In their application of the TALC model to sports tourism in Germany, Heuwinkel and Venter (2018) demonstrated how local governments and tourism agencies can successfully navigate the life cycle stages by adopting targeted marketing campaigns, investing in multi-purpose sports infrastructure, and fostering community engagement. These findings underscore the relevance of the TALC framework for guiding sports tourism development in Italy, where regional disparities and evolving tourism trends present both opportunities and challenges.

Here are the stages of the TALC Model Applied to Sports Tourism as applied by Heuwinkel & Venter in their 2018 German case study of sport tourism:

1.10.1. Exploration Stage

The Exploration Stage represents the earliest phase in the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model, a conceptual framework originally developed by Butler (1980) to explain the temporal evolution of tourist destinations. When applied to sports tourism, as demonstrated in the 2018 case study by Heuwinkel and Venter in Germany, this stage is characterized by the nascent development of the destination as a site for sport-related travel and limited engagement with mass tourism. At this point, the destination is largely undiscovered by the broader tourism market and attracts only a small number of adventurous or highly motivated tourists.

In this phase, the draw to the destination is often based on its natural environment, unique sporting offerings, or cultural authenticity. These early tourists, sometimes referred to as *allocentric* travelers (Plog, 2001), are typically more independent, adventurous, and interested in engaging with uncommercialized sports experiences. For example, they may seek remote locations for rock climbing, mountain biking, paragliding, or alpine skiing—activities which often depend on distinctive topographical or climatic features. These specialized tourists often rely on informal networks or niche communities

for information rather than mainstream promotional materials, and they value the lack of crowding, commercialization, or large-scale infrastructure (Higham & Hinch, 2009).

An illustrative example of this stage can be seen in certain high-altitude regions of the Italian Alps or the Black Forest in Germany, where initial clusters of ski mountaineers, trail runners, or orienteering enthusiasts began visiting the area long before it gained national or international recognition. These early visitors contribute minimally to the local economy due to the absence of organized tourism services, and most accommodations, food, and transportation options remain locally managed and small-scale. Infrastructure development at this point is sparse and rudimentary, reflecting the low level of external investment and government involvement (Getz, 1998).

Importantly, the Exploration Stage is a period of both opportunity and vulnerability. While the authenticity of the destination is preserved, and its environment remains largely undisturbed, the lack of planning or strategic development may lead to missed opportunities for sustainable growth. However, this stage is also when key stakeholders—local businesses, municipal planners, and sport organizations—may begin to recognize the potential for sports tourism development. According to Heuwinkel and Venter (2018), it is during this stage that visionary entrepreneurs or local sports clubs often play a catalytic role in initiating organized events or building the first informal sport tourism networks.

Another significant characteristic of the Exploration Stage is the absence of coordinated marketing efforts. Unlike in later stages, there is no formal branding or positioning of the destination as a sports tourism hotspot. Instead, the destination's reputation grows organically, often through word-of-mouth, social media sharing, and testimonials from the initial wave of visitors (Kaplanidou, 2007). These dynamics often set the tone for the type of tourism the destination may attract in subsequent stages, making early management decisions critical to the sustainable trajectory of the region.

1.10.2. Involvement Stage

The **Involvement Stage** in the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model represents a pivotal phase in the evolution of a sports tourism destination. At this juncture, the gradual increase in tourist arrivals—sparked by the unique sporting

opportunities offered by the destination—begins to generate greater awareness among local stakeholders, including community members, small business owners, municipal authorities, and regional development agencies. As noted by Butler (1980), this stage is marked by the initial institutional and infrastructural responses to the growing influx of visitors. In the context of sports tourism, these responses are tailored to accommodate the specific preferences, needs, and behaviors of sports tourists.

During this stage, the informal and decentralized activities characteristic of the exploration phase begins to give way to more structured forms of development. Local entrepreneurs begin to capitalize on tourism-related business opportunities by establishing guesthouses, cafes, equipment rental shops, guided tour services, and sport-specific amenities. There is a noticeable shift toward the commodification of the sporting experience, as communities increasingly seek to monetize their natural and cultural assets by aligning them with visitor expectations (Getz, 2008). The role of public institutions also becomes more prominent during this stage. Local and regional governments often begin sponsoring and co-organizing sporting events—ranging from community-based competitions to regionally promoted tournaments—to draw greater numbers of participants and spectators.

For instance, in regions such as Italy's Amalfi Coast, where traditional tourism based on natural beauty and cultural heritage already has a strong foothold, local authorities have increasingly invested in integrating sports tourism into their broader tourism portfolio. Activities such as organized hiking expeditions along the Path of the Gods, sailing regattas, and coastal cycling events are actively promoted to diversify the visitor experience and extend the tourist season beyond the summer months (Randelli et al., 2014). The introduction of sport-oriented events and marketing strategies in such destinations signals a clear shift toward the involvement of institutional actors and the formalization of sports tourism within regional tourism strategies.

One of the defining features of the Involvement Stage is the emergence of public-private partnerships in the planning and execution of sport tourism activities. Community stakeholders, sports associations, and government entities often collaborate to enhance the destination's appeal and logistical capacity. This includes investments in sport-specific infrastructure such as stadiums, marinas, hiking trails, cycling routes, or training centers. The development of these amenities

contributes to both the improvement of local quality of life and the marketability of the destination as a legitimate hub for sports tourism (Hall, 1992).

However, the involvement stage is also characterized by increasing pressures on infrastructure, natural resources, and local governance structures. As visitation grows, so too does the complexity of managing tourist flows, environmental sustainability, and community expectations. According to Heuwinkel and Venter (2018), early misalignments between tourism development and community capacity at this stage can lead to longer-term challenges in subsequent phases, such as congestion, environmental degradation, and social discontent. Therefore, strategic planning during the involvement stage is critical to ensuring that the growth of sports tourism is both inclusive and sustainable.

Marketing also becomes more formalized in this phase. The destination begins to receive targeted exposure through digital campaigns, travel media, and sport-specific publications. Word-of-mouth remains influential, but it is now supplemented by more coordinated promotional efforts, such as brochures, destination websites, and partnerships with sports federations or tourism boards (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). These efforts serve not only to attract more tourists but also to solidify the destination's identity as a site for recurring sports tourism experiences.

1.10.3. Development Stage

The **Development Stage** of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) represents a pivotal phase in which the sports tourism destination undergoes significant transformation and institutionalization. Characterized by rapid growth and external investment, this stage typically follows the groundwork laid during the involvement stage, where local interest and modest infrastructure improvements begin to yield measurable economic returns. In the development phase, sports tourism becomes a formalized and strategic sector within the regional tourism economy, often accompanied by a surge in visitor numbers, expansion of facilities, and increased media exposure (Butler, 1980; Getz, 2008).

In the context of sports tourism, the development stage is often marked by a deliberate shift from regional or local sporting events to large-scale, national or

international competitions that have the capacity to draw broad audiences. Host destinations may actively bid to host marquee events such as the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France, or World Athletics Championships, in order to elevate their global profile and attract mass tourism. These events not only bring in thousands of athletes and spectators but also generate substantial media coverage that helps position the destination on the international tourism map (Hall, 1992; Higham & Hinch, 2009).

In many European destinations, particularly those in Italy, France, and Spain, this stage has been instrumental in diversifying tourism portfolios. For instance, regions such as Trentino-Alto Adige have leveraged their natural alpine geography and infrastructure investments to host international cycling and winter sport events, aligning their offerings with broader lifestyle and wellness trends. As the demand for wellness and active lifestyle tourism increases globally, many regions strategically blend sport tourism with wellness packages—including spa experiences, yoga retreats, and nature excursions—to appeal to a wider, health-conscious demographic (Perić, Vitezić, & Đurkin, 2020).

The economic impact of this stage is often substantial. Tourism revenue surges as both participation and spectating audiences increase. Local employment opportunities proliferate in sectors such as hospitality, retail, event management, and transportation. Ancillary industries—including sports equipment manufacturing, logistics, media production, and training facilities—also benefit from the multiplier effects of tourism-related spending (Daniels & Norman, 2003). Additionally, governments often invest heavily in upgrading and expanding infrastructure such as roads, airports, stadiums, accommodation facilities, and digital networks to accommodate the increased flow of visitors and meet international standards.

However, the development stage is not without its complexities and risks. As Heuwinkel and Venter (2018) observe in their German case study, the influx of tourists during peak event seasons can lead to overburdened infrastructure, traffic congestion, and strain on local resources. Furthermore, the scale of development and commercialization may threaten the cultural authenticity and environmental integrity of the destination, especially if planning is short-term and profit-driven rather than guided by sustainability principles.

The need for sustainability and strategic management becomes more pronounced at this stage. Concerns such as environmental degradation, noise pollution, crowd control, and over-commercialization begin to surface, necessitating integrated management practices that balance economic growth with ecological and social responsibility (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Stakeholders are increasingly required to implement policies for sustainable event planning, responsible land use, carbon offsetting, and community inclusion. Failure to address these challenges may lead to destination fatigue or negative public perception, potentially triggering stagnation or decline in later stages of the TALC model.

To mitigate these issues, many destinations adopt smart tourism technologies and data-driven planning frameworks to manage visitor flows, optimize resource use, and improve the overall visitor experience. Examples include digital ticketing systems, real-time crowd monitoring, mobile apps for wayfinding, and participatory governance models that include local residents in tourism planning (Gretzel et al., 2015).

1.10.4. Consolidation Stage

The **Consolidation Stage** within the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model marks the transition from rapid expansion to a more stable and mature phase of destination development. In this stage, sports tourism becomes a structural pillar of the regional economy and is deeply embedded in the planning, branding, and socioeconomic fabric of the destination (Butler, 1980). While growth in visitor numbers continues, it occurs at a slower and more controlled pace compared to the earlier Development Stage, signaling a plateau in tourism expansion. This phase necessitates deliberate and sustainable management practices aimed at preserving the quality of both the tourist experience and the destination's socio-environmental integrity.

In the context of sports tourism, consolidation is characterized by a well-established calendar of events, professionalized service provision, and a high level of public and private sector coordination. Destinations at this stage typically host recurring sports tournaments and have developed comprehensive infrastructure—such as multipurpose stadiums, elite training centers, integrated transport

networks, and quality hospitality services—that can support both amateur and professional sport-related travel. Moreover, they often benefit from strong brand recognition as sports tourism hubs, attracting a consistent stream of both participants and spectators.

A representative example of this phase is Tuscany, Italy, a region that has effectively consolidated its reputation as a prime destination for cycling, golf, and endurance sports tourism. The region offers curated cycling routes through Chianti and the Val d'Orcia, well-maintained golf resorts, and scenic road races that are integrated with cultural and gastronomic experiences (Randelli et al., 2014). Tuscany's tourism model exemplifies how a destination can successfully position itself as both a leisure and sport-oriented region, drawing on its rich landscape, climate, and heritage to create a multidimensional tourism offering. At this stage, sports tourism contributes significantly to regional GDP and employment, offering stable economic returns across multiple sectors, including accommodation, retail, and transportation (Gibson et al., 2012).

However, the consolidation of sports tourism also brings with it complex managerial challenges. With the destination now operating at near or full capacity during peak seasons, issues such as environmental degradation, congestion, and resident-tourist tensions may become more pronounced (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). For example, in popular Tuscan cycling towns like Lucca and Siena, increased traffic during event periods can disrupt local mobility, and intensive use of rural trails may accelerate ecological wear and tear. As such, destination managers must navigate the delicate balance between economic optimization and ecological stewardship, often through the implementation of policies such as visitor caps, zoning regulations, and environmental monitoring systems.

In this stage, tourism governance structures become increasingly institutionalized. Dedicated tourism management organizations (DMOs), sport federations, and municipal authorities coordinate marketing, infrastructure maintenance, and visitor services. Strategies such as event rotation, seasonal diversification, and product differentiation are employed to reduce strain on specific sites and to sustain interest in the destination year-round (Getz, 2008; Hall, 2006). This helps to spread the economic benefits more evenly and minimize the risks associated with over-reliance on a narrow set of tourism offerings.

Additionally, innovation plays a key role in sustaining momentum at this mature phase. Destinations often invest in digital tourism tools, such as GPS-enabled cycling apps, virtual tours, and online booking systems, to enhance visitor engagement while maintaining efficiency. Educational and training programs may also be introduced to ensure a skilled workforce in hospitality and event management, thereby improving service quality and reinforcing the region's competitive advantage (Gretzel et al., 2015).

Importantly, stakeholder inclusion and community participation become vital during this stage. Local residents must be involved in decision-making processes to foster support and ensure that tourism development aligns with community values and needs (Dredge, 2006). Without such participatory governance, sports tourism may face resistance or diminishing support from host communities, potentially threatening the long-term viability of the destination.

1.10.4. Stagnation Stage

The **Stagnation Stage** of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) represents a critical inflection point in the trajectory of a sports tourism destination. At this stage, the destination typically reaches or surpasses its carrying capacity—both ecologically and infrastructurally—and experiences a decline in visitor growth, diminished competitiveness, and erosion of tourism value propositions (Butler, 1980). The sports tourism sector, once a dynamic force in the local economy, begins to show signs of fatigue, often as a result of overdevelopment, saturation, environmental stress, or strategic complacency.

In the context of sports tourism, stagnation manifests when a destination fails to renew or diversify its offerings. Events may become repetitive or lose prestige, and the uniqueness or authenticity that once attracted sports tourists may be diluted by over-commercialization and crowding. Visitor satisfaction may decline, and with it, the positive word-of-mouth and repeat visitation that sustained growth in previous stages (Gibson et al., 2012). Moreover, sports tourists—who tend to value novelty, quality facilities, and immersive experiences—may shift their interest to emerging destinations that offer fresher, more innovative, or less congested environments (Higham & Hinch, 2009).

Environmental degradation and infrastructural strain become especially problematic during this stage. Heavy usage of natural trails, water bodies, stadiums, and urban spaces without adequate maintenance or ecological safeguards can lead to visible wear and tear. For instance, the ecological impact of high-volume cycling events on rural roads and protected landscapes, if unregulated, can contribute to erosion, habitat disruption, and community pushback (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). If local authorities fail to mitigate these issues through reinvestment and sustainable planning, the destination's image may suffer, further accelerating the stagnation process.

A key challenge in this phase is economic overdependence on a single tourism model, often centered on season-specific sports events. As visitation becomes increasingly seasonal or event-dependent, many destinations experience economic volatility, especially outside the peak tourism window. This is particularly evident in smaller Italian cities and regions that once hosted stages of major cycling events—such as the Giro d'Italia or one-off triathlon championships—but lack a sustained calendar of events or diversified tourism offerings to maintain year-round engagement. Once the global spotlight fades, these destinations often struggle to attract consistent visitation or to convert event tourism into long-term destination loyalty (Perić et al., 2021).

In the absence of innovation, destinations may resort to mass marketing and discounting strategies to maintain tourist numbers, thereby attracting price-sensitive tourists who may not contribute significantly to the local economy. This creates a race-to-the-bottom effect, where declining profit margins lead to underinvestment in quality services, event innovation, or environmental protection, further exacerbating stagnation (Getz, 2008). The decline in profitability may also disincentivize local stakeholder participation and weaken community support for sports tourism initiatives.

To address the challenges of the stagnation stage, destination managers must engage in strategic reinvention and reorientation. This may involve the integration of sustainable tourism principles, diversification of event types, introduction of multi-sport or lifestyle-oriented tourism packages, or even repositioning the destination toward niche or heritage sports tourism markets. For example, instead of continuing to rely solely on mass spectator events, a stagnating destination might

pivot to eco-sports tourism, youth sports academies, or inclusive adaptive sports programming to revitalize interest and community engagement (Pike, 2015).

1.10.5. Rejuvenation or Decline Stage.

The final stage of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, as proposed by Butler (1980), represents a critical juncture wherein a destination's future hinges on its ability to adapt to evolving market dynamics, sociocultural trends, and internal challenges. In the context of sports tourism, this stage offers two divergent pathways: rejuvenation, marked by strategic renewal and innovation, or decline, characterized by deteriorating infrastructure, waning tourist interest, and economic downturn. The trajectory a destination follows depends heavily on its institutional capacity, stakeholder collaboration, financial investment, and the flexibility of its tourism model.

Pathway 1: Rejuvenation

Rejuvenation is a proactive response to stagnation. It involves reimagining and reinvesting in the destination's tourism offerings to align with contemporary trends, technological advances, and shifting visitor preferences. In the realm of sports tourism, rejuvenation may manifest through:

- Infrastructure modernization (e.g., retrofitting aging stadiums with smart technologies or eco-friendly materials);
- Diversification of activities, such as incorporating off-season sports (e.g., indoor climbing, snowshoeing, or wellness triathlons) or emerging sports (e.g., e-sports, parkour, or paddle tennis);
- The development of integrated wellness-sports packages, combining athletic activities with spa treatments, nutrition programs, or mindfulness retreats (Perić, Vitezić, & Đurkin, 2020);
- Hosting multi-disciplinary events that appeal to a broader demographic, such as combining music, culture, and sports in destination festivals;
- Leveraging digital platforms for virtual events, e-ticketing, personalized itineraries, and gamified tourism experiences (Gretzel et al., 2015).

Rejuvenation is best exemplified by destinations that, after a period of stagnation or decline, have successfully repositioned themselves. For instance,

Cortina d'Ampezzo in Italy, after experiencing a lull in international visibility post-Winter Olympics, has reinvested in eco-sporting facilities and secured the right to co-host the 2026 Winter Games, thus reasserting its global relevance (IOC, 2023). Similarly, Livigno, once facing plateauing growth, has repositioned itself as a year-round, high-altitude training center for elite athletes while promoting sustainable mountain tourism, thereby appealing to both performance tourists and ecologically conscious travelers.

A key element of rejuvenation is strategic destination branding, where marketing narratives are refreshed to emphasize innovation, sustainability, and authenticity. Collaborative planning among stakeholders—including tourism boards, local businesses, sport federations, and community groups—becomes essential to ensure cohesive and inclusive transformation (Dredge, 2006).

Pathway 2: Decline

Conversely, if a destination fails to address the challenges posed by stagnation—such as environmental degradation, outdated facilities, or loss of visitor interest—it risks entering a phase of irreversible decline. This trajectory is often marked by:

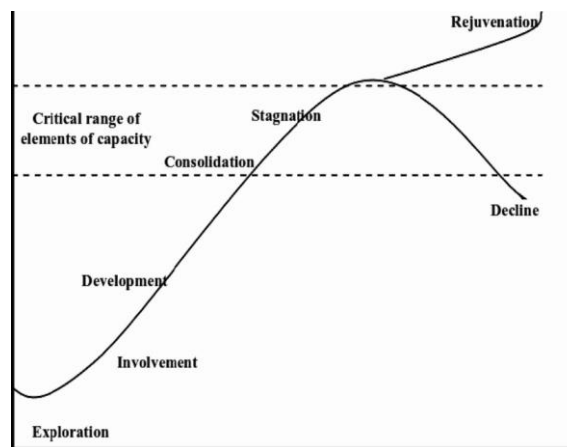
- Diminishing tourist arrivals and revenues;
- Underutilized or abandoned infrastructure, such as empty stadiums or decaying trails (Perić et al., 2021);
- Loss of employment and business closures in tourism-dependent sectors;
- Negative destination image, often fueled by poor visitor experiences or media coverage of mismanagement.

In sports tourism, such decline is particularly severe for event-centric destinations that have failed to transition from one-off hosting to long-term legacy planning. Many small and medium-sized cities in Europe and beyond have hosted legs of high-profile races like the Giro d'Italia or the UCI Road World Championships only to experience a sharp decline in tourist activity once the event has concluded, with little to show in terms of lasting infrastructure or community engagement (Hall, 1992). Without follow-up programming or efforts to transform event attention into sustained visitation, these destinations may struggle to remain viable in an increasingly competitive global tourism landscape.

The absence of resilience strategies, such as diversification into alternative forms of tourism or investment in human capital, often accelerates the downward spiral. Moreover, environmental neglect, loss of community support, and rigid bureaucratic structures can act as systemic barriers to innovation and reinvention (Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

The graph below visually represents the application of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model to sports tourism. The model, adapted from Butler (1980), delineates six distinct stages of development: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either rejuvenation or decline. Each stage highlights the dynamic nature of a sports tourism destination's evolution:

*Figure 2:
A graph showing the six stages of TALC*



Source: Thomas Jones (2012): https://www.researchgate.net/figure/TALC-model-showing-six-stages-of-development_fig1_329540541

1. **Exploration Stage:** Minimal tourism activity as a few visitors explores niche sports events or activities, often in remote or less-known regions.
2. **Involvement Stage:** Increasing visitor numbers prompt local investment in infrastructure, services, and event promotion.
3. **Development Stage:** Rapid growth occurs as the destination gains popularity, hosts large-scale events, and attracts international attention.

4. **Consolidation Stage:** Visitor numbers stabilize, and sports tourism becomes a significant contributor to the regional economy.
5. **Stagnation Stage:** Growth slows, and the destination faces challenges such as over-tourism, environmental degradation, or reduced novelty.
6. **Rejuvenation or Decline Stage:** Depending on local efforts to innovate and adapt, the destination either revitalizes its appeal or experiences a decline in tourism activity.

To provide a more robust analysis of sports tourism development in Italy, this thesis integrates a mathematical approach based on the **Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)** model proposed by Butler (1980). Given the S-shaped growth trajectory inherent in the TALC framework, the logistic growth function is particularly well-suited to model the progression of tourism destinations through the stages of exploration, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either decline or rejuvenation. The logistic growth function is expressed as:

$$P(t) = \frac{K}{1 + \frac{K - P_0}{P_0} e^{-rt}}$$

Where:

- $P(t)$ = Number of tourists or economic activity at time t
- K = Carrying capacity (maximum sustainable number of tourists)
- P_0 = Initial number of tourists at the exploration stage
- r = Growth rate of tourism
- t = Time (in years)
- e = Euler's number (approximately 2.718)

In a study by Widianingsih et al. (2023), the mathematical application of the TALC model is illustrated by examining a hypothetical sports tourism destination in Italy. Initially, the region attracts 50,000 tourists annually. Following investments in sports infrastructure and successful event hosting, the destination's carrying capacity is projected to be 500,000 tourists per year. Assuming a growth rate of 0.3 (30% per year), the logistic growth function can estimate the expected number of tourists at various time intervals (Widianingsih et al., 2023).

Example Calculation: Tourist Growth After 5 Years

$$P(5) = \frac{500,000}{1 + \frac{500,000 - 50,000}{50,000} e^{-0.3 \times 5}}$$

First, compute intermediate values:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{500,000 - 50,000}{50,000} &= 9 \\ e^{-1.5} &\approx 0.223 \\ 9 \times 0.223 &= 2.007 \end{aligned}$$

Now calculate:

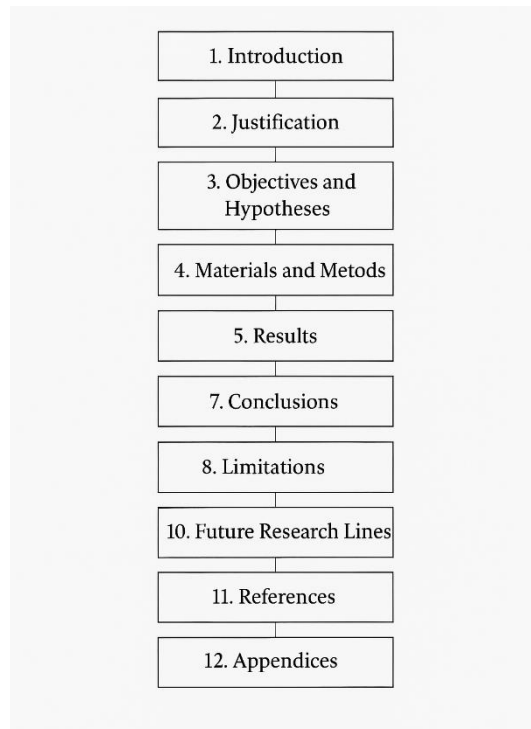
$$P(5) = \frac{500,000}{1 + 2.007} \approx \frac{500,000}{3.007} \approx 166,270$$

From the study by Widianingsih et al. (2023), this implies that, after five years, the number of tourists is projected to reach approximately 166,270. This growth trajectory indicates that the destination progresses from the exploration to the development and consolidation stages. The eventual carrying capacity constraint suggests that growth will slow over time, underscoring the importance of strategic planning to maintain sustainable tourism levels and avoid stagnation or decline.

1.11. Thesis Structure

The thesis is organized into twelve chapters to provide a comprehensive exploration of the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. Each chapter is designed to contribute to the overall coherence of the research and systematically address the objectives and hypotheses.

Figure 3:
Thesis structure summary



Chapter 1: Introduction: This chapter has provided an overview of the research topic, presenting the background, significance, and scope of the study. It has introduced the central research problem, objectives, and hypotheses, setting the foundation for subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Justification: This chapter explains the relevance of the study, highlighting the gaps in current literature and the need for research in this area. It discusses the potential contributions of the study to academic knowledge, policymaking, and practical applications in sports tourism.

Chapter 3: Objectives: The objectives chapter outlines the general and specific aims of the study. It establishes the research focus, aligning with the hypotheses and providing direction for the methodologies employed.

Chapter 4: Materials and Methods: This chapter details the research design and methodology. It includes descriptions of the systematic literature review,

surveys, interviews, and scenario-based analysis. Data collection techniques, analysis methods, and ethical considerations are also elaborated upon.

Chapter 5: Results: This chapter presents the findings from the study, including quantitative data from surveys and qualitative insights from interviews and scenario-based analysis. It highlights trends, patterns, and key variations relevant to the research objectives.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Results: The discussion chapter interprets the findings in the context of the research hypotheses and existing literature. It explores the implications of the results, addresses research questions, and identifies potential strategies to maximize the benefits of sports tourism.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: This chapter summarizes the study's key findings and contributions. It reflects on the research objectives and hypotheses, offering a synthesis of the study's overarching insights.

Chapter 8: Limitations: The limitations chapter acknowledges constraints encountered during the research process, including methodological, contextual, or data-related issues. These limitations provide a balanced perspective on the study's findings and interpretations.

Chapter 9: Applications: This chapter explores the practical applications of the research findings, focusing on policy recommendations, strategies for regional development, and stakeholder engagement.

Chapter 10: Future Research Line: Suggestions for future research are discussed in this chapter, emphasizing areas where additional studies could enhance understanding or address unresolved questions in sports tourism and its socioeconomic impacts.

Chapter 11: References: A comprehensive list of all sources cited in the thesis is included in this chapter, following a standardized APA citation style.

Chapter 12: Appendices: Supplementary materials, such as survey instruments, interview guides, data tables, and additional case study details, are included in this chapter for reference and transparency.

II. JUSTIFICATION

CHAPTER II: JUSTIFICATION

2.1. Research Context and Problem Statement

The rapid growth of sports tourism, as already discussed in the previous chapter, has prompted significant interest among researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders (Weed, 2006). As one of the fastest-growing sectors within the tourism industry, sports tourism encompasses a wide range of activities, including travel for attending live sports events, participating in amateur competitions, and visiting sports-related attractions. From the previous chapter, we deduce that; despite the growing importance of sports tourism, the sector's complexity has posed challenges to achieving a comprehensive understanding of its impacts on host destinations.

One of the critical research gaps identified by Lohana et al. (2023) is the fragmented and often narrow approach to analyzing the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. Many existing studies focus predominantly on economic metrics, such as revenue generation, job creation, and tourist expenditure, without adequately considering the broader social and cultural implications. This economic-centric approach neglects key dimensions, such as community engagement, cultural exchange, and social cohesion, which are essential for assessing the true value of sports tourism.

Another major gap is the limited geographical focus of many studies. Much of the existing literature centers on high-profile mega-events in developed countries, such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics, with relatively little attention given to small-scale events or sports tourism in developing regions. This geographical bias restricts the generalizability of findings and overlooks valuable insights that could be gleaned from diverse contexts. The dynamics of sports tourism in rural or economically underdeveloped regions, for example, may differ significantly from those in urban areas with well-established tourism infrastructure. As Lohana et al. (2023) point out, a more inclusive and geographically diverse approach is essential for developing comprehensive strategies that address the unique needs and opportunities of different regions.

Moreover, the lack of systematic reviews in the field of sports tourism presents a significant challenge to advancing scholarly understanding. Systematic reviews are crucial for synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying research trends, and highlighting gaps that warrant further investigation. The absence of such reviews has led to a fragmented body of literature, making it difficult for researchers and policymakers to access comprehensive insights and best practices.

This research aims to address these gaps by providing a holistic analysis of the socioeconomic consequences of sports tourism, with a specific focus on its dual impact—economic and social—on host destinations. By employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to capture the full spectrum of sports tourism's effects, from measurable economic outcomes to the lived experiences of community members and stakeholders.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of examining both large-scale and small-scale sports events, recognizing that each type of event presents unique opportunities and challenges. Large-scale events may offer significant economic benefits and global visibility but often come with high costs and social disruptions. Conversely, small-scale events, while less resource-intensive, can foster community engagement and provide localized economic boosts. By analyzing both types of events, the research offers a more nuanced understanding of how sports tourism can be leveraged to promote sustainable and inclusive regional development.

Finally, the research addresses the need for a more geographically inclusive approach by focusing on Italy as a case study. Italy's diverse regional landscape, with its mix of urban centers, rural areas, and historical sports traditions, provides an ideal context for exploring the complexities of sports tourism. The findings from this study are expected to offer valuable insights not only for Italy but also for other regions seeking to harness the potential of sports tourism for socioeconomic growth.

2.2. Why Italy Was Chosen for This Research

Italy serves as an ideal context for studying the economic impact of sports tourism and regional development due to its unique combination of cultural, historical, geographical, and sporting significance. Several factors make Italy particularly relevant for this type of research, both in terms of its sports tourism offerings and its potential for regional economic growth. Italy has a long and rich tradition of sports, both in terms of hosting and participating in international sporting events (Mazza, 2021). Football (soccer), for instance, is deeply ingrained in the national culture, with clubs like Juventus, Internazionale Milan, AC Milan and AS Roma having strong international followings. Italy's success in hosting major events such as the FIFA World Cup in 1990, the Winter Olympics in 2006 (Turin), and the upcoming Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics in 2026 underscores its importance as a major player in the global sports tourism landscape (Mazza, 2021).

In addition to these large-scale events, Italy hosts an array of international competitions such as the Giro d'Italia (a prestigious cycling race), the Italian Grand Prix (Formula 1), the tennis tournaments like the Italian Open the recent golf Ryder Cup held in Rome. According to Romiti (2020), these events not only attract global audiences but also contribute significantly to the country's economy through increased tourism expenditure, job creation, and infrastructural development. By focusing on Italy, this research explores how sports tourism, especially through the hosting of mega-events and smaller regional events, contributes to local and national economic development. Italy's diverse portfolio of international sporting events makes it a valuable case for examining how different scales of events influence economic outcomes.

Italy's varied geography—from the Alps in the north to the Mediterranean coasts in the south—offers a wide range of sports tourism opportunities (Manrai et al., 2017). This geographical diversity allows for the exploration of different forms of sports tourism, each contributing uniquely to regional economies. For example:

- Mountain sports tourism in the Alps and Dolomites, including skiing, snowboarding, and mountain biking, attracts tourists year-round, generating significant revenue for local businesses and fostering regional economic development in northern Italy.

- Coastal and water-based sports tourism thrives in the coastal regions, particularly in areas like Amalfi, Cinque Terre, and Sardinia, where activities such as sailing, diving, and beach sports are popular. This draws not only sports enthusiasts but also cultural tourists, combining sports tourism with Italy's broader appeal as a leisure destination.
- Cycling tourism has become increasingly popular in regions like Tuscany and Veneto, where the scenic landscapes and well-developed cycling routes offer an ideal environment for endurance sports. Events like the Strade Bianche and L'Eroica attract international participants and provide an opportunity to analyze the economic impacts of smaller, more niche sports tourism markets.

According to Mazza (2022), Italy's natural diversity thus serves as a living laboratory for studying how different types of sports tourism interact with regional economies, infrastructure, and local communities. The varied sports tourism activities also allow the research to consider how distinct geographical features can be leveraged for economic development through tailored tourism strategies.

One of Italy's most compelling assets is its rich cultural heritage, which adds a significant layer to the sports tourism experience. Unlike other countries that may focus primarily on the sporting event itself, Italy offers a fusion of sports and culture, where tourists are often drawn not just by the events but by the historical and cultural significance of the host cities and regions. For example, tourists attending the Rome Marathon or Milan's football matches often extend their stays to explore the ancient ruins of Rome, the artistic heritage of Florence, or the fashion capital of Milan. This combination of sports and culture amplifies the economic impact by encouraging longer stays, higher spending, and broader regional development. Additionally, the country's UNESCO World Heritage sites and historical landmarks provide a unique backdrop for sporting events, creating a distinctive sports tourism experience that is hard to replicate elsewhere. By using Italy as the case study, this research can analyze how the intersection of cultural tourism and sports tourism enhances the economic benefits for host regions, promoting a more sustainable and diversified tourism economy.

Figure 4 represents a map of Italy. The map illustrates Italy's varied geographical landscape, showcasing key regions known for their distinct

attractions, such as the mountainous areas in the north, the coastal regions in the south, and the central regions rich in historical landmarks. This regional diversity is crucial for understanding the varied sports tourism offerings across the country, as each area contributes uniquely to Italy's overall appeal as a sports tourism destination.

*Figure 4:
Geographical Map of Italy Highlighting Regional
Diversity Relevant to Sports Tourism*



Source: https://www.cittacapitali.it/italia-da-vedere/cartina-italiana/cartina-geografica-italia.html#google_vignette

From an economic perspective, Italy presents a valuable case for exploring the economic impact of sports tourism at both the national and regional levels. According to a study by Rossini et al. (2024), sports tourism has been recognized as a critical component of Italy's tourism strategy, particularly as the country seeks to diversify its tourism offerings and enhance regional economies. National policies promoting tourism development, such as the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (Piano Strategico del Turismo), emphasize the importance of sports tourism as a means to stimulate economic growth, especially in regions that may not traditionally rely on tourism (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017). By focusing on Italy, this

research will evaluate how government policies, regional strategies, and stakeholder engagement contribute to the successful implementation of sports tourism initiatives. The case of Italy offers important lessons on how to balance the economic opportunities provided by sports tourism with the need to preserve cultural and natural heritage, making it an exemplary model for studying the sustainable development of sports tourism. From what has been described so far, it is clear that sports tourism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that this study aims to explore in order to better understand the relationship between sports tourism and regional development.

2.3. The Need for Research

The literature on sports tourism has evolved substantially over the past few decades, yet it remains fragmented and inconsistent in several areas. One significant gap is the absence of comprehensive studies that integrate findings from multiple sources to provide a holistic understanding of the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. While some research focuses on individual events or regions, these isolated studies often fail to capture broader trends and long-term implications across diverse destinations (Gibson, 1998). The reliance on fragmented case studies limits the generalizability of findings and hinders the development of cohesive strategies for maximizing the benefits of sports tourism.

To address this gap, the current study adopts a comprehensive research methodology that combines systematic literature review (SLR), quantitative surveys, and qualitative interviews to ensure a well-rounded analysis. The SLR synthesizes findings from existing studies, offering a consolidated understanding of trends, theoretical frameworks, and key knowledge gaps. According to Bazzanella et al. (2023), the limited regional focus of existing literature—often centered on established sports tourism hubs in North America, Europe, and parts of Asia—further restricts our understanding of how sports tourism operates in diverse socioeconomic contexts, particularly in less-explored regions. The inclusion of survey and interview data in this research allows for context-specific insights, particularly within the Italian landscape, thereby addressing the lack of representation in the existing body of knowledge.

Quantitative surveys complement the literature review by capturing residents' perceptions of the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. This data provides measurable insights into the effects of sports tourism on local economies, infrastructure, and social cohesion. The survey approach addresses a key criticism in the literature, where qualitative assessments often lack statistical rigor and fail to establish patterns that can be generalized across different regions. By employing structured survey instruments, this study offers a more standardized tool for assessing the impacts of sports tourism, contributing to the development of reliable and replicable research methodologies.

Moreover, qualitative interviews with stakeholders, including policymakers, business owners, and community leaders, provide valuable depth and context to the research findings. Interviews are instrumental in capturing nuanced perspectives that are often overlooked in quantitative assessments, such as community pride, challenges in resource allocation, and concerns about sustainability. According to Bazzanella et al. (2023), many existing studies over-rely on case-specific data without exploring broader trends or contextual factors that influence the success of sports tourism initiatives. By incorporating interviews, this research bridges that gap and highlights the lived experiences of key stakeholders, offering a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of sports tourism's role in regional development.

Finally, the use of scenario-based analysis further strengthens the research framework by examining the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa as a case study. This approach allows for comparative insights that inform sports tourism strategies in Italy. While much of the existing literature focuses on short-term impacts, scenario-based analysis provides a platform for evaluating long-term socioeconomic outcomes, drawing lessons from other contexts that can be adapted to different regions.

Given the increasing global reach of sports tourism, there is a pressing need to broaden research perspectives and employ diverse methodologies to capture the sector's multifaceted impacts on host communities. The integration of systematic literature review, quantitative surveys, and qualitative interviews in this study provides a comprehensive approach that addresses existing limitations and contributes to a more accurate and nuanced understanding of sports tourism's role

in regional development. By adopting this multi-method approach, the research offers valuable insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and scholars seeking to optimize the benefits of sports tourism while mitigating its challenges across diverse contexts.

2.4. Socioeconomic Impacts: A Dual Lens

The socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism can be examined through two primary lenses: economic and social. From an economic perspective, sports tourism has the potential to be a significant driver of growth for host regions (Peric, 2018). Revenue generation is one of the most immediate and tangible impacts, with income from event-related tourism (e.g., ticket sales, hospitality, transportation) contributing to the local economy. Major international sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games have been shown to generate millions of dollars in revenue, which can positively impact local businesses, create jobs, and stimulate urban development (Crompton, 2006). In addition to direct revenue, sports tourism can generate a multiplier effect by fostering the development of supporting industries such as hospitality, retail, and transportation, which rely on the influx of sports tourists. The creation of temporary and permanent jobs related to sports tourism (e.g., event management, hospitality staff, marketing) also contributes to regional economic development.

Urban development is another key economic impact, particularly in cities or regions that host major sporting events (Hall, 2004). These events often catalyze infrastructure improvements, such as the construction of sports venues, transportation networks, and accommodations. Additionally, sports tourism can act as a catalyst for broader urban regeneration, especially in areas that are economically underdeveloped or undergoing transformation (Widianingsih et al., 2023). In some cases, hosting a major sporting event can enhance the international visibility of a region, attracting further investment, business opportunities, and long-term tourism.

On the social side, sports tourism also has profound impacts on the identity and cohesion of host communities. According to Lohana et al. (2023), community identity can be reinforced through the pride that locals feel when their region is showcased on the global stage. Sports events often bring together diverse populations, fostering a sense of unity and collective pride among residents, which

can transcend cultural, social, and ethnic boundaries. For instance, hosting large-scale sporting events can spark a renewed sense of national or local pride, as seen in the 2010 FIFA World Cup held in South Africa, which significantly boosted community engagement and volunteerism (Hall, 2004).

However, sports tourism also brings social challenges, particularly regarding gentrification and the displacement of local populations. In some cases, According to Peric (2018), the development of sports infrastructure and the influx of sports tourists can lead to rising property prices and rents, forcing out lower-income residents and altering the social fabric of local neighborhoods. This issue is particularly prevalent in cities where high-profile events are held, leading to the commodification of public spaces and the commercialization of areas that were once accessible to all members of the community. Additionally, there are concerns that the focus on sports tourism may marginalize other cultural or social activities, shifting attention away from local heritage and traditions in favor of sports-driven development.

2.5. Key Challenges in Researching Sports Tourism

One of the key challenges in researching the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism is the diversity of its effects. According to Wanyonyi et al. (2021), sports tourism does not have a uniform impact across all destinations, and its outcomes can vary significantly depending on factors such as the type of event, the size and maturity of the destination, the scale of investment, and the demographic profile of tourists. As a result, it is challenging to generalize findings across different contexts or to create universal measures of success. For example, the economic benefits of hosting the FIFA World Cup in a large city like Rio de Janeiro may differ dramatically from those of hosting a regional sports event in a small town (Widianingsih et al., 2023). This variability requires nuanced and context-specific approaches to measuring impacts, which are often difficult to capture in a single study.

Another challenge as pointed in a study by Gibson (1998), lies in the lack of standardized measurement tools. While economic impact assessments, such as cost-benefit analyses or econometric models, are commonly used to estimate the financial outcomes of sports tourism, there is no consensus on the best approach for measuring the social impacts. Issues such as community sentiment, cultural exchange, or the long-term social consequences of sports tourism are harder to

quantify (Weed, 2006). Furthermore, the lack of standardized methods for comparing studies complicates efforts to aggregate results and draw broader conclusions about the field.

Additionally, sports tourism is highly context-dependent, influenced by regional, national, and global factors. For instance, the economic and social outcomes of sports tourism in a developed country may differ considerably from those in a developing country. Differences in infrastructure, political stability, and cultural attitudes towards tourism can all shape the outcomes of sports tourism activities (Weed, 2006). As such, research in this field must be sensitive to local conditions and avoid overly simplistic comparisons between regions with vastly different contexts.

2.6. Methodological Justification

Selecting an appropriate research methodology is critical to ensuring the reliability, validity, and comprehensiveness of this study (Leung, 2015). Given the multifaceted nature of sports tourism and its socioeconomic impacts, a mixed-methods approach was chosen to integrate quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more holistic understanding of the research problem. This section justifies the choice of methodology by highlighting its alignment with the research objectives, the advantages of combining different data collection techniques, and the need for methodological rigor in addressing the identified research gaps.

Sports tourism is a dynamic field that encompasses economic, social, and cultural dimensions. As such, relying solely on either qualitative or quantitative methods would provide an incomplete picture. A mixed-methods approach enables the study to capture both measurable trends and in-depth stakeholder perspectives, ensuring a more robust and nuanced analysis. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), integrating qualitative and quantitative methods allows for triangulation, enhancing the validity of findings by cross-verifying data obtained through different approaches.

In this study, the combination of systematic literature review (SLR), quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and scenario-based analysis provides a comprehensive framework for examining the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism in Italy. The SLR establishes a strong theoretical foundation, the surveys generate broad statistical insights and helps in the collection of qualitative data, the

interviews offer deeper contextual understanding, and the scenario-based analysis enables comparative evaluation with an international case study. This methodological triangulation ensures that the research captures both general trends and localized impacts, making the findings more actionable for policymakers and stakeholders.

2.6.1. Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Justification

The SLR was conducted to synthesize existing research and identify gaps in the literature related to sports tourism and its impacts on regional development. A systematic approach ensures that the review is comprehensive, replicable, and unbiased, as it follows a predefined protocol for searching, selecting, and analyzing relevant studies (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Given that sports tourism research is fragmented, with many case studies focusing on specific locations or events, an SLR provides a structured way to consolidate knowledge and extract key themes.

Additionally, the SLR serves as the basis for developing research hypotheses and designing survey and interview instruments. By identifying recurring patterns and contradictions in the literature, the review informs the study's empirical approach, ensuring that primary data collection addresses critical gaps and extends current understanding.

2.6.2. Quantitative Survey Justification

The inclusion of a structured quantitative survey is essential for measuring public perceptions of sports tourism's economic and social impacts. Surveys provide generalizable data by capturing a large and diverse sample of residents, ensuring statistical representativeness (Fowler, 2014). Given that perceptions vary based on demographic factors such as age, income, and geographic location, a survey allows for rigorous statistical analysis to uncover significant differences and trends.

Using Likert-scale questions, the survey quantitatively assesses key variables such as perceived economic benefits, tourism expenditure, infrastructure development, and social cohesion. The data collected is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and regression models, which provide empirical evidence for validating hypotheses. This structured approach

ensures that findings are not only reflective of real-world trends but also statistically significant and reliable.

2.6.3. Qualitative Interview Justification

While surveys provide breadth, qualitative semi-structured interviews add depth and context to the findings. Interviews with policymakers, business owners, and community leaders allow for an exploratory and interpretive analysis of sports tourism's regional impacts. Unlike fixed survey responses, interviews enable respondents to elaborate on their experiences, challenges, and recommendations, offering richer insights that quantitative data alone cannot capture (Schultze & Avital, 2011).

The decision to use semi-structured interviews, rather than fully structured or unstructured formats, balances flexibility with comparability. It allows researchers to probe deeper into key themes identified in the literature while maintaining consistency in questioning. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes in interview responses, ensuring that the qualitative findings complement and enhance the quantitative results.

2.6.4. Scenario-Based Analysis Justification

The use of a scenario-based analysis further strengthens the methodological rigor of this study. This approach relies on the systematic review and analysis of secondary data from the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, including published reports, academic studies, government documents, and media sources. By examining this well-documented mega-sporting event, the study can evaluate the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism on regional economies without the need for primary data collection in that context (Cornelissen, 2010).

The scenario-based approach is particularly valuable because it provides empirical lessons regarding both positive legacies—such as infrastructure development, job creation, and increased tourism—and potential pitfalls, including underutilized venues, budget overruns, and social disruptions. By systematically analyzing these secondary sources, the study identifies patterns and outcomes that can inform policy and strategic planning.

Applying these insights to the Italian context allows for a comparative evaluation of scalability and adaptability. For example, lessons regarding

infrastructure investment, community engagement, and event management practices can guide decision-making in regions with differing capacities, resources, and socio-economic conditions. This method ensures that the study is not limited to Italy's experience but benefits from international best practices, enhancing the robustness, relevance, and applicability of the recommendations derived from the research.

2.6.5. Ensuring Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

A key concern in any research study is ensuring validity and reliability. In this thesis:

- Internal validity is strengthened by cross-verifying findings from different data sources (SLR, surveys, interviews, and scenario-based analysis).
- Reliability is ensured through a consistent and transparent data collection process, with survey questions and interview protocols pre-tested before implementation.
- Generalizability is maximized by including a large and diverse survey sample, ensuring that findings are representative of different regions in Italy.

2.7. Thesis Statement

This dissertation investigates the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism on regional development in Italy, focusing on economic, social, and cultural dimensions. It addresses key research gaps by employing a comprehensive methodological approach. The study aims to assess the contributions of sports tourism to regional economies, explore variations across different regions, analyze residents' perceptions, and identify strategies to maximize its benefits while mitigating challenges such as regional disparities and sustainability concerns. By examining both large-scale and small-scale events, the research provides a holistic understanding of how sports tourism can serve as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable territorial growth. The findings contribute to academic discourse and offer practical recommendations for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and communities seeking to harness the transformative potential of sports tourism in Italy and similar contexts.

III. OBJECTIVES

CHAPTER III: OBJECTIVES

3.1. Exploring the Research Gap

As already captured in the previous chapters (chapter 1&2), identifying and addressing the research gap is a critical step in this study, as it ensures the dissertation makes a novel and valuable contribution to the field of sports tourism and its socioeconomic impacts. Despite the growing body of literature on sports tourism, existing research remains fragmented and often narrowly focused. Most studies prioritize economic impacts, such as revenue generation and job creation, while overlooking the broader and more complex social, cultural, and environmental dimensions that influence regional development and community well-being (Ehsani et al., 2012).

A key gap in the literature is the limited focus on territorial growth and the role of sports tourism in fostering balanced regional development. While large metropolitan areas often capture the lion's share of sports tourism benefits, smaller and rural regions remain underexplored despite their potential to host small-scale events that contribute to local economic growth and community engagement (Gibson et al., 2012). This oversight restricts the development of comprehensive strategies that address regional disparities and leverage sports tourism as a tool for inclusive development.

Another notable gap is the limited representation of local community perspectives. Residents are among the most affected stakeholders in sports tourism activities, yet their voices are often excluded from research and decision-making processes. Understanding residents' perceptions and engagement is crucial for assessing the long-term social sustainability of sports tourism initiatives (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). This research addresses this gap by employing surveys and interviews to capture the lived experiences of residents, business owners, and community leaders in Italy.

Furthermore, while many studies have examined the impacts of mega-sport events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics, there is a relative scarcity of research on the contributions of small-scale sports events (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017). Small-scale events are often more sustainable and accessible

for regional destinations and have the potential to provide long-term, localized benefits. However, their economic and social contributions are frequently overlooked in favor of the more immediate and high-profile impacts of large-scale events. By examining both types of events, this dissertation provides a balanced analysis that recognizes the value of small-scale events as a complementary strategy for regional development.

Another gap pertains to the lack of comprehensive methodological approaches in existing research. According to Bazzanella et al. (2023), many studies rely on either qualitative assessments or case-specific data, making it difficult to establish generalizable findings or identify broader patterns and trends. This dissertation addresses this limitation by employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates a systematic literature review, quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and scenario-based analysis. This comprehensive methodology ensures a robust and multi-dimensional analysis of sports tourism's impacts, offering valuable insights for both academic discourse and practical applications.

Finally, the research also responds to the gap in comparative case studies that explore how lessons from international contexts can inform local strategies. The scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa provides valuable comparative insights that are adapted to Italy's unique socioeconomic and cultural landscape. This cross-contextual analysis helps bridge the gap between global best practices and local implementation, contributing to the development of more tailored and effective sports tourism strategies.

3.2. Existing Knowledge and Limitations

The existing body of research on sports tourism often focuses on either large-scale, international mega-events or narrowly evaluates specific economic indicators such as tourism revenue or infrastructure development (Bazzanella et al., 2023). However, such approaches tend to overlook the region-specific dynamics that arise from hosting sporting events, especially in a country like Italy, where diverse regions differ significantly in economic structures, cultural heritage, and tourism potential.

Furthermore, most studies emphasize short-term economic gains, neglecting the long-term territorial growth that sports tourism might foster. According to Riyanto et al. (2023), there is limited literature investigating how local residents perceive these events' socioeconomic impacts or how their perceptions influence public support and policy development for sports tourism initiatives. Additionally, while sustainable tourism has gained traction as a research area, its intersection with sports tourism and the strategies required for its integration into regional development plans remain underexplored.

3.3. Addressing Regional and Community-Level Impacts

Research often generalizes the economic impacts of sports tourism without accounting for regional disparities (Moradi et al., 2023). Italy's regional heterogeneity, ranging from industrialized northern regions to rural southern areas, necessitates a more granular exploration of how sports tourism affects territorial growth across different contexts. Small- and medium-scale sporting events, which are more prevalent in Italy, are particularly underrepresented in the literature. According to Zhao (2023), these events, while less glamorous than mega-events, can significantly impact local economies and foster sustainable growth if managed effectively.

Moreover, residents' attitudes toward sports tourism, shaped by factors such as economic benefits, social impacts, and environmental concerns, remain inadequately studied. Understanding these perceptions is vital for aligning sports tourism strategies with community interests, fostering public support, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits.

3.4. Integrating Socioeconomic and Policy Dimensions

Another gap lies in the integration of socioeconomic impacts with policy frameworks aimed at maximizing the benefits of sports tourism. While there is recognition of the need for infrastructure development and community engagement, few studies provide actionable policy recommendations tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities presented by Italy's regional landscape. The role of strategic investment, such as targeted funding for sports infrastructure and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices, has been insufficiently explored in existing research.

3.5. Advancing the Understanding of Scale-Specific Impacts

While mega-events like the Olympics or FIFA World Cup are well-researched, smaller-scale sports events remain understudied despite their significant potential to stimulate local economies (Ferris et al., 2022). These events may offer a more sustainable and community-focused alternative to mega-events, with fewer risks such as social displacement and environmental degradation. This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing both large-scale and small-scale sports tourism's impacts on Italy's regional and local economies.

3.6. Objectives and Hypotheses

a. General Objective

To provide a comprehensive understanding of how sports tourism contributes to regional growth by analyzing its economic, social, and cultural dimensions. The study also aims to propose strategies and policy recommendations that maximize the benefits of sports tourism while addressing its challenges.

b. Specific Objectives

1. To assess the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism on Italy's spatial and territorial development, emphasizing factors such as revenue generation, employment creation, infrastructure enhancement, and patterns of tourism expenditure across different regions.
2. To investigate local residents' perceptions regarding the socioeconomic effects of hosting sporting events in Italy, focusing on their attitudes, perceived benefits and challenges, and suggestions for improving community outcomes.
3. To analyze the overall economic contributions of sports tourism to the national economy, including its role in revenue generation, job creation, and stimulation of investment in infrastructure and tourism-related industries.
4. To examine the differential economic impacts of both small-scale and large-scale sporting events on Italian regional economies, with attention to

effects on local businesses, tourism demand, and broader regional economic growth.

5. To identify effective strategies and policy interventions that enhance the sustainable development of sports tourism in Italy, emphasizing community participation, stakeholder collaboration, and equitable territorial growth.

c. General Hypothesis

The overarching hypothesis guiding this thesis is as follows:

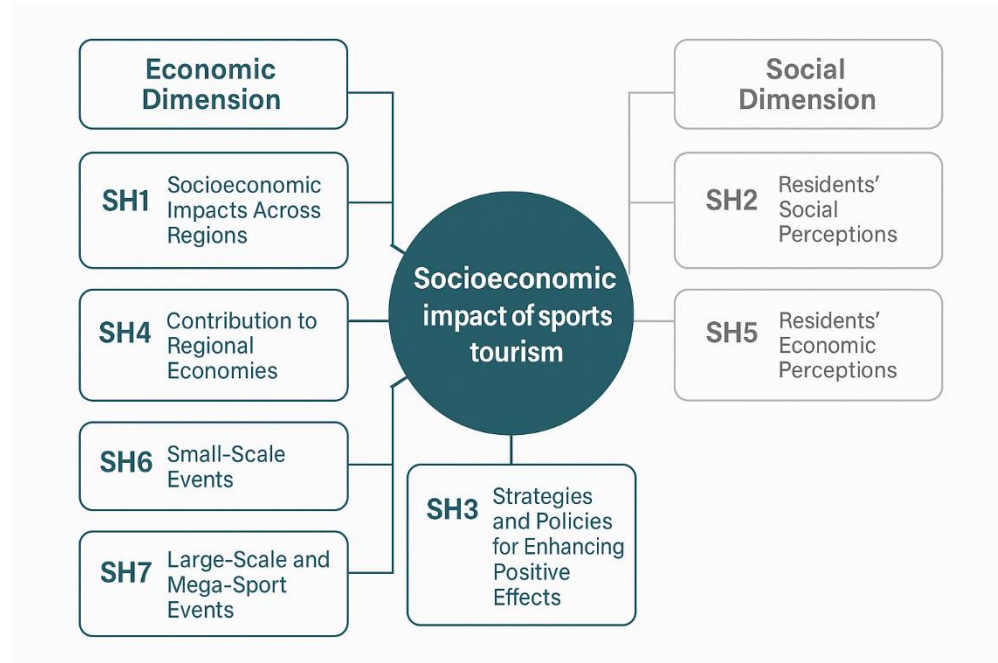
Sports tourism positively influences regional economic development in Italy by stimulating local businesses, creating job opportunities, and increasing tourism, with residents' perceptions of these events significantly contributing to public support for long-term territorial growth (Colacchio & Vergori, 2023).

This hypothesis will guide the entire research process and provides a clear direction for the study. The exploration of how sports tourism affects regional development, alongside the perceptions of local residents, will serve as the foundation of the analysis. To ensure this hypothesis is explored systematically, the research will be aligned with a theoretical framework that accounts for both economic and social dimensions. The study will leverage theories of economic development and community engagement to create a comprehensive view of the impact of sports tourism.

d. Specific Hypotheses

To address the general hypothesis and provide more detailed insights, the following specific hypotheses are formulated. Each one aims to test a particular aspect of the relationship between sports tourism and regional development:

Figure 5:
Summary of specific hypotheses



Note. Summarized and elaborated by the author

a. SH1: Socioeconomic Impacts of Sports Tourism Across Regions

The specific socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism on territorial growth in Italy will differ across regions, with factors such as infrastructure development, job creation, and tourism expenditure playing significant roles (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018). This hypothesis addresses the variability in sports tourism's impact depending on regional characteristics. It will be tested by comparing regions in Italy with different levels of sports tourism activity (FIFA World Cup, 2010) and assessing key indicators such as infrastructure improvements, employment rates, and tourist spending patterns. By focusing on regional disparities, this hypothesis allows for a nuanced understanding of the specific factors that shape the economic effects of sports tourism.

b. SH2: Residents' perception of social impacts of sports tourism

Local residents' perceptions of the socioeconomic effects of hosting sporting events will differ based on factors such as their level of engagement, knowledge of the event's economic benefits, and perceived social and environmental impacts (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023). This hypothesis explores the social dimension of sports tourism by focusing on local residents. It will be tested through surveys and interviews to determine how different demographic factors (such as age, socioeconomic status, and involvement in the tourism industry) influence residents' attitudes toward the economic and social impacts of sports events. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for assessing the broader community support for sports tourism initiatives.

c. SH3: Strategies and Policies for Enhancing Positive Effects

Strategies and policies aimed at maximizing the positive effects of sports tourism on territorial growth may include targeted investments in sports infrastructure, community engagement initiatives, and sustainable tourism development practices (Sudiana et al., 2022). This hypothesis delves into the policy dimension, hypothesizing that well-designed strategies can enhance the positive outcomes of sports tourism. The research will analyze existing policies and propose new strategies based on empirical findings. Interviews with policymakers and stakeholders in sports tourism will help explore the effectiveness of various approaches.

d. SH4: Contribution of Sports Tourism to Regional Economies

Sports tourism, originating from leisure travel for sporting activities, contributes to the host region's economy through multiple channels, including increased tourism expenditure, job creation, and infrastructure development (Widianingsih et al., 2023). This hypothesis aims to establish the economic importance of sports tourism in host regions. It will be tested through economic modeling and analysis of tourism expenditure, employment data, and infrastructure investments. A comparison of regions with high and low levels of sports tourism will offer insights into how these channels contribute to economic growth.

e. SH5: Residents' Economic Perceptions and Influencing Factors

Residents' perceptions regarding the economic impact of sports tourism on their region may be influenced by factors such as their socioeconomic status, level of involvement in the tourism industry, and awareness of the benefits and drawbacks associated with hosting sporting events (Kozhokulov et al., 2019). This hypothesis seeks to identify which factors most influence residents' views on the economic impact of sports tourism. It will be tested by conducting surveys to explore how different community groups perceive the economic benefits and challenges of sports events. The results will help identify key factors that shape local support for sports tourism.

f. SH6: Impact of Small-Scale Sport Events on Local Economies

Small-scale sport events can have a tangible impact on the economy of a region by stimulating local business activity, increasing visitor spending, and enhancing the destination's reputation as a sports tourism destination (Gibson, et al., 2012). This hypothesis focuses on the potential economic benefits of smaller-scale sports events, which often receive less attention than mega-events. It will be tested by analyzing case studies of small-scale events in different regions, measuring their impact on local businesses, tourism spending, and regional branding.

g. SH7: Impact of Large-Scale and Mega-Sport Events

Large-scale or mega-sport events have the potential to generate substantial economic benefits for a region, including increased tourism revenue, international visibility, and long-term infrastructure legacies. However, they may also pose challenges such as cost overruns, social displacement, and environmental impacts (Fernández-Martínez et al. (2022). This hypothesis examines the broader implications of hosting large-scale sporting events. It will be tested through an analysis of specific mega-events hosted in South Africa- FIFA World Cup 2010, measuring their economic benefits against the challenges they bring. The research will consider factors such as tourism revenue, media exposure, and infrastructure development, while also addressing concerns like cost overruns and social displacement.

VI. MATERIALS AND METHODS

CHAPTER IV: MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1. Research Design

The methodological approach was designed to ensure a systematic and comprehensive exploration of the subject, leveraging both primary and secondary data to achieve robust and insightful results.

The study was conducted in four phases. First, a systematic literature review (SLR) was undertaken to synthesize existing literature and identify gaps in the current knowledge base (Owens, 2021). This review provided a foundation for understanding the socioeconomic effects of sports tourism, highlighting key themes, theories, and frameworks pertinent to the research.

Second, a quantitative survey was administered to residents of selected regions hosting sporting events. The structured questionnaire was designed to capture measurable perceptions of economic, social, and cultural impacts. Data from the survey were analyzed using statistical tools, including descriptive statistics and inferential tests such as chi-square and regression models, to examine relationships between demographic variables and perceptions of economic benefits. This phase provided generalizable evidence on residents' attitudes, thereby complementing the insights drawn from qualitative approaches.

Third, to gain deeper contextual understanding, qualitative data were collected through structured interviews. These interviews elicited detailed perspectives from local stakeholders, including residents, policymakers, and business owners, offering nuanced insights into opportunities and challenges associated with sports tourism. The combination of survey and interview data allowed for triangulation, enhancing both the reliability and depth of the findings.

Finally, a scenario-based analysis was conducted using the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa as a case study. This analysis offered a practical context for examining the broader implications of mega-sporting events on socioeconomic dynamics. By comparing the outcomes of the World Cup to potential applications in the Italian context, the scenario-based analysis provided actionable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with hosting large-scale sporting events (Cordova-Pozo & Rouwette, 2023).

Together, these four phases of methodology ensure a balanced and rigorous exploration of the research objectives. The subsequent sections of this chapter detail the research design, data collection processes, and analytical techniques employed in the study, offering a transparent and replicable framework for investigating the impacts of sports tourism on territorial growth

4.2. Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

The systematic literature review undertaken in this dissertation consolidates existing research on the socioeconomic dynamics of sports tourism, with particular attention to its role in regional economic development in Italy. Through a structured analysis of peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and case studies, the review identifies recurring themes such as tourism-driven employment creation, infrastructure development, community engagement, and the challenges of sustainability. Importantly, it highlights gaps in the literature, especially regarding long-term regional impacts of hosting mega-sporting events, the integration of small-scale sports tourism into broader economic strategies, and the comparative performance of Italian regions.

To ensure that this literature review is conducted with the highest standards of rigor and transparency, we adhere strictly to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. These guidelines provide a structured approach to synthesizing research, which enhances the clarity and reproducibility of the review process. By following the PRISMA principles, we are able to systematically assess the quality, relevance, and contributions of existing literature, effectively setting the stage for our own empirical investigations.

Furthermore, this methodical undertaking significantly bolsters the overall validity of our findings. By aligning our research with established academic standards, we not only enhance the credibility of our work but also ensure that it can be replicated by other researchers in the field. This commitment to consistency and methodological rigor is essential in contributing meaningful insights to the ongoing discourse within the discipline (Sohrabi et al., 2021). Ultimately, the systematic literature review not only lays the groundwork for our research but also positions it within the broader scholarly context, highlighting its relevance and potential impact.

4.2.1. Database Selection and Search Strategy

The systematic review was conducted using three major academic databases: Google Scholar, SCOPUS, and ProQuest. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of interdisciplinary research and their accessibility to high-quality, peer-reviewed articles. Each database offers a broad range of studies relevant to sports tourism, regional development, and socioeconomic impacts, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject.

The search strategy employed Boolean operators ("AND," "OR") to refine and combine keywords effectively. Keywords included "sports tourism," "economic impact," "regional development," "small-scale sports events," and "mega-sporting events." To maximize the retrieval of relevant literature, the search terms were further tailored with filters for publication date and language. For instance, searches were restricted to studies published in English between 2000 and 2023, ensuring the inclusion of contemporary and internationally relevant research.

Multiple rounds of searches were conducted to ensure thoroughness. Initial broad searches captured a wide array of studies, while subsequent searches refined the focus to align with the research objectives. Additionally, reference lists of key articles were reviewed to identify further relevant studies, a process known as "snowballing." This iterative approach ensured that no critical literature was overlooked.

4.2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain the quality and relevance of the review, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied during the selection process. These criteria ensured that the selected studies directly contributed to the research objectives and addressed the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism.

4.2.2.1. Inclusion Criteria:

- Articles published in English between 2000 and 2023, capturing recent advancements and trends in the field.
- Peer-reviewed studies focusing on the economic and social impacts of sports tourism on host regions, ensuring academic rigor and credibility.

- Studies addressing critical themes such as resident perceptions, infrastructure development, and sustainability, which are central to understanding the broader implications of sports tourism.
- Comparative analyses of small-scale and mega-sporting events, highlighting their respective contributions to regional development.
- Only primary studies were included for the review

4.2.2.2. Exclusion Criteria:

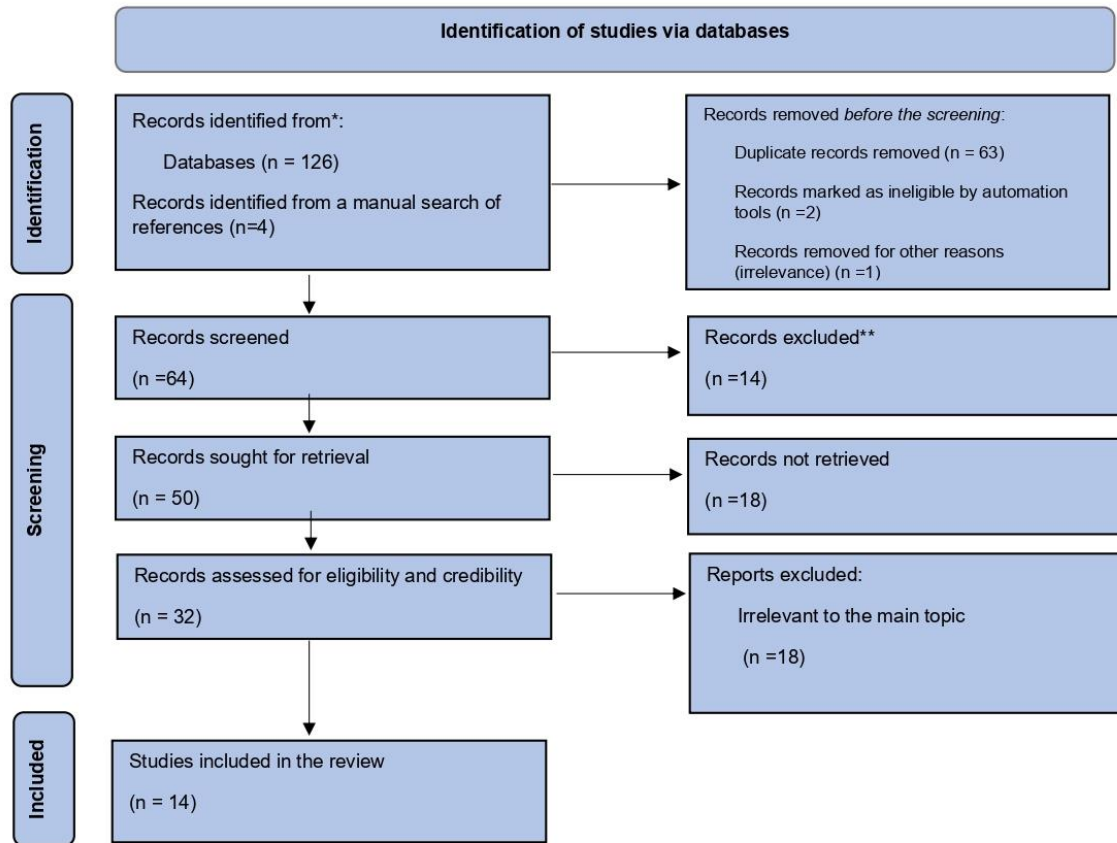
- Non-peer-reviewed articles, such as conference abstracts, editorials, and opinion pieces, which lack the methodological rigor required for this study.
- Studies focusing solely on the behavior of sports tourists, without examining their impacts on host regions or communities.
- Articles unrelated to the economic or social dimensions of sports tourism, such as purely technical analyses of sporting event logistics.

4.2.4. Screening and Analysis Process

The initial search yielded 126 articles. These articles were first screened for duplicates and irrelevance based on their titles and abstracts. After this initial screening, 64 articles remained for further evaluation. Each of these articles was assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure alignment with the research objectives. This detailed review process resulted in the selection of 14 high-quality studies that provided substantial insights into the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. To facilitate a comprehensive analysis, the selected studies were categorized into thematic groups, such as economic contributions, resident perceptions, and the sustainability of infrastructure investments. Each study was critically appraised to extract relevant data, including methodologies, key findings, and gaps in the research. The themes and gaps identified informed the development of the research questions and guided the empirical phases of the study.

The PLASMA flowchart, depicted in Figure 4 below provides a clear and concise visual representation of the search strategy, screening process, and article selection.

Figure 6:
PRISMA Flowchart representing systematic review



In order to systematically extract and organize information from the reviewed articles, a categorization table was developed. This table is structured around two key dimensions: the line of research addressed by each study and the corresponding references. The categorization provides a clear overview of the dominant thematic areas within the literature and enables the identification of recurring patterns, divergences, and research gaps.

4.3. The Research Process and its Phases

Table 3:
Summary of line of research

Line of Research	Studies Include
Explore the perceptions of local residents regarding the economic impact of sports tourism on their region	Rómulo Jacobo et al. (2022), Cheung et al. (2016), Bazzanella (2019), Kozhokulov et al. (2019), Peric, (2018)
To determine the relationship between sports tourism and the economic impact on a region	Tsekouropoulos et al. (2022), Tzoumaka et al. (2022), and Kozhokulov et al. (2019), Perić (2018), and González-García et al. (2018)
Investigate the economic impact of small-scale sports events on the host region, considering factors such as infrastructure utilization and government investments	Duglio & Beltramo (2017), Morfoulaki et al. (2023), Njoroge et al., (2017), Gibson et al., 2003, Fernández-Martínez et al. (2022), Gibson et al., 2003.
Assess the economic impact of large-scale or mega-sport events on the host region, taking into account the scale, investments, and crowd management.	Hritz & Ross, 2010, Vilakazi et al. (2014), Emery, 2002, Preuss, 2006
Examine the actual tourism influx numbers during the FIFA World Cup 2010 and identify the factors contributing to deviations from expected values, offering insights into event-specific challenges and opportunities.	Peeters et al. (2014), Ferreira, S. (2011). Briedenhann 2011, Knott, Brendon & Allen(2012) and Maennig & du Plessis, (2010).

Note. Compiled by the author from the reviewed literature to summarize the main lines of research identified across the studies.

Data collection for this thesis was conducted in two distinct phases: a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. This mixed-methods approach was carefully designed to capture both measurable trends and rich, contextual insights into the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism across various regions in Italy. According to Jones et al. (2013), integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies provides a robust framework for examining complex social phenomena, allowing researchers to address both numerical patterns and the lived experiences of stakeholders.

The quantitative data collection, involved administering a structured survey to residents from diverse regions in Italy. The survey was distributed online through Google Forms and targeted 510 participants to gather comprehensive data on residents' perceptions of sports tourism. The survey was divided into multiple sections to collect information on socio-demographic characteristics, engagement with sports activities, and perceived socioeconomic impacts. Respondents were asked to rate statements on a five-point Likert scale, covering areas such as job creation, infrastructure development, and social cohesion. By employing standardized response options, the survey allowed for statistical analysis and facilitated the identification of key trends and relationships between variables.

The qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including policymakers, business owners, and community leaders. The interview guide was informed by the findings from the literature review and preliminary survey results, ensuring that discussions explored relevant themes such as economic benefits, community engagement, infrastructure challenges, and sustainable development practices. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was conducted either in person or via video conferencing. Interviews were recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for thematic analysis. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed participants to share nuanced perspectives and elaborate on their experiences, providing insights that would have been difficult to capture through the survey alone.

Combining these two phases allowed the study to achieve methodological triangulation, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. Quantitative data offered a broad overview of patterns and trends, while qualitative interviews added depth by exploring the underlying factors and motivations behind residents' perceptions and stakeholder experiences (Leung, 2015). This dual approach

ensured a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of sports tourism on territorial growth in Italy, addressing both macroeconomic indicators and localized social dynamics. Moreover, the integration of these methodologies provided a balanced perspective, as quantitative results were enriched and contextualized by qualitative narratives.

Ultimately, the combined data collection approach aligned with best practices in social science research, as advocated by Creswell (2014), who emphasizes the importance of mixed-methods designs for studies seeking to understand complex phenomena. This methodological rigor positioned the research to make meaningful contributions to the academic discourse on sports tourism and offer actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders involved in regional development initiatives.

4.3.1. Surveys

A structured questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data from residents across Italy. The survey aimed to assess public perceptions of the socioeconomic impacts of hosting sporting events, offering a snapshot of the collective understanding and attitudes of communities in different regions.

Figure 7:

Description and snippet of the google form used in the survey

Survey on Socioeconomic Impacts of Sports Tourism in Italy

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. We are conducting a study to better understand the impacts of sports tourism on communities across Italy. Your responses will help us explore how sporting events influence economic growth, infrastructure development, community engagement, and environmental sustainability in your region.

This survey consists of several sections and will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

4.3.2. Survey Design

The questionnaire was carefully structured to ensure clarity and relevance, comprising three main sections:

1. **Socio-demographic Information:** This section containing 9 questions collected essential background information on respondents, including age, gender, employment status, educational background, and proximity to major sporting venues. These variables were chosen to analyze how demographic and geographic factors influence perceptions of sports tourism.
2. **Resident Interests and Involvement:** This section explored respondents' engagement with sports activities, such as their participation in local events, frequency of attendance at sporting venues, and awareness of regional sports initiatives. By capturing these insights, the survey assessed how personal interest in sports correlates with perceptions of its economic and social impacts.
3. **Perceived Socioeconomic Impacts:** The final section evaluated respondents' views on the economic, social, and environmental consequences of hosting sporting events. Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," participants rated statements related to:
 - Economic benefits such as job creation and tourism revenue.
 - Infrastructure improvements, including new sports facilities and transportation networks.
 - Social cohesion, cultural enrichment, and community pride.
 - Environmental challenges such as waste management and resource consumption.

4.3.3. Survey Administration

The survey was disseminated via Google Forms between November 2021 and January 2022, ensuring accessibility to a wide range of respondents. A total of 510 participants completed the survey, representing diverse geographic regions, including urban centers, rural areas, and coastal towns. To ensure representativeness, demographic quotas were applied to balance the sample in terms of age, gender, and regional distribution. Efforts were made to include

participants from areas with varying levels of sports tourism activity, enabling comparisons between high-impact and low-impact regions.

4.4. Interview

To complement the quantitative data from the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in sports tourism. This qualitative phase provided deeper insights into the dynamics of sports tourism and its impacts on regional development.

4.4.1. Participant Selection

The interviews conducted for this study targeted a diverse group of stakeholders to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives on the impacts of sports tourism. Policymakers formed a key participant group, including representatives from local and regional governments tasked with developing and implementing sports and tourism policies. Their insights were critical in understanding the strategic frameworks and policy interventions shaping sports tourism initiatives.

Business owners, another important stakeholder group, comprised entrepreneurs and managers operating in industries directly influenced by sports tourism. These included sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and event management, where the economic effects of sports tourism are often most pronounced. By engaging with these stakeholders, the study aimed to explore how sports tourism affects business operations, revenue generation, and employment opportunities.

Community leaders also participated in the interviews, representing local organizations and advocacy groups with a vested interest in the socioeconomic outcomes of sports events. Their contributions provided valuable perspectives on how sports tourism impacts social cohesion, cultural identity, and community development.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of regions with varying levels of sports tourism activity, from highly developed hubs to emerging destinations. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to identify further participants. Initial interviewees were asked to

recommend others with relevant expertise or unique perspectives, enriching the data collected and ensuring a broader understanding of the topic.

4.4.2. Interview Guide

The interview guide was developed based on themes identified during the systematic literature review and preliminary survey analysis. Key topics of discussion included:

- Strategies for maximizing the economic benefits of sports tourism.
- Challenges related to community engagement, including resistance to hosting events and equity in resource allocation.
- Insights into sustainable practices for organizing sporting events, particularly those aimed at minimizing environmental impacts.
- Perceived long-term benefits and drawbacks of sports tourism, such as legacy infrastructure and shifts in regional identity.

4.4.3. Interview Process

A total of 25 interviews were conducted over a three-month period. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was carried out either in person or via video conferencing platforms, depending on participant availability and ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis. While the sample size may appear limited, it was deemed appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, qualitative research prioritizes depth of insight over numerical breadth, and 25 interviews were sufficient to reach thematic saturation, whereby no new themes emerged from the data (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Second, the purposive sampling strategy ensured that participants represented a diverse range of stakeholders within the sports tourism sector—including local business owners, policy makers, event organizers, and tourists—thereby enhancing the richness and validity of the findings. Finally, logistical constraints such as time, resource availability, and public health considerations necessitated a focused yet manageable sample size, allowing for rigorous, detailed analysis within the scope of this dissertation.

4.5. Scenario-Based Analysis of Secondary Data on 2010 FIFA World Cup

A scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa was included as a case study to contextualize the impacts of mega-sporting events. This analysis served as a critical component in understanding the broader implications of hosting large-scale events and their potential parallels to the Italian context. By examining a globally recognized event, the study explored key dimensions such as economic contributions, infrastructural investments, and long-term community impacts. The findings from this case study provide valuable lessons and strategies that can inform sports tourism initiatives in Italy.

4.5.1. Gathering and Organizing Data

The data collection process for this scenario-based analysis focused on compiling credible and diverse sources to comprehensively evaluate the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. By examining academic studies, government reports, official FIFA documents, and independent evaluations, the analysis draws on a wealth of secondary data to understand the event's economic, social, infrastructural, environmental, and tourism-related impacts. This robust approach ensures that the findings are both well-supported and representative of the event's multifaceted outcomes.

1. **Academic Studies:** Academic literature formed the backbone of the data collection process, providing critical insights into the socioeconomic implications of the FIFA World Cup. Studies by Cornelissen (2010) and Swart et al. (2011) were instrumental in analyzing the economic contributions of the event, including revenue generation, job creation, and GDP impacts. These studies offered detailed assessments of how South Africa's economy was stimulated during the event and highlighted challenges such as uneven benefit distribution and high organizational costs.
2. **Government Reports:** Reports from the South African government provided official data on the financial, infrastructural, and tourism-related aspects of the FIFA World Cup. For instance, the South African Department of Sport and Recreation published detailed evaluations of the event's economic impact, including statistics on

revenue, employment, and sectoral growth. These documents were crucial for understanding the broader policy and planning framework that supported the event. In addition, municipal reports from host cities like Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban offered localized perspectives on infrastructure projects and their community impacts. These reports detailed how urban transportation systems, public spaces, and tourism facilities were upgraded in preparation for the World Cup, providing a granular view of the event's infrastructural footprint.

3. Official FIFA Documents: FIFA's official publications, including the "2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa Legacy Report," were a vital source of data. These documents provided comprehensive summaries of the event's objectives, execution, and outcomes, emphasizing its global significance and legacy. The Legacy Report outlined key achievements, such as increased tourism arrivals, improved infrastructure, and enhanced global visibility for South Africa. FIFA's financial disclosures also shed light on revenue streams, including ticket sales, sponsorship agreements, and broadcasting rights. These figures helped quantify the direct economic contributions of the event while providing insights into its organizational costs.

4. Independent Evaluations and Media Reports: Independent evaluations by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and consultancy firms added a critical perspective to the analysis. For example, studies by Grant Thornton, a global consultancy firm, provided independent assessments of the economic and infrastructural impacts of the World Cup. These reports offered valuable data on cost overruns, funding mechanisms, and the long-term utility of infrastructure projects. Media coverage from reputable outlets such as The Guardian and BBC News supplemented the analysis by capturing public opinion and controversies surrounding the event. These reports highlighted issues like social displacement, protests against infrastructure projects, and debates over the event's environmental footprint.

4.6. Data Analysis

4.6.1. Quantitative Analysis: Residents' Perceptions

Quantitative data collected from the resident surveys were analyzed using JASP statistical software, chosen for its precision, reliability, and comprehensive statistical tools. The analysis process followed a two-step approach. First, descriptive statistics (such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations) were employed to summarize demographic characteristics of respondents and provide an initial overview of their perceptions of sports tourism. Second, inferential statistical techniques were applied to examine relationships between variables. Specifically, chi-square tests were used to assess associations between categorical variables, such as demographic factors and perceptions of economic benefits, while regression models were employed to identify predictors of residents' attitudes toward the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism.

This structured approach ensured both a broad understanding of overall perceptions and a deeper examination of significant relationships within the dataset. The hypotheses guiding the analysis were:

- **Null Hypothesis (H_0):** There is no significant association between hosting sporting events and perceived economic benefit.
- **Alternative Hypothesis (H_1):** There is a significant association between hosting sporting events and perceived economic benefit.

4.6.2. Qualitative Analysis

To capture the depth and complexity of stakeholder perspectives, a comprehensive thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), provides a systematic approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. This method was particularly well-suited for this study, as it allowed for a detailed exploration of stakeholder perceptions related to the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism in Italy.

The analysis of the qualitative interview data was conducted in a systematic, multi-stage process to ensure rigor, credibility, and alignment with the research objectives. This iterative approach followed established qualitative analysis

principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2019), moving from initial data extraction to the development of a conceptual model representing the socioeconomic dynamics of sports tourism. Each step is described in detail below

a. Step 1: Selection of Quotations

The first step involved reviewing the transcribed interviews to select quotations that were meaningful, contextually relevant, and rich in information about the impacts of sports tourism. Quotations were chosen based on their direct connection to economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the research. For example, one participant stated: *"Hosting the cycling event brought more visitors than usual, which helped my small restaurant stay open for extra hours and hire temporary staff."* This quotation was retained because it illustrates a direct economic impact, aligning with the study's focus on regional economic development. Selecting representative quotations ensured that the analysis was anchored in authentic stakeholder experiences (Patton, 2015).

b. Step 2: Identification of Keywords

In this step, keywords and recurring terms were extracted from the selected quotations. This helped reduce complex qualitative data into manageable units. For instance, from the quotation above, keywords such as *"visitors," "economic impact," "employment,"* and *"business revenue"* were highlighted. This step followed a semantic approach, emphasizing explicit content in the text (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identification of keywords also allowed for the detection of patterns across multiple interviews, revealing, for example, that residents frequently mentioned both *community pride* and *job creation* as perceived benefits of sports events.

c. Step 3: Initial Coding

The identified keywords were then organized into preliminary codes, each representing a distinct concept. For example, codes such as *"economic benefits," "employment generation," "local business stimulation,"* and *"community pride"* were applied across multiple quotations. Some quotations were assigned multiple codes when they addressed more than one concept, reflecting the multidimensional nature of stakeholder perspectives (Miles et al., 2019). This coding was carried out manually and cross-checked to ensure consistency and reliability of the codes across the dataset.

d. Step 4: Theme Development

Once codes were established, they were grouped into broader themes that captured higher-order ideas. For example, codes related to *economic benefits, employment, and local business* were grouped under the theme “*Economic Impacts*.” Similarly, codes such as *community pride, volunteerism, and cultural exchange* were grouped under “*Social and Cultural Impacts*.” Theme development allowed for an interpretive understanding of the data, identifying relationships between concepts and patterns across interviews (Nowell et al., 2017).

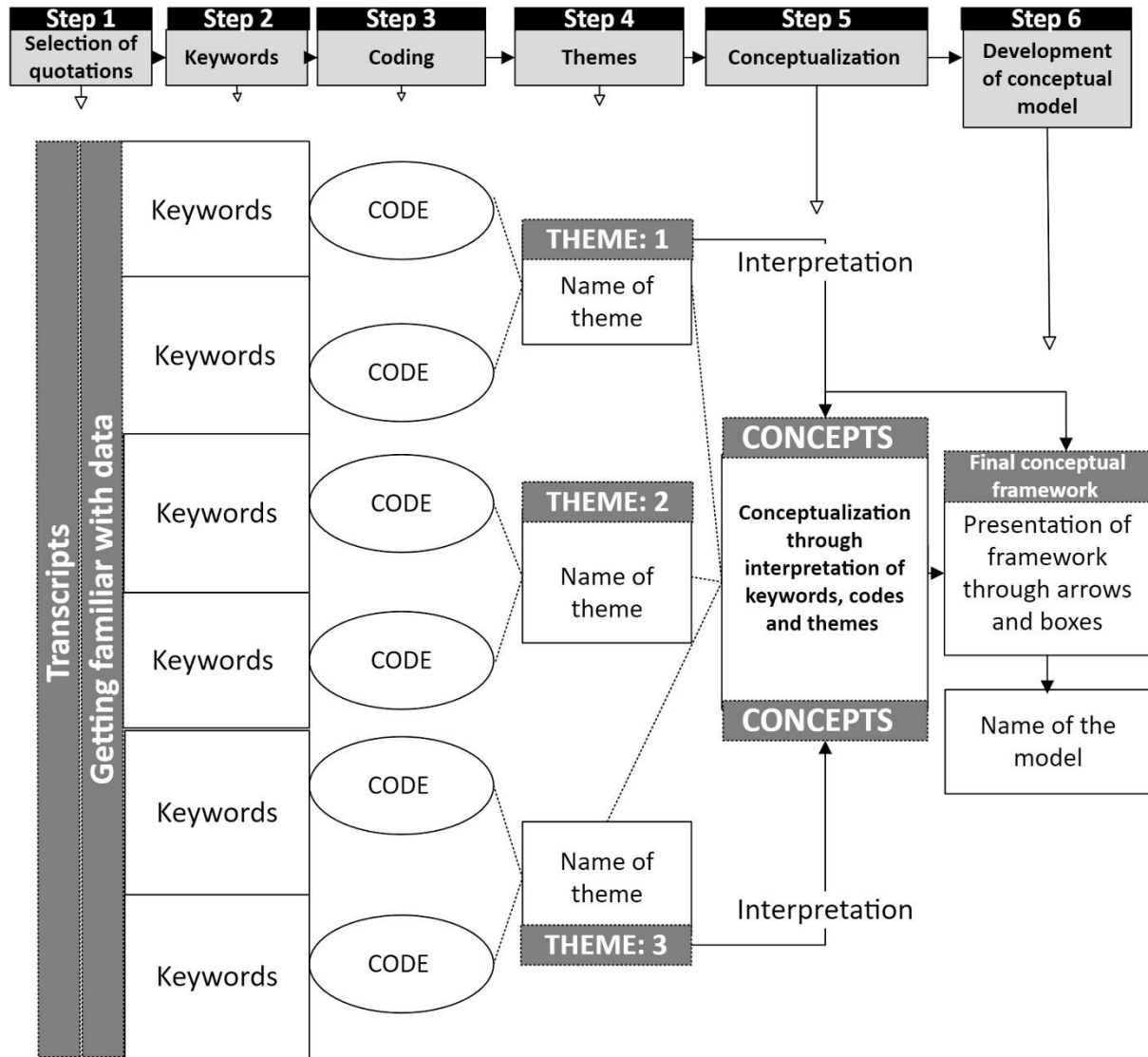
e. Step 5: Conceptualization

At this stage, the themes were interpreted and connected to the theoretical framework established in the systematic literature review. For instance, the theme “*Economic Impacts*” was aligned with existing studies emphasizing tourism revenue, infrastructure stimulation, and job creation (Tsekouropoulos et al., 2022; Perić, 2018). Similarly, “*Social and Cultural Impacts*” was connected to literature highlighting community cohesion and cultural exchange (Rómulo Jacobo et al., 2022; Bazzanella, 2019). This step moved the analysis from descriptive coding to conceptual understanding, situating empirical findings within the broader academic discourse.

f. Step 6: Development of a Conceptual Model

Finally, the identified themes and their interrelationships were synthesized into a conceptual model illustrating the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism in the studied regions. For example, economic impacts were conceptualized as influencing local business revenue, employment, and infrastructural development, which in turn shaped social outcomes such as community pride and cultural engagement. The model served as a visual and theoretical framework linking qualitative insights to practical implications for policy, event planning, and regional development (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Figure 8:
Stages of thematic analysis process used to analyze qualitative data.



Note. Source: Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A step-by-step process of thematic analysis to develop a conceptual model in qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>

4.6.3. Identified Themes from Thematic Analysis process

The systematic coding process in this study aimed to identify recurring themes that captured the depth and complexity of stakeholder perspectives on sports tourism. By analyzing interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses, the following key themes emerged:

4.6.3.1. Community Pride and Identity

One of the most prominent themes was the sense of community pride and strengthened regional identity associated with hosting sports events. Participants frequently highlighted how such events create opportunities for communities to come together, celebrate local culture, and showcase their region to visitors. Respondents noted that sports events often instilled a renewed sense of pride among residents, particularly when local teams or athletes performed well or when the community successfully hosted a well-attended event.

This finding is consistent with previous research by Bama and Tichaawa (2015), who observed that 68% of residents surveyed during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa reported heightened community pride. Such events can foster a collective identity and a sense of achievement that extends beyond the immediate duration of the event. In rural and underserved regions of Italy, where opportunities for large-scale community engagement are limited, sports events can serve as critical catalysts for social cohesion and cultural reinforcement.

However, the analysis also revealed that the sense of pride was not universally shared. Some participants expressed concerns about the exclusion of marginalized groups from event planning and participation, which undermined the inclusiveness of community engagement. For sports tourism to foster a genuinely inclusive sense of pride and identity, stakeholders emphasized the need for community involvement at all stages of event planning and execution.

4.6.3.2. Economic Disparities

The analysis revealed significant concerns about the unequal distribution of economic benefits from sports tourism. While some respondents, particularly business owners and those employed in tourism-related sectors, highlighted the positive economic impacts such as increased sales and job creation, others expressed frustration over being excluded from these opportunities. Lower-income

participants were more likely to perceive sports events as benefiting a select few while increasing living costs for the broader community.

This theme aligns with findings by Preuss (2006), who noted that mega-events often result in the concentration of economic benefits in urban areas and among established businesses, leaving rural regions and smaller enterprises with limited gains. In the context of Italy, stakeholders emphasized that sports tourism investments tend to be concentrated in major cities, exacerbating regional disparities.

Participants also highlighted concerns about the short-term nature of many economic benefits. While sports events create temporary job opportunities and stimulate local businesses during the event, these effects often diminish once the event concludes. Stakeholders emphasized the need for long-term strategies that ensure sustained economic growth, such as leveraging sports tourism to promote year-round tourism and supporting small businesses in event-related sectors.

4.6.3.3. Sustainability Concerns

Sustainability emerged as a critical theme, with stakeholders expressing concerns about both the environmental and financial sustainability of sports tourism initiatives. Participants noted that large-scale events often generate significant waste, strain local resources, and contribute to carbon emissions through increased transportation and energy consumption. Several respondents pointed to examples where insufficient planning had resulted in underutilized infrastructure, commonly referred to as "white elephants."

Research by Collins and Flynn (2008) supports these findings, highlighting the environmental challenges associated with hosting mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of adopting green practices, such as waste management strategies, renewable energy usage, and eco-friendly infrastructure designs, to mitigate the environmental impact of sports tourism.

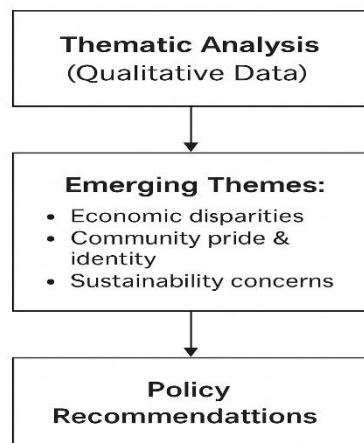
Financial sustainability was another concern raised by participants. Several stakeholders noted that the costs of hosting sports events often exceed initial projections, leading to budget overruns and financial strain on local governments. These concerns are consistent with Pillay and Bass (2008), who found that the 2010

FIFA World Cup in South Africa faced significant financial challenges despite its economic and tourism benefits.

To address these sustainability concerns, stakeholders advocated for a more integrated approach to sports tourism planning. This includes involving environmental experts in event design, prioritizing multi-purpose infrastructure that serves community needs beyond sports events, and implementing transparent budgeting practices to ensure financial accountability.

Figure 9:

Key themes identified from thematic analysis (elaborated by the author from the qualitative analysis conducted)



4.7. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to rigorous ethical guidelines to ensure that research activities were conducted responsibly and respectfully, safeguarding the rights and well-being of all participants.

1. Participant Information and Informed Consent

Before participating in the study, all respondents were provided with comprehensive information about the research. This included the purpose of the study, its objectives, and the potential benefits and risks associated with participation. Participants were explicitly informed that their involvement was

voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

An informed consent form was presented to all participants, detailing their rights and the measures taken to protect their privacy. The consent form required participants to acknowledge that they understood the nature of the study and agreed to take part. For interviews conducted with stakeholders, verbal and written consent were obtained to allow for the audio recording and transcription of the discussions. Care was taken to ensure that participants fully comprehended the information provided, and any questions or concerns were addressed before data collection began.

2. Privacy and Confidentiality

Confidentiality was a critical consideration throughout the research process. Personal identifiers were removed from all data to ensure anonymity, and participants were assigned unique codes to protect their identities. Transcripts from interviews and survey responses were securely stored in password-protected files, accessible only to the principal researcher. In compliance with data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, data handling procedures were designed to safeguard sensitive information and ensure responsible data management.

Furthermore, participants were assured that their responses would only be used for academic purposes and that their individual identities would not be disclosed in any publications or reports. This commitment to confidentiality fostered trust between the researcher and participants, encouraging candid and insightful responses.

3. Minimizing Harm and Ensuring Beneficence

Efforts were made to minimize any potential harm to participants. Given the nature of the study, the research did not involve any physical risks. However, emotional discomfort was a possibility, particularly during interviews where participants discussed challenges or concerns related to sports tourism and community dynamics. To mitigate this, participants were informed that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any point without justification.

Additionally, interview questions were framed sensitively to avoid causing distress, and the researcher maintained a respectful and empathetic demeanor throughout the data collection process. By prioritizing the well-being of participants, the study adhered to the ethical principle of beneficence.

4. Transparency and Ethical Reporting

Transparency was maintained in the presentation and interpretation of findings. Participants were given the option to receive a summary of the research results, demonstrating respect for their contributions and fostering transparency in the research process. Ethical considerations also extended to the reporting of findings, where efforts were made to present data honestly and accurately without exaggeration or bias.

Acknowledging the limitations of the study and any potential conflicts of interest ensured that the research maintained academic integrity and ethical credibility.

4.8. Validating the Research Gap

The research findings from this dissertation, derived from the combined quantitative and qualitative analyses, provided substantial evidence to validate critical gaps in the current understanding of sports tourism's socioeconomic impact. These findings highlight the complexities and nuances of sports tourism, particularly in the Italian context, underscoring the need for more comprehensive and inclusive approaches. The analysis revealed significant insights across three key areas: regional variations, resident engagement, and policy and strategy development.

1. Regional Variations

One of the most prominent gaps identified is the uneven distribution of the benefits of sports tourism across different regions. The JASP statistical analyses confirmed statistically significant differences in residents' perceptions of sports tourism's socioeconomic impact based on geographic location ($p < 0.05$). Urban areas, with their established infrastructure and higher tourism activity, were perceived to benefit disproportionately from sports events. In contrast, rural and suburban regions often struggled to attract sports tourists or leverage events for economic growth.

These findings align with existing literature, such as Preuss (2006) and Duglio & Beltramo (2017), which highlight the tendency for urban centers to capture a larger share of the economic and social benefits of sports tourism. Stakeholders in rural areas emphasized the need for targeted policies and investments to enhance their capacity to host and benefit from sports events. By validating this regional disparity, the study underscores the importance of adopting tailored strategies that address the specific needs and opportunities of different regions in Italy.

2. Resident Engagement

The analysis revealed a significant gap in resident engagement in the planning and execution of sports tourism initiatives. Although residents are primary stakeholders who directly experience the socioeconomic impacts of sports events, their involvement in decision-making processes appears limited. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses revealed a recurring sentiment among participants advocating for greater community inclusion.

Many respondents expressed frustration over top-down decision-making processes that often prioritized commercial interests over community needs. This finding is consistent with the work of Gursoy and Kendall (2006), who emphasize that resident support for tourism initiatives is contingent on their involvement in decision-making and the perceived fairness of benefit distribution.

To address this gap, stakeholders advocated for participatory planning approaches that actively involve residents at all stages of sports tourism initiatives. Recommendations included the establishment of community advisory boards, transparent communication channels, and public forums to gather input and feedback from residents. Greater engagement is essential for fostering community support, enhancing social cohesion, and ensuring that sports tourism initiatives align with local needs and values.

3. Policy and Strategy Development

The study also identified a critical gap in the integration of policies and strategies across economic, social, and environmental domains. Both survey results and interview data underscored the fragmented nature of existing strategies, which often focus narrowly on economic outcomes without adequately considering social and environmental dimensions.

Stakeholders highlighted the need for comprehensive frameworks that align with the diverse goals of sports tourism stakeholders, including policymakers, businesses, community leaders, and environmental advocates. The absence of such integrated frameworks was perceived as a barrier to maximizing the positive impacts of sports tourism and mitigating its negative effects.

This finding aligns with research by Pillay & Bass (2008) and Collins & Flynn (2008), who argue that holistic approaches are essential for the sustainable development of sports tourism. Participants in this study emphasized the importance of adopting policies that balance economic growth with social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Recommendations included the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships, the integration of sustainability criteria into event planning, and the creation of metrics to assess the long-term impacts of sports tourism initiatives.

V. RESULTS

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

5.1. Results from the Systematic Literature Review

The systematic literature review (SLR) conducted as part of this study, which has already been published (Raso & Cherubini, 2023), synthesized findings from a wide range of research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. The systematic review identified several key themes, trends, and research gaps, which collectively provide valuable insights for shaping the analytical framework of this study. To illustrate these findings, the reviewed articles were categorized and organized according to their relevance to the research objectives. Table 6 presents a summarized overview of the selected studies, outlining their central content and contributions to the discourse on sports tourism.

Table 4:
Summarized content of the selected studies and research articles

Reference	Objective	Methodology	Results
Rómulo Jacobo et al, 2022	To analyze the perception and predisposition toward the support of citizens on the impact of sport tourism from a multidimensional perspective	Descriptive study, Survey	the study variables are significant except for social impact.
Cheung et al., 2016	Provide an analysis of tourist athlete expenditures and their subsequent economic impact, as well as their perception of the venue hosting the small-scale international sporting event	Experimental study	There is a positive impact on the destination's image and economic benefits for the community to host an international small-scale sport event.
Morfoulaki et al., 2023	To analyze the current and future potentials of sport tourism in the area's sustainable growth.	Case study and analysis	Sports tourism is estimated to help build a unique

			identity closely linked to sustainability goals.
Hritz & Ross, 2010	To explore residents' perceptions of sport tourism impacts on Indianapolis, focusing on social, environmental, and economic effects and their influence on support for future development.	Survey using questionnaires	Social and economic benefits strongly predicted support for sport tourism development, while environmental benefits and negative impacts had lesser influence.
Perić, 2018	To understand the legacy of the 13th EHF European Handball Championship, held in Croatia in January 2018, by assessing the event's economic and social benefits and costs	Exploratory factor analysis	Community development and pride, security risks, traffic problems, economic benefits, environmental concerns, and economic costs are the primary impact dimensions.

Njoroge et al., 2017	This study examines the role of devolution in promoting sports tourism in Kenya, focusing on Machakos County as a model case. It evaluates the contributions of sports tourism to socioeconomic development and explores the host community's perceptions of its impacts.	A mixed-methods approach was used, combining secondary and primary data collection through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.	Sports tourism in Machakos County generates both positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts: Infrastructure and urban development, economic benefits, community cohesion, cultural exchange, enhanced community visibility, Negative impacts: Economic costs, traffic congestion, security risks, environmental concerns, and social conflicts.
Nyikana & Tichaawa (2018)	This paper explores sports tourism and its contribution to local economic development (LED) in an emerging destination context.	Mixed-method research design	Data reveal that by and large, sports tourism contributes significantly to LED and plays a vital role in the promotion of the region.
Poczta et al. (2020)	To investigate the influence of non-mega sporting events on the perception of negative externalities of host residents	Case study	The elite equestrian sporting event is less burdensome for its residents and gives them more satisfaction.

Kozhokulov et al. (2019)	To examine the socio-economic impact of tourism in the region	Quantitative assessment methodology	The study showed that the impact of tourism on economic and social growth in the Issyk-Kul region is positive.
González-García et al. (2018)	To develop a valid scale to measure residents' perceptions of the impacts generated by sport tourism activities	Descriptive study	The analysis results obtained a five-factor model with 16 items divided into (1) economic impacts, (2) cultural impacts, (3) environmental impacts, (4) social impacts and (5) political impacts.
Njoroge et al. (2017)	To evaluate the role of devolution in promoting sports tourism in Kenya and how sports tourism has contributed to social and economic development in the region.	Case study and survey	sports tourism has both positive and negative impacts on the destination
Tsekouropoulos et al. (2022)	To connect the local, sustainable tourism development with the sporting events and to come up with relevant proposals for the reference area and their generalization in the whole tourist areas.	Quantitative study	Several variables, such as the economic impact, can predict the acceptance of sustainable tourism development through sports.
Tzoumaka et al. (2022)	To explore direct spending profiles of sport event tourists in a small rural destination as an alternative to the economic impact of the multiplier effect studies.	Online survey method	The participants who responded to the survey spent, on average, about EUR 163 for accommodation, EUR

			205 for meals, and EUR 38 for other tourist spending, such as souvenirs.
Peeters et al. (2014)	To use monthly country-by-country arrival data to assess the impact of organizing the FIFA 2010 World Cup on tourism in South Africa	Data analysis	South Africa attracted around 220,000 extra arrivals from non-Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries during the event, and 300,000 over the entire year. These numbers are less than the predictions made by the organizers prior to the event

Note. Compiled by the author from the selected academic studies and research articles reviewed in the literature, summarizing their key findings and thematic contributions.

5.1.1. Resident Perceptions and Community Engagement

Studies by Rómulo Jacobo et al. (2022), Cheung et al. (2016), González-García et al. (2018), Tsekouropoulos et al. (2022), Bazzanella (2019), Kozhokulov et al. (2019), and Perić (2018) provide valuable insights into the complex and sometimes ambivalent perceptions that residents hold toward sports tourism. Collectively, these works reveal a duality of attitudes, in which sports tourism is simultaneously regarded as a vehicle for social and cultural enrichment and as a source of tension or disruption within host communities.

On the positive side, several studies underscore the potential of sports tourism to generate community pride, cultural exchange, and social cohesion. For instance, Rómulo Jacobo et al. (2022) found that residents often perceive

international sporting events as opportunities to showcase local heritage and strengthen a shared sense of identity. Similarly, Cheung et al. (2016) emphasized that when residents feel included in the planning and delivery of sports events, they report higher levels of social connectedness and a more positive outlook on the role of tourism in their community. Such findings align with broader literature suggesting that sports tourism can act as a catalyst for cultural diplomacy and community resilience, particularly when events are framed as locally beneficial rather than externally imposed.

Conversely, other contributions highlight critical concerns and reservations that can undermine community support for sports tourism. González-García et al. (2018) observed that residents may associate sports events with increased congestion, higher living costs, or a diversion of public resources away from essential services. In a similar vein, Tsekouropoulos et al. (2022) argued that the uneven distribution of tourism revenues can exacerbate social inequalities, leading to tensions between groups who benefit directly from sports tourism and those who perceive little or no gain. Bazzanella (2019) further cautioned that poorly managed sports tourism development risks altering traditional ways of life, particularly in small or rural communities, where the influx of visitors may overwhelm local infrastructure.

Additional perspectives enrich this debate. Kozhokulov et al. (2019) highlighted the risk of resident fatigue, noting that communities repeatedly exposed to large-scale events may become increasingly critical or resistant over time if promised benefits fail to materialize. Finally, Perić (2018) stressed the importance of adopting inclusive, participatory planning models that place community interests at the center of sports tourism strategies. According to Perić, such approaches not only mitigate social conflicts but also enhance the long-term sustainability of the sector by ensuring that residents perceive themselves as active beneficiaries rather than passive bystanders.

Taken together, these studies point to a central theme: the success of sports tourism development is contingent on residents' perceptions, which are shaped by both tangible impacts (such as economic redistribution and infrastructure use) and intangible outcomes (such as pride, belonging, or disruption). This body of research underscores the need for planners and policymakers to adopt community-centered

approaches that balance the economic and promotional benefits of sports tourism with its potential to generate social challenges.

5.1.2. Economic Impacts of Sports Tourism

Economic contributions remain a central theme in the sports tourism literature, with scholars consistently emphasizing its capacity to generate revenue, stimulate employment, and catalyze infrastructure development. **Tsekouropoulos et al. (2022)** highlight how sports tourism can provide host regions with immediate economic benefits through increased visitor spending, hospitality services, and ancillary business growth. In particular, their findings suggest that strategically organized events have the potential to inject substantial financial resources into local economies within a short period, thereby supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. Similarly, **Tzoumaka et al. (2022)** demonstrate how sports tourism can enhance destination branding, enabling regions to attract repeat visitors and investment beyond the life of a single event, thus contributing to broader economic diversification.

Expanding this perspective, **Kozhokulov et al. (2019)** draw attention to the role of sports tourism in job creation, noting that event hosting often stimulates both direct employment (e.g., hospitality, event management, transport services) and indirect employment (e.g., supply chains and construction). Their study highlights how such opportunities can be particularly transformative for regions grappling with stagnation or economic decline, where sports tourism may act as a development lever. **Perić (2018)** further stresses the importance of sports tourism in infrastructure development, pointing out that investments in sporting facilities, transport, and urban amenities can have long-term spillover effects that benefit local residents as well as visitors. This perspective positions sports tourism as more than a temporary economic driver—it can serve as a catalyst for long-term regional transformation.

Despite these clear benefits, the literature also cautions against an overreliance on the short-term financial gains associated with sports tourism. Both **Tsekouropoulos et al. (2022)** and **Perić (2018)** underscore the risk of unsustainable growth if strategies focus solely on maximizing immediate revenue without considering long-term community needs. They argue that in some cases, investments in mega-events have left host regions burdened with underutilized

infrastructure and mounting maintenance costs, rather than sustained prosperity. Similarly, **Kozhokulov et al. (2019)** warn that while jobs created during event periods can temporarily boost local employment rates, many of these positions are seasonal or short-lived, thereby limiting their long-term impact on regional economic stability.

5.1.3. Small-Scale Sports Events

Small-scale sports events have emerged in the literature as a compelling and sustainable model for regional development, offering both economic and social benefits without the burdens often associated with mega-events. **Duglio and Beltramo (2017)** emphasize that these localized events foster economic circulation within host communities by stimulating small businesses such as restaurants, accommodation providers, and retail outlets. Their analysis shows that the scale of these events allows communities to reap financial rewards while avoiding the risks of over-investment in large, underutilized infrastructure.

In a similar vein, **Morfoulaki et al. (2023)** highlight the appeal of small-scale events in attracting moderate yet steady flows of visitors. These visitors often seek authentic, community-oriented experiences, which in turn generate recurring demand for local services and cultural activities. Such dynamics promote not only economic vitality but also regional identity.

Gibson et al. (2003) further argue that small-scale events provide more manageable opportunities for host regions, enabling them to integrate sports tourism into existing resources rather than requiring extensive new construction. This integration ensures greater sustainability, as infrastructure improvements can be aligned with community needs.

Finally, **Fernández-Martínez et al. (2022)** underline the social benefits of small-scale events, such as enhancing community pride, volunteerism, and civic participation. These outcomes strengthen social cohesion and support long-term community development.

Collectively, these findings affirm that small-scale sports events represent a viable and resilient alternative for regions with limited capacities to host mega-events, offering balanced pathways for economic stimulation and social enrichment.

5.1.4. Mega-Sports Events and Their Dual Impacts

The literature on mega-sports events, including tournaments such as the FIFA World Cup, highlights a complex interplay between substantial opportunities and notable risks. **Tomino et al. (2020)** underscore the capacity of these events to generate significant revenues through tourism, hospitality, and associated service sectors, while also enhancing the global profile and visibility of host cities and nations. **Vilakazi et al. (2014)** further demonstrate that mega-events can act as catalysts for large-scale urban and infrastructure development, including stadiums, transportation networks, and telecommunications systems, thereby creating enduring physical legacies that benefit both residents and future tourism initiatives.

However, these opportunities are accompanied by significant challenges. **Emery (2002)** cautions that the financial costs of hosting are often underestimated, and the economic benefits may be unevenly distributed, potentially limiting positive impacts for the broader community. **Preuss (2006)** highlights the risk of “white elephant” infrastructure—facilities constructed for a specific event that may become underutilized or financially burdensome after the conclusion of the event. Sustainability concerns, including environmental degradation and resource strain, further complicate the long-term success of hosting mega-sports events.

5.1.5. Tourism Influx and Global Dynamics

Several studies have examined the dynamics of tourism influx during mega-sports events, with particular attention to the **2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa**. **Peeters et al. (2014)** and **Ferreira (2011)** highlight that actual visitor numbers often deviate from initial projections, influenced by a combination of global economic trends, logistical challenges, and perceptions of the host country’s safety and accessibility. These findings indicate that even high-profile events with substantial media attention are not immune to external factors that can affect attendance.

Briedenhann (2011) and **Knott et al. (2012)** further analyze the operational and structural determinants of tourism outcomes, including the adequacy of transport networks, accommodation capacity, and the efficiency of event

management. They argue that misalignments between expected and actual visitor flows can undermine anticipated economic benefits and reduce the overall impact of the event on local tourism industries.

Maennig and du Plessis (2010) contribute an economic and strategic perspective, emphasizing that effective planning must incorporate flexibility to respond to changing conditions, such as global financial fluctuations or shifts in international traveler confidence. Collectively, these studies underscore the necessity of **adaptive management strategies** for mega-events, highlighting that maximizing tourism benefits requires not only meticulous pre-event planning but also the capacity to adjust operational approaches in real time to mitigate risks and optimize visitor experiences.

5.2. Results from the Survey

The survey conducted as part of this research captured a wide range of perspectives from residents across Italy regarding the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism. A total of 510 respondents participated, representing diverse demographic groups and geographic regions. The structured questionnaire covered socio-demographic information, resident interests in sports tourism, and perceptions of its economic, social, and environmental impacts. The results are summarized below.

Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using JASP statistical software to ensure precision and reliability. Descriptive statistics were utilized to provide an overview of respondent demographics and general trends in perceptions. Inferential analyses, including chi-square tests and regression models, were employed to explore relationships between variables, such as resident demographics and their perceived economic benefits of hosting sporting events.

The JASP software facilitated the analysis by offering user-friendly tools for hypothesis testing and visualizations. Key findings include:

- A significant majority (84%) of residents agreed that hosting sports events provides economic benefits to their regions.

- A smaller proportion (13%) expressed uncertainty, while 3% disagreed, highlighting areas requiring targeted stakeholder engagement.
- Chi-squared tests confirmed a statistically significant relationship between hosting sporting events and perceived economic benefits ($p < 0.05$), thereby rejecting the null hypothesis that no such association exists.

The analysis also identified demographic factors influencing perceptions. For instance, younger respondents (aged 18-35) were more optimistic about the economic benefits of sports tourism compared to older participants, indicating generational differences in outlooks.

Hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant association between hosting sporting events and economic benefit.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between hosting sporting events and economic benefit.

Table 5:

Contingency tables on economic benefits of hosting sports on the Economic Benefits of Hosting Sports

Contingency Tables								
			Potential economic benefit of hosting sports				Total	
Yes	Count		428				428	
	% of total		84%				84%	
No	Count		15				15	
	% of total		3%				3 %	
Maybe	Count		67				67	
	% of total		13 %				13 %	

Note: Derived from survey data, analyzed using JASP software, compiled by the author

Table 6:
Calculating the p-value

Chi-Squared Tests					
	Value		df	p	
X ²	1.037		1	>0.001	
N	510				

Note. Derived from survey data, analyzed using JASP software, compiled by the author

Notably, the P-value is less than the significant level of 0.005, this study rejects the null hypothesis because there is a relationship between hosting a sporting event and the potential economic impact of a region

5.2.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Q1. Gender: The gender distribution of respondents was relatively balanced, with males comprising 55% (281 respondents) and females representing 45% (229 respondents). This near parity ensures a broad representation of viewpoints from both genders in the analysis of sports tourism's impacts.

Q2. Age: The majority of respondents, 42% (214 participants), were aged between 12 and 20, reflecting a significant representation of younger individuals. This was followed by 23% (119 participants) in the 41–50 age group and 12% (60 participants) in the 31–40 age bracket. Respondents aged 51–60 constituted 11% (57 participants), while the 21–30 age group accounted for 7% (36 participants). Participants over 60 years made up the smallest proportion, at 5% (24 participants). This age distribution highlights a youthful demographic, which may influence attitudes toward sports tourism's social and cultural impacts.

Q3. Civil Status: Regarding civil status, single individuals comprised the largest group, accounting for 36% (186 respondents). Married respondents followed at 27% (138 participants), while 23% (119 participants) identified as "Other," potentially including widowed or other unclassified statuses. Cohabiting respondents represented 8% (42 participants), and smaller proportions were separated (4%, 20 participants) or divorced (1%, 5 participants). This variation

provides a rich dataset for analyzing how different civil statuses shape perceptions of sports tourism.

Q4. Employment Status: Employment status revealed a diverse participant base. Workers constituted the largest group at 47% (240 respondents), followed by students at 40% (205 respondents). A smaller proportion (4%, 19 respondents) reported being both students and workers. Unemployed participants accounted for 3% (17 respondents), while the "Other" category, which may include retirees or informal workers, comprised 6% (29 respondents). This distribution reflects a mix of economically active individuals and students, offering varied perspectives on the socioeconomic implications of sports tourism. The diversity in socio-demographic profiles allowed for a comprehensive analysis of how perceptions of sports tourism impacts differed across groups, offering nuanced insights into the factors shaping attitudes.

5.2.2. Interests and Engagement with Sports Tourism

The survey indicated high levels of interest in sports tourism among respondents. Nearly 68% reported attending at least one sporting event in their region in the past three years, while 34% actively participated in local sports-related activities, such as volunteering at events or engaging in community discussions. Notably, urban residents were more likely to attend large-scale events, whereas rural respondents were more involved in smaller, community-based sports activities.

This pattern suggests that accessibility and proximity to sports venues play significant roles in shaping engagement levels. Respondents who were more actively engaged with sports tourism tended to have a positive perception of its economic and social benefits, reinforcing the idea that involvement can drive support for such initiatives.

5.2.3. Perceptions of Economic Impacts

Economic benefits emerged as a dominant theme in the survey responses. Approximately 76% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that sports tourism contributed to job creation, while 71% highlighted its role in boosting local businesses, particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors. Younger respondents

(18-29 years old) were particularly optimistic, with 84% perceiving sports tourism as a driver of economic growth.

However, perceptions of economic fairness varied significantly. While urban residents (64%) were more likely to perceive economic benefits as widespread, only 41% of rural respondents agreed, citing limited spillover effects to their communities. This disparity underscores the need for targeted policies to ensure more equitable distribution of economic gains from sports tourism.

5.2.4. Social and Community Impacts

The survey highlighted the social value of sports tourism in fostering community pride and cohesion. Nearly 82% of respondents agreed that hosting sporting events brought communities together, with 74% noting that such events enhanced the region's cultural identity. Respondents in regions with historical ties to sporting traditions expressed the strongest sense of pride, suggesting that cultural context significantly influences perceptions of social impacts.

Nevertheless, concerns about social inequality were also evident. Approximately 37% of respondents believed that the benefits of sports tourism disproportionately favored wealthier individuals or areas, indicating room for improvement in ensuring inclusivity in event planning and implementation.

5.2.5. Environmental Concerns

While respondents acknowledged the economic and social benefits of sports tourism, environmental concerns were frequently raised. Around 48% of participants expressed concerns about the environmental footprint of hosting large-scale events, citing issues such as waste generation, resource consumption, and increased traffic congestion. Urban respondents were particularly vocal about these concerns, with 54% highlighting the need for sustainable practices in event management.

Interestingly, 62% of respondents supported the idea of integrating green initiatives, such as waste reduction programs and renewable energy use, into sports tourism strategies. This finding indicates strong public support for sustainable development approaches that balance economic gains with environmental stewardship.

5.2.6. Regional Variations

The survey revealed significant regional differences in perceptions of sports tourism impacts. Respondents from northern Italy were more likely to report positive economic and social impacts, reflecting the region's well-developed infrastructure and history of hosting major events. In contrast, participants from southern and rural regions were less optimistic, citing inadequate infrastructure and limited economic spillovers as major barriers.

These regional disparities highlight the need for tailored strategies that address local challenges and leverage regional strengths. Policies that prioritize equitable investment in underdeveloped areas could help bridge these gaps, fostering broader support for sports tourism initiatives.

5.3. Results from Interviews

The qualitative interviews yielded rich insights into the multifaceted impacts of sports tourism on regional development, reflecting the varied perspectives of policymakers, business owners, and community leaders. Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several core themes: economic development and employment, community engagement and social impact, policy and planning challenges, and sustainability concerns. These themes helped contextualize and deepen the understanding of the quantitative survey findings.

5.3.1. Economic Development and Employment Opportunities

A recurrent theme across interviews, particularly with business owners and policymakers, was the perceived economic uplift associated with sports tourism. Many participants emphasized the short-term revenue spikes during major events, especially in the hospitality and transport sectors. Hoteliers and event coordinators noted a marked increase in occupancy rates and service demand during peak periods. One business owner remarked:

"Sporting events bring in a wave of customers we don't see the rest of the year. It's a make-or-break season for many of us."

Moreover, local government officials highlighted the potential of sports tourism to generate long-term employment. However, concerns were also raised

regarding the seasonal and temporary nature of such jobs, with one policymaker stating:

“While the economic injection is welcome, we’re still grappling with how to convert this into sustainable, year-round employment.”

5.3.2. Community Engagement and Social Impact

Community leaders emphasized the transformative social effects of sports tourism. Several participants described how events fostered community pride, volunteerism, and cultural exchange, especially in regions hosting international competitions. One community advocate noted:

“These events put our town on the map. They bring people together and give our youth something to aspire to.”

However, this enthusiasm was tempered by concerns about uneven access to event benefits, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods. Some participants highlighted that the allocation of public funds for infrastructure upgrades often bypassed more pressing social needs. This was articulated by a local leader:

“We’re proud to host, but when sports venues are prioritized over clinics or schools, people begin to question the real beneficiaries.”

5.3.3. Policy Coordination and Strategic Planning

Policymakers pointed to the complexity of planning and coordinating sports tourism initiatives. Several mentioned challenges in aligning objectives across tourism, sports, and urban planning departments. Fragmented policy efforts were cited as a barrier to long-term planning, especially in emerging destinations lacking institutional capacity. One regional director observed:

“We have ambitious goals, but too often, departments work in silos, and that slows everything down.”

In contrast, regions with dedicated sports tourism task forces were seen as better positioned to attract events and secure funding. These areas also demonstrated more effective stakeholder engagement and post-event evaluation practices.

5.3.4. Sustainability and Environmental Management

Sustainability emerged as a cross-cutting concern, particularly regarding environmental management during large-scale events. While many interviewees acknowledged recent improvements, such as waste reduction strategies and low-emission transport options, there was consensus that sustainability planning often remains secondary to economic considerations. A community leader stressed:

“We talk a lot about green events, but in practice, there’s limited enforcement and accountability.”

Business owners also expressed the need for more consistent guidelines on environmentally responsible practices, suggesting that incentive-based models might improve compliance and innovation.

5.4. Results from the Analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup

The analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa provides a detailed understanding of the socioeconomic impacts associated with hosting mega-sporting events. By examining key dimensions such as tourism influx, economic contributions, infrastructure investments, and community perceptions, the findings reveal important insights that can inform future sports tourism strategies in Italy.

5.4.1. Tourism Influx

The 2010 FIFA World Cup significantly boosted South Africa’s tourism sector, with actual tourist arrivals exceeding pre-event forecasts. According to Rogerson and Visser (2011), the event attracted approximately 309,000 international tourists, surpassing the projected 250,000 visitors. Domestic tourism also experienced a notable increase, as local attendees traveled to host cities, contributing to heightened hotel occupancy rates, which rose by 24% in urban centers such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. Spending behavior further underscored the event’s economic impact, with international tourists spending an average of \$1,750 during their stay (Du Plessis & Maening, 2011).

For Italy, these findings highlight the potential to leverage its strong global tourism appeal to attract both international and domestic visitors to sporting events. By emphasizing strategic marketing and targeted infrastructural

investments, Italy could replicate or even exceed these tourism outcomes, particularly in high-demand regions.

5.4.2. Economic Contributions

The World Cup generated significant direct and indirect economic benefits. Cornelissen (2010) reported that the event stimulated approximately \$3.6 billion in additional economic activity, driven by ticket sales, sponsorship deals, and broadcasting rights. The hospitality and retail sectors experienced a substantial boost, with restaurants and small businesses reporting a 25% increase in sales during the event period (Bama & Tichaawa, 2015). Additionally, an estimated 130,000 temporary jobs were created in construction, hospitality, and event management sectors (Swart et al., 2011).

Despite these benefits, the analysis also revealed critical challenges. While revenues were high, the cost of organizing the tournament—estimated at over \$3 billion—significantly reduced the net gains (Cornelissen, 2010). Moreover, economic benefits were disproportionately concentrated in major urban centers such as Johannesburg and Cape Town, with rural communities experiencing minimal positive spillovers (Bama & Tichaawa, 2015). For Italy, which continues to explore opportunities to host large-scale sporting events, these findings highlight the importance of applying robust economic modeling to weigh projected costs against expected benefits and to design strategies that ensure a more equitable distribution of event-related gains across both urban and rural regions.

5.4.3. Infrastructure Investments

Infrastructure development played a pivotal role in the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with South Africa investing over \$1.5 billion in new stadiums, transportation systems, and urban development projects. Cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town benefited from improved transportation networks and state-of-the-art stadiums. However, long-term outcomes were mixed. While transportation upgrades delivered sustained benefits by improving urban mobility, certain stadiums became “white elephants,” underutilized after the event (Swart et al., 2011).

Italy could learn from these mixed outcomes by prioritizing infrastructure projects with multi-purpose functionality to ensure long-term utility. The

successful integration of public-private partnerships in South Africa offers a model for financing such initiatives, particularly in regions requiring significant upgrades to host events.

5.4.4. Community Perceptions and Social Impacts

The World Cup had a profound impact on community perceptions, fostering both pride and criticism. Surveys conducted by Bama and Tichaawa (2015) revealed that 68% of South African residents felt proud to host the event, citing enhanced international visibility and improved infrastructure as key benefits. The event also strengthened social cohesion by uniting diverse communities and fostering a sense of national identity (Swart et al., 2011).

However, perceptions of economic fairness were less positive, with 42% of residents believing that the economic benefits were unevenly distributed, favoring wealthier urban areas over rural regions (Cornelissen et al. 2011). Additionally, the displacement of marginalized communities to accommodate infrastructure projects sparked protests and highlighted the social costs of hosting mega-events (Rocha & Xiao, 2022).

For Italy, fostering community engagement and transparency in resource allocation will be critical to garnering public support. By addressing concerns about displacement and ensuring fair economic distribution, Italy can mitigate potential backlash and enhance the social acceptability of large-scale sporting events.

5.4.5. Comparative Insights for Italy

The analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup provides several transferable lessons for Italy. First, leveraging Italy's established global tourism brand could amplify the draw of sporting events, enhancing both international and domestic attendance. Second, policies promoting equitable distribution of economic benefits across regions, particularly in rural areas, could address disparities observed in South Africa. Third, prioritizing sustainable and multi-purpose infrastructure projects can maximize long-term benefits and minimize underutilization risks. Finally, engaging communities in planning and decision-making processes will be essential to securing public support and ensuring social cohesion.

The table below contains organized sources of data and their corresponding studies, along with a summary of each study's insights about the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Table 7.

Summary of Data Sources and Related Studies on the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa

Source	Specific Studies Selected	Summary of Findings
Academic Articles	Cornelissen (2010)	Estimated total economic activity of \$3.6 billion; highlighted significant infrastructure investments but noted uneven benefit distribution and challenges with long-term infrastructure utilization.
	Swart et al. (2011)	Emphasized tourism growth during the event, with over 309,000 international visitors arriving, boosting hotel occupancy rates and visitor spending. However, noted disparities in benefits between urban and rural areas.
	Bama and Tichaawa (2015)	Explored community perceptions, with 68% of residents expressing pride in hosting the event. Identified challenges such as social displacement and lack of inclusion for marginalized groups.
	Du Plessis & Maennig (2012).	Even in World Cup cities, occupancy rates were far from 100% during the event, indicating underutilization of accommodation capacity.
Official Reports	FIFA Legacy Report (2010)	Detailed achievements, including increased global visibility for South Africa, enhanced tourism branding, and urban regeneration. Also noted the importance of long-term planning for sustained benefits.

	South African Department of Tourism Report	Showcased growth in tourism arrivals and revenue during the event. Highlighted efforts to market South Africa as a prime destination for both leisure and business travel post-World Cup.
	UNEP	The actual carbon footprint was 1.65 million tonnes of CO ₂ equivalent, lower than the projected 2.64 million, due to fewer visitors, carpooling, and efficient stadia.
Independent studies	Bruegel	"The World Cup contributed 0.5% (R93 billion) to South Africa's GDP in 2010, creating 130,000 construction jobs and indirectly resulting in a gain of 415,000 jobs"
	Grant Thornton Evaluation	Provided an independent assessment of economic impacts, including job creation and increased revenue in hospitality and retail sectors. Raised concerns about high organizational costs and resource allocation.
	Reuters	In "A decade on, South Africa insists World Cup worth investment", the report shows that Visitor numbers have risen steadily since the World Cup, reaching a high of 10.2 million in subsequent years, contributing close to 10% of GDP.
Media Reports	The Guardian, BBC News	Covered public opinion and controversies, including protests over social displacement and criticism of the "white elephant" stadiums. Highlighted the mixed legacy of the World Cup on South Africa's economy.

Note. This table presents organized sources of data and their corresponding studies, summarizing key insights and findings regarding the socioeconomic and developmental impacts of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

VI. DISCUSSION

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide a comprehensive exploration of the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism on territorial growth in Italy, addressing the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 3. This discussion synthesizes the findings from the systematic literature review, surveys, scenario-based analysis, and interviews to evaluate the hypotheses and assess their broader implications for regional development.

6.1. Socioeconomic Impacts of Sports Tourism Across Regions (SH-1)

The first hypothesis posited that the socioeconomic impacts of sports tourism would vary across Italian regions, influenced by factors such as infrastructure development, job creation, and tourism expenditure. This hypothesis is supported by both the survey results and insights from the scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

The survey revealed significant disparities in perceptions of sports tourism's benefits between urban and rural residents. Urban respondents were more likely to report positive economic impacts, such as increased job opportunities and improved infrastructure, compared to their rural counterparts. These findings are consistent with studies like Cornelissen (2010), which highlight the concentration of benefits in urban centers during mega-events. This urban-centric benefit structure is often a result of strategic planning decisions that prioritize high-return investments and international visibility, typically found in metropolitan regions.

The scenario-based analysis also underscores the importance of regional characteristics in determining the impacts of sports tourism. For instance, in South Africa, urban areas with established infrastructure experienced greater economic gains, while rural regions faced barriers such as inadequate facilities and limited accessibility. For Italy, these results suggest that tailored policies addressing regional disparities—such as targeted investments in underdeveloped areas—are critical to maximizing sports tourism's benefits across all regions.

Furthermore, the disparities observed can also be interpreted through the lens of regional development theories, such as cumulative causation (Myrdal, 1957), which posits that initial advantages in certain regions—such as existing

infrastructure or human capital—tend to attract more investments and opportunities, thereby widening the gap between core and peripheral areas. This theory aligns with the survey's findings, suggesting that already-developed regions in Italy, such as Lombardy or Lazio, are better able to attract high-profile sports events and thereby secure greater socioeconomic returns. Peripheral regions, in contrast, may struggle to participate meaningfully in the sports tourism economy unless assisted by redistributive policies and equitable development strategies.

Comparative analysis with other European nations further reinforces these observations. In Spain, for example, while cities like Barcelona and Madrid have profited enormously from hosting global sporting events—including the Olympics and Champions League finals—smaller cities such as Valencia and Zaragoza have faced challenges in leveraging sports tourism to the same extent. A similar pattern is emerging in Italy, where cities like Milan and Rome dominate the national sports tourism landscape, often receiving disproportionate shares of both public and private investment. This uneven development trajectory calls for a more inclusive approach to sports tourism planning, wherein regional identity, local capacity, and community needs are factored into the selection and promotion of host cities.

Moreover, cultural and historical context also plays a role in determining how regions experience and benefit from sports tourism. Northern regions of Italy, with a tradition of industrialization and international exposure, are often better equipped to accommodate and market sports events on a global scale. Conversely, southern regions, while rich in cultural heritage and potential for experiential tourism, may lack the administrative and infrastructural readiness to host large-scale events. This divergence necessitates differentiated policy prescriptions, such as incentives for public-private partnerships in southern regions or skill development programs to prepare local communities for the demands of sports tourism.

Finally, the uneven distribution of economic benefits raises important questions about social equity and the long-term sustainability of sports tourism as a development strategy. If left unaddressed, such disparities may exacerbate regional inequalities and undermine public support for hosting sports events. Therefore, a more balanced and inclusive model is essential—one that incorporates sustainability indicators, community participation, and equitable funding

mechanisms. Only by addressing these structural disparities can Italy ensure that the socioeconomic dividends of sports tourism are broadly and fairly distributed, aligning with national objectives for cohesion and regional development.

6.1.1. Revenue Generation and Employment Growth

The direct spending of tourists attending sports events, including accommodation, dining, and entertainment, results in immediate revenue generation for local businesses (Downward et al., 2023). Hotels, restaurants, and shops, particularly in the vicinity of sports venues, see a surge in demand, contributing to increased income and business growth. Additionally, the influx of tourists during sporting events generates employment opportunities both in the short and long term (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). Jobs created include those in the service sector (hotels, restaurants, event staff), as well as in the construction and maintenance of sports facilities and supporting infrastructure. For example, the 2020 UEFA European Championship held in Rome led to an increase in employment within the tourism and construction sectors due to the extensive preparation and renovation of facilities (Deriu et al., 2024).

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework employed in this study helps to conceptualize this growth pattern. In the early stages of the TALC, sports tourism destinations often require substantial investments in infrastructure and marketing to attract visitors (Heuwinkel & Venter, 2018). As a destination moves into the "development" phase, these investments begin to yield returns in the form of increased tourist arrivals and higher economic output. Italy, as a sports tourism destination, exemplifies this process, with cities like Roma, Milan, Turin, and Florence having moved through several phases of the TALC thanks to their ability to host international sporting events and capitalize on the associated economic benefits.

Moreover, the employment generated through sports tourism extends beyond traditional roles in hospitality and construction. The proliferation of digital platforms and social media has given rise to new employment opportunities in marketing, content creation, and digital services tailored to tourists and event promotion. Furthermore, the sports tourism industry stimulates auxiliary sectors such as transportation, security, merchandising, and local cultural enterprises (Hu

et al., 2024). These multiplier effects not only enhance local income streams but also contribute to a more diversified and resilient regional economy, which is crucial for long-term sustainability.

The role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is particularly noteworthy in this context. Sports tourism events often act as catalysts for SME growth, providing platforms for local entrepreneurs to showcase products and services (Jæger, 2020). For instance, during international cycling events hosted in Tuscany, many local businesses—including agritourism operators, artisanal food producers, and bike rental companies—experienced notable increases in revenue. Such dynamics illustrate how sports tourism can empower local economies and foster inclusive growth by engaging a broad spectrum of economic actors, from multinational corporations to grassroots vendors (Jæger, 2020).

Additionally, regional case studies in southern Italy, such as the Giro d'Italia's passage through Puglia and Calabria, demonstrate that even less-industrialized areas can benefit significantly from sports tourism when local stakeholders are actively involved in event planning and delivery. These events, while not on the scale of the Olympics or World Cup, nonetheless contribute meaningfully to temporary employment and community-level economic activation. Evidence from these regions indicates that, with adequate support and infrastructure, sports tourism can serve as a mechanism for regional economic revitalization, particularly in areas that have historically struggled with high unemployment and economic stagnation (Raso & Cherubini, 2024).

However, it is important to recognize that these employment gains are often temporally bounded and may vary in quality. While short-term employment during events can reduce local unemployment rates, the sustainability of such jobs is contingent upon the frequency and scale of events hosted (Solberg & Preuss, 2007). Therefore, policymakers must consider strategies to convert temporary employment into long-term opportunities through skills development, vocational training, and investment in the broader sports economy. By doing so, the benefits of sports tourism can extend beyond episodic events, contributing to enduring socioeconomic transformation.

Finally, in the post-pandemic economic landscape, sports tourism has acquired renewed significance as a tool for recovery and resilience (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2024). The lifting of travel restrictions and the return of international events present an opportunity for regions to reimagine their tourism strategies with a focus on sustainability, employment generation, and inclusive development. Italy, with its rich sporting culture and diversified regional landscapes, is uniquely positioned to leverage these dynamics, provided that coherent national and regional strategies are implemented to maximize employment and revenue generation through sports tourism.

6.1.2. Contribution to Infrastructure Development

In addition to stimulating business and employment, sports tourism often acts as a catalyst for infrastructure development. Host regions make substantial investments in improving their roads, public transportation systems, and sports venues, which in turn enhance the long-term economic prospects of these areas. For instance, cities like Turin, which hosted the 2006 Winter Olympics, have seen sustained growth in tourism partially due to the infrastructure developed for the event (Preuss, 2006). These facilities continue to attract visitors long after the sporting event, demonstrating the lasting economic legacy of sports tourism. The findings in this study support the view that investments in infrastructure are not solely for the duration of the event but serve as long-term assets that contribute to regional development and global competitiveness (Preuss, 2006).

Moreover, infrastructure development associated with sports tourism often extends beyond sports-specific facilities. Host cities frequently undertake broad urban renewal projects in preparation for major sporting events, which can include enhancements to airport terminals, railway networks, telecommunications, energy systems, and public amenities (Tu et al., 2023). These improvements not only benefit tourists but also enhance the quality of life for residents by improving mobility, accessibility, and public service delivery. For example, the redevelopment of Milan's public transport system in anticipation of hosting multiple football matches for UEFA Euro 2020 facilitated better connectivity throughout the metropolitan area, contributing to both tourist satisfaction and daily commuter efficiency.

Importantly, the legacy of sports-related infrastructure development is deeply intertwined with regional strategic planning (Dickson & Zhang, 2021). When aligned with long-term urban development goals, such investments can generate sustained benefits that persist well beyond the event's conclusion. Cities like Florence and Bologna have adopted integrative planning models where new or renovated sports venues are incorporated into wider cultural, educational, and recreational precincts. This approach not only maximizes infrastructure utilization but also promotes synergies between sports tourism and other forms of economic activity, such as conferences, exhibitions, and local festivals, thereby reinforcing the multifunctional value of such investments.

However, the outcomes of infrastructure development are not uniformly positive and require careful governance. A critical issue pertains to the risk of "white elephants"—underutilized or abandoned facilities post-event—which can burden local economies with high maintenance costs and limited returns (Baade & Matheson, 2016; Gaffney, 2010). This phenomenon has been observed in various host cities where event-specific infrastructure failed to generate long-term utility, thereby undermining the expected legacy benefits of sports tourism. To mitigate this risk, successful host cities increasingly adopt sustainability frameworks and post-event legacy planning strategies that repurpose sports venues for community use, training centers, and youth development programs (Preuss, 2007; Leopkey & Parent, 2012). For example, several facilities built for the 2009 Mediterranean Games in Pescara have been converted into multi-use community sports complexes, thus ensuring ongoing public value from initial capital outlays (Gallard et al., 2009).

From a policy perspective, infrastructure development related to sports tourism should be guided by inclusive planning processes that engage stakeholders from various sectors, including transportation, tourism, environment, education, and civil society (Toohey, 2008; Misener & Mason, 2006). This cross-sectoral collaboration ensures that infrastructure serves diverse needs and enhances social cohesion by aligning with broader community development goals. Furthermore, investments must be equitable, extending beyond major metropolitan hubs to include smaller municipalities and rural areas that could benefit significantly from improved infrastructure (Higham & Hinch, 2009). By distributing resources more

evenly, regional governments can harness sports tourism as a tool for reducing spatial inequalities and fostering balanced territorial development (Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Smith, 2012).

Infrastructure development prompted by sports tourism represents a dual opportunity: it delivers immediate enhancements in preparation for events and creates a foundation for future socioeconomic growth. When strategically planned and inclusively governed, these infrastructure projects have the potential to transform host regions, improve living standards, and enhance Italy's global competitiveness as a destination for both sports and leisure tourism.

6.1.3. Regional Disparities and Economic Impact

However, the economic impact of sports tourism is not uniform across all regions. More developed urban centers like Milan and Rome are better positioned to reap larger economic rewards due to their existing infrastructure, international recognition, and institutional capacity to organize large-scale events. These cities already possess robust transportation networks, high-quality accommodation facilities, and a diversified economy that allows them to accommodate and benefit from an influx of tourists and associated investments (Guala & Turco, 2009; Richards, 2013). In contrast, rural or less developed regions hosting smaller events may experience more localized and short-term economic benefits. Although such areas do witness an uptick in visitor numbers and related spending, they often lack the foundational infrastructure and promotional capacity necessary to fully capitalize on the potential of sports tourism (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017; Higham & Hinch, 2009).

Structural inequalities, both historical and institutional, contribute to these disparities. Northern and central Italian regions have traditionally benefited from more consistent investment in economic development, including transport infrastructure and public services, while southern regions (Mezzogiorno) have faced chronic underinvestment and socioeconomic challenges such as higher unemployment, lower educational attainment, and limited industrial diversification (Bifulco et al., 2020; Paci & Marrocu, 2014). These structural imbalances mean that even when sports tourism opportunities arise in southern regions, their ability to maximize the benefits is constrained by systemic barriers.

For instance, despite the success of the 2019 Universiade in Naples, reports indicated that the long-term benefits were hindered by inadequate follow-up investments and weak institutional coordination (Bifulco et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, there is growing recognition that smaller regions hosting niche sports events or regional competitions can derive meaningful, albeit more modest, economic gains. These benefits often manifest in increased demand for local products, the promotion of cultural heritage, and temporary job creation (Wilson, 2006; Daniels, 2007). For example, regions in Sicily and Sardinia have hosted international sailing and cycling events that, while not attracting mass audiences, have significantly bolstered local hospitality sectors and raised the profile of otherwise peripheral destinations (Gibson et al., 2012). Such events contribute to rural tourism diversification and can serve as entry points for broader tourism development strategies, particularly if linked with agritourism, heritage tourism, or eco-tourism initiatives (Getz & Page, 2016).

These disparities underscore the need for targeted policy interventions that support underdeveloped regions in maximizing the economic potential of sports tourism. Investments in foundational infrastructure, such as reliable transport links, digital connectivity, and quality accommodations, are critical to enhancing regional attractiveness (Jones, 2001). Equally important are capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving local governance, event management, and community engagement. By fostering local leadership and equipping communities with the skills to plan, host, and sustain sports tourism events, policymakers can help these regions move from the "involvement" to the "development" stages of the TALC framework (Butler, 1980), thereby ensuring more balanced regional growth.

Furthermore, the strategic decentralization of event hosting rights—ensuring that smaller and less affluent regions are deliberately chosen to host national and international events—can serve as a tool for spatial equity. National sporting federations, in collaboration with tourism boards and regional authorities, must adopt equity-based models of event distribution that not only consider economic feasibility but also developmental potential. The legacy planning process should begin at the bidding stage, integrating long-term goals of regional regeneration, youth development, and cultural promotion (Preuss, 2007; Smith, 2012).

6.1.4. Multiplier Effect and Long-Term Growth

The results of this study also underscore the multiplier effect of sports tourism as a critical mechanism through which short-term expenditures generate sustained economic benefits. The economic multiplier refers to the cascading effects of an initial injection of spending—in this case, by sports tourists—on various sectors of the local economy. For every euro spent by a tourist, multiple euros can be generated through secondary expenditures as businesses reinvest profits, employees spend their earnings, and suppliers meet increased demand. This ripple effect stimulates consumption, production, and investment across multiple layers of the economy, thereby reinforcing the transformative potential of sports tourism (Crompton, 1995; Daniels & Norman, 2003; Preuss, 2004).

The multiplier effect is especially pronounced in cities and regions with well-integrated local economies. For example, during the 2020 UEFA European Championship in Rome, the hospitality and retail sectors experienced not only a surge in direct spending but also subsequent waves of economic activity in transportation, event planning, logistics, and media services. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of Italy's local economies, particularly benefited from increased customer traffic, short-term contracts, and promotional exposure. These findings echo the conclusions of Gibson et al. (2013), who argue that the indirect and induced impacts of sports tourism often surpass the initial spending, provided the local economy is sufficiently diversified and interconnected.

Over time, repeated hosting of sports events can help establish a self-reinforcing cycle of growth. As regions accumulate experience in organizing events and invest in infrastructure, their attractiveness to event organizers increases, leading to more frequent and higher-profile events. This cyclical process—sometimes referred to as “event-led development”—can stimulate long-term growth in both the tourism sector and the broader regional economy (Chalip, 2006; Grix & Houlihan, 2014). For instance, Milan's successful hosting of international tennis, athletics, and football tournaments over the past decade has solidified its status as a premier European sports hub, attracting ongoing investment and international attention. These events not only drive tourism receipts but also enhance the city's global brand and investor confidence (Solberg & Preuss, 2007).

Moreover, the multiplier effect is not solely economic in nature; it also encompasses social and cultural multipliers. Sports events contribute to social cohesion, civic pride, and community participation, particularly when residents feel included in the planning and legacy of the events (Misener & Mason, 2006). The engagement of local volunteers, artisans, and performers in the cultural components of sports events can amplify social capital and create intangible assets that benefit the community in the long run. Such dynamics are particularly significant in smaller towns, where a single regional sports event may galvanize community engagement, strengthen local identity, and reinforce social networks — an effect that has been observed in Italian municipalities hosting regional cycling races and local football tournaments (Barget & Gouguet, 2011; Higham, 1999).

However, to fully realize the multiplier effect and ensure long-term growth, it is essential to adopt a strategic, legacy-oriented approach to sports tourism. Without careful planning and reinvestment, the positive impacts can be fleeting or unequally distributed. Regions must therefore prioritize legacy management as a core component of their sports tourism strategy (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). This includes leveraging event revenues to fund education, health, youth development, and cultural programs, thereby multiplying the societal impact of initial economic gains.

From a policy standpoint, governments and regional authorities must develop robust evaluation frameworks to measure the real and potential multiplier effects of sports tourism. These frameworks should track not only immediate indicators such as tourist spending and job creation, but also long-term metrics related to infrastructure utilization, social cohesion, and regional branding (OECD, 2021). By institutionalizing such monitoring systems, policymakers can better understand the life cycle of economic benefits and implement adaptive measures to sustain momentum beyond the event horizon.

6.2. Residents' perception of social impacts of sports tourism (SH-2)

The second hypothesis explored how residents' perceptions of sports tourism's social impacts vary based on factors like engagement levels, knowledge of benefits, and perceived social and environmental impacts. This hypothesis was extensively addressed through survey and interview data.

Survey results indicated that residents who were actively engaged in sports tourism—either as participants, volunteers, or attendees—tended to have more favorable perceptions of its socioeconomic benefits. Younger respondents and those with higher socioeconomic status were particularly optimistic, aligning with findings from Waitt (2003). Conversely, less-engaged residents, particularly in rural areas, expressed skepticism about the distribution of benefits and raised concerns about environmental impacts and social inequities.

Interviews further validated these perceptions, with stakeholders emphasizing the need for inclusive engagement strategies to address disparities. The literature supports these findings, with studies like Gursoy and Kendall (2006) highlighting the critical role of resident involvement in fostering support for sports tourism initiatives.

6.2.1. Positive Perceptions: Economic and Social Benefits

In many regions of Italy, residents expressed positive attitudes toward sports tourism, largely due to the tangible economic benefits. Residents recognize that sporting events can bring increased income to local businesses, stimulate job creation, and boost tourism expenditure. These economic benefits often translate into improved public services, infrastructure development, and an enhanced quality of life for residents. Research conducted by Duglio & Beltramo (2017) and Morfoulaki et al. (2023) aligns with this sentiment, highlighting how local businesses, particularly those in hospitality and retail, see significant revenue spikes during major sporting events.

Moreover, the social benefits associated with sports tourism contribute to positive perceptions among residents. Sporting events often foster a sense of pride and collective identity within host communities. Large-scale events such as the Giro d'Italia or the Rome Marathon unite residents, tourists, and local businesses in a shared cultural celebration. The social cohesion generated through these events can strengthen community bonds, foster social inclusion, and enhance residents' overall sense of belonging. This aligns with the works of Kozhokulov et al. (2019), who note that sports events can play an integral role in community identity formation and enhance civic pride.

In addition to fostering unity and economic growth, sports tourism contributes to urban regeneration and place-making, which are positively perceived by local populations. In several Italian cities, previously underutilized or deteriorating spaces have been revitalized as part of preparations for hosting sports events. For example, the redevelopment of neighborhoods in Naples for the 2019 Universiade created not only functional sports facilities but also beautified public spaces, pedestrian walkways, and community centers that continue to benefit residents post-event. These visible transformations enhance the aesthetic appeal and usability of urban environments, generating a sense of optimism and progress among the populace.

Furthermore, sports tourism can act as a catalyst for civic engagement and volunteerism, particularly during international events that require large-scale coordination and support. Local residents often participate as volunteers, gaining valuable experience, skills, and social connections. This active participation fosters a sense of agency and ownership over the event and its outcomes, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and pride. Such engagement was observed during the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, where over 20,000 volunteers contributed to the success of the games, leaving behind a legacy of enhanced civic participation and community leadership (Preuss, 2006).

From a cultural standpoint, sports events serve as platforms for intercultural exchange, as they bring together athletes, spectators, and media from diverse backgrounds. This exposure promotes cultural awareness, tolerance, and dialogue within host communities. Italian cities hosting international events often organize cultural festivals, exhibitions, and educational programs alongside sports competitions, which further enrich the local cultural landscape. These multidimensional experiences reinforce the perception that sports tourism is not merely an economic venture but a holistic opportunity for cultural enrichment and international visibility.

Finally, the intergenerational appeal of sports events contributes to their broad-based support among residents. Sports tourism is unique in its ability to engage diverse demographic groups—children, youth, adults, and the elderly—through both participatory and spectator roles. Community-based sports events, in particular, are seen as family-friendly and socially inclusive, creating shared

experiences that bridge generational divides. This inclusivity reinforces the idea that sports tourism brings enduring social value to the community, well beyond the duration of the event itself.

6.2.2. Negative Perceptions: Environmental and Social Costs

Despite the recognized benefits, there are also concerns among residents regarding the negative impacts of sports tourism, particularly when it comes to environmental degradation and social disruptions. The increased influx of tourists during major events can lead to overcrowding, noise pollution, and strain on local resources, which are key concerns for residents in both urban and rural areas (Higham, 1999; Waitt, 2003). Traffic congestion and overcrowding, especially in major tourist destinations like Rome, Milan, and Florence, often disrupt the daily lives of residents and lead to complaints about reduced quality of life during event periods (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006).

Furthermore, environmental concerns are increasingly at the forefront of residents' minds, particularly as the tourism sector becomes more conscious of sustainability. The ecological footprint of sporting events is a pressing issue, as large gatherings can result in significant waste generation, air pollution due to increased transportation needs, and potential damage to natural or cultural heritage sites (Collins et al., 2009). For example, events hosted in sensitive regions like the Alps or coastal areas must contend with the balance between maximizing tourism revenue and preserving the local environment. Studies by Poczta et al. (2020) highlight the potential for sports tourism to exacerbate environmental degradation, particularly in regions with fragile ecosystems, thus underscoring the need for sustainable event management practices.

Additionally, residents often express frustration with the uneven distribution of economic benefits, which can lead to social tensions and perceptions of inequality. While certain neighborhoods or business owners—particularly those located near event venues—may enjoy a significant boost in income, others may see little to no benefit. This disparity can generate resentment among residents who feel excluded from the economic gains promised by sports tourism (Fredline & Faulkner, 2004). Such sentiments are particularly evident in smaller municipalities

that host events without the requisite infrastructure to support mass tourism, leading to greater disruption than benefit.

Another pressing issue is the temporary inflation of prices during sports events, which can adversely affect local populations. Accommodation costs, restaurant prices, and public transportation fares often rise substantially during high-profile events, making it difficult for residents—especially those from lower-income backgrounds—to maintain their regular standard of living (Kim et al., 2006). The commodification of public space and services for tourist consumption can also marginalize locals, who may feel that their needs are being subordinated to the interests of visitors and event organizers (Smith, 2012).

From a social perspective, the displacement of communities due to sports infrastructure projects can lead to long-term grievances. In preparation for large-scale events, it is not uncommon for host cities to undertake extensive urban redevelopment, which may involve the demolition of existing neighborhoods, forced relocation of residents, or restriction of access to public spaces (Malfas et al., 2004; Pillay & Bass, 2008). Such occurrences, although more commonly associated with mega-events like the Olympics, have also been observed in Italian contexts where municipal authorities prioritize event-related developments over community consultation. The resulting sense of disenfranchisement can erode public trust in local governance and diminish overall support for future events.

Moreover, the cultural commodification associated with international sports events may dilute or distort local identities. In an effort to appeal to a global audience, host cities often commercialize their cultural assets, transforming traditional festivals, cuisines, and landmarks into tourist spectacles. While this may increase visibility and tourism revenue, it can also lead to a loss of authenticity and cultural homogenization, leaving local residents feeling disconnected from the version of their city presented to the world (Zukin, 1995; Quinn, 2007).

Lastly, the temporary nature of many sports tourism benefits further compounds negative perceptions. Once an event concludes, the promised long-term economic development may not materialize, and the infrastructure constructed for the event may fall into disuse or become a financial burden on local governments. The phenomenon of "white elephants"—expensive venues that are

underutilized post-event—is a recurring concern, particularly in smaller cities without a sustainable post-event plan (Baade & Matheson, 2016; Preuss, 2007). This reality reinforces skepticism among residents about the true value of hosting sports tourism events, especially when weighed against the social and environmental costs incurred.

6.2.3. Residents' Awareness of Long-Term Benefits

Interestingly, the findings also revealed that residents' perceptions of sports tourism are influenced by their awareness of the long-term benefits derived from hosting events. In regions where residents had a clear understanding of how sports tourism could lead to sustained infrastructural improvements, economic diversification, and enhanced international visibility, their support for such events was generally stronger (Gibson, 1998; Gursoy & Kendall, 2006). For instance, in regions like Emilia-Romagna, where the local government has strategically positioned sports tourism as part of a broader economic development plan, residents are more likely to view sporting events as a catalyst for long-term prosperity (Dansero & Puttilli, 2010).

The Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) framework provides a valuable lens through which to examine these dynamics. In destinations that are in the "consolidation" or "rejuvenation" stages of the TALC, residents often exhibit higher levels of support for sports tourism, as they are more aware of the potential long-term benefits of hosting events (Butler, 1980; Getz, 1992). On the other hand, destinations in the earlier stages of the TALC, particularly those in the "involvement" or "development" stages, may experience more resistance from residents who are primarily concerned about the immediate costs and disruptions caused by events (Faulkner, Chalip, Brown, Jago, March, & Woodside, 2001). Understanding this temporal dimension of residents' attitudes is crucial for policymakers aiming to build long-term support for sports tourism initiatives.

This correlation between long-term awareness and support is also shaped by the quality and transparency of communication from authorities. In municipalities where local governments proactively inform residents about the legacy impacts of sports tourism—such as job creation, increased foreign investment, and improved public amenities—public support tends to increase (Fredline, 2004; Misener &

Mason, 2006). Transparent communication strategies that highlight specific examples of successful past events and clearly delineate how new initiatives will benefit local communities in the long run are instrumental in fostering trust and optimism. Conversely, where information is limited or perceived as opaque, skepticism and resistance are more likely to prevail (Waite, 2003).

Furthermore, educational outreach and community involvement play pivotal roles in shaping residents' perceptions. When local residents are included in planning processes and are given platforms to voice their concerns and aspirations, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership over the outcomes (Reid, Mair, & George, 2004). Participatory planning not only enhances the legitimacy of sports tourism initiatives but also ensures that the long-term benefits are aligned with local needs (Hall, 2006). This approach is particularly important in regions with historically low levels of civic engagement or where past tourism projects have failed to deliver on their promises.

In addition, previous experience with successful events serves as a strong determinant of long-term awareness and acceptance. Communities that have hosted international or national sporting events and observed tangible, lasting improvements—such as new transportation links, upgraded sports facilities, or increased tourist arrivals—tend to be more receptive to future endeavors (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003). In contrast, communities with negative past experiences may harbor lingering doubts and require more intensive engagement strategies to rebuild confidence (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

Lastly, media representation and academic research significantly influence public understanding of sports tourism's long-term value. Positive media coverage that highlights local success stories and scholarly work that documents the socioeconomic legacy of sports events can help inform public opinion and counterbalance narratives focused solely on short-term disruption (Toohey & Veal, 2007; Shipway & Fyall, 2012). Integrating such insights into public discourse enables residents to make informed judgments about the trade-offs involved in hosting sports tourism events and encourages a more balanced, forward-looking perspective.

Increasing residents' awareness of the long-term advantages of sports tourism requires a combination of effective communication, inclusive governance, and demonstrable outcomes. These efforts not only help secure community support for future events but also ensure that the benefits of sports tourism are equitably distributed and sustainable over time.

6.2.4. Strategies for Enhancing Residents' Support

The research highlights several strategies for improving residents' perceptions of sports tourism and fostering greater community engagement. One key recommendation is the implementation of more **inclusive planning processes**, where local stakeholders, including residents, are actively involved in the decision-making and planning phases of sporting events (Boonsiritomachai & Phonthanukitithaworn, 2019). Transparent communication and community consultation can help to address residents' concerns, particularly regarding environmental sustainability and social equity. Engaging residents early in the process fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that their interests are represented throughout the planning and execution stages (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Misener & Mason, 2008).

Another important strategy is to emphasize the equitable distribution of benefits to local communities. Residents are more likely to support sports tourism if they see that the economic rewards are fairly shared and that local businesses, workers, and service providers are prioritized in the organization of events (Chang, Ku, & Chen, 2020). This includes measures such as hiring local labor, sourcing materials from regional vendors, and integrating community-based enterprises into event supply chains. Such initiatives can mitigate the perception that sports tourism disproportionately benefits external investors or multinational corporations, thereby enhancing its legitimacy and social license within host communities (Fredline, 2005).

Furthermore, the establishment of community liaison committees serves as an effective mechanism for sustained dialogue between event organizers and residents. These committees, composed of local leaders, business owners, youth representatives, and civil society actors, act as advisory bodies that relay community feedback, monitor the distribution of benefits, and propose context-

specific interventions (Chalip, 2006). Institutionalizing such participatory structures demonstrates a commitment to inclusive governance and fosters a collaborative relationship between municipal authorities and residents.

In addition, legacy planning should be integrated into the initial stages of sports tourism development. Legacy planning involves the creation of long-term strategies that ensure the infrastructure, facilities, and economic impetus generated by sporting events continue to benefit the community post-event (Preuss, 2007; Leopkey & Parent, 2012). These plans might include repurposing temporary structures for community use, preserving upgraded transportation links, or transforming event venues into spaces for local sports development. When residents are actively informed about and engaged in legacy planning, they are more inclined to perceive such events as investments in long-term community development rather than temporary spectacles.

Capacity-building programs aimed at local entrepreneurs and service providers are also critical in enhancing community support for sports tourism. These programs provide training in hospitality, event management, tourism services, and sustainable business practices, equipping local residents with the tools necessary to participate meaningfully in the sports tourism value chain (Kaplanidou, Jordan, Funk, & Ridinger, 2012). Such initiatives contribute not only to increased employment opportunities but also to the broader goal of community empowerment and socioeconomic upliftment.

Moreover, implementing continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms is essential to assess residents' perceptions before, during, and after major events. Surveys, public forums, and digital platforms can be used to gather feedback, identify challenges, and inform future planning (Waitt, 2003; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). These iterative processes build public trust and accountability, showing that resident input is not only welcomed but also instrumental in shaping event outcomes. They also allow for real-time adjustments to mitigate dissatisfaction and ensure more responsive governance.

Lastly, integrating cultural expression and celebration into sports tourism events can significantly enhance community support. By incorporating local

traditions, cuisine, arts, and heritage into the design, marketing, and delivery of sporting events, organizers can create a culturally resonant and inclusive atmosphere (Higham, 1999; Shipway & Fyall, 2012). This approach not only enriches the tourist experience but also reinforces community pride and strengthens the connection between residents and the events hosted in their locality.

Collectively, these strategies underscore the importance of participatory governance, transparency, and long-term vision in maximizing the positive social impacts of sports tourism. When implemented effectively, they contribute to building resilient, empowered communities that are active stakeholders in the tourism and development trajectory of their regions.

6.3. Strategies and Policies for Enhancing Positive Effects (SH-3)

This hypothesis suggested that targeted investments in infrastructure, community engagement, and sustainable tourism practices could enhance the positive effects of sports tourism. Evidence from all research components strongly supports this hypothesis.

The scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup demonstrated the benefits of strategic investments in transportation and urban development. However, it also highlighted the risks of underutilized infrastructure post-event, as seen with South Africa's "white elephant" stadiums (Swart et al., 2011). For Italy, these findings underscore the importance of multi-purpose infrastructure that serves community needs beyond sports events.

Sustainability also emerged as a recurring theme. Survey results showed strong public support for integrating green practices into sports tourism, with 62% of respondents advocating for waste reduction programs and renewable energy use. These findings align with literature emphasizing the need for sustainable practices in event management (Smith, 2012).

6.3.1. Investment in Infrastructure

One of the most critical drivers of sports tourism success identified in this study is infrastructure development. The construction or enhancement of stadiums,

arenas, and other sports facilities is essential not only for hosting large-scale sporting events but also for attracting future events and creating lasting economic legacies (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2006; Preuss, 2006). Infrastructure investment serves as a catalyst for tourism and regional development, as it draws both domestic and international tourists, stimulates local business activity, and generates employment opportunities (Chalip, 2004; Solberg & Preuss, 2007).

Additionally, improving transportation networks and accommodations is vital for supporting the growing influx of sports tourists. Effective and efficient transportation systems—including high-speed rail, highways, and air travel—are pivotal in facilitating access to remote or lesser-known event destinations, thereby ensuring that tourism benefits are distributed more evenly across different regions (Toohey, 2008). In coastal or alpine areas, enhanced connectivity can open new markets and extend the tourism season. For instance, in the Italian Alps, skiing and winter sports events have significantly contributed to regional economic growth by attracting visitors throughout the winter months (Hudson, 2003; Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2004).

Beyond event-specific venues, long-term investments in public amenities such as parks, leisure centers, and multi-purpose sports complexes offer continuous value to host communities. These facilities promote year-round tourism, even outside major events, and help sustain local economies. As noted by Preuss (2006), the creation of infrastructure legacies is vital for maximizing the return on investments in sports tourism. Such infrastructure not only supports sustained tourist inflow but also enhances the appeal of the region as a permanent sports tourism destination (Higham & Hinch, 2009).

Moreover, infrastructure development contributes significantly to social and spatial equity. Improvements in public spaces and recreational facilities can promote healthier lifestyles, facilitate youth engagement in sports, and foster community pride (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). In regions with a history of underinvestment, such developments can be transformative, addressing disparities between urban and rural areas and improving the overall quality of life (Misener & Mason, 2006). When local communities are actively involved in the planning and eventual utilization of these facilities, it cultivates a sense of ownership and enhances long-term support for tourism initiatives.

The integration of sustainable design principles into infrastructure projects further strengthens the viability of sports tourism destinations. Environmentally friendly practices such as green building design, use of renewable energy, and low-impact urban planning reduce the ecological footprint of large-scale events and align with Italy's broader climate goals (Collins, Jones, & Munday, 2009). Facilities equipped with solar energy systems, rainwater harvesting technologies, or sustainable waste management infrastructure not only demonstrate environmental stewardship but also enhance Italy's image as a responsible and future-ready tourism destination, appealing to eco-conscious travelers and global sporting organizations (Mallen & Chard, 2012).

Additionally, digital infrastructure has emerged as a critical yet often underemphasized component of modern sports tourism. Investments in high-speed internet, mobile connectivity, and digital ticketing systems support seamless tourist experiences and enable efficient event logistics. Digital platforms enhance visitor engagement through mobile navigation, real-time information, and personalized content delivery (Trendafilova, Babiak, & Heinze, 2013). In the post-COVID era, digital infrastructure has also become vital for health screening, crowd control, and contactless transactions, underscoring its indispensability to the sustainable expansion of the sector (Pillay & Bass, 2008).

In summary, infrastructure development remains a foundational pillar of sports tourism strategy. It is crucial not only for the immediate execution of events but also for shaping the long-term trajectory of regional economic growth, social integration, and environmental resilience. For Italy to maintain and enhance its global competitiveness in the sports tourism sector, sustained and strategic investment in both physical and digital infrastructure is imperative. If these investments are aligned with local priorities and guided by sustainable principles, they will ensure that the benefits of sports tourism are inclusive, balanced, and enduring.

6.3.2. Community Engagement and Inclusivity

The success of sports tourism initiatives hinges fundamentally on the trust, acceptance, and active participation of local communities. This study has demonstrated that residents' perceptions and attitudes significantly influence the

overall outcomes and sustainability of sporting events hosted within their regions. Consequently, fostering genuine community engagement and inclusivity must be considered a cornerstone of any effective sports tourism strategy (Herbold et al., 2020).

Policymakers and event organizers are thus tasked with establishing robust mechanisms that facilitate meaningful dialogue between stakeholders, including residents, local businesses, government agencies, and tourism authorities. Inclusive planning processes should go beyond mere consultation and aim to embed community voices into the core of event design and implementation. Practical approaches such as town hall meetings, public forums, participatory workshops, and comprehensive surveys offer platforms for residents to express their concerns, preferences, and innovative ideas. This collaborative approach not only mitigates potential conflicts but also builds trust and social capital, which are vital for the long-term legitimacy and success of sports tourism initiatives.

In addition to participatory planning, incorporating community-centric sporting programs into the broader event framework can significantly enhance residents' connection to sports tourism. Grassroots initiatives, community sports leagues, and youth engagement activities are examples of such efforts that foster local pride and inclusiveness. These programs serve as vehicles for social cohesion by bringing together diverse segments of the population and promoting physical activity, health, and social interaction. Research by Gibson et al. (2013) supports this, illustrating how community-based sports initiatives linked to major events can generate positive social externalities, such as improved community morale and intergroup solidarity. Furthermore, embedding volunteerism within event operations empowers residents to actively contribute to the hosting process, thereby increasing their sense of ownership and pride.

Equity in the distribution of economic benefits arising from sports tourism is another critical dimension of fostering community inclusivity. Historical analyses reveal that when economic gains are concentrated within a narrow group, often external investors or specific urban sectors, local residents can become alienated, which undermines long-term support for events (Chang et al., 2020). To counteract this, policy frameworks should prioritize hiring local labor, awarding contracts to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and sourcing goods and services

locally wherever possible. By creating tangible economic linkages between sports tourism activities and the resident population, these measures help ensure that financial benefits circulate within the host community, supporting livelihoods and stimulating broader economic development.

Moreover, inclusive sports tourism policies must address the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups within communities, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and low-income residents. Targeted programs that facilitate access to employment opportunities in hospitality, event management, and tourism services can reduce social inequalities and promote inclusive growth. Initiatives aimed at capacity building and skills development within these groups enhance their ability to participate meaningfully in the sports tourism economy, contributing to social empowerment alongside economic inclusion.

Lastly, ongoing communication and transparency play pivotal roles in maintaining community support throughout the event lifecycle. Keeping residents informed about event planning, expected impacts, mitigation strategies for potential disruptions, and post-event legacy plans fosters an environment of trust and accountability. Digital platforms, social media channels, and local media can be leveraged to disseminate information widely and facilitate two-way communication. This transparent engagement helps manage residents' expectations and enables timely responses to emerging concerns, which are crucial for sustaining positive community relations in the context of sports tourism.

6.3.3. Sustainable Tourism Practices

Environmental sustainability emerged as a pivotal and recurring theme throughout the research findings, highlighting the critical need for host regions to embed sustainable tourism practices within their sports tourism strategies. The substantial ecological footprint generated by large-scale sporting events—including resource consumption, waste production, and increased emissions—necessitates deliberate, coordinated efforts to mitigate adverse environmental impacts (Collins, Jones, & Munday, 2009; Mallen & Adams, 2013). Host regions, therefore, must prioritize the integration of green initiatives aimed at reducing waste, lowering carbon emissions, and conserving natural and cultural resources throughout the event lifecycle (Laing & Frost, 2010).

A foundational element of sustainable sports tourism management involves the adoption of environmentally friendly operational practices by event organizers. These can include the use of renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power to meet the energy demands of venues and supporting infrastructure, thereby significantly reducing dependence on fossil fuels (Trendafilova, Babiak, & Heinze, 2013). Additionally, minimizing plastic use and promoting comprehensive recycling schemes can substantially reduce the volume of waste produced during events. Effective waste management plans, including waste sorting, composting, and diversion from landfills, should be institutionalized as key components of event planning (Jones, 2001). Moreover, the promotion of public transportation, cycling routes, and pedestrian pathways for spectators and athletes can significantly reduce transport-related emissions, which often constitute the largest share of an event's carbon footprint (Collins et al., 2009).

The broader adoption of sustainable tourism practices serves not only environmental but also economic and social objectives. Protecting Italy's rich cultural and natural heritage ensures the preservation of key tourism assets and sustains the long-term appeal of destinations for sports tourists (Buckley, 2012). Regions such as Tuscany and the Dolomites—celebrated for their scenic beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities—exemplify the delicate balance between environmental stewardship and tourism sustainability. Should these ecosystems degrade, the attractiveness of such destinations for nature-based and adventure sports tourism could wane, resulting in diminished economic activity and reduced employment prospects in affected areas (Higham & Hinch, 2009).

Furthermore, recent research highlights an increasing consumer preference for environmentally responsible tourism experiences. According to Kozhokulov et al. (2019), there is a growing global demand for ecologically conscious travel, including among sports tourists, who are increasingly discerning in their selection of destinations based on environmental performance. This shift in consumer behavior presents a strategic opportunity for Italian regions to position themselves as leaders in sustainable tourism. By adopting and promoting sustainable practices, host communities can elevate their global profile and appeal to eco-conscious segments of the international sports tourism market (Font & McCabe, 2017).

In addition to environmental gains, sustainable tourism initiatives also contribute to enhancing the social fabric of host communities. Decreased pollution, efficient use of natural resources, and sustainable urban planning help mitigate the negative social consequences of mass tourism, such as overcrowding and overburdened infrastructure (Mason, 2003). These improvements in environmental quality and public services, in turn, enhance residents' quality of life and strengthen community support for tourism development (Chalip, 2006).

Implementing sustainability within sports tourism, however, necessitates robust governance mechanisms, inter-sectoral collaboration, and continuous performance evaluation. Public-private partnerships can serve as powerful enablers by pooling resources, expertise, and innovation for sustainable event delivery (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011). Moreover, adherence to international sustainability standards—such as the ISO 20121 framework for sustainable event management—can institutionalize best practices, foster accountability, and reinforce credibility among stakeholders (Mair & Laing, 2012). Ultimately, embedding sustainability in sports tourism is not only a moral and ecological imperative but also a strategic asset that ensures the resilience, competitiveness, and inclusivity of tourism economies in Italy and beyond.

6.3.4. Collaborative Efforts Among Stakeholders

The success and sustainability of sports tourism initiatives hinge critically on the effective collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders. These stakeholders encompass local and regional governments, private sector businesses, sports organizations, community groups, environmental advocates, and international bodies (Getz, 2008; Misener & Mason, 2006). Collaborative frameworks enable the pooling of resources, expertise, and influence, thereby ensuring more coordinated and strategic approaches to developing sports tourism as a driver of regional socioeconomic development (Chalip, 2004).

At the regional level, collaboration facilitates comprehensive planning and implementation of sports tourism projects. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) represent a particularly effective model in this regard. Through PPPs, governments and private entities can share both the financial burden and operational risks associated with the development of infrastructure, event organization, and

marketing campaigns (Harris, Jago, Allen, & Huyskens, 2001). Such partnerships enable more substantial investments than might be feasible for individual actors, leading to enhanced sports venues, transportation networks, and accommodation facilities that meet international standards. This cooperative model ultimately strengthens the capacity of host regions to attract and successfully stage large-scale sporting events (Solberg & Preuss, 2007).

Beyond infrastructure, collaborative stakeholder engagement is essential in crafting unified branding and promotional strategies. Regional tourism boards, sports federations, and local businesses must work in concert to position Italy as a premier sports tourism destination on the global stage (Higham & Hinch, 2009). Given Italy's rich heritage in art, culture, and history, there is a unique opportunity to integrate sports tourism within a broader cultural tourism framework. By promoting sporting events in iconic historic cities such as Rome, Florence, and Venice, stakeholders can extend the appeal of sports tourism beyond the event itself to include cultural exploration, culinary experiences, and leisure activities (Smith, 2012). This integrated approach enhances the overall visitor experience, increases length of stay, and diversifies tourism revenue streams, thereby magnifying the socioeconomic benefits for local communities (Jago, Chalip, Brown, Mules, & Ali, 2003).

International collaboration further augments Italy's capacity to host globally prestigious sports events. Close partnerships with international sports governing bodies—including FIFA, UEFA, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC)—are instrumental in securing rights to host marquee competitions that generate significant media attention, tourist inflows, and investment opportunities (Preuss, 2007). Participation in these international networks also facilitates the transfer of knowledge and best practices in event management, sustainability, and community engagement (Toohey & Veal, 2007). Such exchanges are invaluable for enhancing organizational capacity and ensuring that Italy's sports tourism offerings remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market.

Moreover, collaboration must extend to community stakeholders to foster inclusivity and social sustainability. Engaging local residents, grassroots sports clubs, and non-governmental organizations in the planning and execution of sports tourism initiatives can promote social cohesion, equitable benefit distribution, and

shared ownership of tourism development outcomes (Misener & Mason, 2008). This bottom-up engagement complements top-down strategic planning, helping to mitigate potential social disruptions and reinforcing the legitimacy and resilience of sports tourism projects (Gibson & Kaplanidou, 2012).

6.3.5. Emphasizing Year-Round Sports Tourism

While major international events are pivotal, one key recommendation is to focus on year-round sports tourism activities to ensure the sustainability of the tourism sector. Italy's climate and diverse geography allow for a wide range of sports, from skiing and snowboarding in the Alps to cycling and water sports in coastal areas. Developing Italy as a destination for year-round sports activities can spread tourism flows more evenly across seasons and reduce the reliance on single mega-events, which tend to be cyclical and concentrated within short timeframes.

To capitalize on this, Italy should promote adventure tourism and recreational sports that are accessible throughout the year (Schirpke et al., 2018). These include activities like hiking, cycling, and mountain climbing, which are not only popular among tourists but also environmentally sustainable, as they typically require minimal infrastructure and have a low environmental impact. This strategy would also align with the TALC framework's principles of destination development, allowing Italy to position itself as a mature sports tourism destination capable of offering varied, sustainable, and year-round activities.

6.4. Contribution of Sports Tourism to Regional Economies (SH-4)

This hypothesis posited that sports tourism contributes to regional economies through increased tourism expenditure, job creation, and infrastructure development. Results from the literature review, surveys, and scenario-based analysis confirm this hypothesis. The literature consistently highlights the economic benefits of sports tourism, with mega-events like the FIFA World Cup generating billions in revenue (Cornelissen, 2010). Survey data reinforced this perspective, with 76% of respondents recognizing sports tourism's role in job creation and 71% noting its positive impact on local businesses.

However, the study also revealed challenges, such as the uneven distribution of economic gains and the short-term nature of many benefits. For Italy, these

findings suggest that while sports tourism has significant economic potential, strategies must focus on ensuring long-term, equitable growth across all regions.

6.4.1. Increased Tourism Expenditure

Sports tourism plays a pivotal role in augmenting tourism expenditure by attracting diverse groups of visitors, ranging from international tourists to domestic spectators, thereby injecting substantial financial resources into host economies. Mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup serve as prime examples, generating extraordinary levels of visitor spending that extend beyond the immediate context of the sports event itself. The 2010 FIFA World Cup held in South Africa, as analyzed by Cornelissen (2010), exemplifies this phenomenon, where the event contributed an estimated \$3.6 billion to the national economy. This considerable influx of capital was driven primarily by expenditures on accommodations, dining, local transportation, event tickets, merchandise, and related leisure activities. The multiplier effect of such spending stimulates a broad array of economic sectors, fostering growth not only in the hospitality and service industries but also in retail, transportation, and entertainment.

The survey results from this study corroborate these findings, with 71% of respondents acknowledging that sports tourism exerts a positive influence on local businesses. This widespread perception highlights the capacity of sports tourism to act as a catalyst for economic vitality, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that operate within the tourism and hospitality value chains. While mega-events capture global attention, smaller-scale regional sporting events also contribute meaningfully to localized economic stimulation. Duglio and Beltramo (2017) emphasize that regional sports competitions and festivals often lead to increased patronage of hotels, restaurants, and retail outlets, particularly in regions that do not regularly experience substantial tourist inflows. This demonstrates the potential for sports tourism to serve as a year-round economic booster, mitigating seasonal fluctuations in tourism activity.

For Italy, with its established reputation as a premier tourist destination boasting rich cultural heritage and well-developed infrastructure, the potential to capitalize on sports tourism to drive further tourism expenditure is significant. Cities such as Milan, Rome, Florence, and Turin have the infrastructure and

cultural cachet to attract both sports enthusiasts and leisure tourists concurrently, thereby amplifying the overall economic impact. However, the scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup also underscores the critical importance of effective marketing, strategic event planning, and operational efficiency in realizing these benefits fully. The South African experience revealed that logistical challenges such as inefficiencies in ticket distribution, transportation bottlenecks, and limited accommodation capacity in certain locales, can dampen visitor satisfaction and restrict the potential economic gains (Peeters et al., 2014). These lessons are particularly salient for Italy, where the integration of sports tourism into broader destination management plans and investments in seamless visitor experience are essential.

Moreover, the leveraging of digital marketing strategies and data-driven audience engagement can enhance the targeting of potential visitors, expanding the reach of sports tourism campaigns. Coordinated efforts between local tourism boards, event organizers, and private stakeholders are necessary to optimize the timing, pricing, and packaging of sports tourism products. By doing so, regions can maximize visitor spending and encourage longer stays, thus amplifying the multiplier effect on local economies.

6.4.2. Job Creation

The economic impact of sports tourism extends beyond direct revenue generation to include significant contributions to employment. Mega-events require large-scale labor, from event management and construction to hospitality and security services. During the 2010 FIFA World Cup, approximately 130,000 construction jobs were created in South Africa, alongside 415,000 indirect jobs resulting from event-related activities (Vilakazi et al., 2014).

Survey data from this study reinforces the link between sports tourism and job creation, with 76% of respondents agreeing that sports events generate employment opportunities in their regions. Small-scale sports tourism events also contribute to job creation, albeit in more temporary roles. Fernández-Martínez et al. (2022) emphasized that even small-scale events provide seasonal employment in sectors like catering, logistics, and tourism, which are often vital for rural economies.

However, job creation in sports tourism also faces challenges. Many of the employment opportunities generated are short-term, with limited prospects for long-term stability or career growth. The study by Emery (2002) cautions that without sustained investments in the broader tourism sector, these temporary jobs may not lead to lasting economic benefits. For Italy, addressing these challenges requires strategic planning to create more sustainable employment opportunities tied to sports tourism.

6.4.3. Infrastructure Development

Sports tourism often catalyzes infrastructure development, including the construction of stadiums, transportation systems, and urban regeneration projects. In South Africa, the 2010 FIFA World Cup led to significant investments in infrastructure, such as the Gautrain rapid transit system and new stadiums like Soccer City in Johannesburg. These developments enhanced South Africa's capacity to host future events and improved its global image (Pillay & Bass, 2008).

The infrastructure benefits of sports tourism are also evident in Italy, which already possesses a strong network of sports venues and transportation systems. However, the lessons from South Africa highlight potential pitfalls. The phenomenon of "white elephants"—underutilized facilities built specifically for mega-events—poses a significant risk. For instance, several stadiums in South Africa remained underutilized post-World Cup, leading to questions about the cost-effectiveness of such investments (Cornelissen, 2010).

For Italy, the focus must be on optimizing existing infrastructure while ensuring that new developments are multi-functional and sustainable. Public-private partnerships can play a vital role in financing these projects, as seen in the 2010 FIFA World Cup. However, transparency and accountability are critical to avoid cost overruns and ensure public support.

6.4.4. Challenges and Recommendations

Despite the considerable economic benefits that sports tourism can generate, this study highlights several significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of its impacts. One of the foremost challenges identified is the uneven spatial distribution of economic gains associated

with sports tourism. Urban centers, particularly those with well-established infrastructure and a pre-existing tourism base, tend to disproportionately capture the majority of the benefits. This concentration often exacerbates regional disparities, leaving rural and peripheral areas marginalized and underdeveloped in terms of sports tourism opportunities. The disparity is particularly pronounced in Italy, where northern cities such as Milan, Turin, and Bologna are more likely to host high-profile events and attract larger volumes of sports tourists, while many southern or rural regions struggle to capitalize on this economic sector.

Furthermore, the predominance of short-term economic benefits represents another critical limitation. While events generate immediate boosts in employment, local business revenue, and tourism expenditure, these gains often lack durability beyond the event duration. Temporary jobs associated with event preparation and operation may not translate into sustainable employment, and event-driven visitor spending can result in cyclical peaks and troughs rather than steady economic growth. Such temporal limitations raise concerns about the lasting socioeconomic legacy of sports tourism, particularly when investments do not align with broader regional development plans.

In response to these challenges, it is imperative that Italian policymakers and stakeholders pursue a more equitable and sustainable model of sports tourism development. To begin with, the promotion of smaller-scale sports events in underdeveloped or rural regions can serve as a strategic lever to diversify economic benefits more evenly across the country. These localized events, while less internationally prominent, can stimulate grassroots tourism development, encourage local entrepreneurship, and create incremental employment opportunities. Regional governments should prioritize identifying and supporting such events through funding, marketing assistance, and capacity-building programs.

Investment in multi-purpose infrastructure represents another vital recommendation. Rather than constructing venues solely tailored for single events, infrastructure projects should be designed to serve broader community needs, thereby enhancing long-term utility and local engagement. Facilities that can host a variety of sports, cultural activities, and community events ensure continuous use, increasing the return on investment and embedding sports tourism into the

socio-economic fabric of the host regions. This approach also fosters greater social inclusion, as facilities become accessible to residents beyond the event context.

Lastly, fostering robust collaboration among stakeholders is essential to align sports tourism initiatives with wider economic, social, and environmental development goals. Local governments, private enterprises, sports federations, community groups, and environmental organizations must coordinate efforts to create integrated strategies that promote sustainable growth. This multi-stakeholder approach ensures that sports tourism development is not pursued in isolation but is embedded within comprehensive regional development frameworks. It facilitates resource sharing, optimizes marketing and infrastructure planning, and addresses potential social and environmental concerns proactively. By incorporating principles of sustainability, equity, and community engagement, Italy can harness the full potential of sports tourism as a driver of inclusive socioeconomic progress.

6.5. Residents' Economic Perceptions and Influencing Factors (SH-5)

The fifth hypothesis posited that residents' perceptions of the economic impact of sports tourism would be influenced by factors such as socioeconomic status, tourism industry involvement, and awareness of benefits and drawbacks. This hypothesis was supported by survey and interview findings.

Socioeconomic status emerged as a key determinant of perceptions. Wealthier respondents were more likely to view sports tourism positively, citing increased tourism revenue and improved infrastructure as significant benefits. In contrast, lower-income respondents expressed concerns about rising living costs and unequal access to event-related opportunities. These findings are consistent with Gursoy and Kendall's (2006) work on resident perceptions of tourism impacts.

6.5.1. Influence of Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status emerged as a critical factor in shaping residents' perceptions of sports tourism. Wealthier respondents were more likely to express positive views, emphasizing the economic benefits such as increased tourism revenue, improved infrastructure, and job creation. These individuals often have greater access to event-related opportunities, including business ventures, higher-

paying jobs, or property appreciation due to enhanced infrastructure. Such findings align with Gursoy and Kendall's (2006) research, which highlights the positive correlation between higher socioeconomic status and favorable perceptions of tourism impacts.

Conversely, lower-income respondents tended to express skepticism or concerns about sports tourism's economic benefits. They cited rising living costs, including higher prices for goods, services, and housing during major events, as a significant drawback. Additionally, they reported limited access to event-related benefits, such as employment opportunities or business contracts, which were perceived to disproportionately favor wealthier individuals or established businesses. These findings underscore the uneven distribution of economic gains from sports tourism, a theme also identified by Preuss (2006) and Cornelissen (2010).

6.5.2. Role of Tourism Industry Involvement

Another key factor influencing perceptions was residents' involvement in the tourism industry. Respondents employed in tourism-related sectors, such as hospitality, transportation, or event management, expressed overwhelmingly positive views about sports tourism. They highlighted tangible benefits such as increased customer traffic, higher income during events, and opportunities for professional growth. For instance, hotel employees reported higher occupancy rates and increased wages during mega-events, while transportation workers cited surges in demand for services. These findings align with research by Tzoumaka et al. (2022), which emphasizes the direct economic advantages experienced by tourism industry participants.

On the other hand, residents outside the tourism industry expressed more mixed or negative perceptions. Many felt excluded from the economic benefits of sports tourism, perceiving it as a sector-specific phenomenon that primarily benefits those directly involved. This divide reinforces the need for inclusive policies that extend sports tourism's economic gains beyond the tourism industry to the wider community.

6.5.3. Awareness of Benefits and Drawbacks

Awareness of sports tourism's potential benefits and drawbacks was another significant factor shaping residents' economic perceptions. Respondents with greater knowledge of sports tourism's economic contributions, such as job creation, revenue generation, and infrastructure development, were more likely to view it positively. This group often cited examples from past events, such as the 2010 FIFA World Cup, which generated billions in economic activity and left behind improved transportation networks and tourism facilities (Cornelissen, 2010).

Conversely, respondents who were less aware of these benefits or more focused on the drawbacks expressed concerns about the sustainability of economic gains. For example, they highlighted short-term job creation, underutilized infrastructure post-event, and the potential for financial mismanagement during event planning. These perceptions align with Emery's (2002) findings, which suggest that awareness campaigns and transparent communication can significantly improve public support for tourism initiatives by addressing misconceptions and emphasizing long-term benefits.

6.5.4. Challenges and Implications

While the hypothesis is supported by the findings, the study also reveals critical challenges that must be addressed to optimize residents' perceptions of sports tourism. One of the main issues is the perception of unequal benefit distribution, particularly among lower-income residents and those outside the tourism industry. Without targeted interventions, these disparities could lead to reduced community support for sports tourism initiatives.

To address these challenges, strategies should include:

- **Community Engagement:** Ensuring that all community groups, particularly marginalized populations, are included in planning and decision-making processes.
- **Equitable Policies:** Implementing policies that ensure fair access to event-related opportunities, such as local hiring mandates or small business support programs.

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Conducting public education initiatives to highlight the broader economic benefits of sports tourism and dispel misconceptions.

6.6. Impact of Small-Scale Sports Events on Local Economies (SH-6)

The sixth hypothesis focused on the potential of small-scale sports events to stimulate local economies. While the study primarily examined large-scale events, evidence from the literature and stakeholder interviews highlighted the unique contributions of smaller events. Gibson et al. (2012) notes that small-scale events often generate localized economic benefits, such as increased visitor spending and enhanced destination branding. Stakeholder interviews emphasized the importance of these events for rural and suburban areas, where large-scale events are less feasible. For Italy, leveraging small-scale events could provide an effective strategy for promoting regional development in underserved areas.

6.6.1. Localized Economic Benefits

Small-scale sports events are well-positioned to deliver significant localized economic benefits. Gibson et al. (2012) highlights that such events, while limited in scale, often create a ripple effect within local economies. Increased visitor spending is a primary benefit, with tourists contributing to sectors like hospitality, retail, and transportation. For example, attendees of a regional marathon or youth sports tournament spend on accommodations, dining, and shopping, directly boosting local businesses.

Stakeholder interviews conducted in this study echoed these findings, with participants emphasizing the critical role of small-scale events in revitalizing local economies. Business owners in rural areas noted that these events provide much-needed economic activity during off-peak tourism seasons, ensuring a steady flow of income. This aligns with Duglio and Beltramo (2017), who found that smaller events often serve as lifelines for smaller towns, driving revenue without the overwhelming infrastructural demands of larger events.

6.6.2. Enhancing Destination Branding

Another significant impact of small-scale sports events is their contribution to enhancing the destination's branding and visibility. While they may not attract international attention like mega-events, smaller events often foster a strong sense of identity and pride within local communities. They also draw niche markets, such as cycling enthusiasts or amateur athletes, who may later return as leisure tourists or recommend the destination to others.

According to Fernández-Martínez et al. (2022), small-scale events have the potential to position destinations as hubs for specific sports or activities. For instance, a town hosting a recurring cycling race or fishing tournament can establish itself as a go-to location for enthusiasts of those activities. Stakeholder interviews supported this notion, with policymakers in rural Italy highlighting the branding opportunities these events offer, particularly for lesser-known regions seeking to carve out a distinct identity in the competitive tourism market.

6.6.3. Accessibility and Feasibility for Rural and Suburban Areas

Small-scale events are particularly advantageous for rural and suburban areas where hosting large-scale events is impractical due to infrastructural or financial constraints. Stakeholders emphasized that these events are often more inclusive, requiring lower investments and involving local communities more directly. This is especially critical in underserved regions of Italy, where economic activity tends to be concentrated in urban centers.

Studies by Morfoulaki et al. (2023) and Bazzanella (2019) support the idea that small-scale events offer a scalable, sustainable strategy for regional development. These events require minimal infrastructural changes, allowing host communities to utilize existing facilities and resources effectively. Furthermore, their smaller scale reduces the risk of environmental degradation and the long-term underutilization of infrastructure, which are common challenges associated with mega-events (Cornelissen, 2010).

6.6.4. Challenges and Policy Recommendations

Despite their advantages, small-scale sports events face certain challenges. Limited budgets often constrain marketing efforts, reducing their ability to attract

participants from beyond the immediate region. Additionally, smaller events may lack the prestige of mega-events, making it harder to secure sponsorships or government support.

To overcome these challenges, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Community Involvement:** Engage local stakeholders in planning and executing events to ensure they meet community needs and maximize local benefits.
- **Strategic Marketing:** Invest in targeted marketing campaigns to attract niche audiences, leveraging social media and regional networks.
- **Integrated Tourism Packages:** Combine small-scale events with other local attractions, such as cultural festivals or culinary tours, to enhance their appeal and economic impact.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between local governments, businesses, and sports organizations to secure funding and resources for event planning and execution.

6.7. Impact of Large-Scale and Mega-Sporting Events (SH-7)

This hypothesis posited that mega-events have the potential to generate substantial economic and social benefits but also pose challenges such as cost overruns and environmental impacts. Results from the scenario-based analysis and literature review strongly validate this hypothesis.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa demonstrated the economic potential of mega-events, generating \$3.6 billion in revenue and attracting over 300,000 international visitors (Rogerson & Visser, 2011). However, it also highlighted significant challenges, including high costs, social displacement, and environmental degradation. For Italy, these findings suggest that while mega-events can deliver transformative benefits, careful planning and risk management are essential to mitigate negative outcomes.

6.7.1. Economic and Social Benefits of Mega-Events

Mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup have a well-documented ability to stimulate host economies through revenue generation, job creation, and increased global visibility. The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa is a prime example, generating \$3.6 billion in direct economic activity and attracting over 300,000 international visitors (Rogerson & Visser, 2011). This influx of tourists bolstered the hospitality, transportation, and retail sectors, providing a temporary yet significant economic boost.

The World Cup also enhanced South Africa's global profile, positioning it as a viable tourism destination and increasing its competitiveness in the global market (Cornelissen, 2010). Socially, the event fostered national pride and cohesion, with 68% of surveyed residents reporting a heightened sense of community pride (Bama & Tichaawa, 2015). These benefits are particularly transformative for countries seeking to enhance their international standing and stimulate domestic development.

For Italy, the potential benefits of hosting mega-events are considerable. With its strong tourism infrastructure and rich cultural heritage, Italy could leverage mega-events to attract millions of visitors and generate significant revenue. Additionally, such events could provide a platform to showcase Italy's capabilities in event organization and innovation, further solidifying its global reputation.

6.7.2. Challenges and Risks Associated with Mega-Events

Despite their potential benefits, mega-events come with substantial risks that must be carefully managed. The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, while economically impactful, exposed several challenges that continue to inform debates about the feasibility of hosting large-scale events.

Cost Overruns: One of the most significant challenges of mega-events is their high financial cost. South Africa invested billions in stadium construction, urban regeneration projects, and infrastructure upgrades. While these developments enhanced the country's capacity to host the World Cup, many facilities were underutilized post-event, leading to questions about the cost-effectiveness of such investments (Cornelissen, 2010).

Social Displacement: The World Cup also highlighted the social consequences of mega-events, including the displacement of vulnerable communities. Preparations for the event involved the forced relocation of informal settlements to make way for new infrastructure, sparking protests and criticism from human rights groups (Pillay & Bass, 2008).

Environmental Impacts: Mega-events often have a significant environmental footprint, and the 2010 FIFA World Cup was no exception. Transportation, energy consumption, and waste generation during the event resulted in substantial carbon emissions. Although some green initiatives, such as tree-planting campaigns, were implemented to offset these impacts, they were insufficient to fully mitigate the environmental damage (Collins et al., 2009).

For Italy, these challenges highlight the need for strategic planning and robust risk management. While the country has existing infrastructure that could reduce the need for extensive new construction, issues such as cost overruns and environmental impacts remain relevant and require careful attention.

6.7.3. Implications for Italy

The lessons learned from the 2010 FIFA World Cup provide valuable insights for Italy as it considers hosting mega-events. First, Italy must prioritize the efficient use of existing infrastructure to minimize costs and avoid the creation of "white elephants"—facilities that remain underutilized post-event. Multi-purpose stadiums and adaptable urban developments should be central to planning efforts.

Second, inclusive community engagement is essential to address concerns about social displacement and ensure equitable benefit distribution. Strategies such as local hiring mandates, small business support programs, and stakeholder consultations can help mitigate social risks.

Finally, Italy should adopt a comprehensive sustainability strategy to reduce the environmental footprint of mega-events. This includes investing in renewable energy, promoting public transportation, and implementing robust waste management practices. Lessons from South Africa underscore the importance of embedding sustainability into all aspects of event planning to enhance long-term benefits and align with global environmental goals.

VII. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER VII: GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation explores the multifaceted impacts of sports tourism on regional development, focusing on Italy's potential to leverage both large-scale and small-scale sporting events for economic, social, and cultural benefits. Drawing insights from a systematic literature review, survey data, stakeholder interviews, and a scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, the study presents a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges inherent in sports tourism.

7.1 Sports Tourism as an Economic Driver

One of the central findings of this dissertation is that sports tourism serves as a powerful economic driver for host regions. Both large-scale events, such as the FIFA World Cup, and smaller regional sports activities contribute significantly to local economies. Large-scale events have the capacity to generate substantial revenue through increased tourism expenditure, ticket sales, sponsorships, and broadcasting rights. They also create temporary and permanent jobs, stimulate investments in infrastructure, and attract global attention to the host region.

Smaller-scale events, while less resource-intensive, play a crucial role in stimulating local economies, particularly in rural or underserved areas. These events encourage visitor spending in hospitality and retail sectors, support local businesses, and enhance destination branding. For Italy, the potential to use sports tourism to address regional disparities and promote inclusive economic growth is particularly significant. However, the uneven distribution of benefits, particularly between urban and rural areas, and the short-term nature of many economic gains remain challenges that require strategic intervention.

7.2. Social Impacts and Community Perceptions

Sports tourism offers notable social benefits, fostering community pride, social cohesion, and cultural exchange. Hosting sports events provides a platform for communities to showcase their cultural heritage, promote local traditions, and engage with global audiences. These events often leave behind a legacy of increased community engagement and stronger regional identity.

However, the study also highlights varying perceptions among residents about the impacts of sports tourism. Factors such as socioeconomic status, tourism industry involvement, and awareness of benefits and drawbacks significantly shape these perceptions. While wealthier residents and those involved in tourism tend to view sports tourism favorably, lower-income residents express concerns about rising living costs and exclusion from event-related opportunities. Addressing these disparities is critical to ensuring widespread community support for sports tourism initiatives.

7.3. Infrastructure and Sustainability

The dissertation underscores the dual-edged nature of infrastructure investments associated with sports tourism. While mega-events often catalyze significant infrastructural developments, such as stadium construction, transportation upgrades, and urban regeneration, these projects frequently face challenges of underutilization post-event. The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa serves as a cautionary tale, with several "white elephant" stadiums and unfulfilled expectations of long-term economic utility.

For Italy, optimizing the use of existing infrastructure and prioritizing sustainable, multi-purpose developments are essential strategies. Furthermore, the environmental impacts of sports tourism, including carbon emissions, waste generation, and resource consumption, require comprehensive sustainability plans. The study highlights the importance of embedding environmental considerations into sports tourism policies to enhance long-term benefits and align with global sustainability goals.

7.4. Leveraging Small-Scale Events for Regional Development

An important conclusion from this dissertation is the potential of small-scale sports events to drive equitable and sustainable regional development. Unlike mega-events, which often require significant investments and may disproportionately benefit urban centers, small-scale events provide localized economic boosts without overwhelming financial or infrastructural demands. These events can serve as a viable strategy for promoting regional tourism, supporting local businesses, and enhancing community engagement, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

For Italy, where regional disparities persist, investing in small-scale sports events offers an opportunity to foster inclusive growth. Tailored policies that support regional sports initiatives, promote community participation, and link sports tourism with cultural and environmental assets can maximize the benefits of these events.

7.5. Lessons from the 2010 FIFA World Cup Analysis

The scenario-based analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup provides valuable lessons for Italy's sports tourism strategies. While the event demonstrated the economic potential of mega-events, it also highlighted significant risks, including cost overruns, social displacement, and environmental degradation. These challenges underline the importance of careful planning, robust risk management, and stakeholder collaboration in sports tourism.

Italy can draw on these lessons to design sports tourism initiatives that balance economic benefits with social equity and sustainability. Strategic partnerships, transparent governance, and community engagement are critical to ensuring that the positive impacts of sports tourism are maximized while mitigating potential drawbacks.

7.6. Final Remarks

This dissertation demonstrates that sports tourism, when effectively managed, has the potential to act as a transformative force for regional development. The economic, social, and cultural benefits of hosting sporting events are substantial, but they come with inherent challenges that require proactive and inclusive policies. For Italy, a balanced approach that integrates mega-events and small-scale sports activities, prioritizes sustainability, and addresses regional disparities is essential for leveraging sports tourism as a tool for long-term growth and development.

By learning from global experiences and tailoring strategies to its unique context, Italy can position itself as a leader in sustainable and inclusive sports tourism. The findings of this dissertation provide a foundation for future research and policy development, contributing to the broader discourse on optimizing sports tourism for regional and national advancement.

VII. LIMITATIONS

CHAPTER VIII: LIMITATIONS

While this thesis provided a thorough analysis, several limitations should be acknowledged. Recognizing these constraints is crucial for interpreting the findings accurately and understanding the context within which the research is conducted.

-Sampling bias: The research study utilized a convenience sampling method through a Google Module questionnaire, potentially leading to a sampling bias as participants self-selected to take part. This may not represent the entire population's viewpoints, particularly those who may not have access to or choose not to participate in online surveys.

-Generalizability: The research focused solely on participants from diverse regions across Italy, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other regions or countries. Cultural, economic, and social differences between regions could impact the perceptions of sports tourism and its socioeconomic effects.

-Self-reporting bias: The data collected relied on self-reported responses from participants, introducing the possibility of self-reporting bias where respondents may provide socially desirable answers or inaccurately recall information.

-Questionnaire design: While the questionnaire covered various aspects related to sports tourism and socioeconomic impacts, the design and wording of questions could influence participants' responses. Ambiguity or leading questions may have skewed the data collected.

-Complexity of Socioeconomic Impact: The multifaceted nature of socioeconomic impact may pose challenges in fully capturing the complexity of residents' perceptions and the broader economic implications of sports tourism.

-Language Bias: The systematic literature review primarily included articles published in English, potentially leading to language bias. Relevant research in other languages were not fully captured.

IX. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

CHAPTER IX: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This section highlights the practical applications derived from the findings of the study and the systematic review, emphasizing how these insights can be implemented to foster regional economic development through sport tourism.

9.1. Event Planning and Management

One of the most immediate and actionable applications of this study lies in the planning and management of sports events. The findings from both the systematic literature review and empirical research provide valuable insights into the ways in which local governments, tourism authorities, and event organizers can strategically design and implement sporting activities to maximize regional economic benefits while minimizing potential drawbacks.

A key implication is the need for data-informed planning. By understanding the economic contributions of sports tourism—such as increased local spending, job creation, and infrastructure utilization—organizers can prioritize events that generate the greatest positive impacts for the host region. For instance, targeted scheduling of events during off-peak tourism seasons can optimize the use of local accommodation and transport infrastructure, reduce seasonal volatility, and extend the economic benefits of tourism across the year. Additionally, the analysis of resident perceptions, as highlighted in the study, suggests that integrating community priorities into planning can enhance public support and participation, which is critical for sustaining long-term success.

The research also emphasizes the importance of mitigating negative impacts. Large-scale events, in particular, can strain local resources, contribute to congestion, and produce environmental pressures. To address these challenges, practical measures may include developing comprehensive crowd management strategies, implementing environmentally sustainable practices such as waste reduction and energy-efficient facilities, and coordinating with local businesses to distribute economic benefits equitably across sectors. Small- and medium-scale events can also be strategically leveraged to provide manageable opportunities for economic stimulation while minimizing the risk of infrastructure overuse or resident dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, the findings support the adoption of innovative management approaches. This may involve leveraging digital technologies for event coordination, ticketing, and visitor engagement, or incorporating flexible contingency plans to respond to unexpected variables, such as changes in tourist demand or health and safety restrictions. Such approaches not only enhance operational efficiency but also improve visitor experiences, which can translate into positive word-of-mouth, repeat visitation, and strengthened destination reputation.

In practice, a well-informed and carefully executed event management strategy can create a synergistic effect, whereby economic, social, and environmental outcomes reinforce one another. For example, increased local employment and business activity can boost community support for future events, while environmentally responsible planning preserves the destination's natural and cultural assets, ensuring that sports tourism remains a sustainable contributor to regional development. By applying the study's findings in this manner, local governments and organizers are better positioned to transform sports events into catalysts for enduring socioeconomic growth.

9.2. Community Engagement and Support

The success and sustainability of sports tourism initiatives are closely linked to the degree of community engagement and public support they achieve. Findings from this study underscore that residents' perceptions play a pivotal role in shaping the outcomes of sporting events, influencing both the social acceptability and the long-term viability of tourism activities in host regions. By actively engaging with local communities, policymakers and event organizers can ensure that the design, execution, and legacy of sports events align with community priorities, thereby enhancing positive social impacts while minimizing potential friction or opposition.

Practical application of the study's findings involves the development of targeted communication and outreach strategies. For example, informing residents about the projected economic benefits, such as job creation, increased business revenue, and infrastructure improvements, can help build awareness and foster enthusiasm for hosting events. Similarly, highlighting potential social benefits—such as increased community pride, cultural exchange, and opportunities for

volunteerism—can reinforce residents’ sense of ownership and participation. These strategies can be implemented through multiple channels, including public forums, social media campaigns, newsletters, and collaboration with local organizations, thereby ensuring wide-reaching and inclusive engagement.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of two-way dialogue between planners and community members. Beyond simply disseminating information, event organizers can gather feedback on residents’ concerns, expectations, and preferences, which can then inform decision-making processes. This participatory approach not only strengthens trust and legitimacy but also increases the likelihood that events are socially sustainable and perceived as valuable additions to local life.

Finally, fostering community cooperation can have tangible effects on event operations and tourism outcomes. Engaged residents are more likely to support logistical aspects, such as volunteering, crowd management, and promotion of local attractions, while mitigating negative externalities, such as congestion or disruptions. By leveraging the study’s findings in this manner, host regions can cultivate an environment in which sports tourism contributes to both economic development and social cohesion, ensuring that the benefits of sporting events are shared broadly and sustainably.

9.3. Investment in Infrastructure

The study’s findings highlight the strategic importance of targeted infrastructure investment in fostering the long-term benefits of sports tourism. By providing evidence on the economic and social impacts of sporting events, the research offers policymakers and regional planners a foundation for justifying investments in key areas such as sports facilities, transportation networks, and accommodation services. Such infrastructure not only supports the immediate requirements of hosting events but also enhances the destination’s capacity to attract future sporting activities and tourism flows, thereby contributing to sustained regional economic development.

Investments in sports facilities—including stadiums, training centers, and multifunctional venues—can provide both event-specific and broader community benefits. Well-designed and versatile facilities enable regions to host a range of sporting events, from local competitions to international tournaments, while also

offering recreational opportunities for residents throughout the year. This dual-use approach maximizes the return on investment and strengthens the social value of infrastructure.

Similarly, improvements in transportation networks—such as road upgrades, public transit enhancements, and airport expansions—facilitate efficient movement of participants and spectators during events, while simultaneously improving connectivity for local residents and visitors outside of event periods. Enhanced accessibility can stimulate additional tourism, encourage investment, and support broader economic activity in the region.

Investments in accommodation and hospitality services also play a crucial role. Expanding hotel capacity, upgrading service quality, and diversifying lodging options ensures that destinations can meet the needs of both domestic and international visitors, thereby increasing the economic impact of sports tourism. Moreover, such infrastructure can attract other forms of tourism, including business and leisure travel, further diversifying regional revenue streams.

Critically, the study emphasizes that infrastructure planning should incorporate sustainability and legacy considerations. Infrastructure investments guided by long-term community needs, rather than solely short-term event requirements, help prevent underutilization and reduce the risk of “white elephant” facilities. Incorporating environmentally friendly design, flexible use, and maintenance strategies ensures that investments continue to generate social and economic benefits long after the conclusion of sporting events, thereby leaving a lasting and positive legacy for the community.

9.4. Sustainable Development

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of sustainable development principles in the planning and management of sports tourism initiatives. By integrating the insights derived from both the systematic literature review and empirical research, regional planners and policymakers can design sporting events that achieve a balance between environmental preservation, economic growth, and social inclusivity, thereby aligning with broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

From an environmental perspective, the study highlights the need for careful resource management, including energy-efficient facilities, waste reduction, and

the protection of natural and cultural assets. Incorporating environmentally sustainable practices—such as the use of renewable energy, eco-friendly construction materials, and sustainable transport solutions—reduces the ecological footprint of sporting events while demonstrating a commitment to long-term conservation. This is particularly important in regions where tourism-related activities place additional pressures on fragile ecosystems or historical sites.

On the economic dimension, sustainable development involves maximizing the long-term benefits of sports tourism rather than focusing solely on short-term gains. The study indicates that carefully planned events can generate ongoing employment, stimulate local businesses, and create a diversified revenue base, ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed across the community. Investments in multipurpose infrastructure, flexible venue designs, and local capacity-building initiatives further enhance the resilience and efficiency of sports tourism as a regional development strategy.

The social component of sustainability emphasizes community engagement, inclusivity, and equitable participation. Findings reveal that involving residents in decision-making, responding to local needs, and promoting volunteerism not only fosters public support but also strengthens social cohesion. Moreover, sports tourism that is socially inclusive ensures that the benefits—such as cultural exchange, community pride, and recreational opportunities—are accessible to a broad spectrum of the population, including marginalized or vulnerable groups.

By adopting these best practices, regions can host sporting events that are environmentally responsible, economically productive, and socially equitable, creating a model of sports tourism that contributes to sustainable regional growth. This approach ensures that the positive impacts of sporting events extend well beyond the duration of the event itself, providing enduring benefits that reinforce local development objectives and support long-term community resilience.

9.5. Policy Development

The findings of this study provide a foundation for evidence-based policy development in the field of sports tourism. Policymakers can utilize the insights to create or refine regulatory frameworks that strengthen the sector's capacity to contribute to regional development. For example, policies that encourage public-private partnerships can facilitate collaboration between government authorities,

local businesses, and sports organizations, enabling efficient resource allocation and shared responsibility for event planning and execution. Additionally, targeted incentives for local enterprises, such as tax breaks or grants, can motivate businesses to participate in event-related activities, increasing the distribution of economic benefits across the community. Regulatory support for sustainable practices, including environmental protection guidelines and infrastructure standards, ensures that sports tourism growth aligns with broader sustainability objectives, balancing economic, social, and ecological considerations.

9.6. Economic Diversification

Sport tourism offers a strategic avenue for regional economic diversification, particularly in areas dependent on traditional industries or experiencing economic stagnation. The study's findings, supported by the literature review, indicate that both small-scale and mega sporting events can stimulate a wide range of economic activities. These include hospitality, retail, transportation, and cultural services, thereby generating new revenue streams and creating employment opportunities across multiple sectors. By incorporating sports tourism into broader development strategies, regions can reduce reliance on a single economic sector, enhance resilience against market fluctuations, and capitalize on the growing global demand for experiential and event-driven travel. Moreover, leveraging local cultural and natural assets in sports tourism offerings can amplify the region's unique identity, attracting repeat visitors and fostering sustainable economic growth.

9.7. Research and Education

The study highlights the importance of ongoing academic research and education to support the continued development of sports tourism. Universities, research centers, and professional training institutions can use the findings to inform curriculum design, focusing on key areas such as event management, tourism economics, and sustainable destination planning. Further empirical studies are encouraged to explore under-researched aspects identified in the literature review, such as long-term socioeconomic impacts, community perceptions, and the effectiveness of legacy strategies. Educational programs and professional development initiatives can equip future practitioners with the skills needed to manage sports tourism effectively, integrate sustainability principles,

and foster regional development. By bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, research and education ensure that sports tourism continues to evolve as a tool for economic growth, social cohesion, and cultural enrichment.

X. FUTURE RESEARCH LINES

CHAPTER X: FUTURE RESEARCH LINES

After the completion of the present thesis, future research lines arise from the results obtained. In this regard, potential future investigations that could bring further understanding on the topics studied herein are presented below:

- To track the economic impact of sport tourism over several years. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the sustained benefits and potential drawbacks that arise after the initial hosting period of sporting events.

- To perform comparative studies between different regions and countries to identify best practices and contextual differences in the impact of sport tourism. This could help tailor strategies to specific regional characteristics and needs.

- To investigate the implementation and outcomes of sustainable practices in sport tourism. Future research could focus on case studies of regions that have successfully integrated environmental sustainability into their sport tourism strategies.

- To explore how resident perceptions of sport tourism evolve before, during, and after sporting events. This could include the study of social, cultural, and economic factors that influence these perceptions and how they impact public support.

- To examine the role of technological advancements, such as digital marketing and virtual reality, in enhancing the sport tourism experience and its economic impact. This includes analyzing how technology can be leveraged to attract more tourists and improve event management.

- To assess the effectiveness of policies and regulations implemented to support sport tourism. Future research could evaluate the success of different policy interventions and their role in maximizing economic and social benefits.

- To investigate the specific economic impacts of smaller-scale sporting events compared to mega events. This research would help understand the potential of local and regional events in contributing to economic development without the substantial investments required for larger events.

- To evaluate the long-term legacy planning of regions that host sporting events. Future research could focus on how regions can effectively plan and manage the post-event period to ensure continued economic and social benefits.

-To explore the role and effectiveness of private-public partnerships in developing and sustaining sport tourism initiatives. This could include case studies of successful collaborations and the mechanisms that facilitated their success.

XI. REFERENCES

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XII. APPENDICES

CHAPTER XII: APPENDICES

Google form questionnaire used for survey.....	229-234
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5. 5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty

6. 6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work

7. 7. Nationality

8. 8. The family's annual income

Marca solo un óvalo.

☐ 0 - 20 000 euros

☐ 20 000 - 40 000 euros

☐ 40 000 -100 000 euros

☐ More of 100.000 euros

9. 9. Indicate your educational qualification or, if not you, the head of the household

Marca solo un óvalo.

☐ Primary school

☐ Secondary school

☐ College

☐ University

Questionnaire on sports-tourism (en)

Part 2: Candidate interest

10. 10. You play sports throughout the year

Marca solo un óvalo.

☐ Yes

11. 11. Do you practice sports or physical activity during your holidays?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Sometimes

12. 12. Have you ever attended sporting events outside of your usual residence?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

13. 13. If you answered yes to "question 12", please indicate which sporting events you participated in

14. 14. For your holidays, do you choose the destination based on the possibility of doing physical and sporting activities and / or attending sporting events?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Never
☐ Sometimes

15. 15. In the last two years (2020/2021), how many times have you exercised or witnessed an event outside of your usual residence?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ 2-3

16. 16. For the organization of your "sports holidays" trust

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Specialized agencies
☐ Generic agencies
☐ Associations
☐ Internet
☐ Do it yourself
☐ Other

17. 17. If you indicated the Internet in the previous question, please indicate which sites you used

18. 18. If you indicated Internet in "question 16" explain why

Questionnaire on sports-tourism (en)

Part 3: Economic benefit of sporting events and tourism in a region

19. 19. Is there any potential economic benefit to your region from hosting the sporting event?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

20. 20. Will holding a sporting event help the recreational infrastructure of your region and stimulate the construction of new sporting facilities?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

25. 25. Can the sporting event negatively affect other sectors?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

26. 26. If you answered YES to the previous one, indicate which sectors are negatively affected

27. 27. Do sporting events improve the infrastructure of the region?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

28. 28. In your opinion, is the sporting event useful to stabilize the economy?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

29. 29. Does the public administration have to increase the funding for the realization of the sporting event?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

30. 30. Do you think sporting events help significantly in the tourism sector?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

31. 31. Is tourism in a region the basic need of a region to increase its economic status?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

32. 32. Does the realization of a sporting event have to respect the environment?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Little
☐ Much
☐ Any

33. 33. Do you consider that the sports tourism sector can represent a job possibility for the Sports Science graduate?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Maybe

34. 34. Have you worked or are you still working in the field of sports tourism?

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Results questions 1-9

Descriptives

Descriptives

	N	Missing	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
1. Gender	508	0					
2. Age	508	0	32.2	31.0	16.3	12.0	73.0
3. Civil status	508	0					
4. Employment	508	0					
5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty	508	0					
6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work	508	0					
7. Nationality	508	0					
8. The family's annual income	508	0					
9. Indicate your educational qualification or, if not you, the head of the household	508	0					

Frequencies

Frequencies of 1. Gender

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Donna	228	44.9 %	44.9 %
Maschio	280	55.1 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 3. Civil status

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Altro	100	19.7 %	19.7 %
Convivente	42	8.3 %	28.0 %
Separato	20	3.9 %	31.9 %
Single	184	36.2 %	68.1 %
Sposato	157	30.9 %	99.0 %
Vedovo	5	1.0 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 4. Employment

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Altro	29	5.7 %	5.7 %
Disoccupato	17	3.3 %	9.1 %
Lavoratore	236	46.5 %	55.5 %
Studente	207	40.7 %	96.3 %
Studente-lavoratore	19	3.7 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Collaboratrice scolastica	1	0.2 %	0.2 %
Ingegneria	414	81.5 %	81.7 %
Nessun titolo di studio	51	10.0 %	91.7 %
Parrucchiere	1	0.2 %	91.9 %
Scienze sociali	41	8.1 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Collaboratore scolastico	1	0.2 %	0.2 %
Dipendente	1	0.2 %	0.4 %
Docente	344	67.7 %	68.1 %
Finanza	28	5.5 %	73.6 %
Impiegata	1	0.2 %	73.8 %
Infermiera	1	0.2 %	74.0 %
Ingegneri	74	14.6 %	88.6 %
Medico	1	0.2 %	88.8 %
Parrucchiere	29	5.7 %	94.5 %
Statali	27	5.3 %	99.8 %
Tirocinante presso ente pubblico	1	0.2 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 7. Nationality

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Albanese	4	0.8 %	0.8 %
Argentina	2	0.4 %	1.2 %
Belga	2	0.4 %	1.6 %
Cinese	2	0.4 %	2.0 %
Ecuadoriana	1	0.2 %	2.2 %
Italiana	488	96.1 %	98.2 %
Libanese	1	0.2 %	98.4 %
Marocco	1	0.2 %	98.6 %
Moldavia	1	0.2 %	98.8 %
Peruviana	1	0.2 %	99.0 %
Rumena	2	0.4 %	99.4 %
Spagnola	3	0.6 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 8. The family's annual income

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
0 - 20 000 euro	168	33.1 %	33.1 %
20 000 - 40 000 euro	238	46.9 %	79.9 %
40 000 - 100 000 euro	84	16.5 %	96.5 %
Più di 100.000 euro	18	3.5 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 9. Indicate your educational qualification or, if not you, the head of the household

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Diploma di scuola media superiore	163	32.1 %	32.1 %
Laurea e istruzione superiore	208	40.9 %	73.0 %
Licenza elementare	33	6.5 %	79.5 %
Licenza medie	104	20.5 %	100.0 %

Descriptives

	4. Employment	N
6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work	Altro	29
	Disoccupato	17
	Lavoratore	236
	Studente	207
	Studente-lavoratore	19
5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty	Altro	29
	Disoccupato	17
	Lavoratore	236
	Studente	207
	Studente-lavoratore	19

Frequencies

Frequencies of 6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work

6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work	4. Employment				
	Altro	Disoccupato	Lavoratore	Studente	Studente- lavoratore
Collaboratore scolastico	0	1	0	0	0
Dipendente	0	0	1	0	0
Docente	20	10	155	150	9
Finanza	1	0	20	7	0
Impiegata	0	0	1	0	0
Infermiera	0	0	1	0	0
Ingegneri	6	4	24	32	8
Medico	0	0	1	0	0
Parrucchiere	2	1	17	9	0
Statali	0	1	15	9	2
Tirocinante presso ente pubblico	0	0	1	0	0

Frequencies of 5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty

5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty	4. Employment				
	Altro	Disoccupato	Lavoratore	Studente	Studente- lavoratore
Collaboratrice scolastica	0	0	0	1	0
Ingegneria	24	15	189	171	15
Nessun titolo di studio	4	2	22	22	1
Parrucchiere	0	0	1	0	0
Scienze sociali	1	0	24	13	3

Results questions 10-18

Descriptives

	N
10. You play spors throughout the year	508
11. Do you practice spors or physical activity during your holidays?	508
12. Have you ever atended sporing events outside of your usual residence?	508
13. If you answered yes to "question 12", please indicate which sporing events you paricipated in	508
14. For your holidays, do you choose the destination based on the possibility of doing physical and sporing activities and / or attending sporing events?	508
15. In the last two years (2020/2021), how many times have you exercised or witnessed an event outside of your usual residence?	508
16. For the organization of your "spors holidays" trust	508
17. If you indicated the Internet in the previous question, please indicate which sites you used	508
18. If you indicated Internet in "question 16" explain why	508

Frequencies

Frequencies of 10. You play spors throughout the year

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
No	146	28.7 %	28.7 %
Qualche volta	154	30.3 %	59.1 %
Sì	208	40.9 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 11. Do you practice spors or physical activity during your holidays?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
No	197	38.8 %	38.8 %
Qualche volta	131	25.8 %	64.6 %
Sì	180	35.4 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 12. Have you ever atended sporing events outside of your usual residence?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
No	320	63.0 %	63.0 %
Sì	188	37.0 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 13. If you answered yes to "question 12", please indicate which sporting events you participated in

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Basket	5	1.0 %	1.0 %
Beach volley	40	7.9 %	8.9 %
Boxe	2	0.4 %	9.3 %
Calcetto	6	1.2 %	10.4 %
Calcio	132	26.0 %	36.4 %
Ciclismo	1	0.2 %	36.6 %
Crossfit	55	10.8 %	47.4 %
Gare di corsa	1	0.2 %	47.6 %
Ginnastica artistica	2	0.4 %	48.0 %
Giochi olimpici	5	1.0 %	49.0 %
Maratona	4	0.8 %	49.8 %
Mountain bike	16	3.1 %	53.0 %
Nuoto	26	5.1 %	58.1 %
Paddle	26	5.1 %	63.2 %
Pallanuoto	4	0.8 %	64.0 %
Pallavolo	10	2.0 %	65.9 %
Rugby e atletica	2	0.4 %	66.3 %
Sci	4	0.8 %	67.1 %
Surf e gym music	118	23.2 %	90.4 %
Tennis	28	5.5 %	95.9 %
Trekking	21	4.1 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 14. For your holidays, do you choose the destination based on the possibility of doing physical and sporting activities and / or attending sporting events?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Mai	20	3.9 %	3.9 %
No	248	48.8 %	52.8 %
Qualche volta	132	26.0 %	78.7 %
Sì	108	21.3 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 15. In the last two years (2020/2021), how many times have you exercised or witnessed an event outside of your usual residence?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
0	322	63.4 %	63.4 %
1	91	17.9 %	81.3 %
2-3	31	6.1 %	87.4 %
4-5	28	5.5 %	92.9 %
6-7	31	6.1 %	99.0 %
Più di 8	5	1.0 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 16. For the organization of your "spors holidays" trust

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Agenzie generiche	9	1.8 %	1.8 %
Agenzie generiche	23	4.5 %	6.3 %
Agenzie specializzate	31	6.1 %	12.4 %
Agenzie specializzate	23	4.5 %	16.9 %
Altro	90	17.7 %	34.6 %
Associazioni	19	3.7 %	38.4 %
Associazioni	40	7.9 %	46.3 %
Internet	273	53.7 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 17. If you indicated the Internet in the previous question, please indicate which sites you used

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Airbnb	4	0.8 %	0.8 %
Altri	3	0.6 %	1.4 %
Booking	225	44.3 %	45.7 %
Booking, TripAdvisor	10	2.0 %	47.6 %
Booking, edreams	10	2.0 %	49.6 %
Edreams	10	2.0 %	51.6 %
Edreams, airbnb	27	5.3 %	56.9 %
Google	29	5.7 %	62.6 %
Internet	136	26.8 %	89.4 %
Non ricordo	3	0.6 %	90.0 %
Skyscanner	3	0.6 %	90.6 %
TripAdvisor	18	3.5 %	94.1 %
Trivago	30	5.9 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 18. If you indicated Internet in "question 16" explain why

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Bassi costi e facilità di utilizzo	1	0.2 %	0.2 %
Booking	8	1.6 %	1.8 %
Buone offerte	8	1.6 %	3.3 %
Comodità e Semplicità	52	10.2 %	13.6 %
Economico	61	12.0 %	25.6 %
Fornisce molte informazioni, immagini, possibilità di prenotare	1	0.2 %	25.8 %
Mi piace scegliere le mete da solo	147	28.9 %	54.7 %
Per risparmiare tempo e denaro	103	20.3 %	75.0 %
Recensioni	86	16.9 %	91.9 %
È il mezzo più veloce	41	8.1 %	100.0 %

Descriptives

	12. Have you ever attended sporting events outside of your usual residence?	N
13. If you answered yes to "question 12", please indicate which sporting events you participated in	No	320
	Si	188

Frequencies of 13. If you answered yes to "question 12", please indicate which sporting events you participated in

13. If you answered yes to "question 12", please indicate which sporting events you participated in	12. Have you ever attended sporting events outside of your usual residence?	
	No	Si
Basket	4	1
Beach volley	27	13
Boxe	1	1
Calcetto	3	3
Calcio	97	35
Ciclismo	0	1
Crossfit	38	17
Gare di corsa	1	0
Ginnastica artistica	1	1
Giochi olimpici	2	3
Maratona	4	0
Mountain bike	1	15
Nuoto	1	25
Paddle	18	8
Pallanuoto	2	2
Pallavolo	9	1
Rugby e atletica	1	1
Sci	3	1
Surf e gym music	93	25
Tennis	13	15
Trekking	1	20

	16. For the organization of your "spors holidays" trust	N
17. If you indicated the Internet in the previous question, please indicate which sites you used	Agenzie generiche	9
	Agenzie generiche	23
	Agenzie specializzate	31
	Agenzie specializzate	23
	Altro	90
	Associazioni	19
	Associazioni	40
	Internet	273

Frequencies

Frequencies of 17. If you indicated the Internet in the previous question, please indicate which sites you used

16. For the organization of your "sports holidays" trust								
17. If you indicated the Internet in the previous question, please indicate which sites you used	Agenzie generiche	Agenzie generiche	Agenzie specializzate	Agenzie specializzate	Altro	Associazioni	Associazioni	Inter
Airbnb	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	
Altri	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	
Booking	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	22
Booking, TripAdvisor	0	1	0	2	2	0	3	
Booking, edreams	0	3	0	1	2	0	2	
Edreams	0	2	0	2	2	0	1	
Edreams, airbnb	0	2	2	3	6	0	7	
Google	0	3	3	5	4	0	7	
Internet	9	6	21	4	68	19	9	
Non ricordo	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	
Skyscanner	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	
TripAdvisor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Trivago	0	2	5	2	3	0	8	1

Descriptives

Descriptives

	16. For the organization of your "sports holidays" trust	N
18. If you indicated Internet in "question 16" explain why	Agenzie generiche	9
	Agenzie generiche	23
	Agenzie specializzate	31
	Agenzie specializzate	23
	Altro	90
	Associazioni	19
	Associazioni	40
	Internet	273

Frequencies of 18. If you indicated Internet in "question 16" explain why

18. If you indicated Internet in "question 16" explain why	16. For the organization of your "spors holidays" trust							
	Agenzie generiche	Agenzie generiche	Agenzie specializzate	Agenzie specializzate	Altro	Associazioni	Associazioni	Internet
Bassi costi e facilità di utilizzo	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Booking	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	4
Buone offerte	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
Comodità e Semplicità	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	47
Economico	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	60
Fornisce molte informazioni, immagini, possibilità di prenotare	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mi piace scegliere le mete da solo	1	5	13	5	20	8	11	84
Per risparmiare tempo e denaro	3	5	8	5	28	4	11	39
Recensioni	2	5	8	4	27	6	11	23
È il mezzo più veloce	1	6	1	7	8	0	6	12

Results questions 19-34

	N
19. Is there any potential economic benefit to your region from hosting the sporting event?	508
20. Will holding a sporting event help the recreational infrastructure of your region and stimulate the construction of new sporting facilities?	508
21. Are sporting events a good way to promote your region?	508
22. Does the sporting event influence the choice of your travel destination?	508
23. Could the event help the region increase the availability of jobs?	508
24. Do you think a sporting event can have a long-term economic impact on your community?	508
25. Can the sporting event negatively affect other sectors?	508
26. If you answered YES to the previous one, indicate which sectors are negatively affected	501
27. Do sporting events improve the infrastructure of the region?	508
28. In your opinion, is the sporting event useful to stabilize the economy?	508
29. Does the public administration have to increase the funding for the realization of the sporting event?	508
30. Do you think sporting events help significantly in the tourism sector?	508
31. Is tourism in a region the basic need of a region to increase its economic status?	508
32. Does the realization of a sporting event have to respect the environment?	508
33. Do you consider that the sports tourism sector can represent a job possibility for the Sports Science graduate?	508
34. Have you worked or are you still working in the field of sports tourism?	508

Frequencies of 19. Is there any potential economic benefit to your region from hosting the sporting event?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	92	18.1 %	18.1 %
No	23	4.5 %	22.6 %
Si	393	77.4 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 20. Will holding a sporting event help the recreational infrastructure of your region and stimulate the construction of new sporting facilities?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	121	23.8 %	23.8 %
No	22	4.3 %	28.1 %
Si	365	71.9 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 20. Will holding a sporting event help the recreational infrastructure of your region and stimulate the construction of new sporting facilities?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
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Frequencies of 21. Are sporting events a good way to promote your region?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	80	15.7 %	15.7 %
No	24	4.7 %	20.5 %
Si	404	79.5 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 22. Does the sporting event influence the choice of your travel destination?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	131	25.8 %	25.8 %
No	279	54.9 %	80.7 %
Si	98	19.3 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 23. Could the event help the region increase the availability of jobs?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	139	27.4 %	27.4 %
No	42	8.3 %	35.6 %
Si	327	64.4 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 24. Do you think a sporting event can have a long-term economic impact on your community?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	169	33.3 %	33.3 %
No	81	15.9 %	49.2 %
Si	258	50.8 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 25. Can the sporting event negatively affect other sectors?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	98	19.3 %	19.3 %
No	378	74.4 %	93.7 %
Sì	32	6.3 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 26. If you answered YES to the previous one, indicate which sectors are negatively affected

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Agricoltura	2	0.4 %	0.4 %
Ambiente	403	80.4 %	80.8 %
Appalti pubblici, manutenzione ordinaria infrastrutture, servizi sociali	8	1.6 %	82.4 %
Attività agricole, settore tessile, piccole e medie imprese	8	1.6 %	84.0 %
Aumento di prezzi per i residenti	9	1.8 %	85.8 %
Costruzioni e servizi	9	1.8 %	87.6 %
Dei materiali, questioni legate al COVID-19, abbattimento di alberi per ottene spazi utilizzabili	9	1.8 %	89.4 %
Economico	11	2.2 %	91.6 %
Impatto ambientale	2	0.4 %	92.0 %
Infrastrutture non utilizzate al termine dell'evento, vedi Olimpiadi	2	0.4 %	92.4 %
Integrazione, alimentazione, edilizia, aziende inerenti al fitness ecc ecc	2	0.4 %	92.8 %
Non saprei	14	2.8 %	95.6 %
Produzione di materiale, questioni legate all'epidemia, occupazione di terreno e creazione di nuovi spazi	2	0.4 %	96.0 %
Sport riguardanti i motori	6	1.2 %	97.2 %
Trasporto	2	0.4 %	97.6 %
Turismo	6	1.2 %	98.8 %
Tutto tranne lo sport	6	1.2 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 27. Do sporting events improve the infrastructure of the region?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
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Frequencies of 27. Do sporting events improve the infrastructure of the region?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	138	27.2 %	27.2 %
No	42	8.3 %	35.4 %
Sì	328	64.6 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 28. In your opinion, is the sporting event useful to stabilize the economy?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	204	40.2 %	40.2 %
No	68	13.4 %	53.5 %
Sì	236	46.5 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 29. Does the public administration have to increase the funding for the realization of the sporting event?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	112	22.0 %	22.0 %
No	29	5.7 %	27.8 %
Sì	367	72.2 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 30. Do you think sporting events help significantly in the tourism sector?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	116	22.8 %	22.8 %
No	39	7.7 %	30.5 %
Sì	353	69.5 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 31. Is tourism in a region the basic need of a region to increase its economic status?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	75	14.8 %	14.8 %
No	30	5.9 %	20.7 %
Sì	403	79.3 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 32. Does the realization of a sporting event have to respect the environment?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Molto	439	86.4 %	86.4 %
Niente	15	3.0 %	89.4 %
Poco	54	10.6 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 33. Do you consider that the sports tourism sector can represent a job possibility for the Sports Science graduate?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	140	27.6 %	27.6 %
No	25	4.9 %	32.5 %
Sì	343	67.5 %	100.0 %

Frequencies of 34. Have you worked or are you still working in the field of sports tourism?

Levels	Counts	% of Total	Cumulative %
Forse	26	5.1 %	5.1 %
No	449	88.4 %	93.5 %
Sì	32	6.3 %	99.8 %
no	1	0.2 %	100.0 %

Descriptives

	25. Can the sporting event negatively affect other sectors?	N
26. If you answered YES to the previous one, indicate which sectors are negatively affected	Forse	98
	No	371
	Sì	32

Frequencies of 26. If you answered YES to the previous one, indicate which sectors are negatively affected

	25. Can the sporting event negatively affect other sectors?		
26. If you answered YES to the previous one, indicate which sectors are negatively affected	Forse	No	Sì
Agricoltura	0	2	0
Ambiente	84	294	25
Appalti pubblici, manutenzione ordinaria infrastrutture, servizi sociali	2	4	2
Attività agricole, settore tessile, piccole e medie imprese	1	7	0
Aumento di prezzi per i residenti	0	9	0
Costruzioni e servizi	1	8	0
Dei materiali, questioni legate al COVID-19, abbattimento di alberi per ottenere spazi utilizzabili	2	7	0
Economico	1	9	1
Impatto ambientale	0	2	0
Infrastrutture non utilizzate al termine dell'evento, vedi Olimpiadi	0	2	0
Integrazione, alimentazione, edilizia, aziende inerenti al fitness ecc ecc	1	1	0
Non saprei	3	9	2
Produzione di materiale, questioni legate all'epidemia, occupazione di terreno e creazione di nuovi spazi	0	2	0
Sport riguardanti i motori	1	4	1
Trasporto	0	2	0
Turismo	1	4	1
Tutto tranne lo sport	1	5	0

Contingency Tables

Contingency Tables

5. If the student has answered "question 4" indicate the Faculty	4. Employment					Total
	Altro	Disoccupato	Lavoratore	Studente	Studente- lavoratore	
Collaboratrice scolastica	0	0	0	1	0	1
Ingegneria	24	15	189	171	15	414
Nessun titolo di studio	4	2	22	22	1	51
Parrucchiere	0	0	1	0	0	1
Scienze sociali	1	0	24	13	3	41
Total	29	17	236	207	19	508

 χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	9.55	16	0.889
N	508		

Contingency Tables

6. If you answered worker in "question 4", indicate the type of work	4. Employment					Total
	Altro	Disoccupato	Lavoratore	Studente	Studente- lavoratore	
Collaboratore scolastico	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dipendente	0	0	1	0	0	1
Docente	20	10	155	150	9	344
Finanza	1	0	20	7	0	28
Impiegata	0	0	1	0	0	1
Infermiera	0	0	1	0	0	1
Ingegneri	6	4	24	32	8	74
Medico	0	0	1	0	0	1
Parrucchiere	2	1	17	9	0	29
Statali	0	1	15	9	2	27
Tirocinante presso ente pubblico	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	29	17	236	207	19	508

 χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	65.5	40	0.007
N	508		

Contingency Tables

		20. Will holding a sporting event help the recreational infrastructure of your region and stimulate the construction of new sporting facilities?			
		Forse	No	Sì	Total
Forse	Observed	56	5	31	92
	% of total	11.0 %	1.0 %	6.1 %	18.1 %
No	Observed	3	12	8	23
	% of total	0.6 %	2.4 %	1.6 %	4.5 %
Sì	Observed	62	5	326	393
	% of total	12.2 %	1.0 %	64.2 %	77.4 %
Total	Observed	121	22	365	508
	% of total	23.8 %	4.3 %	71.9 %	100.0 %

 χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	225	4	< .001
N	508		

Contingency Tables

19. Is there any potential economic benefit to your region from hosting the sporting event?		21. Are sporting events a good way to promote your region?			
		Forse	No	Sì	Total
Forse	Observed	36	8	48	92
	% of total	7.1 %	1.6 %	9.4 %	18.1 %
No	Observed	5	6	12	23
	% of total	1.0 %	1.2 %	2.4 %	4.5 %
Sì	Observed	39	10	344	393
	% of total	7.7 %	2.0 %	67.7 %	77.4 %
Total	Observed	80	24	404	508
	% of total	15.7 %	4.7 %	79.5 %	100.0 %

 χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	84.2	4	< .001
N	508		

Contingency Tables

		23. Could the event help the region increase the availability of jobs?			
		Forse	No	Sì	Total
24. Do you think a sporting event can have a long-term economic impact on your community?					
Forse	Observed	90	11	68	169
	% of total	17.7 %	2.2 %	13.4 %	33.3 %
No	Observed	29	22	30	81
	% of total	5.7 %	4.3 %	5.9 %	15.9 %
Sì	Observed	20	9	229	258
	% of total	3.9 %	1.8 %	45.1 %	50.8 %
Total	Observed	139	42	327	508
	% of total	27.4 %	8.3 %	64.4 %	100.0 %

 χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	171	4	< .001
N	508		

Contingency Tables

28. In your opinion, is the sporting event useful to stabilize the economy?		27. Do sporting events improve the infrastructure of the region?			Total
		Forse	No	Sì	
Forse	Observed	94	14	96	204
	% of total	18.5 %	2.8 %	18.9 %	40.2 %
No	Observed	22	17	29	68
	% of total	4.3 %	3.3 %	5.7 %	13.4 %
Sì	Observed	22	11	203	236
	% of total	4.3 %	2.2 %	40.0 %	46.5 %
Total	Observed	138	42	328	508
	% of total	27.2 %	8.3 %	64.6 %	100.0 %

 χ^2 Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	114	4	< .001
N	508		