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Investigating the Evolution of Sport Tourism: Identifying Future Research Trends

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the evolution of sport tourism research and identify research gaps in the field. This descriptive-analytical research utilizes a bibliography and illustration method to achieve these goals. A total of 644 articles were extracted from the Web of Science database, and their bibliometric data were analyzed using VOS viewer software. The findings reveal the trend of publishing articles and citing them in recent years, while also outline the most cited articles, researchers, journals, and universities. Additionally, the primary country in the collaboration network was identified. Keyword co-occurrence analysis indicates that the majority of research in this field pertains to sport events and their management. The results also underscore a limited focus on the approach of service dominant logic and its derived concepts. Additional areas for future research include examining tourists' behavior as customers throughout all travel stages, investigating the impact of technology on sports tourism, and exploring tourists' behaviors.

Introduction

The nexus between tourism and sport is intricate and synergistic; however, sport tourism surpasses the mere amalgamation of these two concepts (Kasimati & Asero, 2023; Weed, 2009). Sport tourism (ST) is notably on the rise as a rapidly expanding sector within the tourism industry, drawing in numerous travelers fascinated by sports and recreational activities, regardless of whether sports form the central focus of their journey. This concept arises from the synergistic interaction among activity, people, and place (Pedauga et al., 2020; Weed & Bull, 2012). The phenomenon encompasses "all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, whether engaged in casually or in an organized manner" (Standeven & DeKnop, 1999). As outlined by Gibson (1998),

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sport tourism comprises three overarching categories: watching sports matches, exploring sport-related attractions, and engaging in active participation (Gibson, 1998; Kasimati & Asero, 2023; Mirehie & Cho, 2022).

As tourism constitutes a pivotal component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and aligns with specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly emphasizing Goals 8, 12, and 14 (Morfoulaki et al., 2023), sport tourism significantly contributes to the realization of SDG 8. This is achieved by fostering sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, generating employment opportunities, and promoting decent work for all. Sport tourism serves as a catalyst for the development of new business activities, leading to job creation. Cities strategically harness the latent capacity of hotels to host sports competitions or capitalize on festivals, thereby stimulating growth in the tourism and hotel industry (Herbold et al., 2020; Morfoulaki et al., 2023). In summary, sport tourism emerges as the nexus between the tourism and sport sectors, both grappling with the imperative of sustainable development. The ongoing interplay between active living and active traveling now exerts substantial economic and social influence on global societies, simultaneously serving as a crucial factor in the sustainability of regions (Pedauga et al., 2020).

Moreover, sport tourism makes a meaningful contribution to SDG 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. In addition to providing sporting opportunities and venues for physical exercise to tourists, investments in sport tourism have the potential to foster the participation of local communities in sports activities. Involving residents in the planning and execution of sporting events, as recommended, can further catalyze grassroots investment in event sustainability, thereby promoting resilient and sustainable planning (Morfoulaki et al., 2023). Furthermore, sport tourism plays a pivotal role in destination marketing by directly and indirectly advertising the full array of attractions within a destination (Trzonkowski & Mason, 2023). Capitalizing on these advantages, destinations are increasingly leveraging the hosting of various sporting events to enhance the tourist experience and strengthen their brand. These events, whether singular occasions or recurring, span the entire calendar year, augmenting the comprehensive portfolio of events hosted by the destination (Ziakas, 2023).

The intricate and multidimensional nature of sport tourism, especially as two distinct topics, along with its anticipated significant contribution to sustainable destination development, has positioned it as a field of interest not only for competent authorities, destination planners, and commerce sectors (e.g., event organizers and sport tourism service providers) but also for academic researchers. Despite some earlier scholarly discussions on sport tourism, notably by Gibson in 1998, the pivotal moment came during the 2001 World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) conference in Barcelona, where the importance of sports-related tourism was officially acknowledged (Gibson, 1998). This recognition catapulted sport tourism into a prominent subject for scientific research around the turn of the millennium.

The multifaceted connection between physical activity, sport, and tourism has sparked numerous studies in the field of sport tourism (Schlemmer et al., 2020). To comprehensively understand the evolution of the field and identify future research areas, there is a pressing need for a clearer research map and guidelines. Such tools would enhance the effectiveness of research in this field, providing direction for scholars toward vital research areas and elucidating its social and conceptual schools (Wang et al., 2023).

Bibliometric analysis, as a quantitative method, emerged as a crucial means for researchers to delve into various aspects of the research landscape, encompassing collaboration patterns, the structure of research fields, and citation relations. This analytical approach empowers researchers to grasp the structure, characteristics, and patterns of research activities by scrutinizing scholarly outputs, highly cited publications, influential countries, frequent keywords, and publication trends within a specific research area. Noteworthy for its ability to handle large datasets and contribute to theory development, bibliometric analysis is integral to the upcoming research endeavour (Vatankhah et al., 2023). Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) What has been the trajectory of quantitative publication in the field of sport tourism research thus far?

- 2) What has been the citation trend of research in this field, and which specific articles garnered the highest number of citations?
- 3) Which journals, researchers, countries, and universities received the highest number of citations in the field?
- 4) What are the commonly utilized keywords and the conceptual framework prevalent in this field? Additionally, which research topics currently capture the interest of researchers in this domain?

Literature Review

Sport tourism has emerged as a recent but rapidly expanding niche within the tourism industry, attracting revenue from active sport tourists, spectators, participants, and heritage visitors (Ito, 2019). It constitutes a growing form of tourism resulting from the convergence of tourism and sports, offering a distinct and comprehensive structure to fill leisure and recreation time while enhancing human mental and physical well-being (Harahap & Kartika, 2020). Despite its increasing significance, there remains an ongoing debate regarding the conceptualizations, explanations, and definitions of sport tourism. The unresolved issues include whether it should be referred to as sport tourism or sports tourism, what elements should be included or excluded, the various types of sport tourism, and the categorization of different kinds of sport tourists (Gibson, 2017; Van Rheenen et al., 2017; Weed, 2009).

Gammon and Robinson (2003) characterize a sport tourist as someone involved either actively or passively in a sporting event (Gammon & Robinson, 2003; Pedauga et al., 2020). In a similar vein, Standeven and DeKnop (1999) provide a definition for the sport tourism sector, encompassing "all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, whether engaged in casually or in an organized manner, for non-commercial or business/commercial reasons that require travel away from home and work locality" (Standeven & DeKnop, 1999). Passive sport tourism revolves around spectatorship, wherein individuals travel to witness sporting events. Many spectators decide whether to embark on such journeys prior to considering the hosting destination, with their primary motivations often linked to socializing and seeking hedonic outcomes. This category encompasses those who follow various events, ranging from mega events like the Olympic Games to major events such as the World Athletics Championship, or even local events like a football match featuring their favorite team. In contrast, active sport tourism participants are characterized by their active engagement in either professional sports or recreational activities. This group includes professional athletes, such as soccer players, elite or serious leisure participants like trail runners participating in small-scale ITRA series mountain events, and recreational individuals such as hikers (Schwarzenberger & Hyde, 2013). Gammon and Robinson (2003) introduce a distinctive categorization of sport tourists, classifying those engaged in competitive sports, whether actively or passively, as 'hard' sport tourists. On the other hand, those primarily focused on recreation are termed 'soft' sport tourists. This differentiation in participation is driven by various motives (Gammon & Robinson, 2003). In a broader context, any travel undertaken for sports activities falls under the umbrella of sport tourism, encompassing activities such as skiing, hiking, mountaineering, cycling, hunting, swimming, boating, participating in sports competitions, and spectating at tournaments. These excursions can be undertaken individually or collectively. Regardless of the nature of involvement, whether active or passive, sport tourism revolves around the interaction of activities, people, and places (Perić et al., 2019). Van Rheenen et al. (2017) outline five crucial parameters of sport tourism: the duration of the sport tourists' visit, destination, type of sport, participation experience, and economic gain (Van Rheenen et al., 2017). Furthermore, Weed and Bull (2012) broaden the scope of sport tourism, describing it as a 'social, economic, and cultural phenomenon arising from the unique interaction of activity, people, and place' (Weed & Bull, 2012). This comprehensive conceptualization involves multiple actors in the public, private, and voluntary domains. The cooperation and alignment among these domains are deemed crucial to harness opportunities (e.g., reducing seasonality in tourism, employment, sport facilities development) and mitigate negative impacts (Mollah et al., 2021).

Qualitative reviews in the field of sport tourism, such as Weed's study in 2009, have delved into the existing literature, examining prior reviews to outline potential futures (Weed, 2009). Various dimensions have been identified, including management futures, knowledge futures, the nature of sports tourism futures, and critical and challenging futures. In a similar vein, Getz and Page (2016)'s qualitative review focused on event tourism, offering a thorough analysis of the field's evolution and development. Their work provided both chronological and thematic insights, concluding with a framework for understanding and creating knowledge in event tourism, along with future research directions (Getz & Page, 2016). Mascarenhas et al. (2021) explored the intersection of sport tourism and environmental sustainability. Their study emphasized the scrutiny of sports events, particularly mega events, within the environmental context. Key findings included a concentration on sports practitioners in investigating the environmental pillar of sports tourism, with less attention given to spectators' roles. The study highlighted sports practice as a significant influence on practitioners' greener behavior, particularly in nature-based activities, and underscored the relationship between external pressures, perceptions, and the adoption of ecological management by sports events (Mascarenhas et al., 2021). Perić et al. (2017) contributed a review that outlined a research agenda for service experience in sport tourism. Their paper addressed various aspects, including types of sport experiences, economic dimensions, and business models, with a focus on shaping the future of delivering sport tourism experiences (Perić et al., 2017).

Considering the vast array of studies in the field of tourism and sport, comprehensive bibliometric analyses have become essential. Gammelsæter (2021) stressed the need for an integrated view of the complex scientific field through bibliometric analysis (Gammelsæter, 2021). Hammerschmidt et al. (2024) conducted a state-of-the-art overview of sport management research, utilizing bibliometric analysis to explore recent and frequently discussed topics (Hammerschmidt et al., 2024). Similarly, Das et al. (2024) conducted studies on religious tourism, revealing insights into influential countries and identifying future research hotspots (Das et al., 2024). In the realm of heritage tourism, Bhowmik (2021) shed light on evolving areas of focus, including sustainable tourism activities, heritage integration in urban planning, and local communities' perspectives (Bhowmik, 2021). The study proposed future research areas such as heritage tourism around volcanic regions, analysis of indigenous people's psychological constructs towards involvement in heritage tourism, and the promotion of international festivals in heritage places. In summary, the diverse array of studies in the fields of sport and tourism necessitates comprehensive bibliometric analyses to provide a holistic understanding of the field and to guide future research directions for scholars.

Methodology

The present study utilizes a descriptive-analytical approach, employing bibliographical and illustrative methods to thoroughly understand different aspects of the designated research field and yield substantial findings. These methodologies enable the examination and exploration of various details and features within the subject of investigation, ultimately resulting in tangible outcomes and insights (Blažun Vošner et al., 2017; Tepe et al., 2022). At the outset, the choice of the Web of Science database was motivated by its inclusion of esteemed journals, facilitating the acquisition of essential data for the research endeavour (Hassan Shah et al., 2022). The Web of Science database is a recognized interdisciplinary research platform that records over 12,000 internationally accessible journals and more than 160,000 conferences, including international conferences, worldwide. It not only offers comprehensive information from scholarly articles but also compiles numerous citation indices and studies from various fields (Grzybowska & Awasthi, 2020).

Therefore, in November 2023, the following keywords were searched to retrieve data: Sport tourism, Sports tourism, sport and tourism. After the initial search, data retrieval involved examining the titles, abstracts, and keywords of articles within the scrutinized database. At this stage, a total of 1136 articles were obtained. Subsequently, prior to extracting the data, relevant criteria and filters were specified and applied. As the primary criterion, the examination focused on articles categorized as review and research articles due to their rigorous peer-review processes. Applying this filter narrowed down the retrieved articles to 741. The subsequent filter refined the

scope to studies conducted in English, aligning with the research goal of exploring global trends in sport tourism research. There was no temporal restriction for the beginning point, allowing for inclusion of all relevant studies from the inception to the present (November 2023). Ultimately, a total of 644 articles were retained in the output set and underwent the analysis and examination process in the current research. The necessary information for the bibliographic citation of the studies, encompassing titles, abstracts, organizational affiliations, resources, etc., was extracted from the database for utilization in the analysis (Esmaeili Mahyari et al., 2021).

Subsequently, the bibliographic data of these articles were input into the VOS viewer software. VOS viewer is known for its ability to handle large datasets and generate advanced visualizations (Pahrudin et al., 2022). Utilizing this software visually represents the findings of the research, providing distinctive advantages in clustering, mapping, and other aspects. Through visualizing and graphically depicting patterns, structures, and relationships, the software facilitates a comprehensive comprehension of the nature of a scientific domain based on emerging networks and patterns. This contributes to a nuanced understanding of the intricate interconnections within the field (Vallaster et al., 2019). Using this software, Co-authorship and Keyword Co-occurrence analyses were conducted. Co-authorship analysis, involving the examination of author relationships, enhances comprehension of the social structure and collaborative networks within the studied domain. Additionally, Keyword Co-occurrence analysis, focusing on the investigation of the most frequently employed keywords, elucidates the trends in topics and research trajectories within a specific field. This analytical approach provides insight into the intricate interconnections and thematic developments within the scholarly landscape (Garrigos-Simon et al., 2019; Zupic & Čater, 2014). In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, PRISMA framework was applied, according to the review article standards. The procedural framework for conducting research, delineating by Danvila-del-Valle et al. (2019) is illustrated in the Figure 1.

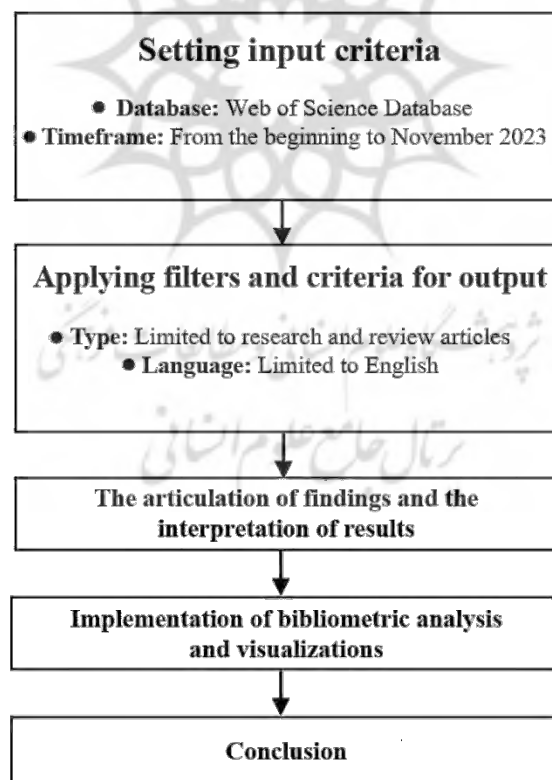


Figure 1. Research stages, Elaborated based on Danvila-del-Valle et al. (2019)

Findings

In the initial phase, the trajectory of scholarly article dissemination and referencing within the field of sport tourism was analyzed using data sourced from the Web of Science database. The analysis reveals that the publication of articles in this domain started with a single article in 1996 and steadily increased, reaching a peak of 101 articles in 2020. However, there was a subsequent decline in article publications, with 71 articles in 2021 and 67 articles in 2022. As of the current year, 53 articles have been authored in this domain up to the present moment. According to the Web of Science database, a total of 644 articles in the field of sport tourism have been published. Furthermore, the dataset within this repository indicates that the citation of articles within the specified domain began in the year 2001 and has steadily increased, reaching 1690 citations by the year 2022. Additionally, in the current calendar year, 1143 citations have already been attributed to articles in this field. The graphical representation of the publication and citation trends of sport tourism articles is observable in Figure 2.

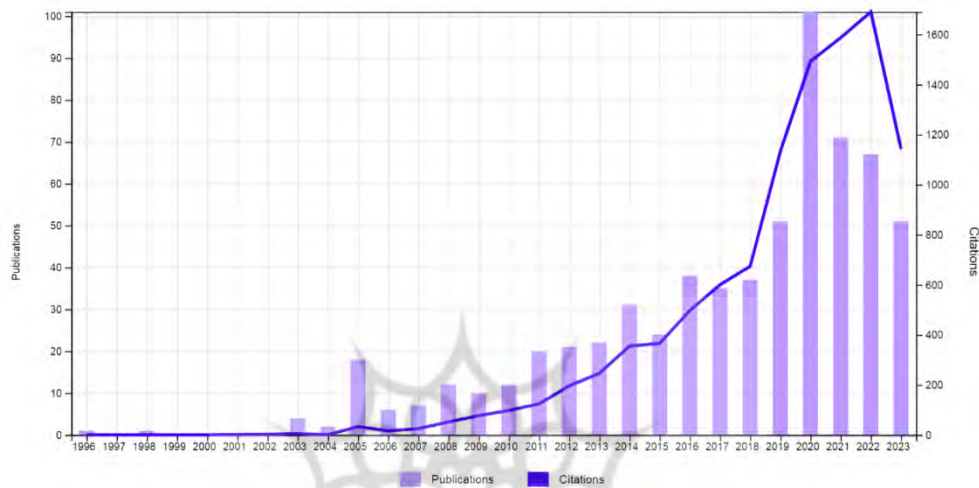


Figure 2. The quantitative trend of Publication and Citation.

Furthermore, the statistics of publications and citations to them, broken down by year, are displayed in Table 1. The overall count of publications has reached 1448, with a total of 16862 citations.

Table 1. Publication and Citation Metrics.

Year	Number of Publication	Number of citation	Year	Number of Publication	Number of citation	Year	Number of Publication	Number of citation
2023	53	1143	2013	22	246	2003	4	5
2022	67	1690	2012	21	196	2002	0	3
2021	71	1587	2011	20	124	2001	0	2
2020	101	1493	2010	12	98	2000	0	0
2019	51	1133	2009	10	77	1999	0	0
2018	37	674	2008	12	52	1998	1	0
2017	35	600	2007	7	25	1997	0	0
2016	38	497	2006	6	16	1996	1	0
2015	24	366	2005	18	33	-	-	-
2014	31	355	2004	2	1	-	-	-

The data extracted from the Web of Science database elucidates that the preeminent article in the domain of sport tourism is entitled "Progress and prospects for event tourism research" authored by Donald Getz and Stephen J. Page in 2016, amassing a total of 454 citations. Published in the

Tourism Management Journal, the second-ranking article is "Critical reflections on the economic impact assessment of a mega-event: the case of 2002 FIFA World Cup" penned by Choong-Ki Lee and Tracy Taylor in 2005, garnering 243 citations. The third most referenced article, "International tourism and climate change" authored by Daniel Scott, Stefan Gössling and C. Michael Hall in 2012 published in the Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change, has accrued a total of 233 citations. Table 2 provides a comprehensive depiction of the top ten cited articles in the field of sport tourism.

Table 2. Most Cited Publications.

Title	Authors and Publication year	Journal	Total citations	Average citations per year
Progress and prospects for event tourism research	Getz and Page (2016)	Tourism Management	454	56.75
Critical reflections on the economic impact assessment of a mega-event: the case of 2002 FIFA World Cup	Lee and Taylor (2005)	Tourism Management	243	12.79
International tourism and climate change	Scott et al. (2012)	Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change	233	19.42
Evaluating the perceived social impacts of hosting large-scale sport tourism events: Scale development and validation	Kim et al. (2015)	Tourism Management	221	24.55
Service Quality, Satisfaction, and Intent to Return in Event Sport Tourism	Shonk and Chelladurai (2008)	Journal of Sport Management	191	11.94
Small-scale event sport tourism: A case study in sustainable tourism	Gibson et al. (2012)	Sport Management Review	191	15.91
Why travel to the FIFA World Cup? Effects of motives, background, interest, and constraints	Kim and Chalip (2004)	Tourism Management	188	9.4
Sport tourism as the celebration of subculture	Green and Chalip (1998)	Annals of Tourism Research	166	6.38
Small-scale event sport tourism: fans as tourists	Gibson et al. (2003)	Tourism Management	149	7.09
Quality of Life, Event Impacts, and Mega-Event Support among South African Residents before and after the 2010 FIFA World Cup	Kaplanidou et al. (2013)	Journal of Travel Research	138	12.54

Through an examination of the available data, the preeminent researchers in the field of sport tourism have been discerned, ascertained by the number of citations attributed to their scholarly contributions. Gibson, amassing 618 citations, holds the foremost position as the most cited researcher in this domain. Subsequently, Getz, with 600 citations, occupies the subsequent tier among highly cited researchers, with one of his articles acknowledged as the most cited in this realm. The third most cited researcher in this field is Page, accruing 454 citations. Table 3 elucidates the top 10 researchers in the field of sport tourism, presenting a ranking based on citation frequencies. The Total link strength signifies the interconnectedness of each element within the collaborative network, depicting its relational significance with other elements in the network.

Table 3. Most Cited Authors.

Author	Number of citations	Number of publications	Total link strength
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Gibson, Heather	618	12	360
Getz, Donald	600	4	296
Page, Stephen J.	454	1	128
Walker, Matthew	359	2	107
Chalip, l	354	2	158
Fairley, Sheranne	327	11	168
Kaplanidou, Kyriaki	297	4	233
Scott, Daniel	277	2	10
Cho, Heetae	274	10	268
Funk, Daniel C.	271	4	148

Subsequent analysis further reveals that the Tourism Management Journal, accruing 1901 citations, holds the distinction as the most cited periodical within the realm of sport tourism research. It is noteworthy that 5 out of the 10 most referenced articles in this domain find their publication venue in this journal. In the second echelon, the Journal of Sport Management is positioned with 664 citations. The third-ranking periodical is the Sustainability Journal, registering 576 citations. Notably, the Sustainability Journal holds the distinction of publishing the highest quantity of articles in this particular field. Table 4 elucidates the top ten most cited journals in this field, presenting alongside them the respective number of published articles and the total link strength.

Table 4. Most Cited Journals.

Journal	Number of citations	Number of publications	Total link strength
Tourism Management	1901	17	285
Journal of Sport Management	664	13	203
Sustainability	576	58	324
Sport in Society	556	14	141
Annals of Tourism Research	534	6	102
Sport Management Review	521	10	110
Current Issues in Tourism	343	12	82
European Sport Management Quarterly	268	11	53
Journal of Travel Research	243	4	45
Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews-Climate Change	233	1	3

Examination of data sourced from the Web of Science database reveals that the University of Florida, with 1060 citations and a total link strength of 429, stands as the foremost institution in the field of sport tourism. This university also attains the distinction of being the most prolific in terms of article publications within this domain. In the second position is Griffith University with 798 citations, followed by the Bournemouth University in the third position with 497 citations. Table 5 presents an inventory of the top 10 research institutions in the field of sport tourism, ranked according to citation frequencies.

Table 5. Most Cited Universities.

University	Number of citations	Number of publications	Total link strength
University of Florida	1060	24	429
Griffith University	798	13	315
Bournemouth University	497	7	99
University of Calgary	459	2	81
University of Queensland	432	17	279
University of Waterloo	344	5	23
Texas A&M University	336	6	141
German Sport University Cologne	295	10	98
Nanyang Technological University	269	9	186
Kyung Hee University	263	4	51

The data extracted from the database reveals that the United States, with 3733 citations attributed to its researchers, holds the foremost position as the most cited country in the field of sport tourism research, exhibiting the highest aggregate link strength. Australia secures the second position with 1873 citations, followed by Canada with 1388 citations, England with 1283 citations, and South Korea with 866 citations, respectively. Table 6 enumerates the top 10 countries, delineated by citation frequencies, accompanied by their overall link strength and the number of published works.

Table 6. Most Cited Countries.

Country	Number of citations	Number of publications	Total link strength
USA	3733	130	954
Australia	1873	55	526
Canada	1388	28	312
England	1283	45	365
South Korea	866	30	197
Germany	787	29	220
Spain	584	57	369
South Africa	487	31	175
China	380	104	273
New Zealand	380	12	84

The collaborative network structure among countries actively involved in sport tourism research can be identified through co-authorship analysis. The visualization of this analysis unveils a network that includes clusters, nodes, and the connections between them, shedding light on the degree of international cooperation in advancing tourism research. In this network, the United States stands out as a dominant participant, with a robust link strength indicating its prominent role in international collaborative endeavors. Following closely, England and Australia secure the

second and third positions, emphasizing their substantial contributions to cross-border collaboration. Figure 3 visually represents the co-authorship analysis among these countries.

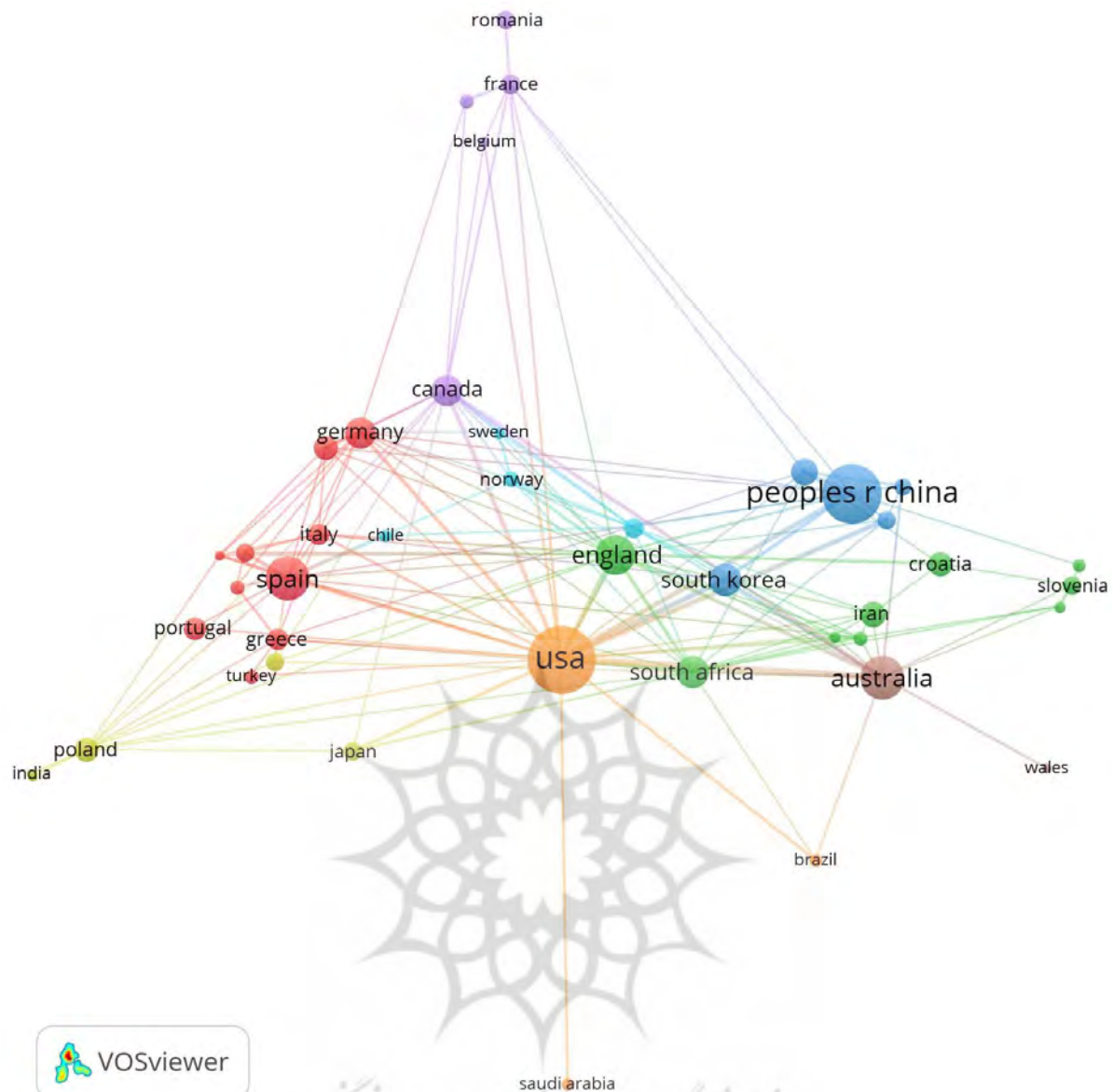


Figure 3. Co-authorship Network of Countries.

To elucidate the conceptual framework of the discipline and investigate its evolutionary and dynamic dimensions, a keyword co-occurrence analysis was employed. This analytical approach depended on two key metrics: keyword frequency and overall link strength. These metrics were instrumental in revealing the interconnections among individual terms and other lexicons within the given context (Chakraborty et al., 2021; Donthu et al., 2020). To merge similar words, avoiding unnecessary repetition, a thesaurus file was used to integrate resembling words. In light of this, the prevalent terms in the realm of sport tourism research encompass "Sport tourism" with a total frequency of 279 occurrences, followed by "tourism" with 56, "sport event" with 46, "sport" with 37, "sustainability" with 25, "active sport tourism" with 16, "customer satisfaction" with 16, "destination image" with 16, "economic impact" with 16, and "motivation" with 16 occurrences are top words in the realm of sport tourism. Table 7 furnishes an inventory of the 20 most frequently employed terms in sport tourism studies.

Table 7. Frequently Used Terms Based on Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis.

Keyword	Keyword Occurrence	Total Link Strength
Sport tourism	279	241
Tourism	56	78
Sport event	46	63

Sport	37	63
Sustainability	25	39
Active sport tourism	16	11
Customer satisfaction	16	22
Destination image	16	24
Economic impact	16	22
Motivation	16	23
Sustainable development	14	19
Sustainable tourism	12	10
Climate change	10	9
Event management	10	22
Nostalgia	10	15
Event tourism	9	10
Golf tourism	9	11
Mega events	9	15
Segmentation	9	12
Destination management	9	10

The density visualization of keyword co-occurrence, based on density and intensity as shown in Figure 4, reveals the repetition of keywords. Additionally, the examination of temporal keyword co-occurrence provides insights into the progression of terms over time, tracking research trends and the subjects investigated throughout previous years. Figure 5 presents the Temporal Keyword Co-occurrence Map, highlighting the significance of themes in recent studies through the use of the yellow color.

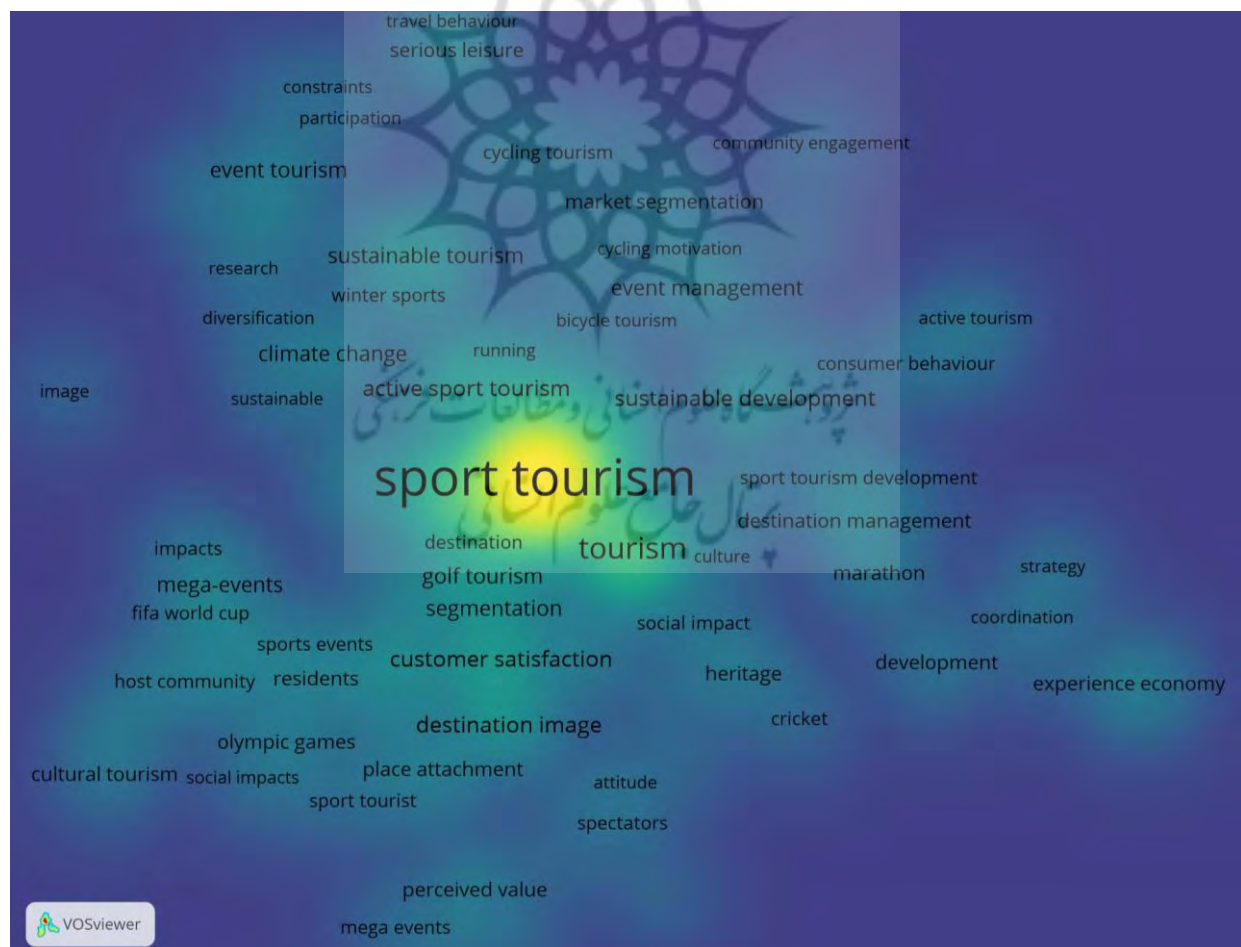
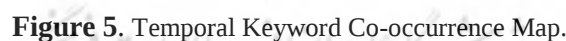


Figure 4. Density Visualization of Keyword Co-Occurrence.



The empirical data reveals a progressive trend in the publication of articles in the field of sport tourism, reaching its peak at 101 articles in 2020. However, a noticeable decline is observed from 2021 onwards. In terms of citations, the trend consistently rises, reaching its highest point in 2022 with a total of 1690 citations. Notably, the article titled "Progress and Prospects for Event Tourism Research" by Donald Getz and Stephen J. Page emerges as the most cited paper in this domain. Furthermore, Heather Gibson is recognized as the most highly cited author, accumulating 618 citations. According to the Web of Science database, the Tourism Management Journal holds the title of the most cited journal publishing articles in sport tourism, boasting 1901 citations.

Following this, an analysis of keyword co-occurrence has uncovered the most frequently used terms in the realm of sport tourism research. Additionally, a temporal examination of keyword co-

occurrence has been conducted to shed light on evolving research trends and thematic shifts within this domain. Consequently, the conceptual structure of the sport tourism field has been envisioned, revealing the popular topics among researchers. In the early studies, a significant portion was devoted to conceptualizing and defining sport tourism (e.g., Deery et al. 2004), followed by a shift towards understanding motivations (e.g., Gibson 2004). Moreover, a majority of studies in sport tourism have emphasized the role of events and event management, particularly focusing on mega events (e.g., Getz and Page ,2016), as well as small events (e.g., Gibson et al. 2012; Gibson et al. 2003). More recently, sustainability has gained prominence in sport tourism research (e.g., Aghili et al. 2023; Hinch and Ito 2018; Mascarenhas et al. 2021), due to its progression, characteristics, and typologies, contributing to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) compared to other tourist modalities (Herbold et al., 2020; Morfoulaki et al., 2023). There is a recognized need for more studies, particularly in developing countries, specifically focusing on the capabilities of sustainable policies in creating resilience for destinations.

Based on findings of the study, experience economy is one of the most significant topics in the field of sport tourism recently addressing the need to know more about customers. While service quality and satisfaction remain popular research topics in the field of sport tourism, reflecting a traditional and static assessment of customer experience, a dynamic perspective suggests the need to comprehend these evaluations holistically (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Adopting a new perspective and considering experiential marketing, sport tourists express a desire not only to engage in sporting activities but also to immerse themselves in the cultures of foreign destinations, encompassing aspects such as food, arts, and leisure activities indicating the need of comprehensive look at the tourists' experiences (Funk & Bruun, 2007). Therefore, further research is warranted in understanding tourists' experiences in sport tourism, particularly through the adoption of customer journey and touchpoints (De Keyser et al., 2020). Exploring experiences in sport tourism can prove being fruitful in various ways. For example, given the limited knowledge potential travelers often have about the mega events they intend to attend; sharing experiences becomes a valuable tool for information gathering before traveling (Nguyen & Tong, 2023). This sharing of experiences can play a pivotal role in shaping the destination image for sport tourism even before travelers embark on their journey (Guo & Pesonen, 2022; Nguyen & Tong, 2023).

Examining the recent repeated keywords in co-occurrence analysis and also comparison with the general research trajectory of tourism, indicates areas warranting increased scholarly attention. Within the realm of sport tourism, the exploration of the service dominant logic concept remains relatively under examined, representing a novel aspect in this field. From this perspective, the creation of value is not an individual endeavour but necessitates the active participation of various actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2006). According to this viewpoint, value is co-created through interactions between customers and service providers, with the quality of interaction serving as a pivotal factor in the process of value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Furthermore, value is not solely derived from customer-service provider interaction; it can also be generated through interactions among customers themselves (Rihova et al., 2018). Tourists play a role in the co-creation of value by contributing to some or all aspects of the tourism experience through their participation and interaction in onsite activities, influencing their subjective experiences (Campos et al., 2018). Even the tourist gaze is shaped by their co-creation efforts and the social context they encounter (Chen, 2023). Hence, in the context of sport tourism, it becomes imperative to conduct more studies focused on value co-creation involving all actors, considering the ecosystem's significance, whether in active or passive tourism.

The exploration of technology in sport tourism is currently limited, highlighting a significant gap in existing research. There is a clear need for additional studies to delve into the role of technologies in enhancing the sport tourism experience. Notably, the tourism industry has begun to acknowledge the metaverse, recognizing its ability to cultivate a sense of presence and social interactions. This technology allows travelers to engage in inspiring travel activities and access services across diverse geographic locations, transcending physical limitations. Technological advancements such as the metaverse, AI, virtual reality, and augmented reality, hold significant potential for application in the realm of sport tourism (Koo et al., 2023). In particular, these technologies offer applicability throughout all stages of a tourist's journey, encompassing the periods before, during, and after the

visit (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Their capacity to enhance the overall tourism experience suggests that further investigation and exploration of their potential utilization in sport tourism are warranted. As limitation, this study addressed the general area of sport tourism, other studies are suggested to examine the specific area of sport tourism (e.g. active sport tourism, mega events in sport tourism and etc.) to envisage future directions more specifically. Also this study utilized WOS database due to its painstaking review procedure but Scopus is another important database might generate new insights in this field specifically in social structure.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines: Ethical points have been observed.

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