

Article

The Role of Organizers in Advancing Sustainable Sport Tourism: Insights from Small-Scale Running Events in Greece

Sofia Gkarane ^{1,*}, Androniki Kavoura ², Chris Vassiliadis ³, Iordanis Kotzaivazoglou ¹, Garyfallos Fragidis ¹ and Vasiliki Vrana ¹

¹ Department of Business Administration, International Hellenic University, 62124 Serres, Greece; ikotza@ihu.gr (I.K.); gary.fragidis@ihu.gr (G.F.); vrana@ihu.gr (V.V.)

² Department of Business Administration, University of West Attica, 12243 Athens, Greece; nkavoura@uniwa.gr

³ Department of Business Administration, University of Macedonia, 54636 Thessaloniki, Greece; chris@uom.edu.gr

* Correspondence: sgkarane@ihu.gr

Abstract

The contribution of small-scale sporting events to tourism sustainable development in local communities has been well recognized in the literature. Small-scale running events in particular are essential in the promotion of sustainable tourism in the community due to their localized impact. Although research has largely focused on the demand side—including participants, spectators, and host communities—limited attention has been given to the supply side, particularly the perspectives of sport event organizers and their role in implementing sustainable practices. This study aims to address this gap and answer key research questions that concern the factors which contribute to the success of these events in relation to their economic, social, and environmental impacts through the lens of the events' primary decision-makers, their organizers. This study employs an exploratory research method, conducting interviews with twenty-five organizers of diverse Greek running events that represent a variety of geographical contexts and event characteristics of the country, based on their long-standing presence. Findings contribute to sustainable sport tourism literature by developing a theoretical framework which encompasses the three dimensions of sustainability, highlighting inclusivity as a key component within the social dimension. Results indicate that organizers perceive their running events as having a positive economic impact and enhancing social cohesion. They are also aware of the potential environmental impact, like trail preservation, and consequently implement responsible measures to protect the environment. Organizers share a variety of specific strategies and practical suggestions aimed at improving the sustainability of running events, such as managing waste effectively or improving accessibility for diverse participants, offering transferable insights for other event planners and local authorities. This paper showcases the key role of organizers in developing partnerships to implement effective sustainable sport event practices in the destination.

Keywords: sport events; running; organizer perception; sustainable development; interviews; tourism; inclusivity



Academic Editor: Jun (Justin) Li

Received: 26 May 2025

Revised: 28 June 2025

Accepted: 11 July 2025

Published: 12 July 2025

Citation: Gkarane, S.; Kavoura, A.; Vassiliadis, C.; Kotzaivazoglou, I.; Fragidis, G.; Vrana, V. The Role of Organizers in Advancing Sustainable Sport Tourism: Insights from Small-Scale Running Events in Greece. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 6399. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17146399>

Sustainability **2025**, *17*, 6399. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17146399>

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Sport tourism, which encompasses a broad spectrum of activities and events, is one of the most rapidly developing sectors of the tourism industry [1]. This global phenomenon

has seen a significant rise and has in fact become a trend in today's world, enjoying a wide-spread popularity [2,3].

Since ancient Greece, sporting events involved travel, therefore many destinations utilize sport tourism to boost their local economies [4]. Sporting events have become a valuable tool for destination marketing, often used to differentiate the destination from competitors in the tourism market [5,6]. In fact, sporting events have become so popular in place marketing that they can even be key players in promoting tourist destinations globally [3]. Furthermore, the literature has recognized the numerous benefits that sports events can offer both to host destinations and to residents, such as professional opportunities, revenue generation, sense of pride, and environmental issues awareness [7–11].

In addition, UN Tourism recognizes sport tourism as a powerful tool which can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); specifically, sport tourism can promote economic growth, social well-being, job opportunities, accessibility, and environmental sustainability [1]. Bazzanella et al. in their systematic review, concluded that the key tourism implications of sport events are related to their potential to positively change the host destination and contribute to economic, social, and environmental advancements [12].

Among sport tourism events, running events are those that have significantly grown during the last years due to their increasing diversity such as trail running, obstacle races and ultra-marathons; this diversity attracts several kinds of participants, from running visitors to casual athletes of 5 km and high-trained athletes [7,8,11]. In fact, running events have become a major component of sport tourism attracting participants and spectators worldwide and contributing to sustainable development by promoting health and community engagement [13]. Their increasing popularity, mainly in Europe, highlights their appeal to travelers who seek not only competition but also cultural exploration [13]. This trend offers various challenges and motivations for many runners and therefore it is expected to further increase the global growth of running tourism [11].

Research has largely focused on the demand side—including participants, spectators, and host communities—yet limited attention has been given to the supply side, particularly the perspectives of sport event organizers and their role in implementing sustainable practices. Although previous studies have explored the economic, social, and environmental impacts of sport tourism [3,6,8,10,13], insufficient consideration has been placed given to the perspectives of sport event organizers and their role on implementing sustainable practices. However, recognizing the critical role of effective planning and stakeholder engagement in successful event tourism, scholars have emphasized the need to delve deeper into the perspectives of key actors, particularly event organizers and investors [14]. Existing research predominantly focuses on participants, spectators, and host communities [3,5,8,9,12,13,15].

Our study focuses on Greece where the running movement has remarkably increased over the past 30 years, providing a positive impact on the domestic tourism industry [15]. Greece hosts internationally renowned races, such as the Athens Marathon and the Alexander the Great Marathon, but most of the running events organized in the country are small-scale [15]. The presence of other notable events, such as the Spetsathlon, further underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics of running events in Greece, as they seem to reflect broad trends and opportunities in sport tourism.

This study aims to address this gap, which stems from the insufficient focus on sport event organizers' viewpoints, by investigating the insights of small-scale running event organizers on sustainability outcomes. Through the application of a qualitative approach, we conduct in-depth interviews with organizers of running events across various destinations in Greece in order to explore the factors driving sustainability, perceived challenges, and implemented strategies, from the perspective of those who are directly

involved in the event organization. Findings present a theoretical framework which highlights the interconnected dimensions of sustainability and also suggests inclusivity as a key component within the social dimension. This research directly contributes to the understanding of sustainable development in the social and economic sphere, aligning with current challenges by exploring economic, social, and environmental goals through the practical lens of event management.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Small-Scale Sport Events and Sustainable Tourism Development

A diverse range of travel activities is included in sport tourism, like participating in recreational or competitive sports, attending sport events, or visiting sport attractions [3,16,17]. The scale of sport events varies, from mega-events like the Olympics to smaller-scale ones, such as cycling and running races [6]. In regard to small-scale events, they play a crucial role in the development of tourist destinations; although they are perceived differently from larger events, they are still closely linked to tourism and have the potential to offer positive economic and development opportunities [18]. Small-scale events are usually organized every year, participants often outnumber spectators, they do not attract special national attention, and they generate low economic impact, yet they have a significant impact on local communities [5,19].

Especially small-scale events related to sports provide several advantages to the host community, as they make use of existing infrastructure (resulting in lower public costs), and they are not difficult to manage in terms of spectators' attendance [20]. They can positively impact the image of the local community and offer benefits that extend beyond sports development; in particular, these events foster high levels of self-esteem and sports participation which can lead to improving the reputation of the host destination [21]. For example, small-scale events, like triathlon, play a significant role in boosting the image of the host destination and in fostering community pride; they also yield intangible benefits, involve local volunteers, and strengthen local tourism and collaboration [22].

The literature has examined the economic, social, and environmental impact of small-scale sport tourism events and their contribution to sustainable development. Koenig-Lewis et al. [23] emphasize the intricate connection between sport and sustainability, asserting that the sector's unique Triple Bottom Line (TBL) contributions across socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions position sports (events) as a potent force for driving sustainable behavior change: (a) Economically, such events can stimulate local development by attracting visitors, supporting small businesses, and extending the tourism season in otherwise low-demand periods; (b) On a social level, small-scale events enhance community identity, foster local pride, and encourage inclusive participation, contributing to stronger social cohesion and civic engagement; and (c) Environmentally, although often less resource-intensive than mega-events, small-scale events still pose sustainability challenges related to waste, transportation, and energy use, yet they also present opportunities to promote eco-conscious practices at the community level.

Several other studies have shown that small-scale events can contribute to the local economy, mainly in sectors like accommodation and catering [10,19,24], even if this income is not important in regard to accommodation [10]. Moreover, small-scale sport tourism events can alleviate seasonality by attracting visitors to host destinations year-round [8,25]. They can also positively impact local communities by increasing their quality of life, providing opportunities for social interaction, fostering volunteerism, and contributing to a strong sense of the community [8,25–27]. In addition, events are parts of broader societal processes and they have the potential to inspire change towards sustainability [28]. In regard to

their environmental impact, it is lower compared to large events; small-scale sport tourism events rely on existing infrastructure and generate a smaller carbon footprint [10,25,26].

Sporting events play a multifaceted role in achieving the SDGs, boosting participant health and well-being, driving economic growth, and fostering social inclusion [29]. They offer a unique intersection of the TBL Framework and its sustainability impacts, where health benefits, cultural significance, and environmental concerns coexist and interact [23]. Building on the growing interest in sustainable sport tourism, several other studies have explored various aspects of sustainability in the contexts of events. For example, Chersulich Tomino et al. examine the social impacts of out-door sport tourism events and the necessary strategic planning elements to achieve event sustainability [30]. In their study, Perić et al. analyze the impacts of an international trail-running event, highlight its economic, socio-cultural, and environmental effects and identify potential local stakeholders' involvement [31]. Another recent study explores how recurring, non-mega sporting events can contribute to sustainable socio-economic development and emphasize the importance of local stakeholders [32]. And Martins et al. examine how the integration of multiple dimensions for sustainable development such as economic, social, environmental, partner, and sport dimensions maximize the benefits for the host destination [33]. Morán-Gámez et al. explore the characteristics of sustainable practices within sporting events organized in natural areas, both protected and unprotected, with a particular focus on environmental aspects [34]. A recent study which investigates the social impacts of recurring non-mega sport events on local residents highlights how their perceptions influence community support intentions and stresses the importance of a community-focused approach [35].

However, while literature highlights the economic, social, and environmental benefits of small-scale events, limited attention has been paid to the viewpoints of their organizers, particularly regarding their perspectives on sustainability, despite their crucial role in the event organization. This research aligns with recent calls in systematic reviews for further exploration of sustainable management practices in sport events [36], especially addressing the identified gap regarding the perspectives of event organizers.

2.2. Organizer Perceptions and Attitude in Tourism

Sport events can be widely diverse; thus, they present unique opportunities and challenges for their organizers [4]. They are also complicated, time-constrained, and involve the direct or indirect participation of various stakeholders [12].

Few studies have explored the organizers' perceptions and attitudes in tourism, particularly in regard to the sustainability of the events and their impact on host communities. One such study investigates these perceptions through qualitative methods, focusing on the economic, social, and community-related benefits of organizing events near Lake Erie [37]. Chersulich Tomino et al., in their study about the impacts of out-door sport tourism events, highlight a focus on the attributes needed for achieving sustainability as well as propose recommendations to help organizers avoid mistakes [30]. Another recent study, which focuses on a non-mega sporting event in Tour de Okinawa, Japan, interviews event organizers and stakeholders' representatives to identify how these participants can leverage the event [38]. Perić et al. examine the organizational challenges of hosting small-scale sports events in rural communities focusing on achieving sustainable economic and social results [31]. Svensson et al. examine the adaptation strategies that Swedish sport event organizers adopted to the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the digitization of events and contributing to the understanding of how this kind of events have been impacted by the health crisis [39]. The factors that contribute to the success of small-scale sport events from the perspectives of event organizers and spectators are explored in another study; emphasis is placed on economic development and social benefits [40]. In addition, an older

study focused on the perceptions of event and festival organizers identifies four dimensions of the impacts of these events including economic benefits and recognizing social costs [9].

It is important to understand the perceptions of various event stakeholders (like these of organizers) for several reasons including the identification of success factors that can foster tourism development for the host destinations [9,40]. Event organizers should not only have in-depth knowledge of sports culture but also be able to work in collaboration with the community in order to develop strategies that will reflect the local needs and broader, lasting-impact objectives [41]. They try to create sustainable events which will have a positive impact on the community through the collaboration with stakeholders and through careful planning [30].

2.3. The Growth of Running Events in Greece

Since the 1960s, running has evolved into an independent sport, shifting from competitive athletics towards more recreational and health-focused physical activities [42]. Over the past three decades, the popularity of running events has significantly increased [42,43], mainly in Europe where marathons especially have become very popular [43].

Among sport events, running ones take place in diverse landscapes and allow participants to have unique travel experiences by exploring new places while engaging in their passion for running [13]. Their increasing popularity demonstrates their appeal to travelers who seek both cultural experiences and sport challenges [13].

In Greece, despite the economic challenges of the past decade, running (especially mountain running) has experienced significant growth [44]. Running events do not only lead to health benefits but also foster social inclusion and enhance well-being, particularly in typically less active groups, such as adults, women, and ethnic minorities [42]. Because of the large-scale participation in these events, they generate various social benefits including entertainment and social cohesion [43]. Authorities also recognize the broader benefits of small-scale sporting events, and thus running events are now seen as valuable tools for local tourism growth and sustainable community development [44]. In recent years, the Greek sport event landscape (particularly road running events) has increasingly become intertwined with civil society dynamics, acting not only as leisure activities but also as platforms for community cohesion, volunteer engagement, and local empowerment [45].

Moreover, the growth of the running movement in Greece has led to the establishment of numerous running clubs and also hundreds of running events organized every year in the country [15]. Running events across Greece leverage cross-sector collaborations, training initiatives, and volunteer engagement to illustrate how sport can facilitate sustainable growth in communities and contribute to the renewal of regions [45]. Therefore, organizers now follow a more professional approach in event organization and have evolved their marketing efforts, incorporating traditional and social media strategies for their running events [44]. The significant participation in running events and their expanding popularity necessitates a greater emphasis on sustainable management practices [43]. For this reason, effective event organization is vital to success while sustainability has been recognized as a critical factor to competitiveness [43].

Given this significant growth and the potential of running events for sustainable outcomes, this study investigates the perspectives of running event organizers in Greece on the sustainable impacts of their events on the destination.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Procedure

This study examines the perceptions and attitudes of sport event organizers towards sustainable development of the destination hosting the event with the use of semi-

structured interviews. Based on this exploratory research, the dynamics of running events in the context of destination sustainability is investigated through the lens of their organizers, that is, those who play an important role in designing and implementing events that can contribute to the destination sustainability.

In Figure 1, a brief of the research procedure is depicted.

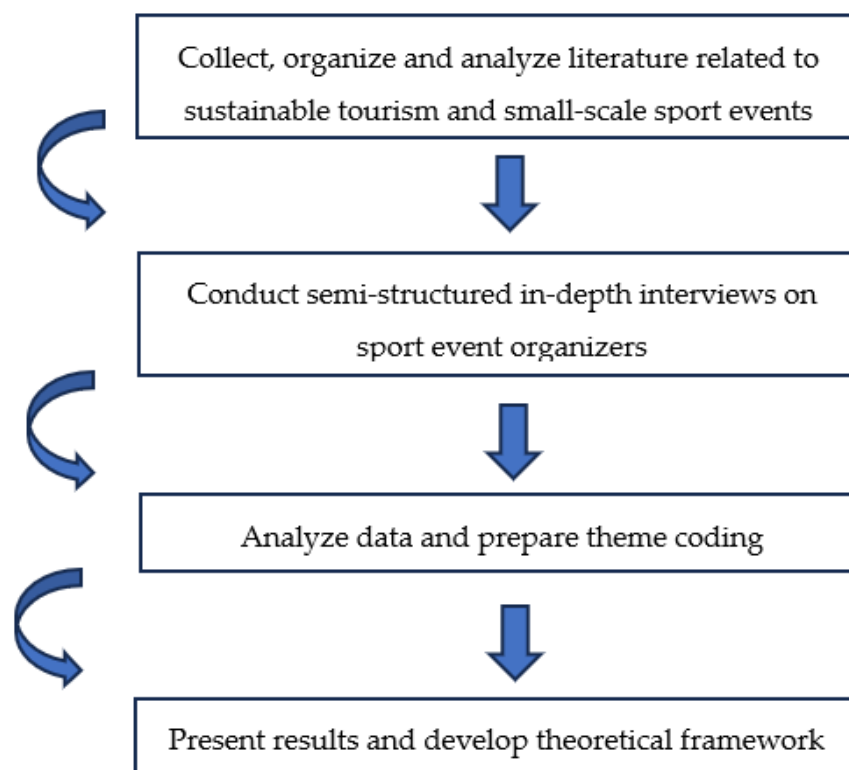


Figure 1. Research procedure for developing the framework.

3.2. Qualitative Research

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative research methodology through semi-structured interviews was considered as the most appropriate [46]. Interviews are recognized as the primary method to collect data, and semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used technique that is employed in qualitative research [47]. During the process, the main interest was to evaluate the organizers' perceptions towards running events and sustainability issues in the destination. Thus, interviewers consistently asked follow-up questions while they avoided interruption of the participants or asking them leading questions [48].

The interview questions focused on identifying factors that seem to contribute to sport events success, exploring how their organizers perceive and address their economic, social, and environmental impacts, and also which strategies they implement in order to enhance the sustainability for these events. The questions were based on concepts related to sustainability on small-scale events, which includes the triple bottom line framework (economic, social, and environmental framework) [19]. Their aim was to examine the practical application of the aforementioned framework, and they were as follows:

Q1. What are the key factors that contribute to the success of the running event in terms of its economic, social, and environmental impacts?

Q2. How do event organizers perceive and address the economic, social, and environmental challenges of running events?

Q3. What strategies and practices do organizers implement to enhance the sustainability of their running events?

3.3. Study Location

The interviews were conducted with organizers of various running events across Greece, including 5 km races, marathons, fun runs, road races, night races, and mountain races. All running events in this study are distinct in terms of geographical features, partnerships, duration, and marketing strategies, yet they share a commitment to sustainability. The Greek destinations chosen for this study are both remote and more accessible regions; consequently, they range from urban centers to rural and coastal regions. These destinations were selected based on the event long-standing presence (with at least five years of operation), their relevance to local development goals, and their organizers' accumulated experience in planning and promoting sustainable practices. Through this selection, an understanding of how organizers adapt sustainable practices within different geographical contexts is provided. Small-scale running events were identified through publicly accessible online sources and local networks, since no official national registry of all running events is available.

3.4. Data Collection

The sample comprised twenty-five small-scale event organizers, who annually plan and execute running events in Greece. A purposive sampling strategy was employed for participant selection, ensuring the recruitment of information-rich cases relevant to the study's objectives. As an official list of events in Greece is missing, event identification was based on publicly available online resources. Our sample was determined based on data saturation, as recurring themes began to emerge and no substantially new insights were obtained. Most of the interviewees are permanent residents of the regions that were examined in the current study. Thus, they have direct and experiential knowledge of the event impact on the regional economy. In addition, sporting events in areas like these are organized by amateurs who are passionate and enthusiastic about sport but they also desire to promote their local community [49]. The success of these events highly depends on the enthusiasm of their organizers [9]. Moreover, these interviewed organizers try to design sport events that have a long-term contribution, promoting the values of sport and environmental consciousness.

Before the interviews, participants were informed via email or telephone in order to schedule the appointments. Both online and onsite interviews were conducted in order to capture the diverse perspectives of the organizers and also to address geographical constraints. For the online interviews, online platforms were used so as to have a video contact with the participants and facilitate interaction.

After collecting the data, the interview transcripts were organized and a unique code was assigned to each respondent; the first respondent was assigned the number O01 (Organizer No 1) and the process continued sequentially until all participants were numbered.

3.5. Data Analysis

To ensure trustworthiness of the data and transparency in data collection and analysis, none of the researchers knew any of the interviewees that assured objectivity and reliability for the research results. Also, the researchers of this study worked independently in the interviews' results to confirm that all reached the same conclusions based on the thematic analysis that was initially predefined from the literature. Prior to coding, the research team thoroughly reviewed all the transcripts of the interviews and cross-checked the original data several times so as to ensure accuracy. Each researcher independently coded the data. The coding procedure followed the established three-step approach, which includes the open, the axial, and the selective coding [50–52].

3.5.1. Open Coding

Open coding is the first level of coding where distinct concepts and themes are identified and categorized; this process involves decomposing the data obtained from the in-depth interviews, then analyzing, comparing, and identifying key themes and concepts [50–52]. During this initial coding phase, the codes were sequentially numbered and labeled with “OC” each in order to indicate their origin (Table 1).

Table 1. Open coding example.

Open Code	Categories	Concepts	Interviews
OC1	Economic benefits	Increased local incomes	The road race positively affects our city. A large number of people come, they eat, they drink, they go from one place to another, they probably stay one night, and this means that 1000, 2000 or 5000€ come in the city. The more the events, the better for our community (Organizer 10)

3.5.2. Axial Coding

Axial coding is the second level of coding where the initial codes which were identified during open coding are refined and categorized [50–52]. At this stage, relationships between codes were identified, similar concepts were grouped, and more abstract understandings were developed. During this phase, axial codes were sequentially numbered and labeled with “AC” each in order to indicate their origin (Table 2).

Table 2. Axial coding example.

Axial Code	Categories	Concepts	Interviews
AC1	Economic impact	Revenue increase	Local businesses, especially hotels and restaurants, increase their sales during the days of the race, Organizer 5
		Seasonality mitigation	Since the road race occurs during off-season period, it attracts tourists and provides a boost to our local economy, Organizer 7
		Indirect economic benefits	The road race puts our area in the map. It attracts visitors who discover our region and return for future visits, Organizer 8

3.5.3. Selective Coding

Selective coding is the final step of data analysis; here, the previous categories are refined and integrated to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being explored [50–52]. In our study, selective coding helped researchers identify the core themes from sport event organizers’ perspectives and link them to broader sustainability concepts, as shown in the theoretical framework presented in Figure 2.

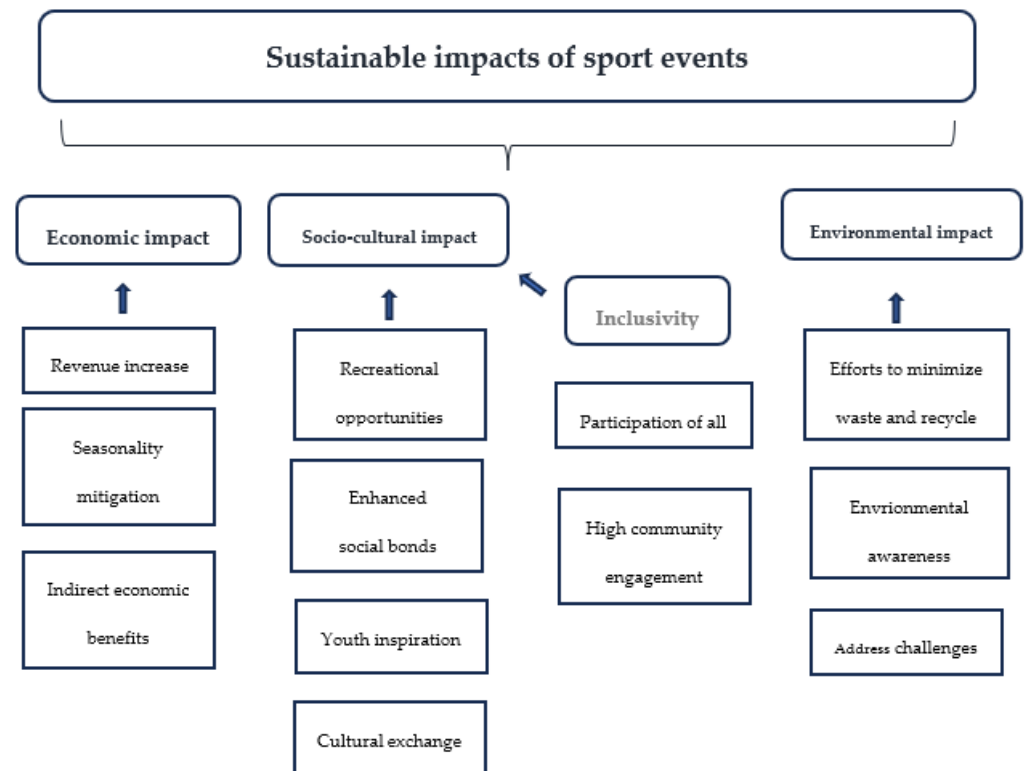


Figure 2. Theoretical framework: The multi-faceted impacts of running events on host communities based on organizers' perspectives.

4. Findings

The analysis of organizers' perceptions highlighted the interconnectedness of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental factors, including inclusivity, which shape the impact of running events on host communities and are depicted in our theoretical framework (Figure 2). Inclusivity, which can be considered as an aspect of social impact, was deliberately separated in our framework in order to highlight its importance from the organizers' viewpoint and also to emphasize its contribution to sustainable outcomes and to sport event success. In the sections below, selected participant quotes are presented to illustrate key themes, while a more critical interpretation of these findings developed in the Discussion section.

4.1. Economic Impact

The positive economic impact of the sport event is recognized and emphasized. It is often seen as the most visible and immediate effect on the host community. As most of them are also local communities' residents, organizers provide a unique and lived experience of the event impact on the region. Thus, organizers believe that their sport events can stimulate local economy by supporting small businesses, like cafes and restaurants, by boosting transportation and accommodation and by attracting visitors outside the high-season period. This means that sport events act as "economic injections" for the host community.

"The economic effect is only positive for local businesses. They open at least three weeks earlier than they had planned in order to serve the athletes and their escorts. Consequently, the tourism season starts earlier because they do not close again. Also, if the weather is fine, there are visitors during the weekends", Organizer 2.

"The economic impact is significant. People from 38 different countries visit us and they stay for more days after the event ends", Organizer 4.

“The running event significantly contributes to the economic boost of the region. Apart from the race days, when hotels are full of visitors, athletes frequently come here for training. Some stay at hotels while others set up their own tents. As long as the race continues to exist, more athletes and their families will come during other seasons, not just for the race”, Organizer 5.

“Hosting, for example, a two-day running event, can significantly benefit the local economy. Many visitors would come to our island, including parents with their children, athletes, and spectators. They will certainly have coffee or lunch”, Organizer 9.

“We should bear in mind that the financial footprint of the event benefits the local economy. Because, as you understand (and this happens for every event, not just ours), during most events, the local community receives the financial benefits. There is very little income from sports activity for the organizers”, Organizer 12.

“The event results in a large number of visitors to the area. It is an important advertisement, and every year we see even more visitors who may initially come for the race but then return with their families for a vacation. This has a significant impact on businesses and their revenue. The event takes place before the beginning of the tourist season, and it serves as a test for businesses to ensure that they are ready in terms of staff and facilities before the peak tourist season”, Organizer 14.

Apart from the boost in the local economy, sport events encourage local businesses to invest in facilities and services in order to cater for the athletes and visitors.

“Certainly, our race is a kind of “injection” for the local economy. The increased tourist presence contributes to the extension of the tourist season and has a positive impact on the income of the locals, strengthening their finances for the rest of the year. The race financially affects the community to a great extent, as it is organized during an off-season weekend when local entrepreneurs do not expect to work because they are already closed. Therefore, it is an extra and very important income for them, ensuring a positive economic closure for the winter. In addition, jobs are created or existing employment contracts are extended with extra workforce in order to provide better services to visitors who come to the island” Organizer 1.

“During the days of the event, many local professionals hire extra staff to meet their needs”, Organizer 23.

4.2. Socio-Cultural Impact

Organizers almost unanimously highlight how their sport events bring together diverse group of people, and they often state that *“the whole community gets involved”*. They consider these events as unifying forces, which create opportunities for social interactions; through these events, stronger connections between residents and visitors are built, and the sense of community and of pride is enhanced. Moreover, the recreational lives of the locals are enriched as they have the chance to engage in different activities within their own communities (volunteerism, community engagement, sports).

“Society definitely comes closer thanks to the running event because everyone works and collaborates, I dare to say, voluntarily, in order to get the best possible result and a strong image of our island to the public”, Organizer 1.

“The impact on society is greater than the economic impact. Participation in our race can be done individually, but most run as groups. In fact, they usually train as a team weeks before the race. This is how relationships develop among the individuals in a group. However, relationships between residents and visitors cannot be cultivated in just one day”, Organizer 7.

“Sports generally help people. Through the race, relationships are strengthened”, Organizer 13.

“The race engaged locals who showed interest and decided to participate. Thus, we achieved our first goal: to involve all locals and attract people from other regions”, Organizer 19.

“In our small communities, events like our race are celebrations. Many people gather in our village, creating a very pleasant and festive atmosphere. The entire village meets in the square for the start and finish, watches the awards and the whole local community participates”, Organizer 24.

In addition, these events inspire the local youth and highlight the importance of sporting.

“Some people have taken up running thanks to the event. In this remote but beautiful region something unique is being implemented”, Organizer 13.

“From the very first race we held, 2–3 people began running. Sometimes, imitation is a positive phenomenon. Anyone who gradually develops a running consciousness is a benefit to society”, Organizer 22.

Furthermore, organizers see these events as a platform that showcases the local culture and traditions of the community. For example, elements including the regional cuisine are often integrated in order to raise awareness about the destination’s uniqueness and possibly encourage repeat visitation.

“Because the local community is involved, volunteers, along with women and elderly ladies, prepare local delicacies. Therefore, they are working together, and are active citizens of our society. This event brings something new to our region, which makes them happy.”, Organizer 8.

“Local associations prepare traditional food and showcase the culinary heritage of our region. This provides a wonderful opportunity for every athlete and visitor to experience the unique flavors of our region”, Organizer 25.

Inclusivity

Running event organizers perceive inclusivity as fundamental for event sustainability. They tend to believe that events should engage the entire community, welcome diverse participants (from various backgrounds, ages, and regions), and create opportunities for social interaction between locals and visitors. However, organizers also acknowledge accessibility challenges, indicating the need for proactive measures to ensure active participation for all.

“While the events are popular, they are not accessible to everyone. Older residents and people with disabilities often find it difficult to participate or even spectate”, Organizer 5.

“Almost all residents of all ages help, support or applaud the athletes. The race is their top event of the year. In this context, with full resident and local society support, social cohesion, cooperation and communication among locals are achieved”, Organizer 13.

“The race successfully engaged locals who showed their interest and actively participated. Thus, we achieved our first goal: to involve all locals and attract people from other regions, fostering foster inclusivity, bringing together people from different backgrounds and creating a welcoming atmosphere for all participants”, Organizer 19.

“The event unites people from diverse cultures. People from other cities and countries gather, increasing social contacts and locals learn how to provide services”, Organizer 21.

4.3. Environmental Impact

Organizers seem to understand the importance of protecting the environment, thus environmental concerns are central during the event planning. They often emphasize sustainable practices like waste management, recycling, or awareness campaigns in order to foster ecological responsibility and behavior among participants, spectators, and locals. Although the events can sometimes (not often) strain urban infrastructure, they can also be an opportunity to highlight and address challenges like traffic congestion or pedestrian accessibility.

“As an organization, in cooperation with the sponsors, we use environmentally friendly materials to enhance the environmental awareness of participants”, Organizer 1.

“Athletes are people who are environmentally conscious. Events of this nature do not burden the environment through noise and garbage, so they are not an environmental burden; on the contrary, thanks to the events, the paths are maintained every year and then a beautiful well-worked network of trails remains that can be used by hikers or just ordinary tourists”, Organizer 8.

“Although there is a mass influx of people in our island on race day, traffic congestion is not a major issue. To promote sustainable environmental behavior, we include leaflets in the athletes’ bags, aiming to prevent vandalism and other environmental concerns”, Organizer 9.

“We are very strict in this issue, and we always point up that if someone grows garbage in the route, they will be excluded from the race and will not be able to participate again”, Organizer 10.

“In my view, sports contribute to environmental awareness. Athletes try to keep the space clean. Beyond our specific race, sports broadly help us become better. We are committed to ensuring our events do not negatively impact the environment”, Organizer 15.

“We actively collaborate with the municipality to ensure the city’s cleanliness is maintained to a high standard after the race”, Organizer 16.

“There are no environmental problems. At the end of the race there is a service which cleans the whole space, and the environment remains as it was before. Occasionally, the event results in enhanced area cleanliness and road improvements. This motivates us to continually strive for betterment”, Organizer 17.

“Runners are also environmentalists. We instruct participants to maintain area cleanliness, and consequently, the environment is cleaner after the race”, Organizer 22.

5. Discussion

Through the lens of the event organizers’ perceptions, our data analysis revealed the multi-faceted impact of running events on the host community, encompassing several dimensions, within the suggested theoretical framework. While organizers recognized the positive impacts, it is important to address challenges and barriers, mainly related to inclusivity, and strive for greater sustainability of future sport events.

In line with existing literature [24], organizers acknowledge the positive economic impacts of the events, including increased employment and income. Also, they concur that visitor spending occurs across various sectors, like food services, shopping, and accommodation [7,53,54]. Organizers confirm that all event participants, from athletes to visitors, contribute to the local economy [18,19,55]. Similar to another existing research on mountain races and their economic impacts, our study demonstrates the economic benefits that small-scale sport events bring to the host community and highlights their value [55].

In addition, events can help to extend the tourism season and provide a boost to the local economy during low season [7,8].

As for the socio-cultural dimension, organizers largely agree that their running events create significant social value for the local community. These perceptions align with existing research [24,27,56,57] which emphasizes the potential of small-scale events to enrich social lives, strengthen social networks, foster community spirit, and motivate locals to become more active in sports. Also, the interviewees pointed out that these events strengthen local identity and foster pride while stimulating tourism development, aligning with other running events studies [3]. Greek organizers deem their events as unique opportunities for recreation and for interactions facilitation between the locals and the athletes/visitors. These findings highlight the importance of participatory event design and local ownership in small-scale event management, suggesting that organizers play a key role not only in logistical coordination, but also in cultivating a shared sense of identity and collective experience.

Within the broader framework of social sustainability, the theme of inclusivity emerged as particularly significant in our study. Indeed, inclusion is one of the central objectives of the SDGs. The potential benefits of inclusivity in sport include increased social participation, improved health and well-being and the development of a more equitable society [58]. Inclusivity and accessibility extend beyond the specific needs of individuals with disabilities and benefit various groups in society like aging people, families with young children using strollers, or individuals with temporary limitations [59]. Ensuring inclusivity in event organization encompasses service provision to all stakeholders such as participants, spectators, members, and other relevant audiences [60]. Much like the Athens Marathon, although at a smaller scale, several regional events now aim to align their goals with broader societal values—such as inclusivity and resilience—indicating a shift in how sport events are perceived and organized within the Greek context [45]. This approach, which fosters an equitable environment for all, contributes to the social sustainability of the event and enhances the event experience for the stakeholders involved. The inclusive approach taken by organizers and other key stakeholders in prior research on running events and inclusion reflects our findings that a commitment to inclusivity leads to a more welcoming event [61].

A running-related study in Greece [15] highlighted that these sport events are intended to be inclusive, welcoming participants of all abilities, ages, genders and races; thus, these events contribute to the emotional and psychological well-being of the attendees and the strengthening of the community ties. In our theoretical framework, the distinction of inclusivity within the social dimension brought attention to its important role in the mind of the organizers to foster mutual understanding, equal participation and collaboration. Given this importance, respondents expressed diverse perspectives on inclusivity. For example, some of them emphasized the wide community engagement and support for the event, acknowledging its ability to unite residents and visitors of all ages and backgrounds. However, other organizers recognized potential barriers to inclusivity such as accessibility challenges that could prevent older residents and individuals with disabilities from fully enjoying the event. Although efforts are made from the part of organizers to create inclusive events, further consideration is needed to address specific needs and challenges that some members of the community may face. For organizers, it is important that everyone has the opportunity to participate and benefit from their sport event. From a sustainable perspective, inclusivity aligns with the long-term goals of organizers in their efforts to create sport events where no segment of the population would feel excluded.

Research findings reveal an understanding among organizers of the necessity to protect the environment. In fact, the majority of interviewees are driven by their own environmen-

tal consciousness and, as many athletes do as well, they prioritize environmental protection. Thus, they actively seek to minimize the environmental impact of their sport events by ensuring, for example, that the entire event site is left cleaner than it was found. This includes encouraging runners to participate in clean-up efforts and promoting interactions with nature among all participants. In addition, according to the literature on marathon sport events [62], by focusing on elements like the natural environment, among others, organizers can create positive emotional experiences for the athletes and thus contribute to the success of the event. The aforementioned suggest that environmental sustainability in small-scale sport events is not simply a matter of compliance or imposed regulations, but often emerges organically from organizers' values and community involvement.

6. Implications

The current research proposes a theoretical framework built on the concepts of sustainability and its integration into event organization; it considers its three dimensions (economic, social, environmental) highlighting inclusivity as a significant component of social sustainability.

In terms of theoretical implications, this paper contributes to the growing body of small-scale event literature by providing sport event organizers' perspectives, integrating sustainability dimensions related to their role. Findings emphasize the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental factors in sport event management, as already presented in the literature [19,21,24,28,30], but places special emphasis on the viewpoint of these key stakeholders, the organizers. Moreover, the introduction of inclusivity as a critical component of sustainability in sport events enriches the discussion on sustainable tourism and highlights the critical role of organizers in addressing goals and challenges during event management. With regard to SDGs, the current study has indirect but important connections to SDG goals, mainly SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) [63]; specifically, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the viewpoint of small-scale sport event organizers, who prioritize equal participation opportunities and inclusive roles within the events and also incorporate sustainable practices to minimize environmental impact. In Greece, and similarly across surrounding countries, these events, through their socio-cultural, economic, and environmental contributions, directly support these goals and also demonstrate how these initiatives can advance sustainability agendas nationally and globally.

Although this paper adopts a primarily conceptual perspective, these points in turn suggest a number of practical implications that arise from the research. For example, local authorities and DMOs can leverage these insights to develop effective strategies to attract and host sustainable sport events. Also, policymakers can integrate these insights to organize targeted strategies to enhance accessibility and broaden participation for all members of the host community (including local residents of all ages, athletes, tourists, and individuals with disabilities), so that everyone benefits from the impacts of the small-scale sport event. In addition, organizers could utilize the present findings to develop sustainable event strategies and mitigate potential challenges.

Another key practical implication of this study arises from the absence of a centralized, official national registry for running events in Greece. The reliance (for our purposive sampling) on publicly accessible online sources and local networks for identifying small-scale events underscores a significant gap in event governance. This study, which reveals the diverse landscape of these events, underscores the critical importance of establishing such an official list.

7. Conclusions and Future Research Directions

Sport events serve as a powerful tool for sustainable tourism development as they foster economic resilience, environmental awareness, and social cohesion. Especially for Greece, where tourism plays a central role in its national economy and given the significant growth of the running movement, sport tourism presents a significant opportunity which can contribute to the economic and social development in the country [15]. Insights from local organizers underline the importance of addressing the environmental challenges and promoting high community engagement to maximize the benefits of such events. Inclusivity emerges as a distinctive theme, reflecting organizers' opinion to guarantee participation for diverse groups and thus ensure long-term sustainability. The theoretical framework not only presents the analysis of the findings but also serves as a guide for future organizers of small-scale sport events who try to integrate sustainability practices into their event planning. Also, this research highlights the necessity for a coherent, organized national registry of running events that could aid both organizers and attendees but also promote sustainable communities where events take place.

This study has several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, since it is focused on a specific context, the perceptions of sport event organizers may not reflect the perceptions of those which are involved in different types of events. Moreover, although organizers' insights are crucial, the perspectives of other key stakeholders, like local community, tourists, and athletes, would provide a broader understanding on the sustainable impacts of the events.

Future research could explore the applicability of these findings in different sports and geographical contexts. The incorporation of quantitative data should also be considered. Factors such as the type of destination (like coastal, mountainous, or rural) may influence the nature and the extend of sport event impacts on sustainability. In addition, future studies should delve deeper into the concept of inclusivity within the context of sustainable sport tourism and possibly explore whether and how access and benefits for all the members of the host community can be ensured.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.G., A.K. and C.V.; methodology, S.G. and C.V.; validation, S.G., A.K., C.V., I.K., G.F. and V.V.; formal analysis, S.G., A.K., C.V., I.K., G.F. and V.V.; investigation, S.G. and C.V.; resources, A.K. and V.V.; writing—original draft preparation, S.G. and C.V.; writing—review and editing, S.G., A.K., C.V., I.K., G.F. and V.V.; supervision, C.V. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because the collected data were based on interviews with event organizers whose answers remained anonymous.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: This paper was fully funded by the International Conference on Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism (ICSIMAT), CODE 81126, Special Account for Research Funds, University of West Attica, Greece.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

1. United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO]. Sustainable Development. Available online: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e/sust_dev_e.htm (accessed on 17 March 2025).
2. Jiang, Y.; Lyu, C.; Chen, W.; Wen, J. Following mega sports events on social media impacts Gen Z travelers' sports tourism intentions: The case of the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. *Tour. Recreat. Res.* **2025**, *50*, 282–296. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
3. Malchrowicz-Moško, E.; Poczta, J. A small-scale event and a big impact—Is this relationship possible in the world of sport? The meaning of heritage sporting events for sustainable development of tourism—Experiences from Poland. *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 4289. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
4. Greenwell, T.C.; Danzey-Bussell, L.A.; Shonk, D.J. *Managing Sport Events*; Human Kinetics: Champaign, IL, USA, 2024.
5. Priporas, C.V.; Vassiliadis, C.A.; Stylos, N.; Fotiadis, A.K. The effect of sport tourists' travel style, destination and event choices, and motivation on their involvement in small-scale sports events. *Event Manag.* **2018**, *22*, 745–765. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
6. Vassiliadis, C.A.; Fotiadis, A. Different types of sport events. In *Principles and Practices of Small-Scale Sport Event Management*; IGI Global: Hershey, PA, USA, 2020; pp. 20–44.
7. Gkarane, S.; Gianni, M.; Vassiliadis, C. Running toward sustainability: Exploring off-peak destination resilience through a mixed-methods approach—The case of sporting events. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 576. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
8. Gkarane, S.; Vassiliadis, C.A.; Gianni, M. Exploring professionals' perceptions of tourism seasonality and sports events: A qualitative study of Kissavos Marathon Race. *Enlightening Tour. A Pathmaking J.* **2022**, *12*, 24–51. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
9. Gursoy, D.; Kim, K.; Uysal, M. Perceived impacts of festivals and special events by organizers: An extension and validation. *Tour. Manag.* **2004**, *25*, 171–181. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
10. Melo, R.; Van Rheenen, D.; Sobry, C. Sport Tourism Events and Local Sustainable Development: An Overview. In *Small Scale Sport Tourism Events and Local Sustainable Development*; Melo, R., Sobry, C., Van Rheenen, D., Eds.; Sports Economics, Management and Policy; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2021; Volume 18. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
11. Van Rheenen, D.; Sobry, C.; Melo, R. Running Tourism and the Global Rise of Small Scale Sport Tourism Events. In *Small Scale Sport Tourism Events and Local Sustainable Development*; Melo, R., Sobry, C., Van Rheenen, D., Eds.; Sports Economics, Management and Policy; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2021; Volume 18. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
12. Bazzanella, F.; Schnitzer, M.; Peters, M.; Bichler, B.F. The role of sports events in developing tourism destinations: A systematized review and future research agenda. *J. Sport Tour.* **2023**, *27*, 77–109. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
13. Poczta, J.; Malchrowicz-Moško, E. Modern running events in sustainable development—More than Just taking care of health and physical condition (Poznan Half Marathon Case Study). *Sustainability* **2018**, *10*, 2145. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
14. Ruhanen, L. Stakeholder participation in tourism destination planning another case of missing the point? *Tour. Recreat. Res.* **2009**, *34*, 283–294. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
15. Maditinos, Z.; Vassiliadis, C.; Tzavlopoulos, Y.; Vassiliadis, S.A. Sports events and the COVID-19 pandemic: Assessing runners' intentions for future participation in running events—Evidence from Greece. *Tour. Recreat. Res.* **2021**, *46*, 276–287. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
16. Gibson, H.J. Active sport tourism: Who participates? *Leisure Stud.* **1998**, *17*, 155–170. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
17. Higham, J.; Hinch, T. *Sport Tourism Development*; Channel View Publications: Bristol, UK, 2018; Volume 84.
18. Bazzanella, F.; Peters, M.; Schnitzer, M. The perceptions of stakeholders in small-scale sporting events. *J. Convent. Event Tour.* **2019**, *20*, 261–286. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
19. Gibson, H.J.; Kaplanidou, K.; Kang, S.J. Small-scale event sport tourism: A case study in sustainable tourism. *Sport Manag. Rev.* **2012**, *15*, 160–170. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
20. Higham, J. Sport tourism destinations: Issues, opportunities and analysis. In *Sport Tourism Destinations*; Routledge: London, UK, 2007; pp. 1–13.
21. Hautbois, C.; Djaballah, M.; Desbordes, M. The social impact of participative sporting events: A cluster analysis of marathon participants based on perceived benefits. *Sport Soc.* **2020**, *23*, 335–353. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
22. Parra-Camacho, D.; González-García, R.J.; Alonso-Dos-Santos, M. Social impact of a participative small-scale sporting event. *Sport Bus. Manag.* **2021**, *11*, 109–124. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
23. Koenig-Lewis, N.; Collins, A.; McCullough, B.P. The game is on!—Sports (events) as a driving force for sustainability. In *The Routledge Companion to Marketing and Sustainability*; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2025; pp. 331–345.
24. Walo, M.; Bull, A.; Breen, H. Achieving economic benefits at local events: A case study of a local sports event. *Fest. Manag. Event Tour.* **1996**, *4*, 95–106. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
25. Getz, D.; Page, S.J. Progress and prospects for event tourism research. *Tour. Manag.* **2016**, *52*, 593–631. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
26. Melo, R.; Sobry, C.; Van Rheenen, D. Conclusion: Current Trends in Small Scale Sport Tourism Events and Local Sustainable Development. A Comparative Approach. In *Small Scale Sport Tourism Events and Local Sustainable Development*; Melo, R., Sobry, C., Van Rheenen, D., Eds.; Sports Economics, Management and Policy; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2021; Volume 18. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
27. Taks, M.; Chalip, L.; Green, B.C. Impacts and strategic outcomes from non-mega sport events for local communities. *Eur. Sport Manag. Q.* **2015**, *15*, 1–6. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

28. Mair, J.; Smith, A. Events and sustainability: Why making events more sustainable is not enough. In *Events and Sustainability*; Routledge: London, UK, 2022; pp. 1–17.
29. Campillo-Sánchez, J.; Borrego-Balsalobre, F.J.; Díaz-Suárez, A.; Morales-Baños, V. Sports and Sustainable Development: A Systematic Review of Their Contribution to the SDGs and Public Health. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 562. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
30. Chersulich Tomino, A.; Perić, M.; Wise, N. Assessing and considering the wider impacts of sport-tourism events: A research agenda review of sustainability and strategic planning elements. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 4473. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
31. Perić, M.; Đurkin, J.; Wise, N. Leveraging small-scale sport events: Challenges of organising, delivering and managing sustainable outcomes in rural communities, the case of Gorski Kotar, Croatia. *Sustainability* **2016**, *8*, 1337. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
32. Oshimi, D.; Yamaguchi, S. Leveraging strategies of recurring non-mega sporting events for host community development: A multiple-case study approach. *Sport Bus. Manag.* **2023**, *13*, 19–36. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
33. Martins, R.; Mascarenhas, M.; Pereira, E. Exploring strategic multi-leveraging of sport tourism events: An action-research study. *J. Destin. Mark. Manag.* **2024**, *32*, 100902. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
34. Morán-Gámez, G.; Fernández-Martínez, A.; Biscaia, R.; Nuviala, R. Measuring Green Practices in Sport: Development and Validation of a Scale. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 494. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
35. Zhang, Y.; Hou, T.; Matsuoka, H. The impact of recurring non-mega sport events on residents' support intention. *Int. J. Event Festiv. Manag.* **2025**, *16*, 247–264. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
36. Ulloa-Hernández, M.; Farías-Torbidoni, E.I.; Seguí-Urbaneja, J. Sustainable practices in the organization of sporting events in protected and unprotected natural areas: A scoping review. *Manag. Sport Leis.* **2024**, *29*, 1–24. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
37. Xie, P.; Sinwald, A. Perceived impacts of special events by organizers: A qualitative approach. *Int. J. Event Fest. Manag.* **2016**, *7*, 50–65. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
38. Yamaguchi, S.; Oshimi, D.; Derom, I. How do event organizers and stakeholders collaborate to achieve the event's strategic objectives? Leveraging the Tour de Okinawa. *J. Conv. Event Tour.* **2024**, *25*, 1–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
39. Svensson, D.; Radmann, A. Keeping distance? Adaptation strategies to the Covid-19 pandemic among sport event organizers in Sweden. *J. Glob. Sport Manag.* **2023**, *8*, 594–611. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
40. Kaplanidou, K.; Kerwin, S.; Karadakis, K. Understanding sport event success: Exploring perceptions of sport event consumers and event providers. *J. Sport Tour.* **2013**, *18*, 137–159. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
41. Pereira, E.; Mascarenhas, M.; Flores, A.; Chalip, L.; Pires, G. Strategic leveraging: Evidences of small-scale sport events. *Int. J. Event Fest. Manag.* **2020**, *11*, 69–88. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
42. Van Dyck, D.; Cardon, G.; De Bourdeaudhuij, I.; De Ridder, L.; Willem, A. Who participates in running events? Socio-demographic characteristics, psychosocial factors and barriers as correlates of non-participation—A pilot study in Belgium. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2017**, *14*, 1315. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
43. García-Vallejo, A.M.; Albahari, A.; Año-Sanz, V.; Garrido-Moreno, A. What's behind a marathon? process management in sports running events. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 6000. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
44. Alexandris, K. Testing the role of sport event personality on the development of event involvement and loyalty: The case of mountain running races. *Int. J. Event Festiv. Manag.* **2016**, *7*, 2–20. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
45. Koutrou, N.; Kohe, G.Z. Sustainability, the Athens Marathon and Greece's sport event sector: Lessons of resilience, social innovation and the urban commons. *Sport Soc.* **2025**, *28*, 57–82. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
46. Denzin, N.K.; Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2011.
47. Kallio, H.; Pietilä, A.M.; Johnson, M.; Kangasniemi, M. Systematic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *J. Adv. Nurs.* **2016**, *72*, 2954–2965. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
48. Boyce, C.; Neale, P. *Conducting In-Depth Interviews: A Guide for Designing and Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input*, 2nd ed.; Pathfinder International: Watertown, MA, USA, 2006; Volume 2.
49. Fotiadis, A.; Stylos, N.; Vassiliadis, C.; Huan, T.C. Advocation travel: Choice of events amongst amateur (non-professional) participants involved in small-scale sporting events. In Proceedings of the Global Marketing Conference, Hong Kong, China, 21–24 July 2016; pp. 1516–1530.
50. Corbin, J.; Strauss, A. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 4th ed.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014.
51. Glaser, B.; Strauss, A. *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2017.
52. Williams, M.; Moser, T. The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *Int. Manag. Rev.* **2019**, *15*, 45–55.
53. Gibson, H.J.; Willming, C.; Holdnak, A. Small-scale event sport tourism: Fans as tourists. *Tour. Manag.* **2003**, *24*, 181–190. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
54. Pereira, E.C.; Mascarenhas, M.V.; Flores, A.J.; Pires, G.M. Nautical small-scale sports events portfolio: A strategic leveraging approach. *Eur. Sport Manag. Q.* **2015**, *15*, 27–47. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
55. Duglio, S.; Beltramo, R. Estimating the economic impacts of a small-scale sport tourism event: The case of the Italo-Swiss mountain trail CollonTrek. *Sustainability* **2017**, *9*, 343. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

56. Chalip, L. Towards social leverage of sport events. *J. Sport Tour.* **2006**, *11*, 109–127. [[CrossRef](#)]
57. Ramchandani, G.; Davies, L.E.; Coleman, R.; Shibli, S.; Bingham, J. Limited or lasting legacy? The effect of non-mega sport event attendance on participation. *Eur. Sport Manag. Q.* **2015**, *15*, 93–110. [[CrossRef](#)]
58. Pitts, B.G.; Shapiro, D.R. People with disabilities and sport: An exploration of topic inclusion in sport management. *J. Hosp. Leis. Sport Tour. Educ.* **2017**, *21*, 33–45. [[CrossRef](#)]
59. Darcy, S.; Dickson, T.J.; Benson, A.M. London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: Including volunteers with disabilities—A podium performance? *Event Manag.* **2014**, *18*, 431–446. [[CrossRef](#)]
60. Dickson, T.J.; Darcy, S.; Johns, R.; Pentifallo, C. Inclusive by design: Transformative services and sport-event accessibility. *Serv. Ind. J.* **2016**, *36*, 532–555. [[CrossRef](#)]
61. Morales, J.R.M.; Gallego, R.M.; Mas, J.R.L. Effects of an inclusive running event on children’s attitudes toward disability students in physical education. *Retos Nuevas Tend. Educ. Física Deporte Recreación* **2024**, 1056–1065. Available online: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=9557887> (accessed on 26 March 2025).
62. Jeong, Y.; Kim, E.; Kim, S.K. Understanding active sport tourist behaviors in small-scale sports events: A stimulus-organism-response approach. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 8192. [[CrossRef](#)]
63. UN. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022. 2022. Available online: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/> (accessed on 26 March 2025).

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.