

A Bibliometric Analysis on the Relationship between Mega Events and Regional Development

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute with a bibliometric analysis related to the impacts of complex mega-events on regional development: Olympics, World Cups, and Expos. This analysis is supported by data from the Web of Science Core Collection; keyword co-occurrence, collaborative networks, and thematic clusters will be developed with the use of advanced tools like VOSviewer. This study analyzes 339 publications published from 1994 to 2024 on research trends, influential contributors, and the disciplinary diversity of the field. These results point out the following themes: economic impacts, urban development, governance, sustainability, and tourism, while disparities in benefits and challenges concerning inclusivity and environmental concerns are unraveled. It gives a comprehensive mapping of the scholarly discourse that provides much valuable insight for researchers and policy practitioners who aim to make mega-events serve the goal of equitable and sustainable regional growth.

Keywords: mega events, regional development, bibliometric analysis

JEL classification: L83, O18, R58, Q56, Z32, D62

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1. Introduction

Mega events such as the Olympics, World Cups, and Expos have been widely recognized to have extraordinary potential for driving urban renewal and economic growth, along with their international visibility. For instance, the Lillehammer Winter Olympics in 1994 exhibited great economic value (Spilling, 1996). Other critics have pointed out financial risks, regional disparities, and lack of long-term benefits, mainly in developing nations (Matheson & Baade, 2005; Jones, 2005). Such divergent views prove that mega-events can actually be very complex in their use as a tool for regional development. Based on this consideration, the present research applies bibliometric analysis by analyzing 339 publications between 1994 and 2024 using specific tools in VOSviewer. These identifications of major themes, including governance, sustainability, and economic impacts, would follow the academic trends and highlight the challenges to be overcome, thereby guiding policymakers and researchers working to ensure that mega-events serve the goal of equitable and sustainable growth.

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2. Review of the literature on the relationship between mega events and country image

Mega-events, such as the Olympics, World Cups, and Expos, are often staged and reported on as a catalyst for regional development and urban renewal. They are recognised for their role in boosting economic activity, encouraging investments, increasing tourism, and city branding (Essex & Chalkley, 2004; Rijina & Sujith, 2019; He et al., 2020). These events usually bring about infrastructural improvements and better socioeconomic indicators, therefore providing a springboard for international recognition and long-term growth of the regions. The Lillehammer Winter Olympics of 1994 epitomised the potential for employment creation, increased tourism, and a boost to the economy; however, the benefits were not spread out fairly, further indicating the need for fair strategies in those approaches (Spilling, 1996).

The academic debate, however, reveals a multifaceted perspective, with some arguments regarding the long-term impacts of staging mega events. Some studies underline the positive aspects in terms of infrastructure upgrade and tourism growth (Rijina & Sujith, 2019), while other studies warn that the benefits in terms of finance are not enough to justify the huge costs and that these events exacerbate regional disparities, favouring central areas at the expense of peripheral regions (Lin et al., 2018; Matheson & Baade, 2005). In developing countries, this inequality is more noticeable, as economic estimates tend to ignore the large amount of spending and disproportionate benefits from mega-events (Jones, 2005).

Furthermore, large-scale events have been linked to the facilitation of collaboration and innovation. For example, the Rugby World Cup held in New Zealand supported interregional cooperation within the tourism network, thus enhancing the collaborative capabilities of different stakeholders (Werner et al., 2016). Empirical studies based on coupling models show that large-scale events can result in the synchronisation of urban development when aided by inclusively designed policies ensuring equitable outcomes (He et al., 2020). However, methodological objections, such as those regarding the application of Computable General Equilibrium models, point to the need for more tailored approaches to estimating whether mega-events are compatible with regional development goals (Massiani, 2018; 2022).

Some authors argue that smaller-scale events replicated over time could lead to more stable and predictable gains than large-scale events, thus offering an alternative route for fostering stable regional growth (Giampiccoli et al., 2015). This synthesis emphasises the ambivalent nature of mega events, where their potential to trigger growth is moderated by the challenges related to fostering inclusiveness and ensuring sustainable benefits.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Data Collection

Data for this study was extracted from the Web of Science Core Collection, a highly developed multidisciplinary academic database with exceptionally demanding

indexing standards. WoS is selected because it covers all peer-reviewed publications, hence guaranteeing a large quantity of high-quality data. The search query used was: TS=(("mega events" OR "major events" OR "global events" OR "international events" OR "sporting events" OR "cultural events") AND ("regional development" OR "economic development" OR "urban development" OR "local development")). The search yielded 339 results.

3.2 Screening process and PRISMA framework

To improve the reliability of the dataset, the research was carried out by adhering to the structure of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021). Organising the methodology helped in a clear, systematic exploration through the records. A PRISMA flow chart represented every step in relation to the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and finally included in the analysis (Moher et al., 2009; Page et al., 2021).

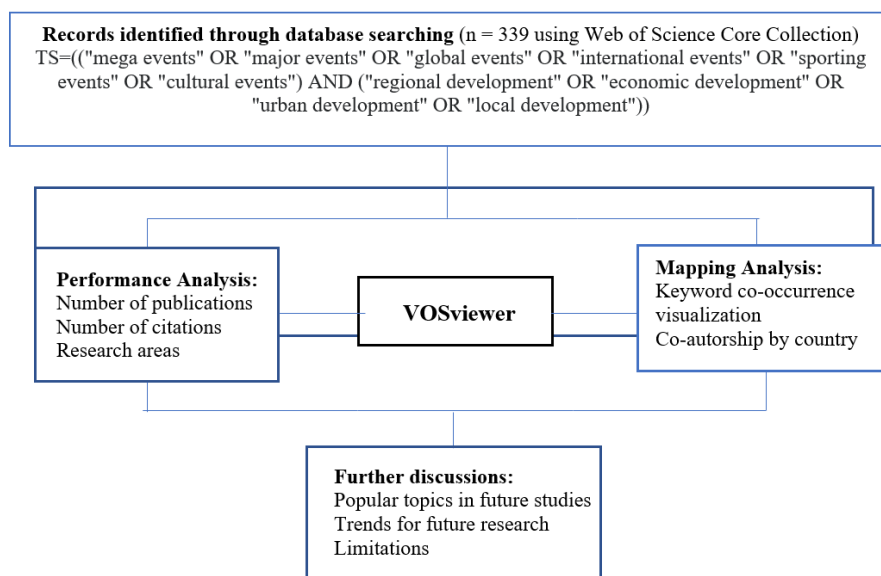


Figure 1. Methodological framework

Source: authors' creation adapted from the PRISMA statement (Moher et al., 2009), readapted based on Nicolescu and Barbu (2024).

3.3 Bibliometric tools and analysis

The bibliometric analysis was conducted using **VOSviewer** and the built-in analytical tools within Web of Science. VOSviewer was used for network visualizations, while WoS's inbuilt tools provided descriptive statistics and trend analyses. The analysis included the following components:

Performance analysis: It focusses on annual trends, the variety of publication types, as well as the specific fields of research they fall under, and an evaluation of the most frequently cited works. by using the in-built tools of WOS.

Mapping analysis

Keyword co-occurrence analysis: Analysis of the prevailing themes and connections between important concepts (van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

Co-authorship Analysis: An analysis of collaboration dynamics among authors, institutions, and countries (Donthu et al., 2021).

The findings are visualised through bibliometric mappings, diagrams, and visualisations generated by VOSviewer and Web of Science. Such visual tools provide a detailed portrayal of the research environment, thus allowing an in-depth understanding of publication patterns, relationships in collaboration, and thematic focus areas (Donthu et al., 2021; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

4. Performance analysis

This section evaluates the temporal trends, publication types, and research areas in the domain of mega events and regional development. The analysis highlights patterns in research output over time and provides insights into the factors driving academic interest in the field.

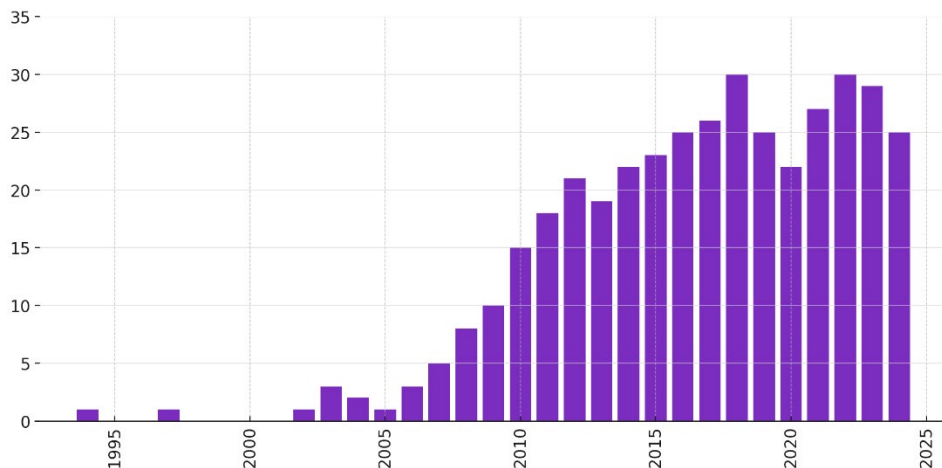


Figure 2. Annual Number of Publications on Mega Events and Regional Development (1994-2024)

Source: Authors' creation based on data provided by WOS.

Scholarly research on this topic has shown a steady increase in the course of time, with some fluctuation. The first published work was in 1994

From 2014 to 2020, there is a clear increase in publications, from 17 in 2014 to reaching its peak of 30 in 2020. This rise can perhaps be attributed to major international events, such as the 2016 Rio Olympics and, more so, the originally

planned 2020 Tokyo Olympics—although delayed, most likely having some effect on the research environment prior to it. The years 2023 and 2024, with 29 and 25 publications, respectively, continue this trend of growth. From 1994 to 2008, the years depict a very low activity of publication with less than five publications in a year. This shows that mega events and regional development were not considered as a critical area of research. Although there has been a general upward trend, specific years, such as 2019 with 16 publications, and 2014 with 17, show small declines. These may be indicative of changes in global event scheduling cycles or competitive research priorities within academia. However, the steady output of publications over the recent past, averaging between 25 and 30 annually since the year 2020, suggests that the field has matured. It is likely that scholars can now build on a firm base of foundational knowledge developed during earlier periods of growth.

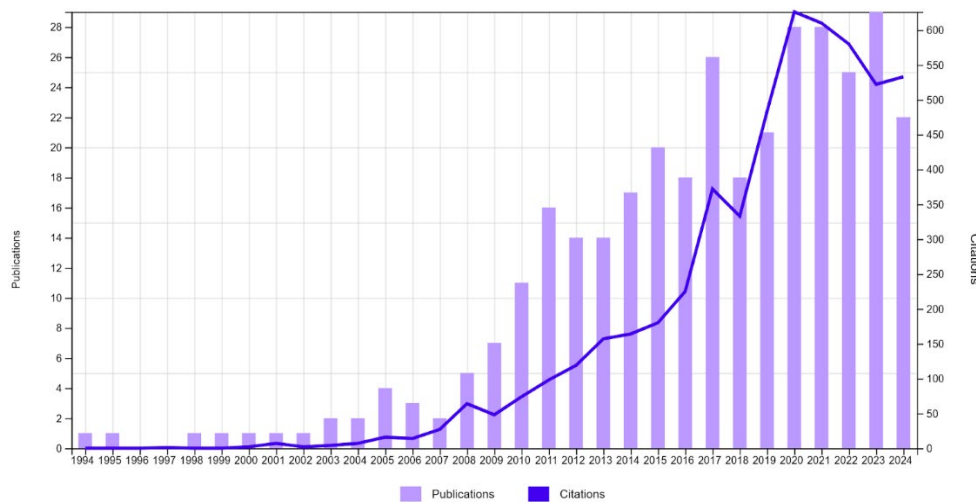


Figure 3. Trends in Publications and Citations on Mega Events and Regional Development (1994–2024)

Source: WoS based on author’s input.

As it can be seen from the graphic, the number of citations started to rise markedly after 2009, indicating that previous studies were starting to gain recognition. This increase may be marked by the organisation of more and more mega events each year. An example can be the 2008 Beijing Olympics: An event that put the mega events into the limelight of international prestige and regional development, and sparked academic interest in economic and cultural legacies.

Moreover, the international importance of 2010 FIFA World Cup as a trigger for regional tourism and investment has probably had an effect on rising citations for related research. Citations rise significantly beginning with 2015, reaching a peak between 2019 and 2020. This period aligns with the publication of major studies that examine the broader impacts of mega events.

As examples, there are the 2016 Rio Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

The 2016 Rio Olympics garnered significant amount of scholarly attention due to the controversies surrounding economic spending, resident displacement, and sustainability concerns. On the other hand, the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia showed the importance of mega events in facilitating regional development through upgrades in infrastructure and in the context of international branding.

5. Types and research areas of publication

This section explores the distribution of publications across various types and thematic research areas, shedding light on the scholarly focus on mega events and their regional impacts. It provides an overview of the forms and areas of research that contribute to the field’s multidisciplinary nature.

Distribution of documents by types

Table 1

Document Type	Count	Percentage (%)
Article	292	86.14
Proceeding Paper	43	12.68
Book Chapters	18	5.31
Early Access	6	1.77
Editorial Material	6	1.77
Review Article	6	1.77
Book	2	0.59

Source: Authors’ creation based on data retrieved from WoS.

The table above shows the exact contributions to the field of mega events and regional development by different publication formats. Specifically, journal articles sum up 292 of the 339 publications with a percentage of 86.14% implying they are the most commonly used tool for publishing rigorous, peer-reviewed research. Proceeding papers add 43 publications at, hence showing the importance of conferences for presenting ongoing studies and as a way of fostering academic discussions.

Book chapters, representative of 18 publications at 5.31%, and books (2 publications), provide thematic depth and link research to broader discussions. Lastly, early access articles were also included, at 6 publications (1.77%), Editorial materials – 6 publications, 1.77% - and review articles – 6 publications, 1.77%.

Note that some of the works fit into multiple categories (for instance, an article could also be under early access), which would explain why the total of 373 is larger than the number of unique records: 339.

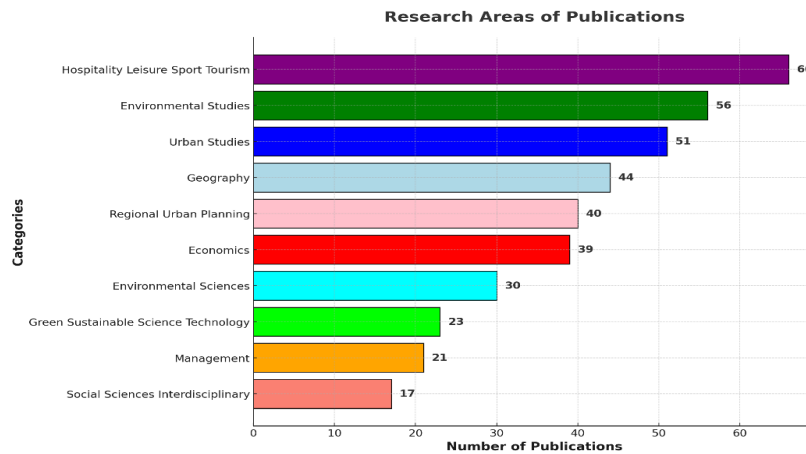


Figure 2. Research areas of publication
Source: authors' creation based on data from WoS.

This figure illustrates a diverse range of focal points concerning mega events and regional development as a multidisciplinary research domain. The major Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, and Tourism category (n = 66) suggests that much attention has been given to the impacts of mega events on tourism and its related industries, with an apparent emphasis on the economic and social beneficial aspects. The next closest categories are those of Environmental Studies (n=56), and Urban Studies (n=51). This trend is indicative of growing awareness in sustainability and the considerable effects of mega events on parameters of urban planning and regeneration.

Other notable categories are Geography with 44 publications and Regional Urban Planning with 40 publications. Also, Economics with 39 publications is an indication of an interest in analyses relevant to economic gains in terms of employment and investment. Other emerging focal areas include Environmental Sciences, with 30 publications, and Green Sustainable Science & Technology, adding another 23 publications, representative of the growing importance being given to sustainability and new environmentally friendly practices. Management brings in 21 publications, while Social Sciences

Interdisciplinary contributes 17, noting subjects like logistical coordination, stakeholder engagement, and societal impacts in line with cultural identity and inequity. Less visible but important categories, which include History, Sociology, and Public Administration, together depict historical perspectives, social relations, and regulatory frameworks.

6. Highly cited publications

This section examines the top ten most cited works and the journals that have published the highest number of articles in the field of mega events and regional development. These analyses highlight influential studies, key themes such as urban regeneration, governance, and sustainability, and the pivotal role of leading journals in shaping the discourse.

Top Ten Most Cited Articles on Mega Events and Regional Development

Table 2

Rank	Title	Authors	Year	Journal	Citations
1	The impact of cultural events on city image: Rotterdam, cultural capital of Europe 2001	Richards, G; Wilson, J	004	Urban Studies	355
2	A state-led nationalism: The patriotic education campaign in post-Tiananmen China	Zhao, SS	998	Communist and Post-Communist Studies	308
3	Mega-events, urban boosterism and growth strategies: An analysis of the objectives and legitimations...	Hiller, HH	000	International Journal of Urban and Regional Research	276
4	Mega-events and socio-spatial dynamics in Rio de Janeiro, 1919-2016	Gaffney, C	010	Journal of Latin American Geography	211
5	Effects of sport event media on destination image and intention to visit	Chalip, L; Green, BC; Hill, B	003	Journal of Sport Management	200
6	The Mega-Event Syndrome: Why So Much Goes Wrong in Mega-Event Planning and What to Do About It	Müller, M	015	Journal of the American Planning Association	189
7	Underestimated costs and overestimated benefits? Comparing the outcomes of sports mega-events...	Whitson, D; Horne, J	006	Sociological Review	145
8	The economic impact of cultural events - A case-study of Salamanca 2002, European Capital of Culture	Herrero, LC; Sanz, JA; del Barrio, MJ	006	European Urban and Regional Studies	113
9	Gentrifications in pre-Olympic Rio de Janeiro	Gaffney, C	016	Urban Geography	107
10	Measuring the social impacts associated with Super Bowl XLIII: Preliminary development of a psychic income scale	Kim, W; Walker, M	012	Sport Management Review	91

Source: Authors' creation based on data from WoS.

As it can be seen from the table, the most cited article in this field of research is written by Richards and Willson (2014), named *The impact of cultural events on city image: Rotterdam, cultural capital of Europe 2001*. It has a number of 355 citations in WOS. Below, a short summary of the first ten articles has been done, so as to understand better the topic.

Richards and Wilson (2004) illustrate how the "Cultural Capital of Europe" event in Rotterdam during 2001 not only enhanced the city's image but also sparked urban regeneration while drawing in visitors and investments. In a similar vein, Herrero et al. (2006) highlight the economic impact of the Salamanca 2002 event,

emphasizing the cultural sector's pivotal role in fostering regional development. Hiller (2000) examines the Cape Town 2004 Olympic bid, where he explains the way such mega events encourages a re-prioritization of urban agendas and are wielded as tools of economic boosterism. Gaffney (2010) and Gaffney (2016) explore socio-spatial dynamics and gentrification in Rio de Janeiro with beautifully eloquent examples of how mega events transform cities, sometimes in a very controversial way. Müller (2015) speaks of the "Mega-Event Syndrome," describing frequent cases of budget overruns and negative consequences for the host cities.

Whitson and Horne (2006) refer to the mega events in Canada and Japan, speaking about underestimated costs and overestimated benefits of such endeavors. Chalip et al. (2003) explore the influence of media coverage of sporting events on the image formation of destinations and tourism. Kim and Walker (2012), on the other hand, examine the non-economic impacts—the psychic income they call it—of a mega-event such as Super Bowl XLIII. In contrast to these authors, Zhao (1998) looks at the development of state-led nationalism in post-Tiananmen China, showing how state-led projects sculpt the ideological component of national identity construction. Taken together, these studies illustrate the multi-dimensional impacts of mega events on urban development, economics, and societal perceptions.

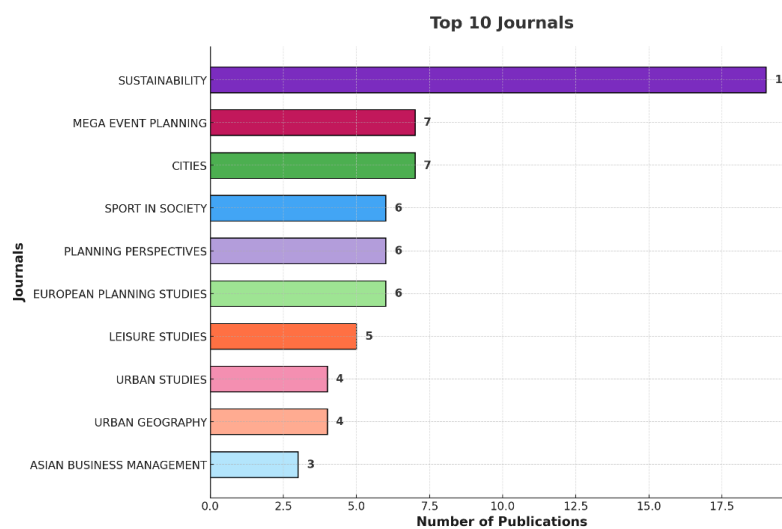


Figure 3. Top 10 Journals which Published the most articles

Source: Authors' creation based on data from WoS.

As represented in the graph, the highest number of publications comes from the journal Sustainability with n=19, indicating that mega events have a strong bearing on sustainability and environmental consideration. This is followed by Mega Event Planning (n=7) and Cities (n=7), pointing toward strategic planning and urban development while hosting large-scale events.

Next in the list are Sport in Society, Planning Perspectives, and European Planning Studies, each having n=6, showing the multidisciplinary approach for

understanding the societal, planning, and regional impacts of these events. Leisure Studies, with n=5, reflects the recreational and social aspect of mega events, showing such events as a promoter of leisure activities and community engagement.

Other journals, such as Urban Studies and Urban Geography, each with n=4, stress more the effect of mega events on the urban area and the way it is spatially organized. Finally, Asian Business Management, n=3, offers a business perspective in respect to management and economic perspectives regarding the hosting of large-scale events.

7. Bibliometric Analysis

As mentioned in the Methodology section, for this part of the article, a mapping analysis shall be performed by using the bibliometric tool named VOSviewer. First of all, the Keyword co-occurrence will be analysed, followed by the analysis of co-actorship.

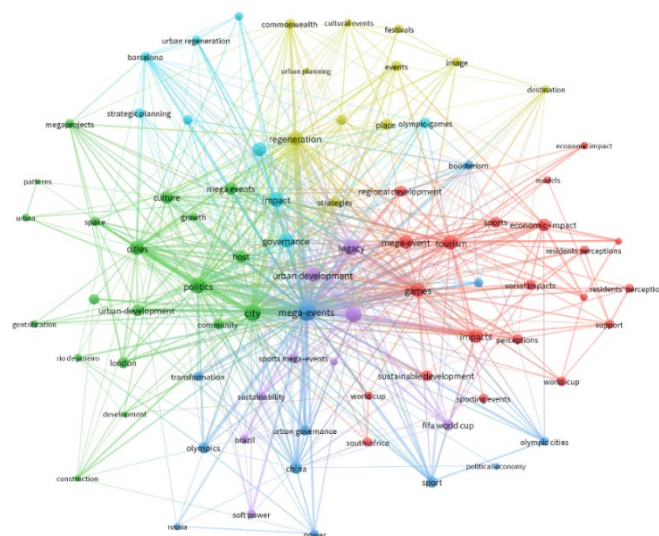


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence visualisation
Source: VOSviewer based on authors' input from WoS.

The co-occurrence analysis in VOSviewer presents six different thematic groups of keyword co-occurrence in a different colour: these groups show more about the research on mega events and regional development.

The green cluster is the largest. It focuses on urban development, cities, governance, politics, and culture. This cluster shows how important mega events are for improving cities, building infrastructure, and political plans. For example, words

like "urban development" and "cities" are very important. They highlight how mega events affect planning and policy in the areas that host them.

The red cluster focuses on the effects on the economy, tourism, social views, and lasting impact of big events. This cluster is important for looking at how big events affect local communities, change tourism trends, and create long-term advantages or problems for cities that host them. The common use of words like "economic impact" and "tourism" shows a strong link between big events and boosting the local economy.

The blue cluster views big events from a political and strategic perspective, with terms such as Olympics, FIFA World Cup, soft power, and political economy. This cluster shows that big events can be used in international diplomacy for the promotion of a country's image, with their ability to showcase global influence.

The yellow group talks about destination image, regeneration, and planning. Words in this group show how big events are used to improve a city's or country's image in the world and bring in investments. For example, words like "destination image" and "regeneration" show how important it is to build a brand and renew cities.

The purple cluster is about sustainability and legacy. It connects words such as "sustainability," "urban governance," and "sporting events." This cluster indicates that a lot of attention is paid to environmental questions and how necessary sustainable practices are in hosting large events. This also reveals that governance is a very important aspect in making sure these events leave a long-lasting, positive footprint. Lastly, the light blue cluster talks about practical and specific parts, including words like construction, mega-projects, and Rio de Janeiro. This cluster presents research that looks into the real problems of hosting big events, often taking the case of changes in Rio de Janeiro before the Olympics.

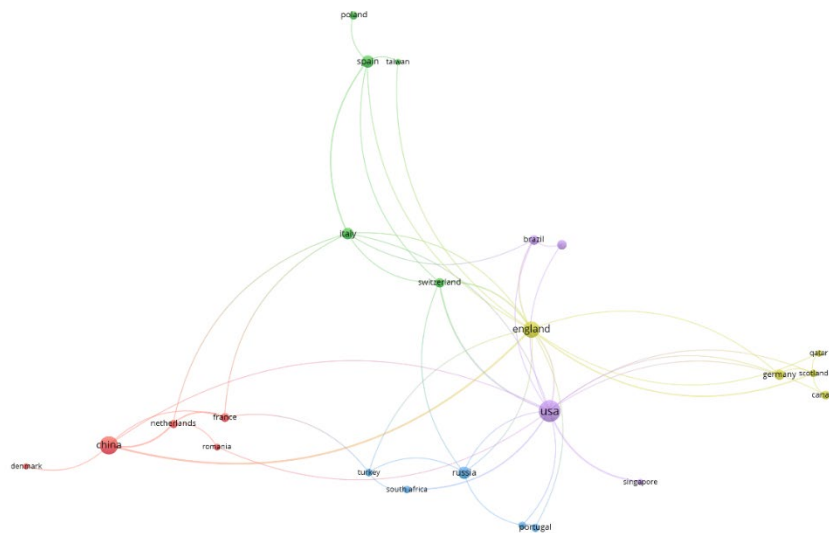


Figure 5. Co-authorship by country
Source: VOSviewer based on authors' input from WoS.

The co-authorship analysis underlines the specific collaboration patterns of countries investigating mega events and regional development. The most influential contributor with the largest research output is the USA; it has an extended collaboration with countries like England, Canada, Germany, and China. This central position shows the leadership taken by the USA in driving research and forming strategic partnerships within global circles. In this regard, China also takes the lead, in close collaboration with European nations like Germany and France, not to mention its neighbours in Asia, like Japan and Singapore. This mirrors the increasing stake that China has placed on the research about mega events, particularly in specialization like urban planning and international positioning.

European countries, led by England, form a very tightly linked regional network. Italy, Spain, and Switzerland are frequent collaborators with England, where mutual interest in various themes such as event governance, cultural impacts, and economic outcomes are indicated. These collaborations are evidence of the cohesive approach taken by Europe to investigating the implications of mega events within urban development and tourism. BRICS nations such as Brazil and South Africa also show increasing activity in international research, in collaboration with both the USA and Europe. In some ways, the connections of Brazil to England and Switzerland stem likely from research related to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and Rio's Olympic Games, whereas the connections of South Africa stem from experience acquired by hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

These collaborations might be seen to amount to special forms of contributions by these countries—based on case studies of their mega-event experiences. Smaller nodes, such as Denmark, Australia, and Portugal, indicate limited research output or fewer collaborations, with a view toward less-explained research potential in terms of increased international partnerships. Russia, despite being of moderate size, is one of the diversely connected countries with both China and Germany, due to mega events hosted: the 2014 Winter Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

8. Conclusions and Discussions

The results of this research have shed light on the different multidimensional impacts of mega events on regional development, along with all the opportunities and challenges involved. These mega events, such as the Olympics, World Cups, and Expos, act to be very potent in triggering city transformation, the rise of tourism, and the chase for international recognition—supported by specified themes in the dimensions of urban development, governance, economic impacts, and sustainability. However, the outcomes also show disparities, so balanced and inclusive strategies are necessary to make sure that all stakeholders will have equitable benefits.

This bibliometric analysis gives a general picture of an evolution of academic interest in mega events and regional development, with a marked increase in publications since 2014, relating such a trend with major international events as the 2016 Rio Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which are subjected to hot debates

on their economic, social, and environmental legacies. While the USA and China emerge as strong contributors to research in this field, countries such as England, Italy, and Spain form quite a strong collaborative network focusing on event governance and cultural impacts. Meanwhile, the emerging economies of Brazil and South Africa provide very interesting case studies informed by their experience of hosting mega events that prove quite insightful regarding challenges and opportunities of using such events for regional development.

Co-occurrence analysis of keywords reveals six large thematic clusters that frame the research discourse: from urban development to economic impacts, political strategies, destination branding, sustainability, and logistical considerations, these clusters epitomize the interdisciplinary nature of mega-event studies. Most notably, the green cluster underlines the centrality of issues in urban development and governance, whereas the red one emphasizes the strong link existing between mega events and economic stimulation through tourism. The purple cluster is all about sustainability and legacy, a sign that environmental considerations are increasingly playing their part in hosting large events.

It also underlined some critical challenges: in terms of the economic benefit, disparities reflected in studies of events such as the 2016 Rio Olympics underline the need for policies to redress inequalities and ensure that benefits from mega events are widely shared. Again, the logistical and financial complexity of hosting such an event, as reflected in the light blue cluster, shows the importance of strong planning and cooperation among stakeholders.

All in all, mega events present a potential for driving regional development, but real success is dependent on dealing with the challenges in terms of sustainability, inclusiveness, and governance. More longitudinal studies investigating long-term impacts of mega events in developing regions should be done in the future, as well as studying new strategies to maximize benefits while minimizing costs. Through increased international cooperation and the introduction of different vantage points, the field will grow and mature, providing usable knowledge for decision-makers and stakeholders across the globe.

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