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Sporting Mega-Events and Social Inequalities
in High-Inequality Countries
A Scoping Review

Master Thesis

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Preface

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who accompanied and supported me during the process of writing this master's thesis. My special thanks go to my supervisor, Nandi Joubert, who assisted me with her professional expertise throughout the entire project phase. Her constructive feedback and commitment have had a significant impact on my examination of the topic. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Ivan Müller, whose additional efforts – despite not having formal primary responsibility – contributed to sharpening the thesis both in terms of content and structure.

Working with both supervisors was particularly enriching for me: on the one hand, I received clear guidance and professional support, while on the other hand, I always had enough space to contribute my own interests and perspectives – a balance that made the work process motivating and personally meaningful.

My sincere thanks also go to my girlfriend and my parents, who supported and sustained me in many ways during this intense period.

The topic of this thesis stems in part from personal experiences and observations from my time as a student. Sport has a powerful symbolic and emotional dimension, characterised by aesthetics, spectacle and global popularity. But it is precisely this fascination that harbours ambivalence: while sport has the potential to promote social cohesion, health and values such as fairness and equality, this potential is often selectively exploited. This is used, for example, to gloss over social tensions or to legitimise political interests.

Against this backdrop, it seems all the more urgent to critically reflect on SMEs, especially in terms of sustainability, social justice and global responsibility – also in light of international guidelines such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

This master's thesis is my attempt to contribute to this reflection.

Abstract

Background: Sporting mega-events (SMEs) are becoming increasingly important as a strategic tool in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, the extent to which they influence social inequalities has not yet been sufficiently researched. This study systematically examines whether and how SMEs can increase or decrease social inequalities in LMICs with high levels of inequality.

Methods: As part of a scoping review, 56 scientific publications were identified, systematically evaluated and assigned to thematic clusters and dimensions of social inequality. A total of 104 mechanisms of action were extracted and categorised according to their direction of effect (positive, neutral, negative, ambivalent). To ensure transparency and traceability in the selection process, the PRISMA-ScR scheme (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) was applied.

Results: The analysis reveals a complex, highly context-dependent impact profile. While a comparatively large number of positive effects were identified in the areas of education and psychosocial health, mechanisms that tend to reinforce social inequalities dominate overall. Structural deficits and selective effects are particularly evident in political-symbolic dimensions. Many positive effects are also temporary, and there is a lack of long-term studies.

Conclusions: The effects of SMEs on social inequality are neither neutral nor universal, but are shaped by specific political, social and economic contexts. This paper provides a conceptual and analytical framework for a field that has been little researched to date and points to the need for a stronger theoretical foundation, long-term impact measurement and international support. Without targeted structural reforms, there is a risk that SMEs will lose their social legitimacy and that their cumulative effects will further entrench existing inequalities.

Abstract

Hintergrund: Mega Sportevents (MSEs) gewinnen als strategisches Instrument in Ländern mit niedrigem und mittlerem Einkommen (Low- and Middle-Income Countries, LMICs) zunehmend an Bedeutung. Inwieweit sie soziale Ungleichheiten beeinflussen, ist jedoch bislang nur unzureichend erforscht. Diese Arbeit untersucht systematisch, ob und wie SMEs soziale Ungleichheiten in LMICs mit hohen Ungleichheitsniveaus verstärken oder verringern können.

Methoden: Im Rahmen einer Scoping Review wurden 56 wissenschaftliche Publikationen identifiziert, systematisch ausgewertet und thematischen Clustern sowie Dimensionen sozialer Ungleichheit zugeordnet. Insgesamt wurden 104 Wirkmechanismen extrahiert und in Bezug auf ihre Wirkungsrichtung (positiv, neutral, negativ, ambivalent) kategorisiert. Zur Sicherstellung von Transparenz und Nachvollziehbarkeit im Auswahlprozess wurde das PRISMA-ScR-Schema (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) angewendet.

Ergebnisse: Die Analyse zeigt ein komplexes, stark kontextabhängiges Wirkprofil. Während in den Bereichen Bildung und psychosoziale Gesundheit vergleichsweise viele positive Effekte identifiziert wurden, dominieren insgesamt Mechanismen, die soziale Ungleichheiten tendenziell verstärken. Besonders in politisch-symbolischen Dimensionen treten strukturelle Defizite und selektive Auswirkungen deutlich zutage. Viele positive Effekte sind zudem zeitlich begrenzt, und es mangelt an Langzeitstudien.

Schlussfolgerungen: Die Effekte von SMEs auf soziale Ungleichheit sind weder neutral noch universell, sondern von spezifischen politischen, sozialen und ökonomischen Kontexten geprägt. Die Arbeit liefert einen konzeptionellen und analytischen Rahmen für ein bislang wenig erforschtes Feld und verweist auf die Notwendigkeit verstärkter theoretischer Fundierung, langfristiger Wirkungsmessung sowie internationaler Unterstützung. Ohne gezielte strukturelle Reformen besteht die Gefahr, dass SMEs gesellschaftlich an Legitimität verlieren und ihre kumulierten Effekte bestehende Ungleichheiten weiter verfestigen.

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List of Abbreviations

CWG	Common Wealth Games
CIBDs	Communities and Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrounds
CWC	Cricket World Cup
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
GNI	Gross National Income
IOC	International Olympic Committee
LMIC	Low and Middle Income Countries
NGOs	Non-Gonvermantal Organisations
OG	Olympic Games
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PanAm	Pan American Games
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
ScR	Scoping Review
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SfDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SME	Sporting Mega-Event
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WC	World Cup
WHO	World Health Organisation

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1.   Introdcution

Sporting mega-events (SMEs) such as the Olympic Games or the World Cup of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) are globally visible and politically significant events. They are frequently used as platforms to project national pride, foster international cooperation, and stimulate economic development. Over recent decades, SMEs have increasingly been expected to leave behind not only physical legacies, such as infrastructure, but also meaningful social impacts (Mair et al., 2021; Chalip, 2018).

However, the effects of SMEs are not universally beneficial. Scholars have highlighted their ambivalent nature: While they can promote investment, tourism, and national cohesion, they often also lead to displacement, debt accumulation, and intensified inequalities – particularly when social outcomes are not systematically planned (Baade & Matheson, 2016). Traditionally, research has focused on economic impacts due to their quantifiability (Hover et al., 2016), yet a growing body of literature now emphasises social and environmental dimensions, sustainability, and questions of justice.

These challenges become particularly pronounced in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Defined by the World Bank based on per capita income, LMICs often face substantial structural inequality, limited institutional capacity, and resource constraints. A high Gini Index – such as South Africa's 63.0 in 2014 – illustrates the degree of income inequality, shaped by long-standing systemic factors. In such contexts, SMEs are frequently framed as development opportunities; however, the benefits tend to accumulate among elites, while vulnerable groups may bear disproportionate burdens (Tomlinson, 2011; Maharaj, 2015).

Consequently, hosting an SME in a country with high social inequality entails both opportunities for transformation and significant risks of reinforcing exclusion. These tensions underscore the imperative to critically examine the theorised nexus between the practical implementation of SMEs and their legacies in high-inequality settings, focusing on the mechanisms through which such events shape, reinforce, or challenge prevailing social structures.

1.1   Problem Statement and Research Gap

SMEs are frequently framed as catalysts for development, modernisation, and social cohesion. While these events can yield positive legacies – such as infrastructure upgrades or national pride – they also carry significant risks, particularly in LMICs. In contexts marked by structural inequalities, fragile governance, and limited public resources, the staging of SMEs often exacerbates existing disparities rather than alleviating them (Tomlinson, 2014; Maharaj, 2015). For example, critical funding is often diverted from essential sectors such as health, education, and housing, while the benefits of the event disproportionately accrue to political and economic elites (Gratton, Shibli & Coleman, 2006).

Despite these concerns, SMEs are still widely used as development instruments. They are promoted as tools for social inclusion, economic growth, and urban modernisation, especially in countries with high Gini Index values (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Chalip, 2018). However, this modernisation narrative often masks the unequal distribution of benefits and the symbolic appropriation of social development goals by local society. In this context, the concept of legacy

has emerged as a central – but underdeveloped – framework for assessing the societal outcomes of SMEs (cf. Chappelet, 2012).

While the economic and infrastructural impacts of SMEs have been extensively studied due to their quantifiability, the social consequences (especially regarding equity and cohesion) remain conceptually vague and empirically underexamined (Mair et al., 2021). This imbalance poses the risk that "social benefits" are used more as political legitimation than as verifiable improvements for marginalised communities.

At the same time, a growing body of global research highlights that social inequality is not declining, but increasing – even in contexts of economic growth (cf. UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Particularly in LMICs, inequality manifests not only economically, but structurally and spatially, shaped by colonial legacies, extractive economic models, and governance deficits (Tomlinson, 2014).

Against this backdrop, there is a urgent need for critical, empirically grounded analysis that evaluates the social legacies of SMEs in countries marked by high inequality. Specifically, it is essential to understand on the one side how and under which conditions SMEs may either reinforce or help transform social disparities in host communities. This study addresses that gap by offering a structured review of empirical findings and mechanisms, providing an analytical framework for future research.

1.2   Research Aims, Scope and Contribution

This study aims to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of the relationship between SMEs and social inequality in LMICs. As more SMEs are being hosted – or considered for hosting – by countries with high levels of structural inequality, such as potential Olympic Games in African nations, it is crucial to examine the long-term societal impacts of these events beyond short-term economic gains.

The review differs from previous research in two key ways: First, it adopts an interdisciplinary and holistic perspective that integrates insights from sports sociology, development studies, and public health to analyse SMEs as both opportunities and risks in contexts of inequality. Second, it draws on a 35-year historical timeframe (1990-2025) to identify empirical patterns and shifts in hosting practices, enabling a more nuanced understanding of whether and how SMEs have contributed to social transformation or exacerbation of disparities.

Methodologically, this thesis applies a scoping review approach, which does not aim to generate new primary data, but to systematically map existing research. This allows for the identification of thematic clusters, recurring mechanisms, and gaps in the literature. The goal is to provide a structured overview that serves both as an analytical foundation for evaluating SMEs in inequality-prone contexts and as a conceptual framework for future research. This approach is particularly suitable in emerging, interdisciplinary research fields where the body of knowledge is broad but fragmented.

From a policy perspective, the findings of this review can support the design of more inclusive and sustainable event strategies. By identifying mechanisms through which SMEs influence social cohesion, participation, or exclusion, the study contributes to evidence-based frameworks

for planning and governance – particularly relevant for LMICs facing limited resources and heightened public scrutiny (Chalip, 2018).

Beyond offering a structured overview of the empirical research landscape, this thesis aims to deepen the understanding of the abstract mechanisms and processes that link SMEs to forms of social inequality. By disaggregating and examining these mechanisms within their respective contexts, the study contributes to a more nuanced and conceptually grounded understanding of how inequalities are reproduced, challenged, or transformed through the organisation and legacy of SMEs. This mechanism-focused approach is intended to support future research in moving beyond general impact claims, enabling more precise theorisation and policy alignment.

1.3   Research Question

As already mentioned, this study aims to critically examine how SMEs influence social inequalities. Therefore it will focus on the mechanisms through which SMEs directly and indirectly influence these disparities. By exploring positive, neutral, negative and ambivalent effects this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between SMEs and social inequalities. The core research question guiding this thesis is:

"How do sporting mega-events shape social inequalities in low- to middle-income countries with high levels of inequality, considering the extent, direction, and variability of their effects?"

1.4   Structure of the Thesis

In the following **Chapter 2** (*Theoretical Background*), key theoretical concepts relevant to the study's contextual focus are examined in depth. This chapter defines essential terminology and presents the main theoretical frameworks underpinning the investigation. It provides insight into the structural conditions within host countries and communities, clarifying why an interdisciplinary perspective is essential. Furthermore, these conceptual foundations demonstrate the study's broader relevance within the fields of social sciences, sport studies, and public health.

Chapter 3 (*Methodology*) outlines the methodological approach, which is informed by the theoretical insights developed in Chapter 2. It offers a detailed explanation of the scoping review design, including the search strategy, study selection process, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and procedures for data extraction and analysis. This methodological transparency ensures that the review is systematic, replicable, and consistent with established guidelines for scoping reviews.

Chapter 4 *(Results)* presents the results of the scoping review. The findings are displayed both in two tabular overviews to enhance clarity and comparability, and in a narrative synthesis to enable deeper engagement with the material. This dual presentation is intended to offer a nuanced understanding of the various dimensions of social inequality in the context of SMEs.

Beyond merely categorising the findings, the chapter also aims to illuminate the complex and multi-layered potential of SMEs to influence social inequalities. In doing so, the analysis highlights not only the individual effects within specific domains (e.g., health, education, infrastructure) but also the intersections and interdependencies between different social dimensions. This

approach supports a more comprehensive interpretation of the societal impacts of SMEs and underscores the need for integrated, context-sensitive event planning and policy development.

Chapter 5 *(Discussion)*, the final chapter of this thesis, presents a critical discussion of both the methodological approach and the key findings of the scoping review. It reflects on the strengths and limitations of the research process, offering a balanced assessment of the study's scope, validity, and generalisability.

The chapter concludes by synthesising the main insights derived from the review and situating them within the broader academic and practical context of SMEs and social inequality. Based on these insights, implications for policy, event planning, and future research are outlined. The discussion thereby highlights the relevance and added value of this work, while also identifying promising avenues for continued investigation in this interdisciplinary field.

2.   Theoretical Background

2.1   Fundamentals of Social Inequality and Social Justice

2.1.1   Concept and Dynamics of Social Inequality

Essentially, social inequality refers to systematic differences in access to socially relevant resources such as education, income, health, political participation and social recognition. These differences occur at both the individual and structural levels. This means that mechanisms of social inequality are constantly being produced and reproduced in society and can have long-term effects on social positions and life chances (Mair et al., 2023).

Addressing social inequality is crucial, as it impacts the stability, economic health, and overall well-being of societies (Gratton, Shibli, & Coleman, 2006). But the concept of 'social inequality' should be understood as being in a constant state of flux (i.e., evolving societal norms or policy reforms. Since Karl Marx introduced his class theory in the mid-19th century, the ideas and theories of social inequality have been constantly evolving (Burzan, 2007). Assignments of inequality are often based on characteristics that are either "ascribed" (such as gender) or "acquired" (such as education). Since the mid-20th century, concepts have become more pluralistic and go beyond the Marxist class concept, which was primarily economic in nature: gender, ethnicity, migration, disability or sexual orientation are now increasingly recognised as independent axes of inequality (cf. Solga et al., 2009; Therborn, 2013). Social inequality is thus further developed into a dynamic, multidimensional category of analysis (Burzan & Schad, 2018). Another important factor is the relationality of social inequality. It does not result from absolute possession or deprivation, but from the comparison of social groups with each other and the associated evaluation and legitimisation of these differences (Kreckel, 2004).

Figure 1: The Four Structural Levels of Social Inequality according to Solga et al. (2009)
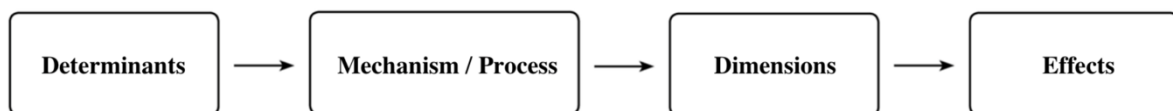
As Solga et al. (2009) have pointed out, social inequality is a dynamic snapshot, in which the preceding steps that can create or reproduce inequality must also be taken into account. Solga's concept of the four structural levels of social inequality provides a solid basis for analysing these dimensions:

1. Determinants: Characteristics such as gender or social origin that define membership of social groups.

2. Mechanism/Process: social processes that link certain characteristics with advantages and disadvantages, such as discrimination.

3. Dimensions: Forms of inequality such as income, power and prestige.

4. Effects: Consequences of these inequalities, such as living conditions and social networks.

Social inequality thus describes systematic advantages and disadvantages that are assigned to social groups on the basis of their social position.

2.1.2 Indicators and Measurability in Practice

Empirical social research generally refers to quantifiable indicators that are operationalised in order to make social inequality measurable. These include the following indicators:

1. Income distribution (e.g. Gini coefficient) (OECD, 2024),
2. Level of education (e.g. PISA) (OECD, 2023),
3. Health (e.g. life expectancy, infant mortality rate) (UNDP, 2023),
4. Employment and social mobility (OECD, 2024),
5. Housing conditions and access to infrastructure (OECD, 2024).

This quantitative data is collected as part of UN reports, the Human Development Index or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Social Justice Analysis and forms the basis for national and international comparisons. In addition, qualitative research approaches should not be neglected – a frequent criticism of recent research – as this makes aspects of social inequality that are more difficult to measure, such as experiences of discrimination, symbolic violence or institutional exclusion, visible. This is important, as these can be just as impactful as quantitative dimensions (Burzan & Schad, 2018).

2.1.3 The Idea of Social Equality as a Societal Goal

Social inequality is not a random by-product of economic development; rather, it is a regulatory mechanism of modern societies that is deeply rooted in political, institutional, and historical structures. In democratic constitutional states, formal equality before the law and equal access to fundamental rights is recognised as a normative basis (cf. UN, 1948). However, real social participation remains highly unequally distributed in many contexts. The discrepancy between normative equality and observable social inequality highlights the significant impact of exclusionary mechanisms that systematically disadvantage certain groups, whether through limited access to education, healthcare, housing, or political participation (Marmot, 2005).

Empirical studies show that high levels of inequality are associated with an erosion of social trust and weaker social cohesion, as well as an increase in health-related and security-related problems (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Marmot, 2005). Conversely, societies with high levels of equality enjoy a higher collective quality of life, with lower crime rates, better health and education outcomes, and increased economic innovation (OECD, 2015).

2.2 LMICs with Elevated Social Inequality

2.2.1 Definition and Classification

According to the World Bank classification, LMICs are economies with a gross national income (GNI) per capita below certain thresholds (cf. World Bank, 2023).

Although countries classified as LMICs do not all experience social inequality in the same way, many face considerable disparities that set them apart from higher-income nations. Social inequalities in LMICs, as measured statistically through the Gini Index, are shaped by limited access to education, healthcare and economic resources. The Gini Index quantifies income distribution within a population annually, where a higher score indicates greater inequality and resources concentrated among a small elite, while a lower score suggests more balanced wealth

distribution (World Bank, 2021). The World Bank defines thresholds in this regard, whereby a country is classified as highly unequal if its Gini coefficient is 0.4 or above. (World Bank, 2024). South Africa, often recognised as one of the most unequal countries, reported a Gini index of 63.0 in 2014, highlighting significant income disparities shaped by historical and systemic factors, including apartheid. In contrast, Switzerland, one of the most equitable countries, recorded a Gini Index of 32.5 in 2014, reflecting comparatively balanced income distribution (cf. World Bank, 2021).

2.2.2 Historical and Contemporary Causes of Structural Inequality

A historical analysis of the processes in regions of the world that currently fall into the category of LMICs with high Gini values reveals the conditions under which such persistent structures can become established. Even the terminology commonly used in the 20th century and still in use today reproduces inequality in the form of international language usage. Categories such as "Third World" are geographically, but above all developmentally, judgmental, which from today's perspective is strongly criticised because it naturalises differences and reproduces power asymmetries. Furthermore, differences between regions within such grids are also distorted and do not do justice to individual contexts. Even the term "Global South", which does not have negative connotations, is problematic because it is geographically contradictory, as is evident in the case of Australia, for example. (Khan et al., 2022).

Current research shows that the structures of colonial rule continue to contribute to social stratification in many countries to this day. The systematic orientation of entire economies towards raw material exports, established through extractive economic models during the colonial era, led to the neglect of investment in education, infrastructure and social services (Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2017; Roessler et al., 2020). At the same time, education systems were often organised along racialised lines, structurally excluding disadvantaged population groups from access to formal education (Abdullahi & Chembayil, 2025). The arbitrary drawing of borders by colonial powers also had long-term consequences, undermining social cohesion and promoting ethnic fragmentation and political instability (Jones, 2021). Furthermore, postcolonial theorists highlight the ongoing "coloniality of power", whereby eurocentric knowledge and power structures persist beyond independence, perpetuating global power imbalances (Quijano, 2000; Mpofu, 2020).

Social inequality therefore remains relevant today and is even postulated as a "major social issue" for the coming decades. Reference is made to the need to systematically examine the interaction between globalisation processes and the formation and reproduction of social inequalities in specific contexts. This is a challenging task for sociology, which finds itself caught between the demands of globalisation theory and empirical implementation: while the relevance of the nation state as a unit of analysis is increasingly being questioned, research practice continues to be dominated by a focus on nation-state-based units of comparison (Burzan & Schad, 2018).

Currently, these tensions manifests particularly in the social polarisation of urban areas in LMICs: while cities are globalising and forming functional centres for sport, culture and

business, informal settlements characterised by exclusion, overpopulation and precarious living conditions are growing on their outskirts (e.g. slums, favelas) (cf. UN-Habitat, 2020).

2.3   Sport as a Social Field

Sport is much more than physical activity or entertainment; it is a symbolically condensed space of social negotiation. Questions of belonging, identity, mobility and power become just as visible in sport as existing social inequalities. Sociological research emphasises the ambivalence of this field: sport can promote social integration, but at the same time also reproduce exclusion – depending on accessibility, institutional framework conditions and social context (Burzan, 2007; Solga et al., 2009).

Access to sport is structurally unequally distributed. Characteristics such as gender, social background, ethnicity or disability have a significant influence on who uses sporting resources – whether as an athlete, official or spectator. In many societies, participation in organised sport is reserved for privileged groups; marginalised players often remain underrepresented or invisible (Spaaij, 2009).

At the same time, sport is increasingly recognised as a tool for social development. As part of "Sport for Development and Peace"[1] initiatives, it is being used internationally to promote education, strengthen communities and improve social cohesion, especially in countries with weak state structures (Edwards, 2015). However, this potential is context-dependent. Spaaij (2009) warns against uncritical romanticisation: sport does not automatically have an emancipatory effect. In inclusive, democratically organised societies, it can strengthen trust and participation. In fragmented or authoritarian contexts, on the other hand, it threatens to stabilise or legitimise existing power relations.

This ambivalence is particularly evident in the context of SMEs. In South Africa, for example, sport functioned both as a symbol of national unity and as a means of exclusion, depending on who was granted access and which narratives dominated. (Cornelissen, 2004; Cornelissen et al., 2011). The protests surrounding the 2014 World Cup in Brazil also point to contradictions: projects in the name of "social development" were criticised there precisely because of their selective effects (Costa, 2013).

In summary, it is evident that sport has social impact potential – but not universal. It unfolds relationally and requires institutional control, participatory planning and conscious inclusion.

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[1] Sport for Development and Peace (SfDP) refers to the strategic use of sport, play and physical activity to advance development goals and promote peace. SfDP initiatives aim to foster social inclusion, individual empowerment, and community engagement, particularly in marginalised settings. Rather than viewing sport as a universal solution, SfDP sees it as a complementary tool within broader development strategies, effective when integrated with education, health and peacebuilding efforts (Rights to Play, 2008).

Without these conditions, sport remains a privilege of those already participating – and fails to realise its emancipatory potential.

2.4 Sporting Mega-Events

2.4.1 Characterisation and Implications of SMEs

"*Mega-events are large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance.*" (Roche, 2000; p. 1)

Even though sport is at the heart of the event, it will impact various structural levels. SMEs, such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup, are major undertakings involving considerable financial, organisational and infrastructural disruption. Additionally, the international nature of such events means that they attract worldwide media attention, focusing it on the event and the host nation. This creates pressure to present the host nation in a positive light to the rest of the world, which can conflict with local efforts and changes (Maenning & Zimbalist, 2012; Chalip, 2018).

Against this backdrop of potential change, narratives of modernisation have increasingly taken centre stage in recent decades. SMEs are seen as symbols that can be used to profile the host country in an international comparison. Criteria such as performance, dynamism and openness are key factors in determining how a country positions itself in the context of global modernisation (Roche, 2000; Black, 2007).

SMEs thus become the expression and driving force of globalisation. It is expected that this will have multifaceted consequences: (1) By establishing and showcasing progressive structures, it is hoped that the country's global standing will be enhanced. (2) At the same time, this repositioning in an international context also strengthens the idea of a national identity as an equal player on the global stage. (3) Finally, a more pragmatic approach is being pursued, which uses SMEs to implement political and urban reform projects (Roche, 2017).

However, their social impact is not inherent; it depends heavily on the context in which they are implemented. In socially divided societies in particular, the question arises as to the extent to which SMEs contribute to social development or exacerbate existing challenges. This ambivalence is a central focus of the present work, which examines how social inequalities become visible, are exacerbated, or reveal integrative potential in the context of such major events (cf. Müller, 2021; Cornelissen, 2011; Roche 2000).

2.4.2 Global Relocation and (Symbolic) Development

In recent years, there has been a noticeable trend of LMICs expressing an increasing ambition to apply for SME alignment, with the aim of achieving alignment if successful (Banda et al., 2024; Horne, 2007). This includes countries with a strikingly high level of inequality, as measured by the Gini value, such as South Africa in 2010 and Brazil in 2014/16. Banda et al. (2024) further argue that this shift in SMEs is driven by the perception that the event can be leveraged for "developmental and social change goals" to foster national progress and global recognition.

South Africa is a particularly relevant example of this dynamic: Following the end of apartheid, the country sought to address significant social inequalities and foster a unified national identity. A notable example of this approach was the 1995 Rugby World Cup, during which Nelson Mandela symbolically endorsed the predominantly white national rugby team, the Springboks. This gesture became a symbol of reconciliation and unity. By wearing the team's jersey and presenting the trophy, Mandela used the event to bridge racial divides and strengthen the sense of a shared national identity in post-apartheid South Africa (Cornelissen et al., 2011). This example highlights the symbolic power of SMEs in promoting unity and national identity, particularly in contexts characterised by deep historical divisions.

However, this potential must be considered in context. The positive symbolism of SMEs often contrasts with the structural realities and power asymmetries involved in their planning and implementation. As Carey et al. (2011) argue, social responsibility, human rights and inclusive development are frequently cited during the bidding and promotional phases of SMEs, but these principles often remain rhetorical commitments rather than enacted policy. Their empirical research shows that, although the language of social inclusion and ethical governance is increasingly used in contracts with host cities and in political discourse, these commitments are rarely implemented through concrete mechanisms or accountability structures. In practice, the interests of corporate actors and sports institutions tend to take precedence over those of civil society and marginalised communities, particularly in contexts where democratic participation is limited or unequal.

Nevertheless, the shift towards SMEs is not only evident in LMICs, but also in highly industrialised democratic countries. In some of these countries, there is a certain reluctance towards SMEs, as critical civil society, transparent cost-benefit debates, and negative experiences with previous events can call their legitimacy into question (Horne, 2007).

2.4.3 Event Legacy

2.4.3.1 Term and Development of the Legacy Concept

Since the 1990s, the concept of "legacy" has been increasingly theorised and differentiated (Chappelet, 2012). This was triggered in particular by the growing pressure on organisers to systematically demonstrate the social benefits of SMEs (Preuss, 2007). Originally focused heavily on economic and infrastructural after-effects – such as new stadiums, transport networks or tourism effects – the concept of legacy has expanded over the last two decades to include social, cultural and political dimensions (Chappelet & Junod, 2006; Preuss, 2007). In research, "legacy" refers to the sustainable, planned and unplanned, positive and negative

effects of SMEs on multiple areas of society. It is therefore no longer viewed as a coincidental aftermath, but rather as an effect that can be actively shaped and strategically planned (Preuss, 2007). In 2005, London became the first host city to use the concept of legacy strategically in its bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, in order to secure the approval of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (cf. House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, 2007).

However, this conceptual opening is not without its problems. Smith (2009) criticises the normatively charged and politically functionalised use of the term. "Legacy" is often used to justify public investment or to postulate socio-political objectives whose actual implementation is neither guaranteed nor empirically verifiable. As a result, the term risks becoming analytically imprecise and strategically arbitrary. For the analysis of social inequality, this means that the "legacy discourse" must not be uncritically understood as inherently positive, but must be reflected upon in terms of its selective effects and political implications.

Unlike the value-neutral term "consequence", the term "legacy" seems to presuppose a tendency associated with the connotation of positive or negative outcomes of an SME. A consequence, on the other hand, refers to a causal relationship and describes what can be directly attributed to the event itself (Chappelet, 2012). Preuss (2015) also draws on this distinction, which resulted in a concept of structural change. It distinguishes between "value in exchange" (latent, potential changes) and "value in use" (changes that have actually taken effect). Not every observed change can therefore be considered a genuine legacy – many remain symbolic, without structural consequences. In such instances, Preuss refers to this as a "placebo legacy".

The ongoing debate surrounding the concept of legacy reflects its inherent complexity and diverse impact. From a scientific perspective, legacies should always be referred to in the plural, as they manifest themselves at different structural levels (Chappelet & Junod, 2006). Cornelissen et al. (2011) categorise the various types of legacy, thus making the abstract term more analytically accessible (see Figure 2). Conversely, Chappelet (2012) criticises an excessive focus on merely listing "what remains", as this detracts from the precision of the term.

Figure 2: Sport Meva-Event Legacies (acc. to Cornelissen et al. 2012)
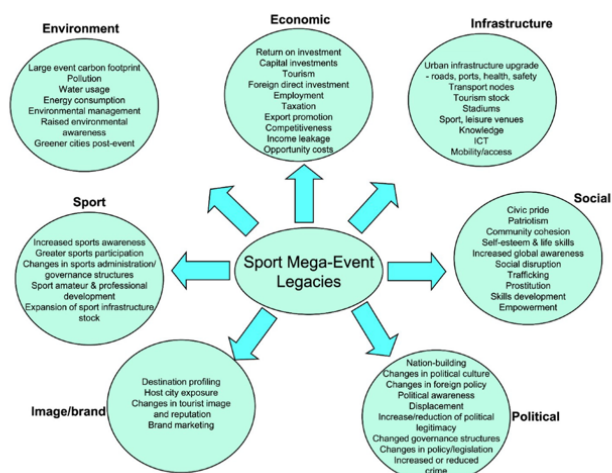
2.4.3.2 Controllability, the Limits of Reality and Evaluation.

In practice, the idea of shaping lega-
cies in a targeted manner faces signifi-
cant limitations. The process of crea-
ting legacies can only be planned or
predicted to a limited extent, as the
social, political and economic factors
determining their effectiveness are too
complex and context-dependent.
Instead, it involves dynamic negotia-
tion processes between individuals
with different interests, interpretative
power and influence. This reality often

Figure 3: Legacy Matrix (acc. to Chappelet, 2012)

thwarts the ambitious planning goals set out in application documents or official legacy strate-
gies. While there are certainly positive, unplanned legacies, the host nation often faces unfo-
reseen negative legacies. For instance, the decline in tourism in Athens two years prior to the
Games was unexpected. This could be seen as a consequence of the widespread international
media coverage of delays in urban construction projects (Chappelet, 2012).

SMEs affect not only the realm of sport, but have also effects in numerous other areas of society.
These effects can manifest themselves at different levels and are often categorised along the
axes of "tangible/intangible" and "territorial/personal" (see Figure 3). Intangible personal lega-
cies – such as skills development or civic engagement – pose significant evaluation challenges
for researchers in terms of their concrete measurement and evaluation (Chappelet, 2012).
As an expression of the interdependence of various social spheres, legacies require a differen-
tiated approach, especially with regard to potential evaluation obstacles:

(1) The distinction between event-related and regular developments is complex. Investments
that would have been planned independently of the event can be reinterpreted retrospectively
as part of the legacy discourse. The mixing of SME-specific and general political developments
makes a clear-cut analysis difficult. These distinctions are hardly recognisable, especially in the
perception of the population. Changes that are mistakenly attributed to the event are referred to
as "placebo legacies". Nevertheless, this subjective attribution has a real impact on the quality
of life of those affected and is therefore a relevant subject of research.

(2) The assessment of whether a legacy is positive, negative or both remains perspective-de-
pendent. For example, the upgrading of a neighbourhood in the event zone helps one group,
while another is faced with relocation or displacement.

(3) Measuring legacies over time is complex, as SMEs change location factors and usually only
indirectly trigger social, ecological and economic processes. Therefore, legacies cannot be iden-
tified in isolation from general urban development – as in the case of Barcelona, for example,
where the reuse of the 1992 Olympic infrastructure merges with other location advantages, such
as the general attractiveness of the city (Preuss, 2015).

2.4.3.3 Relevance to the Analysis of Social Inequality

In the context of this work, a nuanced perspective is essential: not every social legacy automatically contributes to reducing social inequality. Rather, a distinction must be made between general social effects and those with a specific focus on distributional justice and participatory equity. The former may be symbolic, short-lived, or exclusive in nature; the latter must be evaluated on the basis of criteria such as access equity, fairness and structural participation.

Preuss (2007, 2015) emphasises that SMEs inevitably create "loser groups", for example, segments of the population that are displaced by urban development changes or excluded from new infrastructure. A forward-looking event strategy must therefore ensure that the various types of legacy have a broad social impact and are not limited to certain groups. This requires political control, cross-sector coordination and participatory governance structures.

In practice, however, top-down governance structures frequently prevail, with decision-making processes on legacy measures primarily determined by sports governance elites, private-sector stakeholders, and international bodies such as the IOC and FIFA (Wolfe, 2024; Graeff & Knijnik, 2021). This selective structure of legacy policy means that macroeconomic and infrastructural aspects are at the forefront, while microsociological perspectives – especially the voices of marginalised groups – are pushed into the background. Postcolonial and decolonial approaches, as advocated by Wolfe (2024), call for these "minor voices" to be made visible. Only through their inclusion can structural inequalities be meaningfully addressed and more just conditions created.

The assessment of legacies in terms of social justice therefore requires a normative framework based on values such as equality, inclusion, and participation. This normative framework aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will be discussed in the following chapter – in particular, SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

2.5 Sustainability

2.5.1 Sustainability as a Normative Frame of Reference

Figure 5: Conceptual Model of Sustainability in the Olympic Games (acc. to Müller et al., 2021)

Figure 4: Sustainability Score Comparison (acc. to Müller et al., 2021)
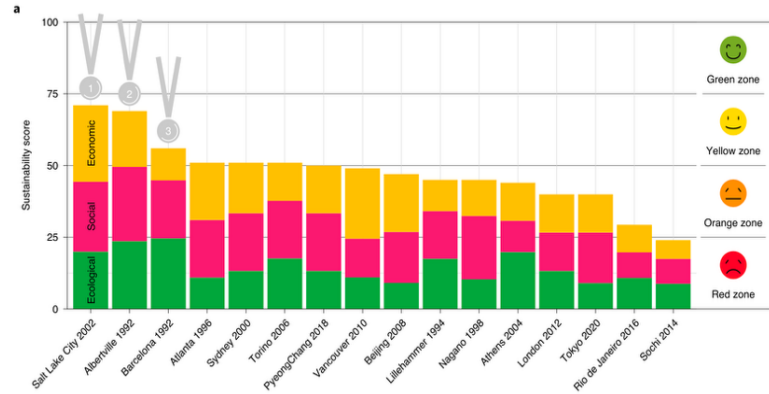
The discussion on social legacies highlights that not only short-term or symbolic effects in the context of SMEs that are relevant, but above all long-term, structural changes that extend beyond the actual event. In this context, the concept of sustainability has gained increasing importance: it serves as an analytical and normative frame of reference for assessing for assessing long-term impacts of SMEs in terms of ecological, economic and social justice.

Originally limited to environmental issues, sustainability is now understood in a much broader sense. In addition to ecological dimensions, it also encompasses social and economic dimensions and is thus regarded as a holistic guiding principle for societal transformation (Mair & Smith, 2021; Heinberg, 2010). This multidimensional conceptualisation is also reflected in public perception. Studies among adolescents and young adults have shown that sustainability is not primarily understood by many as an ecological responsibility, but also as a social and economic responsibility. It is particularly striking that many younger people increasingly associate sustainability with educational equity, global solidarity, social cohesion and the fight against inequality. This growing awareness indicates that sustainable development goes beyond environmental protection and must include social transformation (Damico et al., 2022; Müller et al., 2021). This is supported by the finding that a central deficit of event research in recent decades is that the social dimension in particular is neglected or not mentioned at all in the concept of sustainability. Although the social effects of SMEs – such as temporary public enthusiasm – have been regularly recognised, they have often been limited to a short-term perspective. As a result, long-term structural development was often overlooked or underexplored (Smith, 2009).

2.5.2 Rating Systems in the Context of SMEs

Müller et al. (2021) attempt to introduce an appropriate system that reflects this multidimensional understanding of sustainability, especially in the context of SMEs (or specifically the Olympic Games), offers an instrument for the organisers and host nations that makes developments in the three main areas of sustainability more tangible, transparent and comparable. This aims to harmonise the interaction between dimensions to ensure none is over- or underemphasised. Giving equal weight to all dimensions aims to counteract the existing economic bias and associated phenomena such as "greeningwashing" and to avoid long-term ecological and social harm (Müller et al., 2021).

The aim is to view sustainability not merely as an outcome, but as a continuous and dynamic impact process that unfolds over time and across sectors. Only in this way can structural changes – for example in infrastructure, access to participation or environmental quality – be identified as authentic indicators of sustainable development.

2.5.3 Sustainability as a Global Principle of Justice and International Responsibility

The growing importance of sustainability in discussions about SMEs reflects a deeper ethical and political shift, not merely a technical or managerial issue. As Damico et al. (2022) point out, sustainability is now increasingly regarded as a moral and intergenerational issue. In their empirical study, young people in particular emphasise that sustainability should not be considered solely in ecological terms, but must also encompass social justice, equal opportunities, and inclusive participation. This broader understanding of sustainability aligns with the normative demands of international organisations (e.g. the United Nations, 2015). Müller et al. (2021) support this broader understanding in their evaluation of the Olympic Games, emphasising that sustainability in the context of SMEs must be measurable over decades, particularly with regard to social and infrastructural changes. Thus, sustainability becomes a long-term touchstone for justice, unfolding not at the moment an event takes place, but in its aftermath in terms of living conditions, participation opportunities and urban transformation processes.

In the context of ecological challenges, sustainability is is increasingly framed as a counter-narrative to overconsumption, resource exploitation and the climate crisis. For example, Boykoff & Zimbalist (2017) describe the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio as exemplifying the tensions between ambitious sustainability goals and practical implementation problems. Similarly, Bama & Tichaawa (2016) offer an analysis critical of the infrastructural legacy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, where the narrative of sustainability often collided with processes of social exclusion and conflicts of interest. These critical voices demonstrate that, in the context of SMEs, sustainability is not merely a technical standard, but a normative model that is increasingly being demanded by civil society. The demand for just and long-term sustainability, as set out in existing literature (cf. Müller et al., 2021; Damico et al., 2022), gives the sustainability debate new depth and a stronger moral urgency.

2.5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations' SDGs are a globally recognised framework for sustainable development. Integrating environmental, economic and social objectives, they are used in scientific literature as an authoritative reference framework for assessing social transformation processes (United Nations, 2015). As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 17 SDGs were formulated to reflect a holistic understanding of sustainability. As the central institution coordinating multilateral cooperation, the UN establishes international standards in areas such as peace, human rights, and sustainable development (Daws & Weiss, 2008). This significantly shapes the global discourse on sustainability. This normative role establishes the UN as a relevant reference point for evaluating the long-term social impacts of SMEs.

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) is the overarching normative goal of this work as it seeks to reduce inequalities within and between countries, addressing the core subject matter directly. Thematically relevant individual goals from other SDGs are also considered, including SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). These goals cover key areas of social action identified as particularly relevant in international research on inequality, development, and governance in LMICs (Braveman et al., 2018; Kabeer, 1999; Parnell & Pieterse, 2014).

The specific operationalisation and combination of these goals into an analytical framework is carried out in the methodology in order to ensure a clear distinction between the conceptual basis and the analytical perspective of the study.

Figure 6: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals acc. to UN

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

To answer the research question posed, a literature review in the form of a scoping review was conducted. This review type was particularly suited for this study, as it allows for a comprehensive overview of the research field while identifying central themes and existing knowledge gaps. Unlike a traditional literature review, which provides an in-depth analysis of a narrowly defined topic, a scoping review offered a broader exploration, making it ideal for capturing the dual nature of SMEs – beneficial in some contexts, harmful in others – and the variability across studies. In this context, which explored the complex interplay between SMEs and social inequalities across various countries, the scoping review enabled the inclusion of a wide range of studies and perspectives. This type of review also offered methodological flexibility to incorporate diverse study designs and approaches, which iwas especially advantageous when analysing qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical studies, as in this case (cf. von Elm et al. 2019). The interdisciplinary nature of this topic, intersecting sports science, social science, and history, further supported the need for a scoping review, allowing for the integration of literature from multiple fields to construct a holistic view of current research.

Furthermore, this review aimed to address research gaps, especially regarding how SMEs intersect with social inequality, thereby guiding future studies in this domain.

3.2 Search Strategy

3.2.1 Information Sources

To comprehensively address the research question, a wide range of databases and online libraries (Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Group, Swisscovery, PubMed, Web of Science, and JSTOR) was utilized. Each database was selected for its unique contributions to this interdisciplinary research, encompassing essential literature across social sciences, public health, sports science and development studies.

This broad selection ensured that the review has a well-rounded foundation, including relevant studies on social inequalities, SMEs and their socio-economic impacts in countries with high levels of social inequality. The choice of databases was also based on considerations of open and licensed accessibility, the latter of which is provided through the University of Basel.

3.2.2 Search Strings

An important component of the search strategy was the creation of a suitable keyword matrix (see Appendix B), systematically combining primary terms and related keywords to cover various aspects of the topic. The central search terms in this context were 'social inequalities,' 'social impact,' 'mega- sport event,' 'mega-sport event legacies,' 'high inequality countries,' and 'LMICs. Using Boolean operators, these terms were combined to retrieve a broad array of relevant studies while refining the search to meet the study's scope. Outdated terms like 'developing countries' were also included to ensure historical comprehensiveness, recognising that earlier studies may use terminology that differs from contemporary language but is critical to capturing

long-term trends. A complete list of search strings is also provided in the appendix (see Appendix B).

Finally, a backward and forward citation tracking method was applied in the final stage of the search to ensure that no relevant studies or information were overlooked.

3.3   Study Selection Process

This section provides a detailed outline of the study selection process. Initially, all identified studies were screened for relevance based on their titles and abstracts. Following this preliminary screening, duplicate entries were removed to ensure each study was reviewed only once.

The remaining studies then underwent a full-text review to determine their alignment with the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.3.1   Inclusion Criteria

The focus was on studies published within the last 35 years (1995-2025) to ensure relevance, specifically targeting research on SMEs such as the FIFA World Cup, the Olympic Games, and the like. Studies were prioritised if they examine defined aspects of social inequality (e.g., income disparity, health inequalities, educational disparities and further forms of inequality identified in the literature) and had a country-specific focus. This time frame included foundational examples, such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup in South Africa, while also allowing for a broader comparison of SME impacts across different historical and socio-economic contexts. Furthermore, selected studies with a global scope were also included (e.g. Mair et al. 2023). However, the condition for this was that these studies also examine high inequality LMICs to a significant extent.

By examining whether and how these events have influenced social inequalities over time, this study aimed to identify evolving patterns and trends. While historical insights provided valuable context, recent studies were prioritised to capture contemporary theories and approaches.

3.3.2   Exclusion Criteria

Studies that lacked a focus on social impacts, presented purely economic analyses without social dimensions, or focused on SMEs in high-income countries with a Gini index below 0.4 at the time of the event were omitted. Furthermore, only studies published in English, German, and French were considered to maintain language accessibility.

These selection criteria narrowed the study's scope, ensuring it remained manageable and aligned with the research objectives. Each stage of the selection process was documented using a PRISMA flow diagram, enhancing transparency and reproducibility. Studies that were primarily addressing tourist experiences or media coverage were excluded unless they directly related to structural inequalities.

3.4   Data Extraction and Analysis

This section specified key data points to be extracted from each identified study to ensure consistency and relevance in the analysis. Data extraction focused on several primary aspects:

1. **Study Characteristics**: Basic information such as the study's authors, publication year, country, and type of study (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) will be recorded to provide context.
2. **Description of the SME**: Details about the SME analysed in each study, including the event type (e.g., Olympics, FIFA World Cup), year of occurrence, and location, will be noted to track the specific events under investigation.
3. **Social Inequality Dimensions Addressed**: Each study's focus on specific aspects of social inequality – such as income disparity, access to healthcare, or educational inequality – was extracted to assess which inequalities were most frequently linked to SMEs.
4. **Methodology and Data Source**: Information on each study's research methods (e.g., surveys, interviews, case studies) and data sources was collected to present methodological diversity and reliability.
5. **Findings on Social Impacts**: Key findings related to the social impacts of SMEs, including positive, neutral, negative and ambivalent effects, were summarised. This included any identified mechanisms by which SMEs influence social inequalities.
6. **Long-Term Outcomes or Legacies**: Data on whether the study identifies any long-term legacies or outcomes related to social inequality will be included, as these are critical to understanding SMEs' lasting impacts.

This structured approach to data extraction will ensured that relevant information was consistently recorded, facilitating a comprehensive and systematic synthesis of findings across all included studies.

This structured data extraction approach aligned with the theoretical framework based on the structural levels of social inequality (cf. Solga et al., 2009), using a deductive approach. Here, the categorization emphasised mechanisms and processes affecting specific dimensions of social inequality. While Solga et al. conceptualised dimensions of inequality as the outcomes of a sequential process initiated by individual and structural determinants, this study redefined these dimensions as pre-defined analytical categories. These categories (e.g. health equity, education, and governance) provided a framework for identifying social mechanisms within the included studies. The SME functioned as a fixed contextual determinant, not in the classical sense of a personal or structural attribute, but rather as an analytical anchor. Within each dimension, observed mechanisms were identified and categorised according to their perceived social impact. This inversion of Solga's original sequence supported the descriptive, mapping-oriented logic that was appropriate for scoping reviews. It enables the identification of recurring patterns and critical gaps across domains of social inequality without presupposing causal pathways.

To enhance transparency and efficiency, *Covidence* was used to manage the systematic review process. Covidence streamlined key stages, including study screening, data extraction, and documentation, ensuring adherence to *PRISMA* guidelines. Its ability to provide clear documentation of each review stage and facilitate consistent data extraction made it a highly suitable tool for this research (Covidence, n.d.; Page et al., 2021). By leveraging Covidence, this study

ensured that the review process was efficient, reproducible, and aligned with the scoping review's objectives.

3.4.1 Categorisation

To systematically analyse the included studies, two main grids were created and translated into results tables, which depicted different types of data and pursued correspondingly differentiated analysis objectives.

Grid 1 mainly documents the formal characteristics of the included studies in the sense of a classic scoping review design. Among other things, it documents the authorship, year of publication, geographical focus, SME studied, study design, methods, data sources and target groups. As an exception to the formal context, an initial categorisation by impact dimension was also included:

Table 1: Categorisation Grid 1: Studies and Characteristics

No.	Study (Author, Year)	Title	Country / Region	SME / Event	Study Design	Method(s)	Data Source(s)	Target Group / Fokus	Assigned Dimension

The assignment to the impact dimension in Grid 1 was based on a prioritisation of content and should therefore be understood as heuristic and not conclusive. Many of the studies analysed dealt with multiple, interwoven mechanisms of impact that could not be clearly assigned to a single dimension. Therefore, in a second step (Grid 2), a more in-depth categorisation was carried out, in which specific mechanisms were also assigned to other dimensions – for example, if an aspect identified in the original "Health Equity" study had clear links to the governance dimension. In cases without a recognisable primary focus, this was noted accordingly.

Grid 2 provides an in-depth structure of the content. Here, central mechanisms from the studies were grouped thematically by dimension and cluster, described and classified according to their direction of impact. This enabled a multi-perspective analysis at the level of the individual mechanisms – regardless of the original thematic focus of the respective studies.

Table 2: Categorisation Grid 2: Contents

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
e.g. Gender, Diversity & Empowerment	e.g. Gender and Social Inequalities in Sport	e.g. Selective Inclusion	e.g. While integration was emphasized, disparities remained in race and gender participation rates, showing partial inclusion and residual exclusion.	Studies assigned	+, ±, 0, -

This double categorisation reflected the complexity of the study situation and took into account the fact that many contributions did not argue one-dimensionally, but rather dealt with social dynamics in multiple layers.

3.4.1.1 Dimensions of Social Inequality: A Framework for Analysis

Based on the theoretical framework of social inequality presented in Chapter 2 and the particular relevance of structural contextual conditions in LMICs, a theoretically sound, multidimensional framework was developed. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) forms the overarching normative basis of this work. The selected dimensions are based on specific United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and address key social areas that are particularly relevant for the analysis of SMEs in highly unequal LMICs. The category system serves both as an

analytical tool for this study and as a structuring framework for future research. Since not all forms of social inequality are explicitly considered in the SDG framework, the dimension of symbolic power integrates a cross-cutting approach to systematically include cultural, epistemic and representational inequalities.

a) Health Equity and Wellbeing

Fair and equal opportunities to achieve the best possible level of health, including social determinants such as income, housing, education and the environment (Braveman et al., 2018; WHO, 2021). Well-being complements this approach with a holistic view of subjective and objective well-being (WHO, 2023). This dimension is based on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

b) Education and Human Capital

Education encompasses institutionalised learning processes, while human capital also includes economically useful skills, health, experience and social skills (OECD, 2001). Both aspects are relevant to SDG 4 (Quality Education) as they relate to both quantitative access (e.g. enrolment rates, qualifications) and qualitative factors (e.g. skill levels, quality of education). (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2023). This dimension is based on SDG 4 (Quality Education).

c) Urban Transformation and Environmental Justice

Fair distribution of ecological opportunities and risks, and participation in environmentally relevant decisions in urban transformation processes (Bullard, 2000; Dempsey et al., 2011. This dimension is based on SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 Climate Action).

d) Governance, Participation and Rights

Inclusive and transparent decision-making processes and effective protection of political and social rights (Benz, 2004; Gaventa & Valderrama, 1999). This dimension is based on SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

e) Economic Inclusion and Resource Distribution

Equal access to markets, capital, infrastructure and fair employment (International Labour Organisation, 2022). This dimension is based on SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

f) Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation

Analysis of symbolic orders, interpretative power and representation processes that are not explicitly anchored in the SDGs but shape structural inequality (Said, 2003) and are therefore relevant in the context of SDG 10 (Reduce Inequalities).

g) Gender, Diversity and Empowerment

Elimination of gender and diversity-related discrimination and promotion of scope for action and decision-making among marginalised groups (Kabeer, 1999; Saavedra, 2009). This dimension is based on SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

3.4.1.2 Direction of Impact

The direction of impact refers to the way in which SMEs can influence social inequalities – i.e. whether they can influence existing inequalities:

-   promote social inequalities (**negative direction** of impact),

0   stabilise or cause no significant change (**neutral direction** of impact),

+   reduce social inequalities (**positive direction** of impact),

±   both amplify and reduce at the same time (**ambivalent direction** of impact).

This is an inductive, methodological category – based on different statements by the authors – that enables research results to be categorised in an evaluative and systematic way, as well as in terms of content. It moves the analysis beyond mere description and is intended to reveal further possible patterns.

3.4.1.3 Typology of Scientific Statements and Data

In order to systematically evaluate the statements on the effects of SMEs on social inequality, a typological differentiation was made according to the type of evidence (cf. Mayring, 2015). This distinguishes between four forms of scientific statements:

(a) Statements with **directly measured empirical evidence** (e.g. primary data collection),

(b) Statements based on **indirect empirical evidence** from secondary sources,

(c) **Interpretative statements** derived from contextual understanding, and

(d) **Theoretical-conceptual statements** that formulate models or conceptual frameworks.

This typology allows for a more nuanced assessmentof the research landscape with regard to the informative value, generalisability and theoretical foundation of existing studies. This attribution of typologies is not discussed further in the following sections, as it is only intended to ensure a certain degree of practicality when the created framework is used in practice.

3.4.2   Synthesis Strategy

This study uses a synthesis methodology based on a convergent, thematically structured approach commonly used in scoping reviews. The aim was not to assess the quality of studies or to identify causal relationships, but rather to collect, categorise and analyse existing research literature with regard to the social impact mechanisms of SMEs in countries with high inequality.

Methodologically, a convergent synthesis was carried out, in which both quantitative aspects (e.g. distribution by topic or region) and qualitative content (e.g. mechanisms of impact, normative assessments, governance structures) were integrated. The extracted data were organised thematically into seven core dimensions of social inequality, in line with the chosen SDGs. Within each dimension, studies were grouped by mechanism type and categorised according to effect direction. Where studies did not explicitly state the direction of social impact, an interpretative judgement was made based on the narrative content, in line with predefined coding guidelines. The results are presented in two ways: in tabular form to visualise distributions and

in narrative form to provide more in-depth content. This approach enables a systematic, context- and theory-based interpretation of a multi-layered and interdisciplinary field of research.

With regard to the narrative synthesis, it should be noted that it serves as a supplement to the tabular overviews, as is typical for scoping reviews. It provides a more detailed analysis of the content, discussing examples and presenting arguments based on recurring themes and patterns revealed by the visualised categorisation. It is therefore descriptive, analytical, comparative and structuring. This implies that not all studies, mechanisms, patterns, etc. are mentioned in the synthesis's body text nor is interpretation provided at this stage.

3.5 Quality Assessment

Since this investigation is a scoping review, with the primary aim of providing an overview of the current state of research rather than evaluating the quality of individual studies, a critical appraisal tool will be deliberately omitted. This is in line with established scoping review guidelines (von Elm et al., 2019; Peters et al., 2015).

4.   Results

4.1   Included Literature and Selection Process

By searching the various databases, a total of 117 literature records on the topic at hand were identified through title and initial abstract screening, and were then integrated into the PRISMA flow process. In addition, five further studies were identified and integrated using the backward and forward citation tracking method. In a second step, the records were imported into the Covidence tool. There, all duplicates were automatically removed before the structured screening process, which consists of abstract and full-text screening, was carried out. At the end of the screening process, 56 studies and scientific papers resulted, which now serve as the basis for this chapter. The detailed screening process is visualised in the PRISMA flow diagram, including exclusion reasons.. The chart also describes the reasons for excluding certain papers during the identification and screening process.

Figure 7: PRISMA Flow Chart
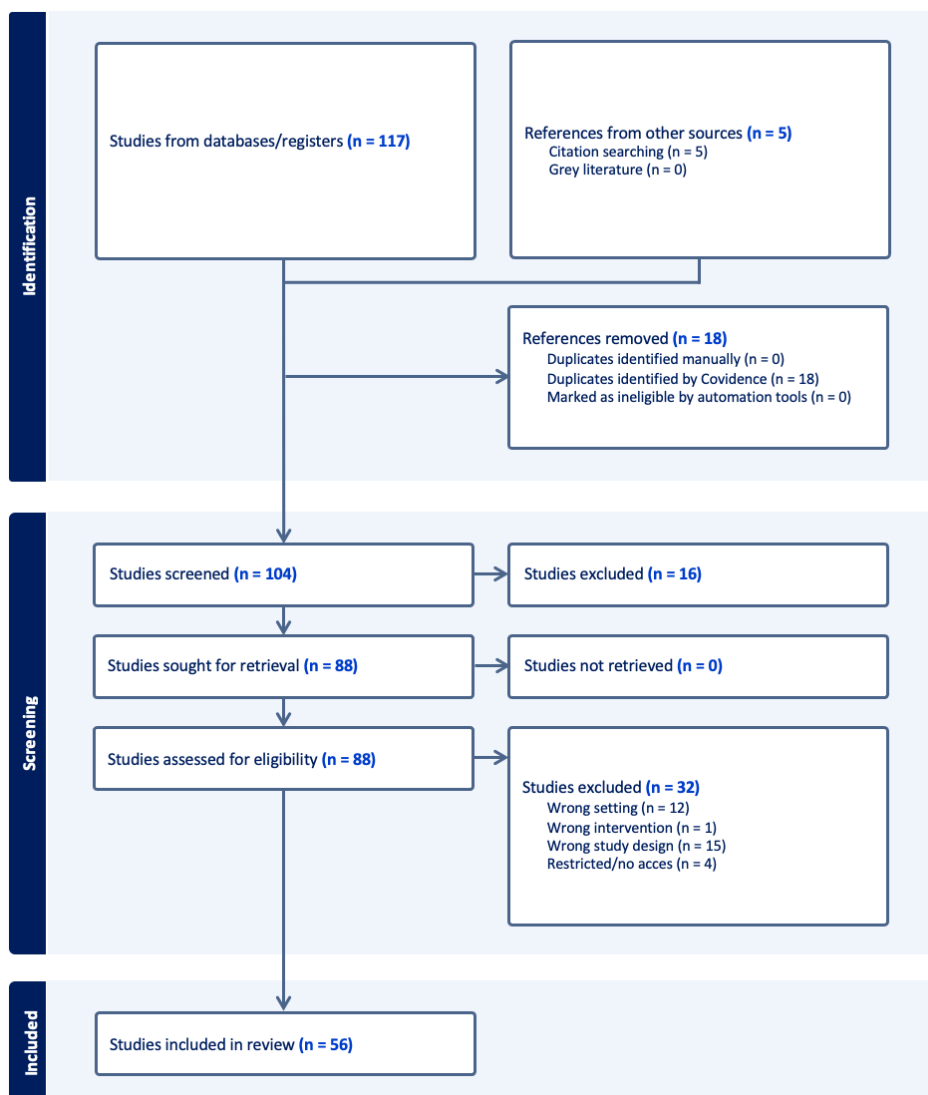
4.2 Study Characteristics and Categorisation

4.2.1 Literature Review

The extracted data from the included literature was coded in the first table as specified in the methodology. The following presentation resulted from the systematic processing:

Table 3: Descriptive Data

Literature Review

No.	Study (Author, Year)	Title	Country / Region	SME / Event	Study Design	Method(s)	Data Source(s)	Target Group / Fokus	Assigned Dimension
1	Annear et al. (2019)	Sports mega-event legacies and adult physical activity: A systematic literature review and research agenda	Global	Multiple SMEs	Qualitative	Systematic Literature Review	Peer-reviewed Literature (2000–2018), Multiple Scientific Databases	Adult Populations in SME Host Nations	Health Equity & Wellbeing
2	Baroghi et al. (2024)	Towards a Holistic Framework for the Olympic-Led Sustainable Urban Planning Process	Brazil	OG 2016	Conceptual / Framework Development	Literature Review	Secundary Data, Official Documents	Urban Population	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
3	Bek et al. (2019)	Creating an enduring developmental legacy from FIFA2010: the Football Foundation of South Africa (FFSA)	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Semi-structured Interviews. Documentay Analysis	Primary Data (Stakeholder Intervies), Secondary Data (Project Documentation)	FFSA, Local Youth	Education & Human Capital
4	Black & Peacock (2011)	Catching up: understanding the pursuit of major games by rising developmental states	India, Malaysia	CWG 1998 & 2010	Qualitative / Conceptual Analyisis	Case Studies, Document Analysis and Semi-structured Expert Interviews	Government Documents, Policy Reports, Strategic Plans, Interviews with Key Stakeholders	State Development Strategies	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
5	Boykoff & Zimbalist (2017)	Green Games: The Olympics, Sustainability, and Rio 2016	Brazil	OG 2016	Qualitative / Discourse-based	Policy and Media Analysis	Official Documents, Media, Secondary Literature	Urban Populations, Protestors, Civil Right Organisations	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
6	Burnett (2010)	Sport-for-development approaches in the South African context: A case study analysis	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Mixed-Methods	Media Analysis & Interviews, Questionnaires	Primary Data (Protest Coverage, Interviews)	Disadvantaged Youth and Communities	Education & Human Capital

No.	Study (Author, Year)	Title	Country / Region	SME / Event	Study Design	Method(s)	Data Source(s)	Target Group / Fokus	Assigned Dimension
7	Burnett (2017)	Educational legacies of mega-sport events for Africa	Global	Multiple SMEs (OG)	Qualitative	Interviews, Documentary Analysis, Literature Research	Educational Programmes Documents (IOC)	Developing Nations (School Sport / Education Legacy)	Education & Human Capital
8	Butler & Aicher (2015)	Demonstrations and displacement: social impact and the 2014 FIFA World Cup	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Mixed-Methods	Media-Analysis and Interviews	Primary Data (Protest Coverage, Interviews)	Displaced and Protesting Residents	Governance, Participation & Rights
9	Cornelissen et al. (2011)	Towards redefining the concept of legacy in relation to sport mega-events: Insights from the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Conceptual / Empirical	Theoretical Analysis, Empirical Case Study	Secondary Literature, Policy Documents	Urban Population	Multi-dimensional Perspective
10	Cornelissen (2011)	More than a Sporting Chance? Appraising the sport for development legacy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative / Policy Evaluation	Case Study, Document Analysis	Government Reports, NGO Program Data	Youth Development, SFD programs	Multi-dimensional Perspective
11	Cornelissen (2012)	Our struggles are bigger than the World Cup': civic activism, state-society relations and the socio-political legacies of the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative	Critical Discourse Analysis	Media Coverage, Activist Statments, Secondary Data	Civil Society, Activists	Governance, Participation & Rights
12	Curi et al. (2011)	The Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro 2007: Consequences of a sport mega-event on a BRIC country	Brazil	PanAm Games 2007	Sociological Analysis	Document Review & Fieldwork	Secondary Data	Spectators & Local Residents	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
13	Darnell (2012)	Olympism in Action, Olympic hosting and the politics of 'Sport for Development and Peace': investigating the development discourses of Rio 2016	Brazil	OG 2016	Qualitative	Critical Discourse Analysis	Media Sources, IOC Policy Documents, Development Goals	Development Narratives	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
14	de Almeida et al. (2017)	Sport and Development in Brazil – Lessons from multiple sport mega-event hosting and sporting programmes in disadvantaged communities	Brazil	SMEs 2007-2016	Conceptual / Essayistic	Literature Discussion, Conceptual Framing	Scondary Literature / Secondary Empirical Data, Policy Documents, NGO Programmes	Disadvantaged Communities	Governance, Participation & Rights
15	Death (2011)	'Greening' the 2010 FIFA World Cup: Environmental Sustainability and the Mega-Event in South Africa	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative	Document Analysis, Stakeholder Interviews, Obseravational Insights	Primary Data (Interviews), Secondary Data (e.g. Project Reports)	Local Authorities, Event Organisers	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
16	Dimeo & Kay (2004)	Major Sports Events, Image Projection and the Problems of 'Semi-Periphery': A Case Study of the 1996 South Asia Cricket World Cup	India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka (South Asia)	CWC 1996	Qualitative Case Study	Document Analysis (Mainly Media Coverage)	English-language Press Articles (from Participating Countries)	Portrayals of Host Nations	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
17	Dowse & Fletcher (2018)	Sport mega-events, the 'non-West' and the ethics of event hosting	"Global South" (inc. South Africa, Brazil)	Multiple SMEs	Conceptual / Critical	Critical Literature Analysis	Secondary Data (e.g. NGO Reports)		Governance, Participation & Rights
18	Gaffney (2010)	Mega-events and socio-spatial dynamics in Rio de Janeiro, 1919-2016	Brazil	SMEs 1919-2016	Critical Spatial Analysis	Historical Analysis	Archival Data, Government Documents	Urban Population	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice

No.	Study (Author, Year)	Title	Country / Region	SME / Event	Study Design	Method(s)	Data Source(s)	Target Group / Fokus	Assigned Dimension
19	Gibson et al. (2014)	Psychic income and social capital among host nation residents: A pre–post analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative	Pre-post Survey	Primary Data	Local Residents	Health Equity & Wellbeing
20	Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)	Global sport mega-events and local community impacts: the case of housing and redevelopment in Porto Alegre at the 2014 Men's World Cup finals in Brazil	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Qualitative Case Study	Interviews, Media Analysis	Primary Data, Secondary Data e.g (Local Housing Movements)	Local Residents (Low-income Areas)	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
21	Graeff et al. (2020)	The closer to danger, farther from harm? The impact of sport mega events in communities affected by infrastructure associated with the FIFA World Cup 2014 in Porto Alegre	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Qualitative	Semi-structured Interviews, Ethnographic Fieldwork	Primary Data	Low-income Communities	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
22	Haferburg (2011)	South Africa under FIFA's reign: The World Cup's contribution to urban development	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Empirical Observations, Document Analysis	Primary Data, Policy Reports, Urban Development Plans	Urban Population	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
23	Haferburg & Steinbrink (2017)	Mega-Events in Emerging Nations and the Festivalization of the Urban Backstage: The Cases of Brazil and South Africa	Brazil, South Africa	FIFA-WC 2014, OG 2016	Qualitative Case Study	Comparative Analysis, Field Observations	Policy Documents, Media Sources, Prior Fieldwork	Marginalized Urban Populations	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
24	Harris (2011)	Mega-events and the developing world: A look at the legacy of the 2010 Soccer World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Policy Review & Socio-political Critique	Systematic Literature Review	Secondary Data, Official Reports	Local Society	Economic Inclusion & Recourse Distribution
25	Heere et al. (2016)	Ethnic identity over national identity: an alternative approach to measure the effect of the World Cup on social cohesion	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Quantitative Trend Analysis	Questionnaires (Pre/Post-event)	Primary Data	Students from Diverse Ethnic Backgrounds	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
26	Horne (2018)	Understanding the denial of abuses of human rights connected to sports mega-events	General / Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014, OG 2016	Qualitative	Conceptual Analysis / Critical Discourse	Literature, NGO Reports, Human Rights Reports, Media	Local Population (Human Rights Violations)	Governance, Participation & Rights
27	Hummel (2018)	Do Poor Citizens Benefit from Mega-Events? São Paulo's Street Vendors and the 2014 FIFA World Cup	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Political Enthnography (Qualitative)	Interviews, Surveys, Observations	Primary Data & Policy Documents/Press Coverage	Licensed/Unlicensed Street Vendors	Economic Inclusion & Recourse Distribution
28	Ivester (2015)	Culture, resistance and policies of exclusion at World Cup 2014: the case of the 'Baianas do Acarajé'	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Qualitative Case Study	Ethnographic Interviews, Participant Observations	Primary Data (Interviews), Secondary Data (Media Articles)	Afro-Brazilian Women Street Vendors ('Baianas')	Economic Inclusion & Recourse Distribution
29	Kaplanidou et al. (2013)	Quality of Life, Event Impacts, and Mega-Event Support among South African Residents before and after the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Quantitative	Pre-post Survey	Primary Data	Local Residents (Percieved QOL)	Health Equity & Wellbeing
30	Kersting (2007)	Sport and National Identity: A Comparison of the 2006 and 2010 FIFA World Cups	South Africa, Germany	FIFA-WC 2006/2010	Qualitative Comparative Study	Content Analysis, Public Opinion Analysis	Surveys, Media Coverage, Public Reactions	National Populations, Fan Identity	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation

27

No.	Study (Author, Year)	Title	Country / Region	SME / Event	Study Design	Method(s)	Data Source(s)	Target Group / Fokus	Assigned Dimension
31	Knott (2015)	The Strategic contribution of sport mega-events to national branding: the case of South Africa and the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Mixed-Methods	Content Analysis, Branding Strategy Assessment	Documents, Interviews, Secondary Data	National Branding Institutions, Marketing Experts	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
32	Leal de Oliveira (2020)	Mega-events, legacies and impacts: notes on 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics	Brazil	OG 2016	Theoretical-Conceptual / Case Study	Document Analysis	Secondary Data (e.g. Plans, Reports)	Urban Population	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
33	Lepp & Gibson (2011)	Reimaging a nation: South Africa and the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative	Content Analysis	Newspaper Articles, National Branding Campaigns	National Image	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
34	Liang et al. (2024)	Legacies and impacts of major sporting events for communities and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds: a systematic review	Global	Multiple SMEs (2000-2023)	Systematic Review	Literature Review (PRISMA)	Secondary Data (Peer-rebviewed Journal Articles)	Communities and Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrunds (CIDBs)	Multi-dimensional Perspective
35	Maharaj (2015)	The turn of the south? Social and economic impacts of mega-events in India, Brazil and South Africa	India, South Africa, Brasil	CWG 2010, FIFA-WC 2010, FIFA-WC 2014	Qualitative Comparative Discussion	Literature Review	Policy Documents, Secondary Literature	Urban Poor Population	Economic Inclusion & Recourse Distribution
36	Mair et al. (2023)	Social impacts of mega-events: a systematic narrative review and research agenda	Global	Multiple SMEs	Qualitative	Systematic Narrative Review	Peer-reviewed Literature	General Public (Social Impacts)	Multi-dimensional Perspective
37	Mishra (2012)	'The Shame Games': a textual analysis of Western press coverage of the Commonwealth Games in India	India	CWG 2010	Qualitative	Textual / Content Analysis	"Western" Media Coverage	Portrayals of Host Nations	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
38	Musikavanhu et al. (2021)	The lasting social value of mega events: experiences from green point community in Cape Town, South Africa	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative	Interviews	Primary Data	Local Residents	Health Equity & Wellbeing
39	Ngonyama (2010)	The 2010 FIFA World Cup: critical voices from below	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Commentary / Critical-Analytical	Literature-based Essay	Secondary Literature, Media Reports, Interviews	Social Movements, Labour Formations, NGOs, Activists	Governance, Participation & Rights
40	Penfold (2019)	National identity and sporting mega-events in Brazil	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014, OG 2016	Qualitative Case Study	Discourse Analysis	Media Discourse, Political Speeches	National Identitiy / Representation (Host Nation)	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
41	Ribeiro et al. (2021)	The social impact of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games: comparison of residents' pre- and post-event perceptions	Brazil	OG 2016	Quantitative (Panel Survey)	Surveys (Different Time Points)	Primary Data (Longitudinal Resident Data)	Local Residents	Health Equity & Wellbeing
42	Ribeiro et al. (2022)	Resident attitudes toward the Rio 2016 Olympic Games: A longitudinal study on social legacy and support behaviours	Brazil	OG 2016	Quantitative, Longitudinal	Repeated Surveys	Primary data	Local Residents	Health Equity & Wellbeing
43	Richter et al. (2014)	There are a lot of new people in town: but they are here for soccer, not for business' a qualitative inquiry into the impact of the 2010 soccer world cup on sex work in South Africa	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Multi-Method Approach	Discussion and Survey Data	Sex Workers	Gender, Diversity & Empowerment

No.	Study (Author, Year)	Title	Country / Region	SME / Event	Study Design	Method(s)	Data Source(s)	Target Group / Fokus	Assigned Dimension
44	Rivera (2014)	Rio de Janeiro and the 2016 Olympic Games: A Critical Frame Analysis of Competing Legacies	Brazil	OG 2016	Qualitative	Critical Frame Analysis	Media, Institutional Reports, NGO Documents	International Institutions, State Actors, Grassroots Organisations	Governance, Participation & Rights
45	Robinson et al. (2017)	Rio 2016 Olympic Games and the Social Impacts of Megaevents: A Qualitative Study	Brazil	OG 2016	Qualitative	Bibliographic / Field Research (Interviews, Participant Observation)	Primary Data (Residents, Program Leaders, Community Organisers)	Sport and Leisure Managers	Multi-dimensional Perspective
46	Sànchez & Broudehoux (2013)	Mega-events and urban regeneration in Rio de Janeiro: planning in a state of emergency	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014, OG 2016	Critical Urban Studies Approach	Document Analysis, Policy Review	Government Reports, Planning Documents, Media Analysis	Local Social Groups	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
47	Sengupta (2017)	A window into India's development story – the 2010 Commonwealth Games	India	CWG 2010	Political Economy Analysis	Literature Research & Document Analysis	Secondary Data; Goverment, Media, NGO Reports Data	Urban Poor, Displaced Populations	Governance, Participation & Rights
48	Steinbrink et al. (2011)	Festivalisation and urban renewal in the Global South: socio-spatial consequences of the 2010 FIFA World Cup	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Theoretical Framing, Case Anaysis	Secondary Data (e.g. Planning Documents)	Urban Population	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
49	Swart et al. (2011)	A sport and sociocultural legacy beyond 2010: A case study of the Football Foundation of South Africa	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Interviews, Observations, Document Analysis	Primary Data, Secondary Data	Small-town Community (Non-host)	Education & Human Capital
50	Talbot (2021)	Talking about the 'rotten fruits' of Rio 2016: Framing mega-event legacies	Brazil	OG 2016	Qualitatve, Framing Analysis	Discourse Analysis of Media	News Articles, Media Coverage	General Public / Media Consumers	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
51	Tasci et al. (2019)	A longitudinal study of Olympic Games' impact on the image of a host country	Brazil	OG 2016	Qualitative	Longitudinal Survey	Primary Data	Local Residents	Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
52	Tomlinson (2014)	Olympic legacies: recurrent rhetoric and harsh realities	Global	OG (Multiple Editions)	Conceptual / Critical Review	Literature Review, Discourse Analysis	Secondary Data (Legacy Reports)	Policymakers, Olympic Hosts, General Public	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
53	Van Blerk (2019)	'Let's Win this Game Together': Children's Rights Violations, Macro-Securitisation and the Transformative Potential of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Qualitative, Rights-based Analysis	Creative Participatory Approach	Interviews, Reports, NGO Documents	Favela-based Children	Governance, Participation & Rights
54	Vico et al. (2019)	Sports mega-events in the perception of the local community: the case of Itaquera region in São Paulo at the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil	Brazil	FIFA-WC 2014	Mixed-Methods	Literature Review, Interviews, Questionnaires	Primary Data (Focus Groups), Secodary Data (Literature)	Local Community	Health Equity & Wellbeing
55	Witt & Loots (2010)	Flying the mythical flag of a green and inclusive 2010 FIFA World Cup in KwaZulu-Natal	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Micro-case Analysis	Field Engagement, Project Documets	Rural Women, Environmental and Gender Initiatives	Gender, Diversity & Empowerment
56	Wood (2019)	Advancing development projects through mega-events: the 2010 football World Cup and bus rapid transit in South Africa	South Africa	FIFA-WC 2010	Qualitative Case Study	Interviews, Policy Analysis	Primary Data (Interviews with Local Residents), Secondary Data (Government Documents)	Urban Population	Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice

4.2.1.1 Quantitative Data

These quantitative data serve to provide a structured description of the research field being studied and also form an important part of the basis for answering the research question:

A total of 56 scientific publications were identified and included in the analysis as part of this scoping review. This results in a publication period of 20 years, from 2004 to 2024.

In terms of geographical distribution, the focus is clearly on Brazil (n = 23) and South Africa (n = 20). Both countries were examined in isolation in the analysed literature and are characterised by a high thematic density in the context of SMEs. Other individual countries that were explicitly focused on are India (n = 2). In addition, various studies that chose a regional or global approach (n = 11) were included. These studies covered several countries at the same time and, in addition to the countries already mentioned, also included nations such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Malaysia in some cases. This results in a total observation period covering various SMEs held between 1996 and 2016.

With regard to the event formats analysed, the results show a clear dominance of the FIFA World Cup (FIFA WC) (n = 33) as the subject of investigation, followed by the Olympic Games (OG) (n = 12). Other events that were the subject of individual studies include the Commonwealth Games (CWG) (n = 5), the Cricket World Cup (CWC) (n = 1) and the Pan American Games (PanAm Games) (n = 1). In addition, four studies combined several SMEs or different country contexts.

A systematic evaluation of the study types and methodological designs was deliberately not carried out in this work. Given the specific research question – with a focus on thematic mechanisms and impact patterns – such a categorisation would only have offered indirect insights. Nevertheless, the corresponding Table 3 (see p. 25-39) provides a rough guide and offers points of reference for methodologically sound in-depth studies in future research.

Table 4: Focus Assignment

Dimension	Number of Studies/Papers
Health Equity & Wellbeing	7
Education & Human Capital	4
Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice	14
Governance, Participation & Rights	9
Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution	4
Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation	11
Gender, Diversity & Empowerment	2
Multidimensional Perspective	5

For the structured presentation of the literature, each study was assigned a primary thematic focus ("*assigned dimension*") in Table 4. This assignment is based on a heuristic assessment of the content focus, such as health, education or governance, and thus serves as a rough thematic overview of the research field. It is not an exclusive or analytically exact categorisation. The classification is independent of the differentiated mechanism classification in Appendix A (Table 6), in which individual mechanisms of action can be assigned to several dimensions depending on the context. For example, a study focusing on "health equity" may also include mechanisms that can be assigned to the dimensions "Urban Transformation" or "Governance, Participation & Rights". The assignment in Table 3 therefore serves primarily as a guide and overview structure, but should not be understood as a detailed typology of impacts.

A total of 104 mechanisms of action were identified and assigned to seven analytical dimensions (see Table 5). The majority of mechanisms were categorised under "Governance, Participation & Rights" (n = 28), followed by "Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation" (n = 17) and "Education & Human Capital" (n = 16). The fewest mechanisms were recorded in the dimension "Gender, Diversity & Empowerment" (n = 8).

In terms of the direction of impact, negative effects clearly dominate (n = 62), while 27 mechanisms were assessed as positive based on the authors' interpretations / coding scheme, 10 as neutral and 5 as ambivalent. The dimensions "Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice" and "Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution" are particularly negative (10 negative mechanisms each). In contrast, slightly positive assessments predominate in "Education & Human Capital" (9 positive vs. 4 negative) and "Health Equity & Wellbeing" (5 positive vs. 4 negative).

Table 5: Impact Directions per Dimension

Dimesion	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Ambivalent	Total Number of Mechanisms
Health Equity & Wellbeing	5	2	4	0	11
Education & Human Capital	9	2	4	1	16
Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice	0	0	10	1	11
Governance, Participation & Rights	4	3	21	0	28
Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution	2	0	10	1	13
Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation	5	3	7	2	17
Gender, Diversity & Empowerment	2	0	6	0	8
Total	27	10	62	5	104

4.3 Synthesis

The results of the scoping review have been summarised in this section according to dimension. The aim of the narrative synthesis was to identify recurring patterns, thematic clusters and conceptual gaps within the field of research. The description follows a structure based on the seven dimensions of social impacts of SMEs in order to enable comparability and contextualisation and to supplement the main work of tabular categorisation (see Appendix A).

4.3.1 Health Equity and Wellbeing

In the dimension of Health Equity & Wellbeing, 11 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to three thematic clusters: (1) *Access and Structural barriers*, (2) *Psychosocial and Emotional Impact*, and (3) *Sustainability*.

The *Access & Structural Barriers* cluster describes mechanisms that restrict access to health-promoting resources. Studies have documented an unequal distribution of sports-related facilities, with newly developed infrastructure disproportionately benefiting privileged population groups (Annear et al., 2019; Liang et al., 2024). Both spatial barriers (e.g., long distances to facilities) and economic hurdles (e.g., fee-based services) exist. Death (2011) refers to projects initiated in connection with the 2010 FIFA World Cup that were intended to create leisure and health opportunities. However, such measures often exacerbate existing inequalities, as their impact tends to remain confined to urban centres, while poorer and more rural regions gain little benefit.

Within the *Psychosocial & Emotional Impact* cluster, a total of five mechanisms were identified that relate to the concept of well-being (cf. WHO, 2023) and frequently focus on processes affecting, or shaped by, subjective perceptions and value orientations. Gibson et al. (2014) and Musikavanhu et al. (2021), for example, documented increased national pride, communal optimism, and feelings of inclusion among Black South Africans during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Such affective responses, often conceptualised as "psychic income", were described as being generated through SME-related mechanisms.

Furthermore, a comparatively large number of studies (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Musikavanhu et al., 2021; Gibson et al., 2014) reported on concepts such as the *Feel-Good Factor* or other SME-induced emotions, which refer to a positive atmosphere prevailing during the event. It was generally noted, however, that this collective mood – comprising emotions such as joy and pride – rarely persisted beyond the event itself. In contrast, Ribeiro et al. (2022) and Graeff et al. (2020) documented that marginalised groups at times experienced feelings of exclusion and insecurity, for example as a result of restrictive security measures. Findings on the use of sports programmes as a tool for crisis prevention, for example in cases of substance abuse or teenage pregnancy, are viewed positively, albeit less researched (Swart et al., 2011; Burnett et al., 2010). Kaplanidou et al. (2013), in a longitudinal analysis, demonstrated that the psychological and symbolic dimensions of SMEs were evaluated positively by local populations across different host locations during the event. However, expectations of sustained economic growth and long-term improvements in well-being were frequently unmet in the post-event phase. Of particular

relevance in this context was the strategically employed concept of Quality of Life (QoL)[2], which served as a reference framework in the study. The findings indicated that perceptions of the relevance of specific life domains varied according to the temporal phase: during the event, socially oriented mechanisms were assigned greater importance, whereas economic aspects tended to gain prominence in the post-event period.

The *Sustainability* cluster is largely shaped by subjective perceptions and should be understood in terms of the duration and scope of SME mechanisms. Several studies report that marginalised groups express feelings of neglect after SMEs because promised social and health improvements often fail to materialise (Talbot, 2021; Vico et al., 2019). While short-term increases in physical activity have been documented, these rarely result in long-lasting health-promoting structures (Annear et al., 2019; Gibson et al., 2014). Furthermore, the positive collective mood experienced during SMEs is rarely utilised in a sustainable manner, resulting in the failure to capitalise on the potential for emotional mobilisation (Gibson et al., 2014; Tasci et al., 2019; Musikavanhu et al., 2021; Cornelissen et al., 2011).

Summarised:

- **Ambivalent Profile:** Mechanisms show a balanced ratio with four negative and four positive effects.
- **Urban-rural Discrepancy:** Unequal benefits and access to health-promoting infrastructure and services.
- **Short-term Nature of "Psychic Income":** Positive psychosocial effects are usually temporary.
- **Ambivalence of Emotions:** Coexistence of joy, pride and belonging on the one hand, and threat and exclusion on the other.
- **Subject-oriented Measurement Focus:** Dimensional effects are predominantly measured using subjective assessments rather than objective indicators.

4.3.2 Education and Human Capital

In the dimension of Education and Human Capital, 16 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to four thematic clusters: (1) *Structural Challenges & Criticisms,* (2) *Partnerships & Strategic Approaches,* (3) *Curriculum & Institutional Education,* and (4) *Social Outcomes & Youth Empowerment.*

The *Structural Challenges and Criticisms* cluster presents a mixed picture with regard to the direction of the mechanisms of action. In the literature, the negative mechanisms occur

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[2] Quality of Life (QoL) refers to individuals' perceived well-being across multiple life domains, including economic, social, environmental and psychological aspects. In the context of mega-events, QoL reflects how people evaluate changes in their living conditions, social cohesion, and future prospects as influenced by the event (Kaplanidou et al., 2013).

primarily in the context of neglect or non-prioritisation of the education sector (De Al-meida, 2017, Bek et al., 2019; Cornellissen, 2011). According to Cornellissen (2011), South Africa has invested disproportionately more financial resources in tourism or other sectors that appear to be economically profitable. Bek et al. (2019) also argue along these lines, pointing out that investments in education are distributed unevenly. This means that rural people, who are already under-resourced, will continue to be structurally disadvantaged. Furthermore, the indirect SME effects are also described as unsustainable in the education dimension. At the same time, however, there is also a consensus that SMEs should definitely trigger positive mechanisms. For example, during the period of the event, there is an increase in foreign donations and investments that specifically aim to promote education. This phenomenon also confers benefits on structures that were established prior to the occurrence of the event, including the Football Foundation of South Africa (FFSA), the value of which, as posited by Swart, is primarily situated in its peripheral impact area (Bek et al., 2019; Swart et al. 2011).

This leads to the next cluster, *Partnerships & Strategic Approaches*, where the literature emphasises the importance of networks and strategic partnerships. Once again, Bek et al. (2019) underscore the significance of these strategic approaches, using the FFSA case study as an example. The success of Football FFSA clearly shows that community-based educational initiatives in the SME environment can have a high potential impact. A key point of criticism is that such successes have so far rarely been systematically incorporated into the legacy planning of international sports organisations.

The *Curriculum & Institutional Education* cluster encompasses mechanisms that bring about changes in school structures. Similar to the preceding clusters, SMEs are portrayed in the literature as potential catalysts for educational reform by concentrating attention, resources, and expertise (Burnett et al., 2020). Improvements to school infrastructure (modernisation or construction of new facilities), curricular content (sports education elements and health-related topics), and teacher training and continuing professional development are identified as the core positive outcomes indirectly stimulated by SMEs (Bek et al., 2011; Burnett, 2017). However, Burnett (2017) cautions that education programmes associated with SMEs can pose a risk to the integrity of local cultural expressions by promoting values and ideologies that may conflict with local traditions.

The final cluster within this dimension, *Social Outcomes & Youth Empowerment*, refers to the positive effects of various SME-related processes that facilitate the social integration of children and young people and provide opportunities for them to acquire a wide range of skills. These extracurricular initiatives are considered particularly promising in marginalised communities (Burnett, 2017; Swart et al., 2011). Nonetheless, such impacts are often limited in duration, resulting in only temporary or fleeting forms of inclusion and influence (van Blerk et al., 2019).

Summarised:

- **Positive Profile:** The majority of the mechanisms identified are considered to have a positive effect; only four mechanisms were coded as purely negative.
- **Selective Impact Patterns:** Positive effects occur primarily in certain groups or regions; marginalised population groups benefit only to a limited extent.
- **Potential as a Catalyst:** Educational projects and initiatives related to SMEs show great potential for social inclusion, especially in marginalised communities.
- **Limited Data Availability:** There are few studies on the respective mechanisms, often individual findings that rarely involved long-term investigations.
- **Regional Focus:** The majority of the findings originate from the South African context.

4.3.3 Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice

In the dimension of *Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice,* 11 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to three thematic clusters: (1) *Social Displacement and Inequality*, (2) *Event-driven Urban Development* and (3) *Environmental Concerns and Misrepresentation.*

The cluster of *Social Displacement and Inequality* appears to be a central theme in the literature analysed. Well over 20 scientific publications could be attributed to the mechanisms of forced resettlement and gentrification (cf. Gaffney, 2010; Talbot, 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2021; etc.). Both mechanisms are assessed as threats to existing living conditions due to SME-induced infrastructure projects and investments. Many papers see marginalised neighbourhoods as being particularly affected (Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013). These processes have also been documented on multiple occasions as violations of international standards, which often do not provide for adequate compensation or opportunities for participation for those affected (Baroghi et al., 2024; Maharaj, 2015). Brazil provides a striking example: in the run-up to the Olympic Games, many informal, socio-economically disadvantaged settlements were cleared. The reason for this was that a nationwide housing programme in the urban peripheries was interlinked with construction projects within the SME zone. Low-income people or slum dwellers were given the choice of moving to the programme's housing complexes, some of which were located several kilometres outside the cities, or accepting a small compensation payment, which in fact meant moving to another informal urban settlement (Leal de Oliveira et al., 2020).

Furthermore, mechanisms such as mobility restriction or unequal infrastructure access (Graeff et al., 2020; Haferburg, 2011) were frequently documented in this cluster. The literature suggests that displaced persons or residents in peripheral areas in particular hardly benefit from the expansion of urban infrastructure, such as a new metro line built especially for the World Cup (Talbot, 2021).

Another thematic focus appears to be emerging in the context of *Event-driven Urban Development*. Under the concepts of festivalisation (Steinbrink et al., 2011) and urban restructuring bias (Witt & Loots, 2010), numerous studies note that, in the exceptional circumstances of an upcoming SME, developments are legitimised that primarily aim at global visibility and tourist attractiveness – without delivering sustainable benefits for disadvantaged groups (Haferburg &

Steinbrink, 2017). As Steinbrink et al. (2011) emphasise, festivalisation refers to the instrumentalisation of SMEs, a strategy already implemented in Europe and the United States to advance urban development. In the South African context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the application of this strategy is considered unsuccessful with regard to reducing social inequalities. Rather than contributing to the overcoming of post-apartheid urban divides, it instead exacerbated fragmentation, displacement, and housing shortages, raising serious doubts about the benefits of the event for the wider population. Beyond this purely negative connotation, the associated expansion of infrastructure is also described as ambivalent: although perceived as modernisation and potentially offering local advantages, it regularly coincides with the aforementioned exclusionary mechanisms (Butler & Aicher, 2015).

The third cluster, *Environmental Concerns and Misrepresentation*, primarily relates to environmental aspects and their portrayal. The reviewed literature points to a widespread performative character in the context of environmental and sustainability rhetoric – for example, in the form of greenwashing or short-term cosmetic enhancements without lasting ecological impact (Boykoff & Zimbalist, 2017; Death, 2011; Witt & Loots, 2010). Death (2011) further criticises that such practices can even exacerbate ecological externalities and social exclusion.

Summarised:

- **Strong Negative Profile:** 10 out of 11 mechanisms display unequal, exclusionary, or conflict-laden effects.
- **Low Diversity of Mechanisms:** Relatively limited variety within the dimension, with 11 identified mechanisms.
- **Ambivalence of Modern Infrastructure Projects:** While new urban developments may appear modernising, they frequently exacerbate living conditions for marginalised groups.
- **Time Pressure as Legitimation:** Political and legal exemptions are invoked to justify restrictive measures and forced relocations.
- **Performative Sustainability Rhetoric:** Environmental and sustainability discourses are largely symbolic, while ecological and social exclusion persist.

4.3.4   Governance, Participation & Rights

In the dimension of *Governance, Participation & Rights,* 28 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to six thematic clusters: (1) *Governance, Power and Political Control*, (2) *Global Narratives and Ideology*, (3) *Protest, Civil Society and Resistance*, (4) *Social Exclusion and Disempowerment*, (5) *Urban Development*, *Legacy and Sustainability* and (6) *Human Rights and Governance Failiures*.

Within the *Governance, Power and Political Control* cluster, the literature reveals a marked research focus on the political dynamics surrounding social inequalities in the context of SMEs in LMICs. Studies highlight that political structures at non-elite levels are either absent or lack sufficient authority to counteract prevailing inequalities within the affected countries and regions (Baroghi et al., 2024; Cornelissen, 2012; Curi et al., 2011).

A further extensively documented mechanism in this cluster concerns special urban security measures implemented during SMEs (Curi et al., 2011; Gaffney, 2010; Graeff et al., 2020). These include heightened police and military presence, which is frequently associated with discriminatory practices. Young people were often labelled as security threats: during the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, for example, large-scale police and military deployments in marginalised districts such as the Favela Maré resulted in targeted human rights violations against youth. Reports documented house raids involving property damage, physical and verbal abuse, and the fatal shooting of a 14-year-old boy. In Recife, Black and low-income youths near stadium areas were particularly exposed to police violence. Such incidents illustrate how security policies linked to mega-sport events can exacerbate pre-existing social inequalities along class and racial lines (van Blerk, 2010).

Time pressure resulting from fixed event deadlines was regularly cited as a rationale for bypassing participatory processes at lower political levels. This urgency was also described as being deliberately exploited to advance transformative initiatives that, under ordinary circumstances, would likely have encountered stronger resistance (Harris, 2011).

Finally, the literature points to a privatisation of governance, characterised by arbitrariness in planning decisions and the prioritisation of individual or elite interests over equity-based interventions. This often led to a redirection of *pro-poor* development agendas, thereby diluting the originally intended redistributive character of planned measures (Wood, 2019). For example, in the case of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, route alignments and investment decisions in transit systems were adjusted to be tailored primarily to meet the short-term mobility needs of FIFA and international visitors, undermining earlier plans aimed at serving broader, disadvantaged populations (Wood, 2019).

The *Global Narratives and Ideology* cluster summarises mechanisms that reveal themselves in the context of globalisation efforts. The focus is on the reception of a follow-up narrative in which LMICs orient themselves towards socio-economically better-off nations, with SMEs often being presented as part of the solution (cf. Black & Peacock, 2011). The literature particularly emphasises the potentially profitable networks between non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and local communities, which can open up multilateral perspectives on development issues, including in the social sphere. At the same time, problematic aspects of such cooperation are identified, for example when external actors dominate and local voices remain underrepresented (Burnett, 2010). For example, SfD and Sport for Aid projects implemented in Brazil and several African countries are often criticised as reproducing neocolonial, linear development logics that reinforce existing dependencies rather than promoting sustainable transformations. In this context, the Eurocentric IOC agenda is also criticised for its lack of context sensitivity: its central concern of promoting social transformation through Olympism is of little relevance in the African context, as national priorities are often focused on economic growth, conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence (Burnett, 2017).

Within the framework of the cluster *Protest, Civil Society and Resistance*, connections between SMEs and resistance from the host population are paraphrased from the literature. The example of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil can be used to illustrate this. The 7-1 defeat against Germany

led to massive national disappointment and short-term riots, including flag burning, looting and isolated acts of violence. Although these riots quickly subsided, they acted as a catalyst for broader social protest (Penfold, 2019). According to Penfold, this example illustrates that sport loses its function as an identity-forming factor of integration when sporting success fails to materialise and a lack of substantial legacy planning makes existing social injustices impossible to ignore. Instead of covering up social inequalities, the event brought them to the fore and reinforced the perception of misplaced government priorities. As a result, a new form of collective articulation emerged: the World Cup served as a platform for grassroots protests that addressed the discrepancy between symbolic prestige and social reality, and whose momentum carried over into the 2016 Olympic Games.

In addition to such cases, several studies document that SMEs also open up spaces for collective mobilisation that can transcend national borders. The state of emergency and international attention create opportunities to strengthen protests, for example by increasing the visibility of abuses and providing access to supporting resources (Cornelissen, 2011, 2012). However, this declared potential for reducing inequalities is accompanied by a follow-up mechanism that is supported by much of the literature: increased security measures and police repression, especially during the event phases, severely restrict these movements (Talbot, 2021).

The *Social Exclusion and Disempowerment* cluster examines political mechanisms that are predominantly described in the literature as amplifiers of social inequality. SMEs often exacerbate spatial and social exclusion: public spaces are closed off to low-income groups, security zones are expanded, and control over urban areas is shifted in favour of wealthier actors. Affected groups are given little say, which reinforces processes of social disempowerment (Curi et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2017; Sengupta, 2017; Tomlinson, 2014).
Corruption and unfulfilled expectations further fuel mistrust of local institutions (Ribeiro et al., 2021; Ribeiro et al., 2022). The legacy discourse identifies the prevailing top-down governance as a central problem, as vulnerable groups are systematically excluded from sports and health-related initiatives (Annear et al., 2019; De Almeida, 2017).
These vulnerable groups also include street children and homeless people, whose rights are severely restricted by the criminalisation of poverty. People have often been specifically charged with 'loitering', fined and subsequently imprisoned (Ngonyama, 2010; Rivera, 2014; Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013). A drastic example of this is the 2007 FIFA Preliminary Draw in Durban (South Africa): Street children and poor adults were housed in 'free accommodation' that turned out to be overcrowded prisons where they were exposed to violence, rape and an increased risk of HIV infection (Ngonyama, 2010).

The *Urban Development, Legacy and Sustainability* cluster addresses the repeated emergence of neoliberal urban policy as a defining feature of SME-related development strategies. In this context, SMEs are often framed as catalysts for large-scale urban modernisation, with governments pursuing state-led economic strategies followed by market-oriented reforms in an attempt to stimulate growth and global competitiveness (Darnell, 2012; Sengupta, 2017; Tomlinson, 2014). However, the modernisation-as-development paradigm has frequently remained unrealised. Empirical accounts highlight that while such projects can deliver visible infrastructure

upgrades in the short term, they often leave behind substantial public debt, incomplete construction, and underutilised facilities. These outcomes disproportionately affect low-income populations, who not only bear the fiscal burden but also face displacement and reduced access to urban resources in the post-event phase (Sengupta, 2017; Talbot, 2021; Tomlinson, 2014).

The last cluster, *Human Rights and Governance Failures*, provides insight into human rights violations in the context of SMEs. John Horne (2018) in particular reports extensively on such mechanisms. Horne considers one of the most common human rights violations to be when SME projects force people to relocate. Under Mayor Eduardo Paes (2009-2016) alone, over 20,000 households were affected, representing the highest number of evictions in Rio's history. Although the IOC emphasised the importance of human rights, it shirked its responsibility to monitor compliance with them (Horne, 2018).

Summarised:

- **Negative Profile:** 21 of the 28 mechanisms indicate a reinforcement of social inequalities.
- **Systemic Deficit:** Bottom-up governance approaches remain under-researched, and empirical studies on human rights impacts are limited.
- **Dominance of Top-Down Structures:** Decision-making is often externally driven, with minimal local participation or deliberate exclusion.
- **Potential for Collective Mobilisation:** Protests reveal opportunities for civil society articulation, yet are frequently curtailed by repression.
- **Causal Logic:** Inequality dynamics do not appear to be a by-product but often a direct outcome of the structural and political governance of SMEs.

4.3.5   Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution

In the dimension *Economic Inclusion & Recourse Distribution* 13 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to three thematic clusters: (1) *Economic Inequality and Resource Misallocation*, (2) *Labor, Employment and Exploitation* and (3) *Social Exclusion and Marginalisations*.

A first recurring theme emerges from the cluster *Economic Inequality and Resource Misallocation*. Many academic contributions argue in this context that certain population groups are socio-economically disadvantaged. Particularly frequently represented among these is the selectivity with which public investments are made in the course of SMEs: The focus on immediate event zones, tourist infrastructure and symbolic construction projects inevitably goes hand in hand with a neglect of long-term social development goals (Black & Peacock, 2011; Boykoff & Zimbalist, 2017; Cornelissen, 2012). In several cases, governments have incurred the displeasure of the population due to the use of public funds for SME-related projects (e.g. Butler & Aicher, 2015; Cornelissen et al., 2011). For example, most of the World Cup stadiums in Brazil had no sustainable reuse concepts after the 2014 tournament, which reinforced the widespread accusation that the considerable expenditure – around four billion US dollars in public funds – bypassed the actual needs of the population, especially in the areas of health and education. Only the sports venues in Rio de Janeiro were incorporated into a broader utilisation concept as part of the 2016 Olympic Games (Butler & Aicher, 2015). This misallocation of

public funds further exacerbated the potential for social conflict, as it was accompanied by inflation triggered by the event. For example, mass protests broke out in the run-up to the World Cup after fare increases were announced – a trigger that initiated broader debates about corruption, inadequate public services and the legitimacy of government investment decisions (Butler & Aicher, 2015).

The second cluster, *Labour, Employment and Exploitation*, reveals a tension between the proclaimed economic goals and promises within the framework of SMEs and the temporary and socially very limited effect in reality. Cornelissen (2011) notes that there was a brief economic boost and an increase in the number of jobs, but that these did not leave a lasting legacy, as Graeff & Giulianotti (2024) also note. This means that this boost, especially in the construction industry, quickly levelled off after the event. Patriotic rhetoric, among other things, motivated many people to help with the implementation of projects and work that were pending for the SME. A particularly striking example of the dynamics of exploitation in the context of such events is the massive use of unpaid labour during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa: Under the guise of patriotic volunteer work, thousands of people were recruited who received no remuneration whatsoever and were instead fobbed off with symbolic 'rewards' such as T-shirts or certificates. In a country with unofficial unemployment rates of up to 40%, this was ultimately seen less as voluntary commitment than as an expression of structural vulnerability and social exploitation (Ngonyama, 2010).

The last cluster, *Social Exclusion and Marginalisation*, primarily refers to the dynamics of exclusion of small local businesses and street vendors in the course of SME alignment. In this context, Ivester (2015) refers to specific requirements that host countries must meet in order to be allowed to host the FIFA World Cup, for example. These include the establishment of so-called exclusion zones within a two-kilometre radius of each World Cup stadium. Within these zones, only FIFA and its official sponsors have the right to sell products, advertise or offer services. These regulations are problematic in that they systematically exclude local traders and business owners, who traditionally earn their living in the vicinity of sporting events, from the economic benefits of the event.

Summarised:

- **Negative Profile** 10 of 13 mechanisms are understood to reinforce social inequality.
- **Temporality:** Economic boosts and increases in employment are generally limited to the period before and during the SME.
- **Public Funds Tension:** Opaque and selective expenditure of public funds creates friction between the population and the government.
- **Exploitation Allegations:** Patriotic rhetoric and volunteerism contrast sharply with the limited socio-economic gains for the human resources employed, particularly from lower-income groups.
- **Threat to Small Traders:** Exclusive SME regulations threaten the economic sphere – and thus the livelihoods – of poorer populations, especially those dependent on informal trade.

4.3.6 Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation

In the dimension *Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation* 17 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to four thematic clusters: (1) *Symbolic Politics and Image Management*, (2) *Community Cohesion and Identity*, (3) *Exclusion and Social Division*, and (4) *Media and Discourse Power*.

Numerous studies in the *Symbolic Politics and Image Management* cluster examine how host nations strategically employ SMEs to construct a favourable international image. Within the literature, this is widely framed under the concept of *nation rebranding*, which refers to the use of such events as platforms to position the country as progressive and investment-ready (cf. Knott, 2015). This is often achieved through visual and symbolic staging that merges narratives of modern urban development with elements of cultural continuity (Black & Peacock, 2011; Curi et al., 2011). For example, during the 2007 Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, selected urban districts were upgraded and prominently showcased, creating a visible contrast between affluent and low-income neighbourhoods (Curi et al., 2011). Such symbolic interventions frequently generate heightened public attention and a temporary sense of optimism among local populations (Black & Peacock, 2011). However, several authors note that these effects tend to be confined to the event period and seldom yield structural benefits for marginalised groups (Darnell, 2012).

Performative inclusion is also evident in the selective incorporation of rural populations and traditional cultural elements into global visibility campaigns. These practices, while projecting an image of diversity and heritage, often serve primarily as external showcases rather than vehicles for substantive empowerment (Knott, 2015; Annear et al., 2019). A prominent example is the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, which marked a turning point in SME symbolic politics. As the first Asian and only the second developing country to host the Games, Malaysia invested nearly USD 600 million, despite limited sports tradition, under the direction of Prime Minister Mahathir. The event was embedded in a broader development and foreign policy strategy aimed at presenting Malaysia as a modern, Muslim, multicultural nation and positioning it as a contender for future SMEs such as the Olympic Games (Black & Peacock, 2011). While these representational efforts may have strengthened national identity narratives, they also entailed the stigmatisation and concealment of pressing socio-economic issues, such as crime and precarious living conditions, ultimately reinforcing social inequality in the post-event phase (Dowse & Fletcher, 2018).

The *Community Cohesion and Identity* cluster encompasses processes through which SME symbolism can influence social interactions and identity formation within local populations. SMEs may foster encounters between diverse communities and international visitors, encouraging mutual understanding, reducing xenophobia, and creating a temporary sense of collective identity (Graeff & Giulianotti, 2011). Such dynamics can enhance cohesion across socio-economic divides during the event period and can contribute to a sense of inclusion and political recognition (Kaplanidou et al., 2013). In some cases, these interactions are reported to foster improved intercultural understanding (Butler & Aicher, 2015).

In contrast to the previous cluster, the literature in this *Exclusion and Social Division* cluster documents predominantly negative dynamics, with SMEs often linked to the production of social inequality through measures taken in anticipation of large international audiences. Studies report that marginalised groups have been stigmatised or removed from areas of high visibility within event zones. In Rio de Janeiro, for instance, intensified surveillance and spatial regulations ahead of the 2016 Olympic Games displaced low-income communities and restricted public access to certain urban spaces (Graeff et al., 2020). Comparable practices have been observed in other LMICs, where exclusion operates not only physically but also symbolically, rendering certain groups underrepresented or invisible in official narratives.

A particularly striking case of "urban sanitisation" is the N2 Gateway Project in Cape Town prior to the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Informal settlements along the main highway from the airport to the city were demolished to enhance the city's image for international visitors, with thousands of residents relocated to the remote "Blikkiesdorp" Temporary Relocation Area. The relocation severed access to employment and social networks, making return to the original sites virtually impossible (Haferburg & Steinbrink, 2011).

The role of the media in the *Media and Discourse Power* cluster shaping SME narratives is described as ambivalent. On the one hand, media coverage can challenge stereotypes and promote more nuanced representations; on the other, it risks reinforcing dominant hegemonic discourses and entrenching existing power relations (Horne, 2018). For example, Western media coverage of the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi was partly shaped by racialised and culturally stereotypical portrayals, with the event being labelled the "Shame Games". Such narratives, as multiple authors argue, not only influence international perceptions of the host nation but also reverberate within local identity and recognition discourses (Mishra, 2012; Dimeo & Kay, 2004).

Summarised:

- **Ambivalent Profile:** Within 17 mechanisms identified, 5 positive, 7 negative.
- **Pride vs. Stigma:** Tension between poverty stigmatisation and national/global identity.
- **Costly Modernisation Narrative:** High public spending on symbolic projects to boost global standing, often creating economic strain.
- **Media's Dual Role:** Downplays socio-economic issues and reinforces stereotypes, but can also reduce prejudice and improve international image.

4.3.7   Gender, Diversity & Empowerment

In the dimension *Gender, Diversity & Empowerment* 8 mechanisms were identified that could be assigned to four thematic clusters: (1) *Gender and Social Inequalities in Sport*, (2) *Structural Barriers to Inclusion*, (3) *Justificatory and Symbolic Narratives* and (4) *Empowerment*

The comparatively small number of mechanisms and the weak empirical basis point to a clear research deficit. Although gender and diversity aspects are frequently emphasised in the rhetoric surrounding SMEs, the evidence base remains limited in the context of highly unequal LMICs.

In the *Gender and Social Inequalities* cluster, the literature focuses in particular on the one-sided prioritisation of traditionally male-connoted sports in the context of SMEs (Burnett, 2010; Ivester, 2015; Witt & Loots, 2010). This focus often contributes to the marginalisation of women and gender-diverse individuals and their specific needs, and can further reinforce existing social inequalities. Football is particularly often cited as an example: analysis of the 2010 FIFA World Cup shows that the participation of women and girls was primarily limited to organisational functions, spectator roles or symbolic appearances – such as accompanying children when the teams entered the field (Witt & Loots, 2010).

The *Structural Barriers to Inclusion* cluster highlights the unequal distribution of resources between elite and grassroots sport. While financial and infrastructural investments are often concentrated on performance-oriented sports, participatory offerings and inclusive structures remain largely underrepresented. As a result, sport loses its potential role as an instrument for promoting diversity and equality (Cornelissen et al., 2011). On the other hand, the literature points to opposite effects, such as transgression through sport, where participation in sporting activities within the framework of SMEs can symbolically or practically challenge and transcend existing gender norms (Witt & Loots, 2010).

The *Justificatory and Symbolic Narratives* cluster also addresses the strategic instrumentalisation of inclusive rhetoric by state actors. Moral arguments – such as ensuring child safety – are often used specifically to legitimise expanded police powers and control measures in the context of SMEs (van Blerk et al., 2019).

The final cluster, *Empowerment*, repeats a dynamic that has already been hinted at in other dimensions. SME projects are seen as an opportunity to improve various skills within included communities (Musikavanhu et al., 2011).

Summarised:

- **Negative Profile:** Six of the eight mechanisms are understood to reinforce social inequality.
- **Limited Evidence Base:** Only two academic studies focus primarily on this dimension.
- **Gender Inequality:** SMEs and sport remain, overall, male- and elite-dominated.
- **Sport as an Instrument:** Depending on intent, sport can create either inclusive or exclusive settings with regard to gender and diversity.
- **Community Empowerment:** Host communities report feeling recognised and identify various opportunities when meaningfully integrated into SME processes and projects.

4.3.8 Cross-Dimensional Overview

The findings of the scoping review reveal a series of cross-cutting patterns, structural overlaps, and conceptual gaps across the seven analysed impact dimensions. While each dimension offers specific perspectives, recurring mechanisms and themes point to the systemic and interdependent nature of the social effects of SMEs in contexts of high inequality.

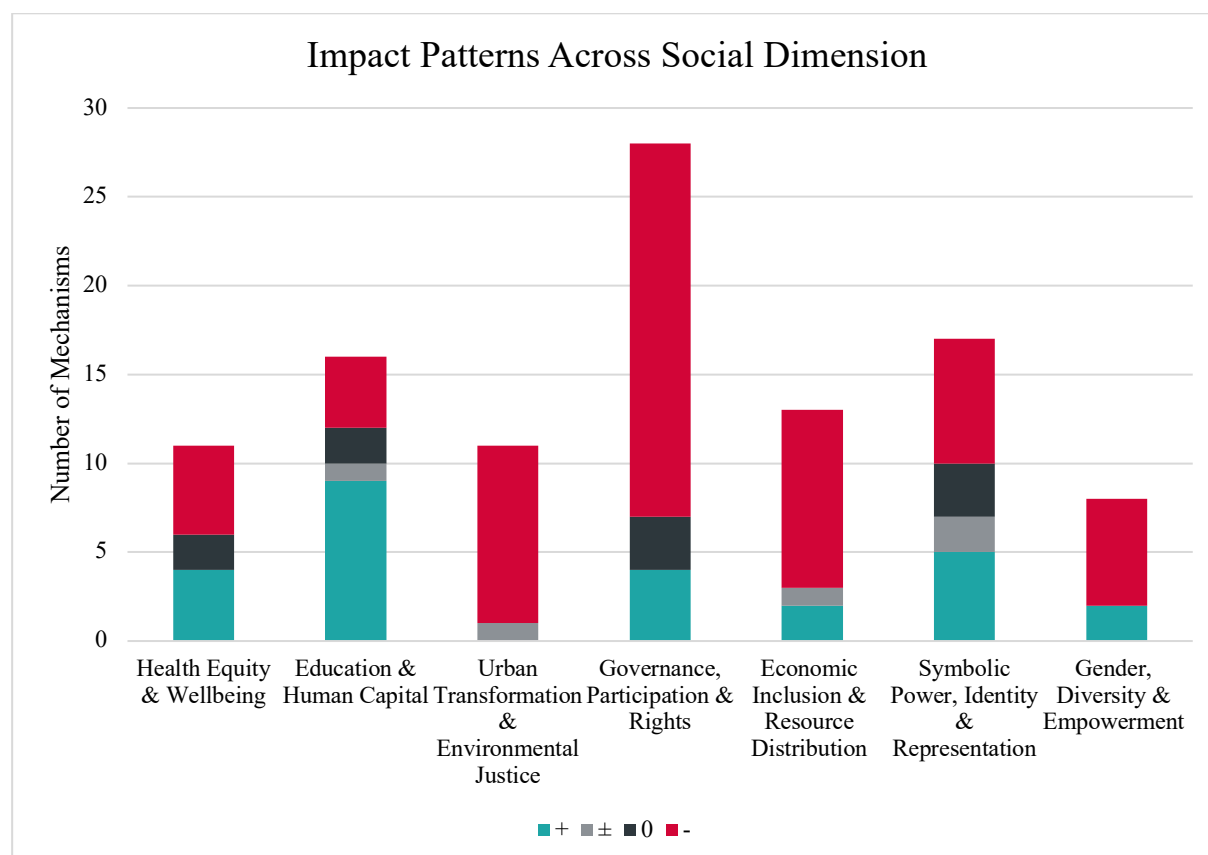Figure 8: Impact Patterns Across Social Dimensions

Figure 8 supplements the preceding quantitative analysis with a graphical representation of the directions of impact across all seven analytical dimensions. In addition to the narrative synthesis, it provides an overview of the distribution and weighting of the 104 identified mechanisms and visualises their positive (+), negative (-), neutral (0) and ambivalent (±) effects. The colour coding differentiates the directions of effect and illustrates at a glance those areas in which mechanisms with predominantly negative effects dominate. The bar chart thus serves as a visual summary of the numerical results and supports their classification in the further discussion.

Content Patterns

The impact profile proves to be ambivalent and highly context-dependent. Numerous mechanisms – such as resettlements, infrastructural interventions or governance measures – occur in different contexts but lead to widely varying results. This context dependency is a central, overarching characteristic of the SME impact logic.

A frequently used, cross-dimensional narrative is that of the catalytic function of SMEs. This encompasses both positive and negative effects (e.g. economic upswing and gentrification), but is often used in the literature without reflection and with insufficient empirical support.

Three recurring patterns can be identified:

1. **Selective Effects:** Selective effects: Benefits often accrue to urban elites, political decision-makers and international actors. Marginalised groups are often only mentioned symbolically or strategically involved, but their actual integration remains limited.
2. **Ambivalent Narratives:** Ambivalent narratives: Discourses on "development", "inclusion" or "sustainability" reveal recurring discrepancies between communicated rhetoric and legacy plans on the one hand and reported results on the other.
3. **Asymmetrical Sustainability of Impact:** Positive, mostly intangible effects such as empowerment or social cohesion are predominantly described as short-term, while tangible effects such as resettlement, gentrification or expanded security structures are presented as long-term in several studies.

Quantitative Patterns

A comparison of research priorities highlights differences both between and within the dimensions. The highest publication density is found in the dimensions of *Governance*, *Urban Transformation*, and *Symbolic Representation*, which are regarded as central research areas in the LMIC context and display numerous interdependencies with other dimensions.

In contrast, there are clear research gaps in the areas of *Health*, *Education*, and *Gender* and *Diversity*. Within the *Health* dimension, the literature focuses predominantly on psychosocial effects; studies addressing physical health indicators or health policy legacy processes are largely absent. Differences also emerge with regard to the direction of impact: while the areas of *Health* and *Education* tend to emphasise positively connoted effects, other dimensions are dominated by negative effects, which suggest a reproduction of social inequalities.

Another significant finding is the lack of longitudinal studies: in almost all dimensions, systematic analyses of the sustainability of social impacts are missing. The available evidence is largely based on short-term observations in the immediate context of the events, which makes a robust assessment of long-term transformation processes considerably more difficult.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This scoping review examined a total of 56 academic contributions addressing the social impacts of SMEs LMICs with high inequality indices. The analysis identified 104 mechanisms, which were categorised dimensionally using a specifically developed classification system. On this basis, cross-cutting patterns and key research gaps relating to the effects of SMEs on social inequalities were identified.

The findings reveal a heterogeneous impact profile with a clear predominance of negative mechanisms. While SMEs occasionally present opportunities for international visibility, investment, and social participation, processes that reinforce existing social inequalities, or even generate new disparities, dominate.

Three central patterns can be identified: the selective distribution of benefits, narrative tensions, and asymmetrical impact levels, particularly with regard to the duration and sustainability of post-event effects.

Furthermore, the distribution of impact profiles suggests that certain dimensions, such as *Education* and *Health*, tend to generate more positive effects, whereas others – notably *Urban Transformation* and *Governance* – are predominantly shaped by negative mechanisms.

Finally, the analysis highlights a marked underrepresentation of the Health and Gender dimensions, which indicates significant research gaps and untapped transformative potential. The limited number of longitudinal studies further exposes a methodological deficit in the field, hindering robust assessments of sustainable social transformations.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings

The results of this scoping review are largely consistent with the current state of research on the impacts of SMEs, while also highlighting specific mechanisms and research gaps that, in the context of highly unequal LMICs, have so far received insufficient attention. The interpretation follows the chronology presented above: first, thematic patterns and key mechanisms are discussed, followed by an examination of quantitative and distributional aspects, such as trends, concentrations, and research gaps, both within and across the analysed dimensions.

5.2.1 Selective Impact

The analysis of the relevant studies confirms a central pattern that is consistently documented in the broader research literature: the social impacts of SMEs rarely unfold in an inclusive manner, but rather follow predominantly selective and often exclusionary logics (Chalip, 2006; Coakley & Souza, 2013; Darnell, 2012; Maharaj, 2015; Preuss, 2007).

At the micro level, urban elites, political decision-makers, and economically privileged groups tend to be the primary beneficiaries, while marginalised population segments – such as residents of informal settlements, indigenous groups, or informal workers – are frequently excluded from material and social benefits. In the literature, this selectivity is often linked to governance mechanisms primarily oriented towards economic profitability and global visibility, but rarely towards social inclusion or participatory processes. Forms of volunteerism, in this context, appear less as tools for participation and more as a form of resource exploitation, whereby many

contribute to the event but only a few derive tangible benefits. This pattern aligns with Wolfe's (2024) concept of the "double problem" of SMEs: first, their planning and implementation frequently cause social and spatial harm, deepening existing inequalities; second, research remains heavily macro-oriented, leaving micro-social dynamics – particularly the everyday exclusionary experiences of marginalised groups – underexplored. This observation resonates with post-colonial and decolonial perspectives, which critique the structural silencing of "minor voices" in the planning and evaluation of SMEs (Quijano, 2000; Mpofu, 2020).

At the macro level, benefits tend to be concentrated among state institutions, international sports federations (e.g., IOC, FIFA), and private-sector actors. Social legacy management often remains symbolic or selective, suggesting a strategic prioritisation of economically exploitable target groups (Boykoff & Zimbalist, 2017; Gaffney, 2010). Marginalisation is frequently addressed only indirectly – for example, through resettlement, rising living costs, or restrictive security measures – without clearly identifying or systematically examining the affected groups (Broudehoux, 2007; Kennelly & Watt, 2011).

As the theoretical foundations on structural inequality in LMICs illustrate (cf. Solga et al., 2009; Tomlinson, 2014), these selective impacts cannot be explained solely by the event itself. Rather, they emerge from the interplay between the social position, spatial proximity to event zones, and political participation opportunities of the affected groups. Depending on place of residence (central vs. peri-urban), timing of the impact (pre-, peri-, or post-event), and level of institutional embeddedness (organised civil society vs. informal groups), the social consequences vary considerably (Mair et al., 2021).

5.2.2 Ambivalence: Planned and Rhetorical Legacies vs. Reality

The analysis reveals a recurring tension between the legacy promises embedded in political, media, and institutional narratives, and the actual documented outcomes in highly unequal LMICs. Across almost all dimensions, discrepancies emerge: while SMEs are rhetorically positioned as catalysts for development, inclusion, and national unity, the findings show that these promises are often not fulfilled in practice. Political and economic elites disproportionately benefit, whereas disadvantaged population groups are mostly only symbolically included and excluded from material improvements.This pattern aligns with Black & Peacock's concept of a *catching-up imperative*, whereby LMICs strategically use SMEs to close perceived gaps in the global order and to signal modernity. Maurice Roche (2000, 2017) situates these dynamics within a broader cultural modernisation strategy, in which SMEs generate political legitimacy while suggesting global cultural belonging. Roche cautions, however, that such symbolic gains often occur without structural improvements for marginalised groups, shifting development promises to the discursive level while existing power and resource inequalities persist or even intensify.

The findings of the review also reflect a shift in the SfD paradigm: originally driven by social and developmental objectives, approaches have become increasingly infused with neoliberal logics, in which competitiveness, global visibility, and economic growth dominate (Spaaij, 2009; Coakley & Souza, 2013). The role of symbolic staging emphasised in the literature –

such as collective euphoria, national identification, and media-driven legacy narratives – is confirmed in the analysed studies as a discursive compensation for structural disadvantage. Roche (2017) describes this mechanism as part of a "legitimation spectacle" that simultaneously produces both consent ("celebration") and resistance ("contestation").

This ambivalence can also be explained through "social dilemma theory" (Mair et al., 2023), which demonstrates how residents navigate tensions between short-term individual benefits and long-term collective costs. In the context of SMEs, this means that residents may acknowledge positive aspects such as temporary employment opportunities, improved infrastructure, or international visibility, while simultaneously anticipating negative long-term consequences such as rising living costs, displacement, or intensified social inequalities (cf. Fredline, 2005). Such trade-offs can result in ambivalent attitudes – from initial approval and participation to growing scepticism or resistance once anticipated negative effects materialise (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006).

In postcolonially shaped LMICs with high inequality indices, SMEs are particularly often staged as national modernisation projects that promise symbolic unity and international recognition (Cornelissen, 2011; Mpofu, 2020). These "staged cities" (Maharaj, 2015) may generate temporary international attention and a sense of collective belonging, yet over the long term they often prove neither socially inclusive nor environmentally sustainable (cf. Broudehoux, 2007; Müller, 2021).

Coakley & Souza (2013) emphasise in this context that legacy and development goals can only be equitable and sustainable if they are planned, financed, organised, and strategically linked to existing social structures and the lived realities of the local population. In countries with high inequality, social impact must therefore be defined and implemented as an operational core objective; not merely as a rhetorical by-product in official narratives.

5.2.3 Asymmetrical Impact Levels

A key finding of the scoping review is the temporally limited effectiveness of many identified mechanisms and the resulting asymmetrical balance between tangible and intangible legacies. While intangible effects – such as empowerment, social cohesion, or improved access to education, often prove short-lived and lose significance soon after the event, tangible legacies such as urban infrastructure projects or economic investments generate long-term changes that frequently exacerbate existing inequalities. This pattern, short-term positive versus enduring negative, recurs consistently across many of the studies analysed in the review.

The unequal sustainability of different types of impact can be explained by the widely discussed measurement problem surrounding social effects. Tangible changes are relatively easy to capture using indicators such as construction volume, investment figures, or infrastructure metrics. In contrast, social effects are normatively charged, context-dependent, and methodologically difficult to operationalise. Chappelet (2012) highlights that intangible legacies in particular lack standardised indicators – a deficit that political decision-makers can strategically exploit to generate symbolic narratives whose actual impact is difficult to verify empirically. Similarly,

Preuss (2007) argues that long-term social effects are rarely measured reliably, making it difficult to distinguish between temporary "event effects" and sustainable transformation.

This diagnosis is also reflected in the theoretical background: drawing on concepts such as *event legacy management* (Preuss, 2019) and critical urbanism approaches (Smith, 2012), it becomes clear that tangible, materially oriented changes within neoliberal development logics often represent strategic resource allocations favouring growth-oriented actors, while social and participatory goals are structurally deprioritised.

This pattern is also evident in the evaluative structure of the analysed dimensions: in areas such as Urban Transformation, Governance, or Economic Inclusion – where measurement indicators are clearly defined – studies predominantly document structurally burdensome, long-term effects. In contrast, contributions focusing on Wellbeing or Education tend to report more positive outcomes, but these are based on less robust empirical evidence.

Conclusion: Overall, these observations suggest that SMEs in highly unequal LMICs are more likely to reproduce or even exacerbate existing social inequalities. Positive mechanisms aimed at inclusion and equal opportunities prove to be less sustainable in this context, losing their effectiveness rapidly in the post-event period. In addition, only very few neutral effects were identified, indicating that SMEs in this setting tend to generate, or are primarily framed in terms of, polarising impacts.

5.3   Research Gaps

While some reviews (e.g., Thompson et al., 2018) argue that negative legacies are underrepresented in the literature, the findings of this scoping review suggest that, in highly unequal LMICs, negative mechanisms predominate. This deviation indicates a potential bias in the academic discourse, possibly resulting from normative expectations, selective reporting, or methodological limitations. Of particular significance is the lack of contextual sensitivity in many studies, which generalise SME effects without accounting for the specific socio-economic and political conditions of unequal LMICs.

Another striking finding is the limited attention to core social domains such as Education, Health, and Gender – dimensions that hold particular societal relevance in contexts of structural disadvantage and in light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 10). The Economic dimension also exhibits low research density, which may partly be attributable to methodological constraints (see following Chapter 5.4, Strenghts and Limitations).

The results indicate that especially in positively assessed dimensions such as Education and Health, there remains untapped potential which, under favourable political, institutional, and financial conditions, could contribute to a long-term reduction of social inequalities. However, such impacts rarely emerge quickly or visibly; rather, they develop gradually and cumulatively, requiring context-specific research designs and longitudinal studies. The latter are still rare in this field. The few available studies, such as those on educational programmes (Burnett, 2017) or health-focused initiatives, nonetheless point to the transformative potential of SMEs in these areas.

In the area of Gender, the research gap is particularly significant: according to the Commission for Gender Equality, women in South Africa are disproportionately likely to live in poverty, are more severely affected by unemployment, and rarely have access to land reform. Gender-based violence is widespread – with estimates suggesting that one in two women could experience sexual violence during their lifetime (Witt & Loots, 2010). Given these structural inequalities, the marginal presence of Gender dimensions in SME research is particularly problematic, as it leaves critical questions related to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) unaddressed.

Another key research desideratum concerns the physical health effects of SMEs on local populations. While numerous studies exist on the health-promoting effects of SMEs in high-income countries (e.g., MacAuley, 2015; Annear et al., 2019), comparable research for LMICs is almost entirely absent – despite the fact that such empirical investigations may be more methodologically feasible than in other dimensions. The reasons for this absence remain unclear, but they point towards a context-related neglect of socially relevant research questions in relation to SMEs.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the thematic coverage of SME research is imbalanced. Relevant social issues – such as unequal healthcare provision, structural discrimination, or inadequate access to education – remain largely neglected (cf. Vilani, 2015). This stands in stark contrast to the realities in LMICs and to the normative objectives of the SDGs, which emphasise social inclusion, equal opportunities, and sustainable development. For an adequate assessment of the transformative potential of SMEs in the interest of social justice, context-sensitive, socially oriented research is required. Research that systematically captures long-term and difficult-to-measure impacts.

5.4   Strengths and Limitations

A central methodological strength of this study lies in the combination of a clearly defined, dimension-based analytical approach with a broad and interdisciplinary literature base. This approach made it possible to systematically organise heterogeneous study findings and to establish comparability in a theoretically demanding and, until now, largely unsystematised field of research.

The explicit focus on social inequality provides new insights but also entails limitations. Since social inequalities are often linked to normative expectations, there is a risk of an over-representation of negative mechanisms. A more neutral framing, for instance through the use of broader terms such as "social impacts", could help future studies to capture and compare a more balanced spectrum of effects.

Additional methodological limitations include:

- **Lack of standardisation in impact assessment:** The categorisation of effects as positive, negative or ambivalent is partly based on subjective assessment, as no consistent standards for operationalising the social impacts of SMEs are currently available.
- **Heterogeneity of included studies:** The scoping methodology incorporates a wide variety of study designs, theoretical perspectives and contexts. While this increases the breadth of

coverage, it makes comparability more difficult and places constraints on the synthesis of findings.

- **Single authorship and language selection:** The selection of studies was conducted by a single researcher and limited to English-language publications, which may carry a risk of selection bias.
- **Exclusion of purely economic studies:** The deliberate exclusion of literature focused primarily on economic aspects may result in an under-representation of economic effects. This choice, however, is justified by the historical dominance of economic impacts in the discourse, often framed within neoliberal paradigms such as profit maximisation and place-marketing.
- **Limited significance of quantitative counts:** The number of identified mechanisms and clusters indicates only general trends and should not be interpreted as an evidence-based statistical foundation, as the scoping approach does not provide representativeness in a strict sense.

Despite these limitations, the chosen methodological approach proved to be a theoretically grounded analytical tool that offers a structured entry point into a complex and under-researched field. The dimension-based analysis not only provides a framework for categorising social mechanisms but also establishes a sound basis for identifying further thematic priorities, addressing research gaps and enabling more effective comparative analyses.

5.5 Recommendations

5.5.1 Research

Conceptual and methodological development: The legacy concept, often used normatively in the literature, should be given stronger theoretical grounding and greater methodological differentiation. A useful step would be to establish an impact model that distinguishes between tangible and intangible, as well as direct and indirect, effects, linking these axes with socio-economic indicators (e.g., levels of inequality) to identify and strengthen particularly vulnerable groups.

Capturing micro-level and intangible effects: Future research should focus more on mechanisms at the micro level, such as participation opportunities, psychosocial effects, and individual wellbeing. Intangible legacies, such as trust in institutions or empowerment, remain underexplored empirically, yet they play a central role in sustainable social development.

Strengthening context-specific approaches: Generalised assessments of SMEs should be replaced by differentiated analyses that explicitly take into account regional inequality levels, political systems, and societal structures. Participatory designs that incorporate local expertise and interdisciplinary perspectives are essential, particularly in the LMIC context.

Expanding international comparability: The increasing shift of SMEs to the LMICs calls for a broadening of international research perspectives. Comparative studies that systematically include diverse national contexts can contribute to a more balanced and globally relevant understanding of impacts.

In this regard, Mair et al. (2021) represent a key study addressing this research gap, making an important conceptual contribution (see Figure 9). Their work responds to many of the issues identified here by integrating both temporal and social perspectives. The inclusion of a temporal dimension highlights the importance of assessing mechanisms at different stages, as their scope and direction of impact may shift over time.

Figure 9: Legacy Monitoring Concept acc. to Mair et al. (2021)
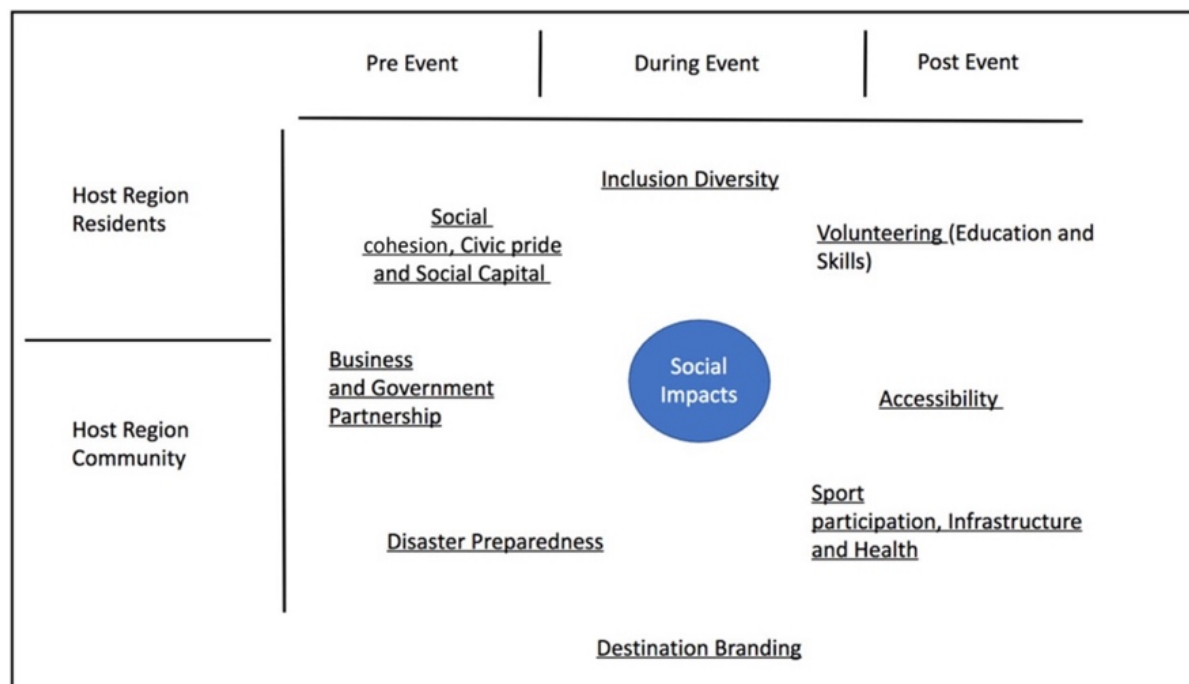
5.5.2 Policy and Practice

The findings of this study make it clear that social sustainability in the context of SMEs should not be treated as a symbolic by-product but must be established as a binding political objective. This requires clear regulatory frameworks, participatory governance structures, and active support for independent research.

a) Binding frameworks for social sustainability
- Integrate clearly defined social legacy objectives (e.g., access to education, healthcare, and affordable housing) into tender processes and contractual agreements.
- Develop mandatory sustainability indicators for underrepresented dimensions such as gender, health, and participation (cf. Müller, 2021).
- Establish international financing and cooperation models between high-income countries and LMICs, supported by umbrella organisations such as the IOC or FIFA.
- Ensure context sensitivity by avoiding the blanket transfer of standard legacy concepts to all host countries.

b) Participatory and inclusive governance structures

- Ensure early and substantive involvement of local and civil society actors in planning and decision-making processes.
- Dismantle authoritarian-technocratic organisational logics that undermine participatory processes.
- Promote democratic participation formats at the local level, moving beyond purely symbolic inclusion.

c) Political support for independent research

- Fund methodologically robust impact studies, including longitudinal designs.
- Develop open, standardised databases for impact measurement.
- Support interdisciplinary research approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative methods.

5.6 Conclusions and Outlook

The central contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual and analytical framework that enables a systematic examination of the relationship between SMEs and social inequality. Building on interdisciplinary perspectives and theoretical approaches – particularly the legacy concept, the dimensions of social inequality (cf. Solga et al., 2009), and the SDGs – this framework offers a structured entry point into a hitherto fragmented field of research. It facilitates the targeted classification of empirical findings, the identification of recurring patterns, and the detection of conceptual gaps. At the same time, it serves as a heuristic tool for future research that seeks either to deepen existing trends or to challenge them critically – ideally through context-sensitive primary studies with longer time frames.

The findings demonstrate that SMEs are neither inherently inclusive nor exclusive. Their social impacts do not occur automatically but result from complex interactions between political structures, institutional frameworks, and societal participation. This Scoping Review highlights that, while areas such as education (SDG 4) and health (SDG 3) show potential for positive social effects, the prevailing reality is one of selective and often short-term impacts, which tend to reproduce or even exacerbate existing inequalities (SDG 10).

Against this backdrop, the legitimacy of SMEs is increasingly measured by their ability to leave behind durable and socially just structures (Coakley & Souza, 2013). This necessitates that social sustainability is not treated as a symbolic by-product but is embedded as an explicit political objective in the planning, delivery, and legacy phases of such events. There can be no universal blueprint for social legacy strategies; rather, they must be operationalised in a context-specific manner and adapted to local social, economic, and political conditions.

According to Reuters (2024) and the IOC, several LMICs, including India, Indonesia, Chile, Egypt, and South Africa, have expressed interest in hosting the 2036 Olympic Games. This underscores the urgency of more systematically integrating structural inequality considerations into the governance frameworks of international sports organisations. Only in this way can future SMEs genuinely act as instruments of global solidarity and sustainable development (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 10), rather than deepening existing disparities.

In light of the findings, social equality should not be regarded as an automatic outcome of SMEs but as a consciously formulated and firmly anchored objective of such events. While the ambition to guarantee all people a life in dignity may be unrealistic within the scope of a single event, the reproduction or exacerbation of existing inequalities must under no circumstances be permitted.

Author's Note

In this thesis, I used the support of AI (ChatGPT, DeepL) to translate from German to English, to check orthography, grammar and structure to secure the text's flow and readability.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Mechnanisms Overview

Table 6: Mechanism Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Health Equity & Wellbeing	Access and Structural Barriers	Spatial Infrastructure Inequity	Sport infrastructure developed for the SME primarily benefited wealthier groups, disadvantaged communities remained underserved.	Annear et al. (2019)[b], Liang et al. (2024)[a]	-
		Structural Activity Barriers	Structural barriers (e.g. income, education) prevented long-term physical activity increases among lower-income populations.	Annear et al. (2019)[b]	0
		Neglected Socio-Environmental Needs	Environmental initiatives linked to the mega-event often failed to address urgent socio-environmental issues in marginalised areas.	Death (2011)[c]	-
	Psychosocial and Emotional Impact	Sport-Based Social Intervention	Sport was employed as a tool for addressing social challenges such as youth delinquency, substance abuse, or early pregnancy.	Burnett (2010)[a]	+
		Perceived Quality of Life Shift	Perceptions of improved infrastructure and wellbeing shaped public attitudes towards the mega-event, with variation across social groups.	Kaplanidou et al. (2013)[a]	+
		Perceived Exclusion & Insecurity	The mega-event fostered perceptions of exclusion and insecurity among marginalised groups through limited participation, symbolic underrepresentation, and intrusive security measures.	Ribeiro et al. (2021)[a], Ribeiro et al. (2022)[a], Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)[a], Graeff et al. (2020)[a]	-
		Educational Spillover	Youth-targeted activities associated with the mega-event delivered informal education on topics like health, leadership, and sustainability.	Swart et al. (2011)[a]	+
		Affective Event Experience	The mega-event triggered collective emotional experiences such as joy, pride, or inspiration, shaping both immediate public mood and long-term symbolic memory.	Cornelissen et al. (2011)[d], Musikavanhu et al. (2021)[a], Gibson et al. (2014)[a]	+
	Sustainability	Post-Event Disillusionment	Unmet expectations led to widespread disillusionment following the mega-event, especially among already marginalised groups.	Talbot (2021)[c], Vico et al. (2019)[b]	-
		Unsustained Activity Engagement	Increases in physical activity during the mega-event did not persist over time, particularly in structurally disadvantaged communities.	Annear et al. (2019)[b], Burnett (2017)[b]	0
		Transient Emotional Effects	Emotional responses to the mega-event (e.g., joy, unity) were short-lived and lacked transformative societal influence.	Gibson et al. (2014)[a], Tasci et al. (2019)[a], Musikavanhu et al. (2021)[a], Cornelissen et al. (2011)[d]	-

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Education & Human Capital	Structural Challanges and Criticism	Instrumentalisation of SMEs for External Education Funding	SMEs are leveraged to attract external financial resources for education, which can lead to dependency and misalignment with local educational priorities.	Bek (2019)[a], Swart et al. (2011)[a]	±
		Secondary Focus (priority on tourism etc.)	Educational objectives are often sidelined in favor of economic or tourism-related goals associated with SMEs.	Cornelissen (2011)[a]	-
		Short-Termism	SME-led programs lacked sustainability planning, leading to limited long-term educational impact.	Bek et al. (2019)[b]	0
		Commercialisation of SFD Programs	Pressure to implement business models in Sport for Development (SFD) initiatives shifts the focus away from social objectives, reducing their transformative capacity.	De Almeida (2017)[c]	-
		Non-SME Legacy Reach	The FFSA brought benefits to non-host areas, countering the usual spatial inequality in legacy distribution from mega-events.	Swart et al. (2011)[d]	+
		Inequity in Access to Benefits	Educational benefits from SME investments are often unevenly distributed, disadvantaging rural and under-resourced communities.	Bek et al. (2019)[b]	-
	Partnership and Strategic Approaches	Corporate Involvement	Corporate sponsors contributed to SME-related educational initiatives outside formal organising bodies, helping to address localised inequalities.	Swart et al. (2011)[c]	+
		Strategic Alliances	Hybrid bottom-up approach, involving local stakeholders, which increased community agency and ownership.	Burnett (2010)[a] , Swart et al. (2011)[c]	+
	Education and Curriculum	Cultural Transmission	Educational content linked to SMEs often reflects Western norms and values, potentially undermining local cultural contexts.	Burnett (2017)[b]	-
		Infrastructure Leveraging	Use of the SME as a catalyst to attract or justify external and internal investment in school infrastructure.	Bek et al. (2019)[b]	+
		Curriculum Reform	SME used as an opportunity to introduce or pilot new curricular content such as life skills, sports education or value-based education (Olympionism).	Bek et al. (2019)[b], Burnett (2017)[b]	+
		Educator Professionalisation	SME-affiliated programs enhance teacher competencies, particularly in physical education and life skills instruction.	Bek et al. (2019)[b]	+

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Education & Human Capital	Social Impact and Youth Empowerment	Sport-based (Youth) Empowerment	Participation in sport within SME contexts boosts youth self-esteem, social recognition, and perceived employability, particularly in marginalised communities.	Burnett (2010)[a], Swart et al. (2011)[a]	+
		Skill Development	Youth gain practical skills through involvement in SME-related construction and event logistics.	Cornelissen et al. (2011)[c]	+
		Youth Development, Social Integration and Community Pride	Engagement in SME-linked youth initiatives fosters social inclusion, civic pride, and community identification.	Swart et al. (2011)[a]	+
		Temporary Inclusion	Some children were selectively involved in event-linked initiatives (e.g., football programs), but with no structural change in their conditions.	Van Blerk et al.(2019)[a]	0
Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice	Social Displacement and Inequality	Forced Relocation	Event-led regeneration resulted in forced evictions and physical displacement of residents, particularly marginalised/informal communities. Often without proper compensation or adherence to international housing standards.	Baroghi et al. (2024)[b], Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Cornelissen (2012)[a], Darnell (2012)[a], De Almeida (2017)[b], Gaffney (2010)[b], Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)[a], Haferburg (2011)[b], Haferburg & Steinbrink (2017)[b], Leal de Oliveira et al. (2020)[a], Maharaj (2015)[b], Mair et al. (2023)[b], Ngonyama (2010)[a], Ribeiro et al. (2021)[a], Rivera (2014)[b], Robinson et al. (2017)[a], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[b], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[b],	-
		Gentrification	Infrastructure investment linked to SMEs triggered rising property values and an influx of wealthier residents, displacing original low-income populations and deepening spatial inequalities.	Gaffney (2010)[c], Haferburg & Steinbrink (2017)[c], Ribeiro et al. (2021)[a], Rivera (2014)[b], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[b], Sengupta (2017)[b], Talbot (2021)[a]	-
		Urban Restructuring Bias (Urban Beautification)	Infrastructure development catered to international image and affluent areas, while spatial inequalities in marginal neighborhoods were deepened.	Cornelissen (2011)[c], Harris (2011)[b], Leal de Oliveira et al. (2020)[c], Witt & Loots (2010)[b]	-

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice	Social Displacement and Inequality	Mobility Restriction	The establishment of security perimeters and targeted infrastructure interventions reduced both physical and symbolic access for lower-income residents to urban public spaces.	Graeff et al. (2020)[a], Haferburg (2011)[b]	-
		Unequal Infrastructure Access	SME-related infrastructure predominantly served wealthier areas, often neglecting the needs and priorities of lower-income communities.	Leal de Oliveira et al. (2020)[c], Talbot (2021)[a]	-
	Event-Driven Urban Development	Festivalisation	Urban development strategy using events to attract investment, improve global image, and boost local economies, often at the cost of inclusive planning.	Haferburg (2011)[d], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[b]	-
		Short-Term Urban Upgrading	Urban development projects justified and accelerated under the guise of hosting mega-events, often lacking long-term community/sustainability benefit.	Haferburg & Steinbrink (2017)[c], Maharaj (2015)[b]	-
		Construction/Improvement of Infrastructure	SMEs motivated targeted infrastructure spending in areas such as transport, sports facilities, and basic public services, with mixed long-term benefits.	Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Cornelissen et al. (2011)[d]	±
	Environmental Concerns and Misrepesentation	Greenwashing	Environmental rhetoric was used for promotional purposes without substantial ecological benefit or implementation of sustainable practices.	Boykoff & Zimbalist (2017)[b], Death (2011)[d], Witt & Loots (2010)[b]	-
		Certification Misuse	Sustainability certifications were used as performative tools despite unmet environmental goals.	Boykoff & Zimbalist (2017)[c]	-
		Environmental injustice	Mega-event produced a large carbon footprint and negative environmental externalities, which tend to disproportionately affect lower-income individuals.	Cornelissen et al. (2011)[b], Death (2011)[a]	-

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Governance, Participation & Rights	Governance, Power and Political Control	Centralised Governance and Exclusion	Concentration of decision-making power in higher levels of government and reduction of local participation to meet mega-event deadlines.	Baroghi et al. (2024)[b], Cornelissen (2012)[a], Curi et al. (2011)[a], Death (2011)[d], Dowse & Fletcher (2018)[d], Gaffney (2010)[d], Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)[a], Graeff et al. (2020)[a], Haferburg (2011)[d], Leal de Olveira et al. (2020)[a], Mair et al. (2023)[b], Musikavanhu et al. (2021)[c], Ribeiro et al. (2022)[a], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[d], Sengupta (2017)[c], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[c], Van Blerk et al. (2019)[a], Vico et al. (2019)[a], Witt & Loots (2010)[b], Wood (2019)[d]	-
		Legitamicy Seeking	Governments pursue mega-events to bolster internal political legitimacy and gain favor with international organisations, often overshadowing inclusive policy planning.	Black & Peacock (2011)[d]	0
		Strategic Ambiguity	Flexible legal and regulatory frameworks enabled evictions and land grabs, masking social injustices under the guise of development.	Gaffney (2010)[d]	-
		State of Emergency /Exception Strategy	The mega-event is used as a pretext to implement transformations/laws that would face greater resistance under normal conditions.	Harris (2011)[d], Ivester (2015)[b], Leal de Oliveira et al. (2020)[d], Ngonyama (2010)[a], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[c]	-

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Governance, Participation & Rights	Governance, Power and Political Control	Security-Driven Urbanism	Use of military and surveillance tactics to control urban spaces and exclusive event-areas during the event, often targeting poor and racialised populations.	Baroghi et al. (2024)[c)], Cornelissen (2011)[c)], Curi et al (2011)[a)], Gaffney (2010)[c)], Graeff et al. (2020)[a)], Haferburg & Steinbrink (2017)[c)], Leal de Oliveira et al. (2020)[b)], Liang et al. (2024)[a)], Mair et al. (2023)[b)], Ribeiro et al. (2021)[a)], Rivera (2014)[b)], Sengupta (2017)[b)], Talbot (2021)[a)], Van Blerk et al. (2019)[a)]	-
		Policy Redirection	Existing pro-poor urban development agendas were rebranded or redirected to align with event goals, weakening their original redistributive impact.	Wood (2019)[c)]	-
		Privatization of Governance	Decision-making power shifts toward private actors in the name of public interest, often resulting in profit-oriented rather than equity-based urban interventions.	Wood (2019)[d)]	-
	Global Narratives and Ideology	Lack of Community Ownership	Externally driven development models lacking local ownership face sustainability challenges and lower community uptake.	Burnett (2010)[c)]	-
		Aid Alignment with SME	Development aid was shaped or steered by SME-related goals rather than independently defined local needs.	Bek et al. (2019)[b)]	0
		Intersectoral Collaboration	Formation of networks between NGOs, governments, and local communities enhances collaborative capacity and development delivery.	Burnett (2010)[a)]	+
		Cultural Imperialism	Import and implementation of (Olympic) values, often with Eurocentric and neo-colonial perspectives.	Burnett (2017)[d)]	-

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Governance, Participation & Rights	Protest, Civil Society and Resistance	Suppression of Dissent	Legislative tools and security frameworks criminalise protests, restricting freedoms of expression, movement, and assembly, especially during SME implementation.	Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Cornelissen (2012)[a], Maharaj (2015)[b], Ngonyama (2010)[a], Van Blerk et al. (2019)[a]	-
		Strategic Mobilisation	The event was strategically used by activists and civil society to mobilise and articulate broader social grievances, leveraging international attention.	Cornelissen (2011)[a], Cornelissen (2012)[c]	+
		Protest Unity	Instead of fostering cohesion, the events served as platforms for marginalised communities to unite in protest, challenging the official narratives.	Penfold (2019)[c]	+
		Transnational Solidarity	International civil society groups bolster local protest efforts by enhancing visibility, legitimacy, and resource access.	Cornelissen (2012)[b]	+
	Social Exclusion and Disempowerment	Socioeconomic Barriers to Access	High ticket prices and elite-oriented planning limited access for the majority of citizens, reinforcing class divisions.	Curi et al. (2011)[a], Robinson et al. (2017)[b]	-
		Privatisation of Public Space	Conversion of publicly accessible areas into commercial zones, restricting access for low-income residents. Event-related facilities (e.g. stadiums, athletes' villages) were largely inaccessible to the general public after the Games.	Curi et al. (2011)[a], Robinson et al. (2017)[b], Sengupta (2017)[b], Tomlinson (2014)[c]	-
		Exclusion from SME Decision-Making	Smaller community-based organizations often lack the capacity to navigate complex funding mechanisms, which limits their ability to participate in legacy programs and exacerbates inequality by excluding socially vulnerable populations from sport and health initiatives.	Annear et al. (2019)[b], De Almeida (2017)[d]	-
		Distrust in Local Institutions	The SME fostered disillusionment with local government due to unmet expectations and corruption, especially among disadvantaged groups.	Ribeiro et al. (2021)[a], Ribeiro et al. (2022)[a]	-
		Criminalisation of Poverty	Police action targeted homeless people and street children to 'clean up' for international visitors, including detainment in prisons.	Ngonyama (2010)[a], Rivera (2014)[b], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[b]	-
		Displacement of Local Needs	Local development goals are marginalised in favor of global branding and spectacle, limiting long-term local benefits and reinforcing exclusion.	Dowse & Fletcher (2018)[c]	-

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Governance, Participation & Rights	Governance, Power and Political Control	Centralised Governance and Exclusion	Concentration of decision-making power in higher levels of government and reduction of local participation to meet mega-event deadlines.	Baroghi et al. (2024)[b], Cornelissen (2012)[a], Curi et al. (2011)[a], Death (2011)[d], Dowse & Fletcher (2018)[d], Gaffney (2010)[d], Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)[a], Graeff et al. (2020)[a], Haferburg (2011)[d], Leal de Olveira et al. (2020)[a], Mair et al. (2023)[b], Musikavanhu et al. (2021)[c], Ribeiro et al. (2022)[a], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[d], Sengupta (2017)[c], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[c], Van Blerk et al. (2019)[a], Vico et al. (2019)[a], Witt & Loots (2010)[b], Wood (2019)[d]	-
		Legitamicy Seeking	Governments pursue mega-events to bolster internal political legitimacy and gain favor with international organisations, often overshadowing inclusive policy planning.	Black & Peacock (2011)[d]	0
		Strategic Ambiguity	Flexible legal and regulatory frameworks enabled evictions and land grabs, masking social injustices under the guise of development.	Gaffney (2010)[d]	-
		State of Emergency /Exception Strategy	The mega-event is used as a pretext to implement transformations/laws that would face greater resistance under normal conditions.	Harris (2011)[d], Ivester (2015)[b], Leal de Oliveira et al. (2020)[d], Ngonyama (2010)[a], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[c]	-

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution	Economic Inequality and Resource Misallocation	Health Resource Diversion	Financial resources were diverted to elite event infrastructure at the expense of equitable investment in long-term public health promotion.	Annear et al. (2019)[d]	-
		Event-Linked Inflation	SMEs contributed to short-term inflation in host regions, increasing the cost of basic goods and services and disproportionately impacting low-income populations.	Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[b]	-
		Fiscal Mismanagement	Public funds were disproportionately directed toward infrastructure and event preparation, diverting resources from essential services like education, housing and health.	Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Cornelissen et al. (2011)[c], Maharaj (2015)[b], Talbot (2021)[d]	-
		Selective Investments	Investment associated with mega-events often targets specific, highly visible sectors (e.g., stadiums, tourism infrastructure, elite sport), neglecting broader socioeconomic development.	Black & Peacock (2011)[d], Boykoff & Zimbalist (2017)[b], Cornelissen (2012)[c], Curi et al. (2011)[a], De Almeida (2017)[b], Gaffney (2010)[b], Graeff et al. (2020)[a], Haferburg (2011)[c], Ngonyama (2010)[b], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[c], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[b]	-
		Uneven Distribution of Benefits	Infrastructure and service improvements were perceived to disproportionately benefit certain areas or populations, reinforcing existing inequalities.	Kaplanidou et al. (2013)[a], Musikavanhu et al. (2021)[a], Ribeiro et al. (2022)[a], Robinson et al. (2017)[c]	-
		Reinforcement of Elitism	Mega-events provided branding opportunities for Western companies; economic benefits flowed disproportionately to elites and foreign investors.	Ngonyama (2010)[d]	-

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution	Labor, Employment and Exploitation	Volunteer-Driven Skills Development	Volunteering in sports programs provides skill development and perceived stepping stones to employment, promoting active citizenship.	Burnett (2010)[a]	+
		Economic Boost	SMEs generated short-term employment opportunities, increases in consumer spending, and localized tourism, with limited long-term retention.	Cornelissen et al. (2011)[b]	±
		Abscence of Long-term Socioeconomic Benefits	SMEs typically produced no lasting improvements in employment levels, (particularly in constructio) educational access, or infrastructural resilience.	Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)[a], Harris (2011)[b], Liang et al. (2024)[a], Ngonyama (2010)[a]	-
		Volunteer Exploitation	Unpaid volunteerism was promoted under patriotic rhetoric in a context of mass unemployment.	Ngonyama (2010)[d]	-
	Social Exclusion and Marginalization	Barriers to Market Participation	Local small enterprises had little access to opportunities and were often uninformed, excluding them from the event's economic advantages.	Liang et al. (2024)[a]	-
		Informal Economy Displacement	Informal traders were excluded from newly developed urban zones and operating licenses were restricted, limiting their income opportunities.	Cornelissen (2011)[a], Gaffney (2010)[b], Haferburg (2011)[b], Harris (2011)[c], Ivester (2015)[b], Maharaj (2015)[b], Mait et al. (2023)[b], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[b]	-
		Retail Business Networking	Street vendors connected to brokers who could offer votes or bribes to officials benefited from selective non-enforcement of restrictive event laws, allowing them to operate during the event.	Hummel (2018)[a]	+

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation	Symbolic Politics and Image Management	Image Management	Media and architectural strategies to mask poverty and present an image of a modern, successful city to the international audience.	Baroghi et al. (2024)[c], Cornelissen (2011)[c], Curi et al. (2011)[d], Haferburg (2011)[d], Lepp & Gibson (2011)[c], Sánchez & Broudehoux (2013)[c], Wood (2019)[b]	-
		Symbolic Sustainability Narratives	SME narratives are primarily aimed at creating symbolic legacies rather than achieving actual systemic change. Projects tend to prioritise aesthetics and global image over local needs. Symbolic legacies, such as national pride or local identity, were reinforced through collective engagement but offered limited material benefit.	Bek et al. (2019)[c], Boykoff & Zimbalist (2017)[c], Gaffney (2010)[d], Harris (2011)[c], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[d], Swart et al. (2011)[a], Witt & Loots (2010)[d]	0
		Nation Rebranding Strategies	Hosting mega-events is strategically leveraged to reframe or update the national image, including distancing from past associations or projecting modernity, potentially masking deeper structural inequalities.	Black & Peacock (2011)[d], Darnell (2012)[d], Knott (2015)[d], Lepp & Gibson (2011)[c], Mair et al. (2023)[c], Penfold (2019)[c], Steinbrink et al. (2011)[c], Talbot (2021)[d], Tasci et al. (2019)[d], Van Blerk et al. (2019)[a]	0
		Image Enhancement & Political Symbolism	Sporting mega-events are used as tools by governments to elevate international standing and gain recognition, especially for emerging or marginalised nations.	Black & Peacock (2011)[d], Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Harris (2011)[b], Tasci et al. (2019)[d]	+
		Symbolic National Pride	Expressions of national pride during SMEs promoted temporary collective identity and potential social integration across diverse groups, particularly when inclusively framed.	Kersting (2007)[b]	+
		Performative Inclusion	Celebratory or cultural representations were perceived as inadequate substitutes for material improvements in everyday life. Marginalised groups were symbolically included in SME narratives (e.g., through visibility campaigns), but derived limited tangible economic or social benefit.	Annear et al. (2019)[c], Curi et al. (2011)[a], Cornelissen et al. (2011)[c], Darnell (2012)[c], Dowse & Fletcher (2018)[c], Knott (2015)[a], Maharaj (2015)[c], Tomlinson (2014)[c], Penfold (2019)[c], Vico et al. (2019)[c]	-

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation	Community Cohesion and Identity	Improved Cultural Understanding	SMEs facilitated cultural exchange between host populations and international visitors, contributing to mutual understanding.	Butler & Aicher (2015)[b]	+
		Inclusive National Identity Formation	SMEs temporarily fostered a civic-oriented national identity that transcended ethnic divisions, using symbolic campaigns to enhance visibility of diverse identity forms and reduce social exclusion.	Heere et al. (2016)[a], Kersting (2007)[b]	+
		Event-Induced Communal Cohesion	The symbolic and unifying effects of the event were not experienced equally across ethnic or socio-economic groups. They temporarily generated a sense of community among host communities, enhancing subjective well-being through shared experiences.	Butler & Aicher (2015)[b], Cornelissen (2011)[b], Gibson et al. (2014)[a], Heere et al. (2016)[a], Kaplanidou et al. (2013)[a], Knott (2015)[a]	±
		Temporary Reduction of Xenophobia and Exclusion	SMEs helped reduce xenophobia and exclusion through intercultural exchange and inclusive marketing, especially in post-conflict or multicultural settings.	Kersting (2007)[b]	+
	Exclusion and Social Division	Event Legiticamy Barrier	Public order issues and security breaches during SMEs were used to question host nation legitimacy and reinforce negative international perceptions.	Dimeo & Kay (2004)[c]	-
		Symbolic Marginalisation	Residents of informal or low-income areas felt symbolically excluded or stigmatised through urban transformation efforts and lack of recognition.	Graeff & Giulianotti (2024)[b], Rivera (2014)[b]	-
		Social Fragmentation	Surveillance practices and stigmatization related to SMEs weakened community trust, particularly in marginalized neighborhoods.	Graeff et al. (2020)[a], Vico et al. (2019)[a]	-
		Symbolic Urban Cleansing	Use of mega-events as a justification to sanitise urban space, often by removing marginalised populations.	Haferburg & Steinbrink (2017)[c]	-
	Media and Discourse Power	Media Stereotyping	International media reinforced colonial stereotypes, portraying host nations as incapable and undermining their self-representation.	Dimeo & Kay (2004)[c], Mishra (2012)[c]	-
		Power of Media	Difficulty to change people's perceptions of the host nation image positively in a world filled with negative media coverage.	Tasci et al. (2019)[d]	0
		Role of Academics and Media	Academics, NGOs, and (social) media play a crucial role in either perpetuating denial or bringing attention to human rights abuses related to mega-events.	Horne (2018)[d], Ivester (2015)[c]	±

Mechanisms Overview

Dimension	Cluster	Mechanism	Description	Literature (a) (b) (c) (d)	Effect
Gender, Diversity & Empowerment	Gender and Social Inequalities in Sport	Gendered Access Barriers	The top-down implementation of traditionally male-dominated sports limited participation opportunities for girls and women, reinforcing existing gender inequalities in sport.	Burnett (2010)[a], Ivester (2015)[a], Witt & Loots (2010)[d]	-
		Marginalisation of Sex Workers	SMEs intensified existing structural vulnerabilities of sex workers – most of whom are women – through increased surveillance, loss of income, spatial exclusion, and lack of access to protection or health services, further marginalising this group.	Richter et al. (2014)[a]	-
		Selective Inclusion	While integration was emphasized, disparities remained in race and gender participation rates, showing partial inclusion and residual exclusion.	Swart et al. (2011)[b]	-
	Structural Barriers to Inclusion	Transgression through Sport	Active or symbolic transgression of social norms related to gender, sexuality, identity, or power – enabled by or occurring within the sporting field. In this context, sport can function a space for emancipation and normative shift	Witt & Loots (2010)[a]	+
		Sport Development Imbalance	SME legacies often prioritised elite sport infrastructure (e.g., stadiums, professional teams), with minimal investment in community or grassroots development.	Cornelissen et al. (2011)[b]	-
	Justificatory and Symbolic Narratives	Moral Justification	Authorities invoked moral concerns – such as child safety – to legitimise surveillance and exclusionary practices, thereby obscuring punitive strategies.	Van Blerk et al. (2019)[c]	-
		Narrative Control	Inclusive state language was used strategically to suppress dissent and unify public opinion, while simultaneously concealing exclusionary and marginalising policies.	Witt & Loots (2010)[d]	-
	Empowerment	Community Empowerment	Community members reported increased confidence, leadership, and organizational skills through participation in local SME-linked initiatives, contributing to broader empowerment outcomes.	Musikavanhu et al. (2021)[a]	+

Appendix B: Keyword Matrix and Search String Protocol

Table 7: Keyword Matrix

Primary Concept	Related keywords/phrases	Boolean Operators
Sporting Mega Events	"Mega-sport events", "Sport mega-events", "Large-scale sports events", "SME", "MSE", "FIFA World Cup", "Olympic Games"	AND/OR/NOT
Social Inequalities	"Income disparity", "Wealth distribution", "Educational inequality", "Healthcare access", "Systemic inequality"	AND/OR/NOT
Impact	"social impact", "economic impact", "environmental impact", "legacies", "outcomes", "effects"	AND/OR/NOT
Low- and Middle-Income Countries	"LMICs", "developing countries", "Global South", "high-inequality countries", "emerging economies"	AND/OR/NOT

a) "(Sporting mega-events Impacts Social inequalities)"

b) "(Sporting mega-events)" AND "(Social inequalities)" AND "(Impact)" AND "(LMICs)"

c) "(Sporting mega-events Impacts High Inequality Countries)"

d) "(Sporting mega-events Social Legacies Global South)"

Google Scholar

e) "(Sporting mega events) AND (Global South)"

f) "(Sporting mega events) AND (Social inequalities)"

g) "(World Cup) AND (social inequalities) "

PubMed

h) "Impact of mega sporting events in global south"

i) "(Sporting mega-events) AND (Social inequalities) AND (Impact) AND (Low- and middle income countries)"

j) "(Sporting mega-events) AND (Social inequalities) AND (Impact) AND (Global south)"

k) "(Sporting mega-events) AND (Social inequalities) AND (legacy) AND (High inequality countries) NOT (Non mega sporting events)"

Swisscovery

l) "[Sporting mega events] AND [Social inequalities] AND [Impact] AND [Low- to middle income countries] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/1995 TO 12/31/2025)]"

m) "[Sporting mega events] AND [Social inequalities] AND [Global South]"

n) "(sporting mega-events) OR (mega-sport events) OR (large-scale sports events) OR (FIFA World Cup) OR (Olympic Games) AND (social inequality) OR (income disparity) OR (wealth distribution) OR (educational inequality) OR (healthcare access) OR (systemic inequality)"

o) "[Sporting mega-events] AND [Long-term trends"] AND [Legacy analysis] AND [Global south] OR [High-inequality countries] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/1995 TO 12/31/2025)]"

Taylor & Francis Group

p) "(((((Sporting mega-events) AND (Social inequalities)) AND (Impact)) AND (Low- and middle-income countries)) [1995-2025]"

q) "((High inequality countries) AND (Sporting mega events))"

JSTOR

r) "((Sporting mega events) AND (inequalities))"

s) "((Mega Sport Event) AND (Legacy) AND (Social) OR (Olympic legacy) OR (Social legacy) OR (sport mega-events))"

t) "((Sport mega events) AND (social legacy))"

Web of Science

Note: The search strings were adapted to the specific functions of the respective databases. Additional tested search strings yielded only identical or no further results and were therefore not documented further.

Appendix C: Statment of Authorship

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich die vorgelegte Arbeit selbstständig angefertigt und keine anderen als die in der Arbeit angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe. Alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäss aus Quellen entnommen wurden, habe ich als solche gekennzeichnet. Darüber hinaus bestätige ich, dass die vorgelegte Arbeit nicht an einer anderen Hochschule als Seminar-, Projekt- oder Abschlussarbeit oder als Teil solcher Arbeiten eingereicht wurde.

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Eine Überprüfung der Arbeit auf Plagiate und KI-gestützte Programme – unter Einsatz entsprechender Software – darf vorgenommen werden. Bei begründetem Verdacht auf eine unerlaubte oder nicht gekennzeichnete Anwendung von KI bei schriftlichen Leistungsüberprüfungen ist die Kandidatin bzw. der Kandidat auf Einladung hin verpflichtet, an der Klärung des Verdachts mitzuwirken, z.B. durch Teilnahme an einem Gespräch. Ich habe zur Kenntnis genommen, dass unlauteres Verhalten zu einer Bewertung der betroffenen Arbeit mit einer Note 1 oder mit «nicht bestanden» bzw. «fail» oder zum Ausschluss vom Studium führen kann (gemäss §25 der Ordnung für das Masterstudium «Sport, Bewegung und Gesundheit» an der Medizinischen Fakultät der Universität Basel vom 19. Dezember 2016).

Datum: 01. September 2025   Unterschrift:
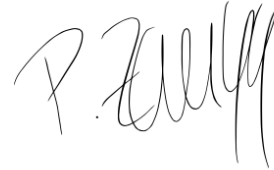
Appendix D: Author's Rights

Hiermit bestätige ich, dass die Publikation der vorliegenden Arbeit oder Teile des Inhalts – auch in Auszügen beziehungsweise als Zusammenfassungen oder in Rohdatenform – sowie die Abgabe der Autorenrechte (auch unentgeltlich) an Verlage oder Dritte stets der Einwilligung des Gutachters bedarf.

Datum: 01. September 2025   Unterschrift:

Appendix E: Poster

Sporting Mega-Events and Social Inequalities in High-Inequality Countries
A Scoping Review

DSBG

UNIVERSITÄT BASEL
Departement für Sport, Bewegung und Gesundheit

UNI BASEL

Pascal Zaugg BSc – Supervisor: Nandi Joubert

1 | Theoretical Background

Sporting mega-events (SMEs) such as the Olympic Games or football World Cups are often positioned as catalysts for economic, social and infrastructural development (Preuss, 2007; Maharaj, 2015). This catalytic effect is increasingly being exploited strategically, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) with high inequality indices (Gini). While the economic effects of SMEs have been relatively well researched, the social dimension remains underrepresented (Mair et al., 2021). This paper therefore examines the social impacts of SMEs in highly unequal LMIC contexts. The theoretical framework links central concepts in the context of structural inequality:

1. **Social inequality:** The four structural levels of social inequality (Solga et al., 2009)
2. **Legacy concept:** Planned vs. unplanned, positive vs. negative after-effects of events (Preuss, 2007; Chapellet, 2012)
3. **Sustainability & Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** as a normative reference for long-term, fair development (Müller et al., 2021)

> **Research question**: How do SMEs shape social inequalities in LMICs with high levels of inequality, considering the extent, direction, and variability of their effects?

2 | Methods

A scoping review (according to PRISMA guidelines) was conducted

Literature Search:
Systematic database search with clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Data Extraction:
Focus on three central areas of analysis:
- Descriptive study data
- Social dimensions (e.g. governance, health, education, identity)
- Mechanisms of action (positive, negative, neutral, ambivalent) in relation to social inequality

Data Analysis:
- Dimension-based analysis model (based on the United Nations SDGs)
- Narrative synthesis (cluster-based)

Objective: To review the research field in a descriptive-analytical, comparative manner. To identify patterns, trends and research gaps in the literature.

Analysis Categories – Seven Dimensions:
1. Health & Wellbeing
2. Education & Human Capital
3. Urban Transformation & Environmental Justice
4. Governance, Participation & Rights
5. Economic Inclusion & Resource Distribution
6. Symbolic Power, Identity & Representation
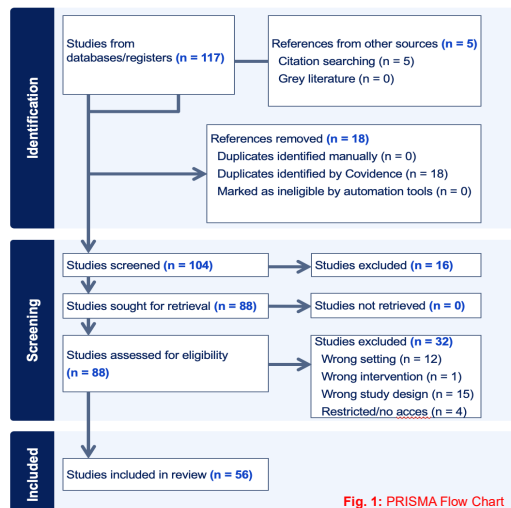7. Gender, Diversity & Empowerment

Identification

Studies from databases/registers (n = 117)

References from other sources (n = 5)
Citation searching (n = 5)
Grey literature (n = 0)

References removed (n = 18)
Duplicates identified manually (n = 0)
Duplicates identified by Covidence (n = 18)
Marked as ineligible by automation tools (n = 0)

Screening

Studies screened (n = 104) → Studies excluded (n = 16)

Studies sought for retrieval (n = 88) → Studies not retrieved (n = 0)

Studies assessed for eligibility (n = 88) → Studies excluded (n = 32)
Wrong setting (n = 12)
Wrong intervention (n = 1)
Wrong study design (n = 15)
Restricted/no acces (n = 4)

Included

Studies included in review (n = 56)

Fig. 1: PRISMA Flow Chart

3 | Results

The scoping review analysed a total of [56] studies and identified [104] mechanisms, which were classified into seven social dimensions. A total of 62 negative (-), 27 positive (+), 10 neutral (0) and 5 ambivalent mechanisms were identified. In addition, the combination of quantitative descriptive data and narrative synthesis revealed certain patterns, trends and gaps in the analysed literature.

Key Findings – Dimension-Based Patterns (Quantität)

- **Governance, Participation & Rights**: highest density of mechanisms, predom. negative
- **Urban Transformation** & **Economic Inclusion**: strongly negative impact
- **Education & Health:** rather positive effects, but limited evidence
- **Gender & Empowerment**: strongly underrepresented → research gap

Übergreifende Muster (Content-Related)

→ Selective Impacts
- Benefits concentrated among privileged groups
- Marginalised actors remain structurally excluded
- Distribution of effects is uneven and context-dependent

→ Ambivalent Assessments
- Simultaneous opportunities and risks within the same measure
- Inclusion narratives contrast with exclusion practices
- Positive effects often limited or contradictory

→ Symbolism instead of structural change
- Often short-term image gains instead of sustainable change
- Social effects rarely embedded in long-term policy
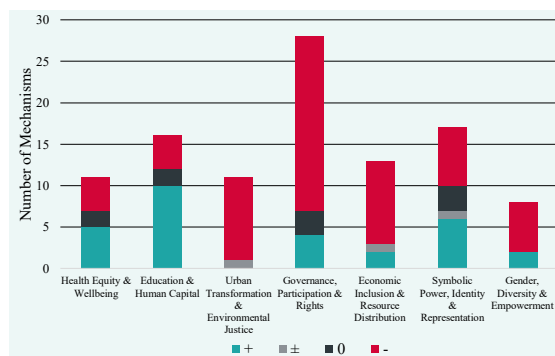- Lack of mechanisms to perpetuate positive effects

Fig. 2: Impact patterns across social dimensions

4 | Discussion

→ The results confirm key patterns: SMEs in LMICs often have a selective and ambivalent effect – social inequalities tend to be reproduced rather than reduced, particularly in the areas of governance, urbanisation and access to resources.

→ Non-infrastructural effects such as empowerment or symbolic participation are under-researched, particularly in the dimensions of Gender and Health.

Limitations
- Heterogeneous study designs
- Lack of standardisation
- Low number of long-term studies
- Single authorship selection

Strenghts
- First systematic overview of social SME impacts in LMICs
- Theory-driven approach (legacy, SDGs, etc.)
- Differentiated, dimension-based analysis grid

Recommendations

Research: More long-term studies, analysis of intangible effects, further development of legacy concept/sustainability concept

Policy: Participatory governance structures and binding social legacy goals.

Practice: International support systems for LMICs, transparent target definitions, monitoring and evaluation. Stakeholders IOC/FIFA: Implement binding sustainability standards and social indicators (context-sensitive).

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