

The Impact of Recreational Sports on Improving Community Economic Welfare: A Scoping Literature Review

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Abstract

Recreational sports have become an integral part of modern society, with participation in Indonesia reaching 65% in 2022. However, a comprehensive understanding of their direct contribution to community economic welfare, especially in rural and small communities, remains limited. This study aims to conduct a scoping literature review to map the evidence on the impact of recreational sports on community economic welfare. Following the Arksey and O'Malley framework, a systematic search was conducted on Scopus, Springer, Wiley, and Google Scholar databases for English-language articles published between 2020 and 2025. From 506 initial records, 8 articles were selected for final analysis after screening. The findings indicate that recreational sports contribute to economic welfare through job creation, increased local spending, infrastructure investment, and enhanced tourism appeal. Team sports (e.g., soccer, basketball), water-based activities (e.g., surfing), and running events (e.g., marathons) demonstrate the most significant economic impact. The underlying mechanism involves a positive multiplier effect that stimulates various local economic sectors. Key enablers include government support, community participation, private sector involvement, and effective marketing. Conversely, constraints include limited funding, inadequate promotion, cultural barriers, and poor accessibility. Optimizing the economic benefits of recreational sports requires integrated programming and multi-stakeholder collaboration among government, communities, and the private sector.

Keyword: Recreational sports; economic welfare; society; scoping review

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Introduction

Recreational sports have become an integral part of modern society, serving not only as a means of maintaining physical health but also as a tool for improving economic well-being (Erida et al., 2023). This phenomenon is evident in various countries, where recreational sports activities contribute to community development and local economic growth (Schulenkorf, 2012). This phenomenon is increasingly relevant given data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) which shows that participation in sports activities in Indonesia has increased significantly, reaching 65% in 2022 (Reavindo et al., 2025). This increase in participation has not only had a positive impact on public health, but also on economic aspects, especially in the context of tourism and sports industry development (Sohrabi et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, the recreational sports sector has shown significant potential in creating jobs and increasing community income. For example, research by (Rangkuti et al., 2023), shows that recreational sports in certain areas can increase local income by up to 20% during the sports season. However, there is still a gap in understanding how recreational sports can directly contribute to the economic well-being of communities, especially in rural areas and small communities. Previous studies have shown that recreational sports can contribute to local economic growth in various ways, such as increased revenue from sports tourism, job creation, and improved quality of life for the community (Bradbury et al., 2023).

For example, research by (Ghaderi et al., 2023), shows that small sporting events can provide significant economic benefits to host communities, including increased local spending and promotion of a positive image of the city. However, although many studies have discussed the relationship between sports and the economy, there is still a gap in understanding how recreational sports specifically can drive the economic well-being of communities. (Chen & Liu, 2023), researching the effectiveness of community sports provision in China, found that participation in sports activities can improve social inclusion and public health. However, many of these studies do not consider the long-term impact of investment in recreational sports infrastructure on the local economy.

This creates a research gap that needs to be filled to provide a more comprehensive picture of how recreational sports can serve as a driver of economic growth. Research by (Bradbury et al., 2023), shows that the presence of professional sports teams and sports facilities can boost the local economy through job creation and increased tax revenue. However, this research tends to focus on professional sports and does not discuss the impact of smaller and more affordable recreational sports. Therefore, it is important to conduct a broader literature review to understand how various forms of recreational sports can contribute to the economic well-being of communities.

This gap includes a lack of research focusing on the long-term impact of recreational sports on the local economy and how various factors, such as infrastructure and government support, can influence these outcomes. Research by (Vujović et al., 2011), highlights the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors in developing sports facilities that can increase community participation. However, further research is needed to explore how sports policies and programs can be optimized to support economic well-being.

The objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive literature review on the impact of recreational sports on the economic well-being of communities.

By identifying and analyzing various existing studies, this article aims to provide new insights and recommendations for stakeholders in designing sports programs that not only improve physical health but also promote local economic growth. To achieve the research objectives, the researcher employs the scoping literature review method. Scoping literature review is a methodology aimed at mapping the existing literature within a broad field of investigation, focusing on the identification and understanding of various concepts, evidence, and research patterns (Munn et al, 2018). This methodology does not aim answer specific research questions but rather to provide an overview of the topic, including areas that have not been extensively studied.

Recreational sports have evolved beyond their primary role in promoting physical health to become significant drivers of socio-economic development. In Indonesia, participation in sports activities reached 65% in 2022 (Sadiq & Uthman, 2024), highlighting their pervasive role in society. This surge is not only a health indicator but also a potential catalyst for local economic growth, particularly through tourism and the sports industry. For instance, recreational sports in specific Indonesian regions have been reported to boost local income by up to 20% during peak seasons (Rangkuti et al., 2023).

Despite this potential, a clear understanding of how recreational sports directly and sustainably enhance community economic welfare, especially in rural and small community contexts, is still nascent. Existing literature often focuses on large-scale, professional sports (Bradbury et al., 2023) or the social benefits of community sports (Chen & Liu, 2020; Ghaderi et al., 2023). However, these studies frequently overlook the specific pathways through which smaller-scale, accessible recreational sports influence local economies. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research synthesizing the long-term economic impacts and the interplay of factors like infrastructure, policy support, and community engagement in maximizing these benefits. While foundational studies like (Vujović et al., 2011) emphasized public-private partnerships in sports development, the contemporary landscape, particularly post-2020, demands an updated synthesis that reflects recent trends and evidence.

This scoping review aims to fill this gap by systematically mapping the literature from 2020 to 2025 on the impact of recreational sports on community economic welfare. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does recreational sports contribute to improving the economic well-being of the community?
2. What types of recreational sports have the most significant impact on the local economy?
3. Through what mechanisms does recreational sports affect economic well-being?
4. What are the supporting and hindering factors in maximizing the economic impact of recreational sports?

By addressing these questions, this review provides a consolidated evidence base to guide stakeholders in developing effective recreational sports programs that foster sustainable local economic development.

Method

This study uses a comprehensive literature review approach to identify and synthesise the latest literature on the impact of recreational sports on improving the economic welfare of communities. This scoping literature review follows the framework of (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), which consists of five stages: (1) identification of research questions, (2) identification of relevant studies, (3) selection of studies, (4) data extraction, and (5) collation, synthesis, and reporting of results. This process involves collecting, analysing, and synthesising data from various relevant sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic under investigation. This approach is suitable for mapping key concepts and evidence in a broad field and identifying research gaps.

Translated with DeepL.com (free version) Inclusion criteria include: (1) original research articles or literature reviews published between 2020 and 2025; (2) full text available online; (3) written in English; and (4) sourced from Google Scholar, Wiley, Scopus, or Springer databases. The research year limit was applied to capture the latest and most relevant findings in the rapidly growing field of sports economics and community development. Exclusion criteria include: (1) articles published before 2020 or after 2025; (2) non-English articles; (3) articles not sourced from the specified databases; and (4) articles with full texts that are inaccessible. Translated with DeepL.com (free version) The search process was conducted in a predetermined database and ensured that the articles found were highly credible.

This research went through a systematic procedure, including:

1. Observational studies and document analysis in the form of articles to determine the theme, topic, title, and urgency of the research.
2. Establishing research questions to focus the discussion so that it remains focused. Searching for relevant articles in the following databases: Scopus (81), Springer (46), Wiley (37), and Google Scholar (342). using the keywords : "recreational sport" or "sport recreation" or "recreational activity", "economic welfare" or "economic well-being" or "economic impact", "sport tourism" or "sports tourism" or "adventure tourism", "community development" or "local economic development", "economic benefit" or "socioeconomic impact". Based on the initial search in the database, 506 articles were found.
3. The next step involves further filtering the articles, such as removing duplicates and assessing topic relevance, resulting in a total of 25 articles.
4. The next step involved filtering to find articles that could be downloaded in full, resulting in 8 articles.
5. The final step involved a final analysis, with the team agreeing that 8 articles were suitable. For clarity, the analysis was presented using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) as follows.

The study selection process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. After removing duplicates, the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles were screened for relevance. This resulted in 25 articles for full-text review. These articles were assessed based on inclusion criteria, with a focus on the

availability of full texts and direct relevance to the research question. The final selection consisted of 8 articles that were considered most relevant for in-depth analysis. The PRISMA flow diagram (diagram 1) illustrates this process.

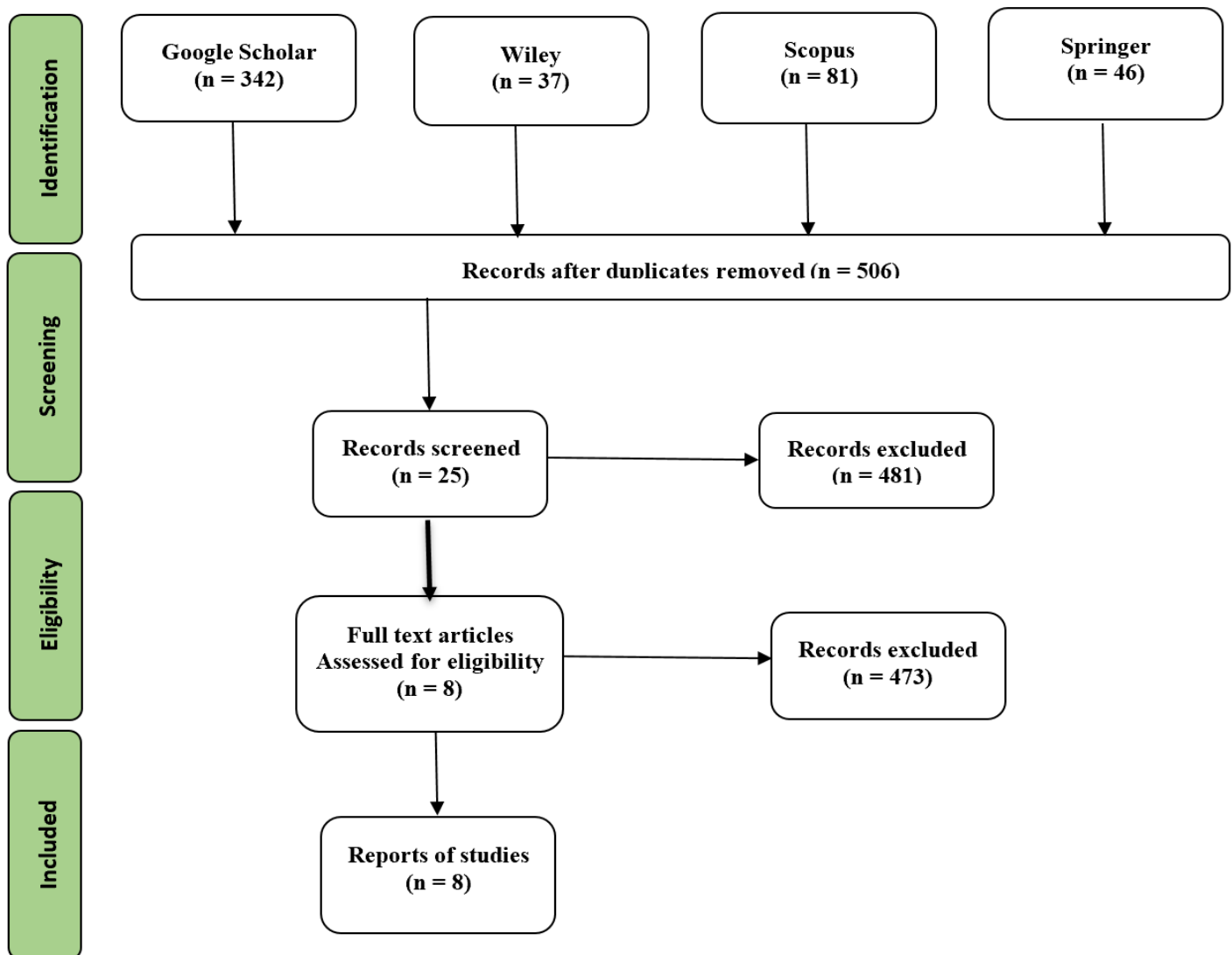


Diagram 1. PRISMA research process flow

The data obtained from selected articles were analysed using a scoping literature review method, assisted by the Publish or Perish and Mendeley applications and the following databases: Google Scholar, Wiley, Scopus, and Springer. This approach enabled us to identify trends, key findings, and gaps in existing research on the impact of recreational sports on improving the economic well-being of communities (Keane et al., 2019). The analysis was conducted systematically, taking into account the context, methodology, and results of each study reviewed (Bafeta et al., 2013).

Data from eight selected articles were extracted and mapped using a standard form in Microsoft Excel, which contained details about the authors, year of publication, objectives, methodology, main findings, and conclusions related to economic impact. This analysis

followed the principles of thematic analysis. The extracted data were reviewed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the research questions. The findings were then synthesised narratively to provide a comprehensive overview of the evidence, highlighting convergent and divergent results across studies. The Publish or Perish application was used for initial citation management, and Mendeley was used for reference organisation.

Results

The final analysis included 8 articles published between 2020 and 2024. The studies employed diverse methodologies, including comprehensive surveys, quantitative and qualitative approaches, systematic reviews, and mixed methods. The key findings from each study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of review analysis results from 8 documents

No	Author	Objective	Method	Results	Conclusion
1	Bradbury et al., 2023	Exploring the impact of professional sports franchises and related venues on the local economy.	A comprehensive survey approach that includes secondary data analysis from various sources	The results of the study show that the impact of professional sports franchises and venues on the local economy varies: job creation, tax revenue, economic growth, variability of impact.	Professional sports franchises and their venues can provide some economic benefits to local communities, but these effects are often more complex and not always positive.
2	Chen & Liu, 2020	Exploring the effectiveness of community sports provision in improving social inclusion and public health in rural areas of China.	A quantitative and qualitative approach.	Community sports provision has a significant positive impact on social inclusion and public health.	Community sports provision as a tool for improving social inclusion and public health in rural areas of China. These findings have broad implications, suggesting that investment in sports programs is not only beneficial for physical health but also supports sustainable social development.
3	Fernández-Martínez et al., 2022	Exploring the influence of small-scale sporting events on participants' intention to recommend the host city.	A quantitative approach with data collection through questionnaires.	There is a significant positive relationship between participants' experiences and their intention to recommend the host city.	The importance of small-scale sporting events in building a positive image of the host city. Practical implications for developing more effective destination marketing strategies, utilizing sporting events as a tool to attract tourists and boost local tourism.
4	Tulus et al., 2024	Exploring how competitive swimming events can empower local tourism in Swembath Natural Springs.	Qualitative approach using case study methods.	Competitive swimming events at Swembath Natural Springs have successfully attracted tourists from various regions, which has had a positive impact on local community income.	Competitive swimming events can be an effective tool for empowering local tourism and supporting sustainable development in Swembath Natural Springs.
5	Román et al., 2022	Exploring the environmental and socio-economic aspects of surfing and recreational tourism.	Qualitative and quantitative approach.	Surfing tourism has a significant impact on the environment. Surfing activities also provide substantial economic benefits to local communities, such as job creation and increased income	Surfing tourism can be a tool for sustainable economic development if managed properly.

6	Lukosevičiute et al., 2022	Exploring and analyzing the economic impact of recreational trails through a systematic review of existing literature.	A systematic review approach, which involves collecting and analyzing data from various relevant literature sources.	from the tourism sector. Recreational trails have a significant economic impact at various levels: increased tourism, property values, consumer spending, health, and well-being.	The importance of recreational trails as valuable economic assets that provide significant economic benefits, not only to increase tourism but also to increase property values and consumer spending.
7	Ghaderi et al., 2023	Exploring the psychological benefits gained by the organizing community from small-scale sporting events.	A qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and surveys.	Small-scale sporting events provide various psychological benefits for the community, including: increased social engagement, strong community identity, social network building, mental well-being, and local economic impact.	Small-scale sporting events have significant potential to provide psychological benefits to the organizing community. This study shows that the positive impacts generated can strengthen social relationships, community identity, and mental well-being.
8	Davies et al., 2020	Measuring and evaluating the social return on investment (SROI) of community sports and recreation facilities.	A mixed methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis.	Community sports and recreation facilities have a significant social impact. They generate much greater social value.	Investment in community sports and recreation facilities not only provides direct benefits to the individuals who use them, but also has a broader positive impact on society as a whole.

The analysis of the 8 studies revealed several convergent themes regarding the economic impact of recreational sports:

1. Diverse economic channels the economic benefits are delivered through multiple channels, including direct job creation (Bradbury et al., 2023; Román et al., 2022), increased tourism revenue (Tulus et al., 2024; Fernández-Martínez et al., 2022), and the stimulation of local businesses through consumer spending (Lukosevičiute et al., 2022).
2. Significance of Sports Type: Team sports, water-based activities (e.g., surfing), and mass participation running events are consistently highlighted as having high economic potential due to their ability to attract participants and spectators.
3. The Multiplier Effect: The concept of a multiplier effect is implicit in several studies, where initial spending in the sports sector circulates through the local economy, generating further benefits (Lukosevičiute et al., 2022; Davies et al., 2020).
4. Foundational Social Benefits: Investments in recreational sports yield significant social returns, including improved public health and stronger community cohesion (Chen & Liu, 2020; Ghaderi et al., 2023; Davies et al., 2020), which underpin long-term economic resilience and reduce public expenditure.

Discussion

This scoping review synthesized recent evidence to elucidate the role of recreational sports in enhancing community economic welfare. The findings provide nuanced answers to the proposed research questions. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that recreational sports contribute to economic well-being through both direct and indirect pathways. Directly, they generate employment in event management, facility operations, and hospitality (Bradbury et al., 2023; Román et al., 2022). Indirectly, they act as a catalyst for

local economic activity. The presence of sports facilities and events increases visitor numbers, leading to higher spending in adjacent sectors like accommodation, food, and retail (Lukoseviciute et al., 2022; Tulus et al., 2024).

This creates a positive multiplier effect, as explained by (Davies et al., 2020), where every dollar invested generates a larger social and economic return. Furthermore, the social benefits improved health (Chen & Liu, 2020) and community cohesion (Ghaderi et al., 2023) form a critical foundation for economic development by reducing healthcare costs and creating a more stable, engaged community attractive to further investment. The economic impact varies significantly by the type of recreational sport. The analysis suggests a hierarchy of impact:

- **High-Impact Activities:** Mass participation events like marathons and large team sports tournaments consistently show high economic returns. For instance, the Jakarta Marathon example (Tulus et al., 2024) demonstrates their power to generate substantial direct revenue. Similarly, water sports like surfing (Román et al., 2022) can define a region's tourist identity, creating sustained economic opportunities in rental services, coaching, and associated tourism.
- **Moderate but Sustainable Impact:** Recreational trails for hiking and cycling (Lukoseviciute et al., 2022) may not generate single-event windfalls but provide a consistent, year-round draw for tourists. They enhance property values and support local outdoor retail and guiding services, offering a stable source of income diversification for rural and peri-urban communities. This contrasts with the findings of (Bradbury et al. 2023), which caution that the economic benefits of professional sports franchises are often concentrated and may not trickle down broadly. This highlights that smaller-scale, community-embedded recreational activities can sometimes offer more equitable and sustainable local economic benefits.

The mechanisms linking recreational sports to economic welfare are interconnected:

1. **Job Creation:** Direct employment in facilities and events, and indirect jobs in supported industries (tourism, retail).
2. **Increased Local Expenditure:** Spending by participants, spectators, and tourists on goods and services within the community.
3. **Tourism Attraction:** Sports events and unique recreational offerings (e.g., surf breaks, scenic trails) enhance a destination's appeal, bringing in external money (Fernández-Martínez et al., 2022; Román et al., 2022).
4. **The Multiplier Effect:** The recycling of initial spending through the local economy as businesses and employees re-spend their income locally.
5. **Social Capital and Health Dividend:** Improved community health reduces public health burdens, and stronger social networks can lead to more resilient local economies and better collaboration for development (Davies et al., 2020; Ghaderi et al., 2023).

Maximizing economic impact hinges on a constellation of factors.

- **Supporting Factors:** Strong government support through funding, supportive policies, and infrastructure development is paramount (Bradbury et al., 2023; Lukoseviciute et al., 2022). Active community participation ensures local ownership and high engagement rates, which are critical for sustainability (Chen & Liu, 2020; Ghaderi et al.,

2023). Private sector involvement through sponsorship and investment provides essential financial leverage and marketing reach. Finally, strategic marketing and promotion are crucial to building a destination's profile and attracting visitors (Fernández-Martínez et al., 2022).

- **Inhibiting Factors:** Financial constraints are a primary barrier, particularly for rural communities, limiting facility development and event hosting (Davies et al., 2020). Inadequate promotion, as seen in the initial case of Swembath Natural Springs (Tulus et al., 2024), can prevent potential benefits from being realized. Poor accessibility, both in terms of geographic location and transport links, severely limits participation and tourist numbers (Lukoseviciute et al., 2022; Román et al., 2022).

The findings hold significant relevance for Indonesia. With high sports participation rates, the potential for community-based sports tourism is vast. The success of the Jakarta Marathon and the revitalization of Swembath Natural Springs through swimming events (Tulus et al., 2024) serve as local examples. However, to replicate this success, Indonesia must address key inhibitors. Strategic investments are needed in recreational infrastructure beyond urban centers, coupled with capacity-building in digital marketing for local communities, as demonstrated in the Swembath case. Fostering public-private partnerships can help overcome funding limitations and leverage business expertise in event management and promotion.

Conclusion

This scoping review confirms that recreational sports are a potent tool for enhancing community economic welfare. The economic contributions manifest through job creation, increased local spending, tourism development, and significant social returns on investment. The most impactful activities tend to be those that attract participants and spectators, such as team sports, water sports, and running events. The mechanism of impact is underpinned by a positive multiplier effect that ripples through the local economy. Realizing this potential requires a coordinated approach that leverages enablers government policy, community engagement, private investment, and effective marketing while proactively addressing constraints like funding shortages, poor promotion, and accessibility issues.

This review has limitations. The restriction to articles from 2020-2025, while ensuring recency, may have excluded seminal earlier works. The reliance on a limited number of final studies and the inclusion of Google Scholar, despite quality checks, may affect the comprehensiveness and generalizability of the findings. Future research should move beyond correlation to establish causality through longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies. Specifically, in-depth investigation into the role of local government policies in facilitating or hindering recreational sports development is crucial. Further exploration of context-specific business models that ensure the financial sustainability of community sports programs, particularly in rural Indonesia, is also highly recommended.

Author's Statement

I hereby declare that the article entitled “The Impact of Recreational Sports on Improving Community Economic Welfare: Scoping Literatur Review” is an original work and has not been published in any form in any journal or other media. This article is a contribution that has not been submitted for publication in any journal and is not currently being proposed for publication elsewhere. All data and information contained in this article are taken from reliable sources and are clearly listed in the bibliography.

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