

Volunteer Sport Tourism: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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Abstract

This systematic literature review synthesises existing knowledge on volunteer sport tourism—the intersection of volunteering, sport, and tourism—in order to clarify its evolution, theoretical foundations, and practical implications, and to address the fragmentation of the field across disciplines. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and doctoral dissertations published in English between January 1974 and December 2025 were retrieved from Web of Science, Scopus, SportDiscus, and Google Scholar, complemented by citation tracking. Studies focused on volunteers travelling to sporting events were included; conference abstracts, editorials, and works addressing only local volunteering or general tourism were excluded. The methodological quality of 32 included studies was appraised narratively by two authors independently against three criteria, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Findings were integrated through a thematic narrative synthesis supported by analytical mapping tables. The review identifies five dominant themes: motivations, volunteer experiences and satisfaction, economic and social impacts, organisational and management perspectives, and destination and legacy dimensions. The synthesis contributes to theoretical development by proposing an integrated tripartite framework that connects volunteer antecedents, event experiences, and legacy outcomes, and offers practical recommendations for event organisers, policymakers, and destination stakeholders. The review was conducted without pre-registration.

Keywords: volunteer sport tourism; mega-events; volunteer motivation; event management; destination legacy; literature review



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1. Introduction

Volunteer sport tourism represents the intersection of three distinct phenomena: volunteering, sport, and tourism. The convergence of these phenomena gives rise to a complex social practice in which individuals travel to particular destinations for the express purpose of providing unpaid labour at sporting events, ranging from small-scale community competitions to mega-events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup [1]. In general terms, sport volunteer tourists may be defined as those travelling abroad, or within the boundaries of their own country, for the purpose of volunteering at specific sporting events [2]. The phenomenon has attracted increasing academic attention, particularly over

the past two decades, reflecting both its growing practical significance and its theoretical richness as an area of inquiry.

The significance of volunteer sport tourism extends across multiple dimensions. Economically, volunteers may represent considerable cost savings for event organisers, with estimates suggesting that mega-events require thousands of volunteers whose labour, were it remunerated, would amount to millions of dollars [3]. Socially, volunteer sport tourism facilitates cross-cultural exchange, community development, and skill transfer [4]. From a destination perspective, volunteers serve as ambassadors who extend their visits beyond the event period and generate positive word-of-mouth promotion. At the individual level, volunteers acquire memorable tourism experiences, professional development opportunities, and psychological benefits, including enhanced self-esteem and social connectedness [5]. Freeman [6] further demonstrates that volunteer labour constitutes a substantial economic input, with participation rates positively associated with human capital—a counterintuitive finding that underscores the non-monetary value structure of volunteer work.

Despite its importance, scholarship on volunteer sport tourism remains fragmented across disciplines, including tourism studies, sport management, event management, and volunteer studies. This fragmentation has resulted in theoretical inconsistencies, methodological variation, and limited cumulative knowledge building [7]. Although several review articles have examined specific aspects of sport event volunteering, a comprehensive synthesis addressing the tourism dimension is still lacking.

The fragmentation noted above is not merely organisational but substantive: existing reviews tend to address either volunteering or sport tourism in isolation, leaving the tripartite intersection of volunteering, sport, and tourism critically underexamined. Three specific shortcomings characterise the current state of knowledge. First, prior syntheses rarely interrogate how the tourism dimension—travel, destination experience, and temporary residence—reshapes volunteer motivations and outcomes relative to local volunteering. Second, dominant theoretical frameworks have been imported from the general volunteering literature (e.g., SDT, VPM, social exchange theory) without integration with tourism-specific theories such as destination image, travel motivation, or memorable tourism experience. Third, the field exhibits a persistent geographic and event-type bias towards Western mega-events, while smaller-scale, community, and cross-cultural contexts remain analytically marginal. The present review responds to these shortcomings by combining a PRISMA-guided systematic search with an analytical, rather than descriptive, content analysis of the included studies, and by proposing an integrated tripartite framework that explicitly links antecedents, event experiences, and post-event legacies (introduced in Section 5.4). The review pursues four primary objectives: first, to map the evolution of volunteer sport tourism research over time; second, to identify the dominant theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches; third, to synthesise key findings across thematic areas through an analytical comparison of studies; and finally, to delineate research gaps and to formulate a structured future research agenda. Through this comprehensive synthesis, the review aims to contribute to both theoretical advancement and practical application within the field of volunteer sport tourism.

The structure of this review proceeds as follows. Following the introduction, the second section establishes the theoretical framework by conceptualising volunteer tourism, sport tourism, and their intersection, while reviewing the predominant theoretical perspectives. The subsequent section describes the research methodology employed for the identification, selection, and analysis of the literature. Thereafter, the next section presents a descriptive overview of the literature corpus, followed by a detailed thematic analysis across five key themes. Section 5 offers a critical discussion that synthesises theoretical, methodological, and contextual considerations. Section 6 identifies research gaps and

proposes a future research agenda, while the final section, the conclusion, sets out the implications of the review for theory, practice, and policy.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptualising Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism, frequently referred to as voluntourism, denotes organised travel in which tourists engage in voluntary work to support community development, environmental conservation, or social welfare projects [8]. This definition emphasises both the altruistic dimension and the organised nature of the activity, thereby differentiating it from spontaneous helping behaviour or local volunteering. The motivations underlying volunteer tourism span a spectrum from purely altruistic desires to assist others to more self-oriented goals, such as personal growth, the enhancement of one's curriculum vitae, and the experience of different cultures. This duality engenders both opportunities and tensions within volunteer tourism, since organisations must reconcile volunteers' service contributions with their tourism expectations.

2.2. Sport Tourism as a Niche

Sport tourism encompasses travel undertaken for the purposes of active or passive participation in competitive or recreational sport [9]. Gibson's [9] foundational typology distinguishes three principal forms: active sport tourism (participation as athlete), event sport tourism (attendance as spectator), and nostalgia sport tourism (visits to sport-related sites and halls of fame). Volunteer sport tourism does not map neatly onto any of these categories; rather, it constitutes a hybrid form in which the volunteer simultaneously occupies a productive role within the event apparatus and a tourist role in the destination—a duality that the existing sport tourism typology has not fully accommodated. Within the wider field of tourism, sporting events—particularly mega-events such as the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, and other world championships, alongside regional multi-sport competitions—have become major generators of tourism over recent decades. Such events attract spectators, athletes, officials, media representatives, and volunteers from around the world, thereby creating temporary communities characterised by complex social dynamics. The tourism dimension of sporting events extends beyond mere attendance during competition to include pre-event familiarisation visits and post-event return trips, which suggests that sporting events foster enduring destination relationships. According to Pigeassou [10], sport tourism should be understood as an economic and social activity situated at the intersection of sport and tourism, in which individuals engage in short-term journeys away from their usual environment to experience sport-related activities; this framing underscores the layered nature of motivations and experiences that may also surround volunteer participation within sport tourism contexts.

The convergence of sport and tourism gives rise to a distinctive set of characteristics, including temporal concentration, spatial clustering, media attention, and emotional intensity [9]. These characteristics exert a substantial influence upon volunteer experiences, as volunteers operate in high-pressure environments while simultaneously engaging with destination attractions and cultural activities. A thorough appreciation of these contextual factors is therefore essential for an adequate understanding of volunteer sport tourism as a distinct phenomenon.

2.3. Defining Volunteer Sport Tourism

Volunteer sport tourism may be defined as organised travel undertaken in order to participate in unpaid voluntary work at sporting events or sport-related activities in destinations away from one's usual place of residence. This definition encompasses three

essential elements: the voluntary nature of participation; the sport context; and the tourism dimension, which entails travel and a temporary stay in a host destination. Accordingly, this form of volunteering is distinguished from local sport volunteering by its tourism component, and from general volunteer tourism by its specific focus on sporting events.

Several characteristics distinguish volunteer sport tourism from other forms of volunteering and tourism. First, the time-bounded nature of sporting events generates compressed volunteer experiences characterised by intense social interaction over a limited duration [1]. Second, the competitive and performance-oriented context produces distinctive psychological dynamics, including pressure, excitement, and collective effervescence. Third, the global character of major sporting events facilitates international volunteer participation, giving rise to multicultural volunteer workforces and the attendant cross-cultural dynamics [11]. Finally, the visibility and media attention surrounding sporting events afford volunteers heightened prestige and recognition relative to many other volunteering contexts.

The volunteer sport tourism experience can be conceptualised across temporal phases, namely pre-event anticipation and preparation, event-period participation, and post-event reflection and legacy [4]. This temporal structure recognises that volunteer experiences commence prior to arrival at the destination and continue beyond departure, with consequent implications for how volunteers construct meaning and derive satisfaction. In this connection, Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley [12] developed the Volunteer Satisfaction Index (VSI), a multidimensional instrument designed to capture volunteers' satisfaction across multiple dimensions of the experiences they have within organisations that rely predominantly on volunteer labour. A nuanced understanding of these temporal dynamics is essential for the development of comprehensive theoretical frameworks and effective management practices.

2.4. Theoretical Perspectives

A range of theoretical frameworks has been employed in the analysis of volunteer sport tourism. Self-Determination Theory [13] frames motivation as a continuum extending from amotivation, through extrinsic forms of motivation, to intrinsic motivation, with autonomous motivation characterised by perceived choice and value congruence. As applied to volunteer sport tourism, Self-Determination Theory suggests that volunteers whose participation satisfies the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness will experience greater satisfaction and sustained commitment [14]. This framework helps to account for why some volunteers return repeatedly while others participate on only one occasion.

The Volunteer Process Model, formulated by Omoto and Snyder [15], conceptualises volunteerism as a sequential process encompassing antecedents, experiences, and consequences. Antecedents include the motivations, personality attributes, and social networks that lead individuals to volunteer. Experiences comprise the actual volunteer activities, the relationships formed with fellow volunteers and beneficiaries, and satisfaction with the volunteering process. Consequences include effects upon the volunteers themselves, such as skill development and identity change, as well as organisational outcomes such as retention and performance [16]; this model thus provides a comprehensive framework for understanding volunteer sport tourism as a developmental process rather than a discrete event.

Social exchange theory posits that individuals enter into relationships on the basis of anticipated rewards and costs, with such relationships sustained when the perceived benefits exceed the costs incurred [17]. Applied to volunteer sport tourism, volunteers appraise tangible benefits such as training, meals, and uniforms alongside intangible benefits such as social interaction, skill development, and meaningful contribution [18].

When the experienced benefits outweigh costs such as time commitment, physical demands, and opportunity costs, volunteers report satisfaction and an intention to continue. It is contended that this framework underscores the importance of organisations providing adequate support and recognition to their volunteers.

Studies grounded in environmental psychology, particularly the stimulus-organism-response model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell [19], have been drawn upon to understand how the physical and social environments at sporting occasions, such as mega-sport events, influence volunteer satisfaction and behaviour. The event environment serves as the stimulus, volunteer satisfaction represents the internal state of the organism, and continuance intention constitutes the behavioural response [4]. This perspective highlights the manner in which management practices generate environments that shape volunteer experiences and ensuing outcomes.

These theoretical frameworks are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, each illuminating different facets of volunteer sport tourism. The integration of these perspectives permits a more comprehensive understanding of why individuals volunteer at sporting events, what they experience throughout their participation, and what outcomes ensue for volunteers, organisations, and destinations [7,20]. The challenge for future research lies in the development of integrated frameworks that synthesise insights from multiple theoretical traditions while preserving conceptual clarity and empirical testability.

Drawing the preceding subsections together, volunteer sport tourism cannot be adequately understood through any single conceptual lens. Each strand contributes a distinct analytical layer. Volunteer tourism (Section 2.1) supplies the altruistic-egoistic motivational continuum and the ethical tensions surrounding unpaid travel-based labour. Sport tourism (Section 2.2) introduces the temporal compression, emotional intensity, and destination-relationship dynamics that distinguish event contexts. The theoretical perspectives just outlined add complementary explanatory mechanisms: SDT accounts for need-based motivation; the VPM captures the temporal unfolding of antecedents, experiences, and consequences; social exchange theory addresses the perceived equity of cost-benefit balances; and environmental psychology models the situational stimulus-organism-response chain.

Read together, these strands suggest that volunteer sport tourism is best conceptualised as a temporally extended, contextually embedded process. Tourism-specific antecedents (destination image, travel motivation) and sport-specific stimuli (event prestige, collective effervescence) jointly shape the volunteer experience and its downstream legacies. This integrative reading directly informs the analytical lens applied in Section 4 and the integrated framework proposed in Section 5.4.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Aim and Questions

The present literature review seeks to synthesise current knowledge of volunteer sport tourism through the systematic analysis of peer-reviewed publications addressing the phenomenon. The review pursues answers to four research questions:

- What are the dominant themes in volunteer sport tourism literature?
- How has research in this field evolved over time?
- What theoretical frameworks predominate in volunteer sport tourism research?
- What are the key research gaps requiring future investigation?

These questions guide the systematic analysis while remaining sufficiently open to capture emergent themes and unanticipated patterns within the literature.

3.2. Research Design

The systematic literature review presented here employs the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology [21] in order to identify, evaluate, and synthesise the existing research on volunteer sport tourism. The PRISMA approach provides a transparent and replicable framework for the conduct of literature reviews, thereby ensuring methodological rigour and reducing potential bias in the selection and analysis of studies.

Generative AI tools (Claude Sonnet 4.5, Anthropic) were employed to assist in the drafting and revision of the manuscript text. Literature identification, selection, and analysis were conducted by the authors. All content was reviewed and verified by the authors, who assume full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

The conduct and reporting of this review comply with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines [21]. A completed PRISMA 2020 Checklist is provided as Appendix B and the corresponding flow diagram is presented in Figure 1. The review protocol was not prospectively registered. At the planning stage, several registers were available, including PROSPERO, the Open Science Framework (OSF) Registries, and INPLASY. PROSPERO accepts systematic reviews with a health-related outcome, broadly construed to encompass social care, welfare, public health, and education. Prospective registration was nevertheless not undertaken. The inclusion and exclusion criteria, search string, and screening procedures were nevertheless specified prior to the commencement of screening and were applied consistently across all records, in accordance with the PRISMA principles of transparency and replicability. No protocol amendments were introduced during the review process. The absence of prospective registration is acknowledged as a methodological limitation of the present review.

3.3. Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases in order to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant scholarly work. The principal databases consulted included the Web of Science Core Collection, Scopus, and SportDiscus, which together provide extensive indexed coverage of sport management, tourism, leisure studies, and interdisciplinary social science research. Google Scholar was used as a complementary source to identify additional peer-reviewed records and to mitigate the risk of database bias. Records retrieved through Google Scholar and through citation tracking that fell into the “grey literature” category (notably doctoral dissertations) were subjected to the same eligibility criteria as records from the indexed databases, with three additional quality safeguards: (i) only doctoral dissertations from accredited universities and identifiable supervisory committees were retained; (ii) conference abstracts, editorials, and unrefereed reports were excluded a priori (see exclusion criterion 3); and (iii) every grey-literature record retained was cross-checked against the indexed databases for any associated peer-reviewed publication, which was preferred over the grey-literature version where available. This procedure ensured that the inclusion of non-indexed sources did not compromise the methodological quality of the synthesis.

A systematic search strategy was developed using Boolean operators in order to retrieve relevant literature situated at the intersection of volunteering, sport, and tourism. The search string employed was as follows: (“volunteer*” OR “volunteerism” OR “volunteering”) AND (“sport*” OR “sporting event*” OR “mega-event*”) AND (“tourism” OR “tourist*” OR “travel*” OR “destination*”).

The search covered publications issued between January 1974 and December 2025. This approximately fifty-year timeframe was selected in order to capture foundational theoretical works (e.g., [13]), the emergence of volunteer sport tourism as a distinct

research area (1990s–2000s), and recent developments in volunteer management and sustainability (2010s–2020s).

Studies were included if they satisfied the following criteria:

1. Topical relevance constituted an essential requirement: the study was required to focus primarily on volunteers at sporting events who travel to destinations specifically in order to volunteer (volunteer sport tourists), or on the management and outcomes of volunteer programmes at sport tourism events.
2. With respect to publication type, peer-reviewed journal articles, published books, and doctoral dissertations were included in order to ensure academic quality and rigour.
3. As regards language, only studies published in English were included, owing to resource constraints and in the interests of consistency in interpretation.
4. The study presented original empirical research, a systematic review, a meta-analysis, or a substantive theoretical framework relevant to volunteer sport tourism.

Studies were excluded if they:

1. Focused solely on local volunteers without the tourism dimension (that is, where residents volunteered at events in their own community without travel);
2. Addressed general tourism volunteering without a specific focus on sporting events;
3. Constituted conference abstracts, editorials, or brief commentary pieces lacking substantial empirical or theoretical content;
4. Constituted duplicate publications of the same study.

The selection of studies proceeded through a multi-stage screening process in accordance with PRISMA guidelines:

In accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology [21], a comprehensive systematic literature search was conducted to identify relevant scholarly work on volunteer sport tourism. The search was executed across four major academic databases: Web of Science ($n = 198$), Scopus ($n = 156$), SportDiscus ($n = 108$), and Google Scholar ($n = 25$), yielding a total of 487 database records. An additional 23 records were identified through supplementary sources, including citation tracking and grey literature searches, bringing the total initial corpus to 510 records.

Following the removal of duplicates, 154 duplicate entries were eliminated, leaving 356 unique records for title and abstract screening. The systematic screening process applied predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria in order to ensure relevance and methodological quality. During this stage, 268 records were excluded: 142 studies did not focus specifically on sporting events; 89 studies failed to address volunteer tourism as a distinct phenomenon, instead concentrating either on general volunteering or on tourism in isolation; and 37 records were excluded as conference abstracts lacking sufficient empirical or theoretical depth for inclusion in this synthesis.

The remaining 88 full-text articles underwent eligibility assessment against the established inclusion criteria. This stage resulted in the exclusion of a further 56 articles. The principal reasons for exclusion at the full-text phase were as follows: insufficient focus on volunteer sport tourism ($n = 28$), indicating that, although these studies referred to volunteer tourism or sporting events, they did not provide a substantive analysis of their intersection; a primarily descriptive or non-academic character ($n = 18$), which did not meet the quality threshold for peer-reviewed empirical or theoretical contribution; and inability to access the full text ($n = 10$), notwithstanding multiple retrieval attempts through institutional access and interlibrary loan services.

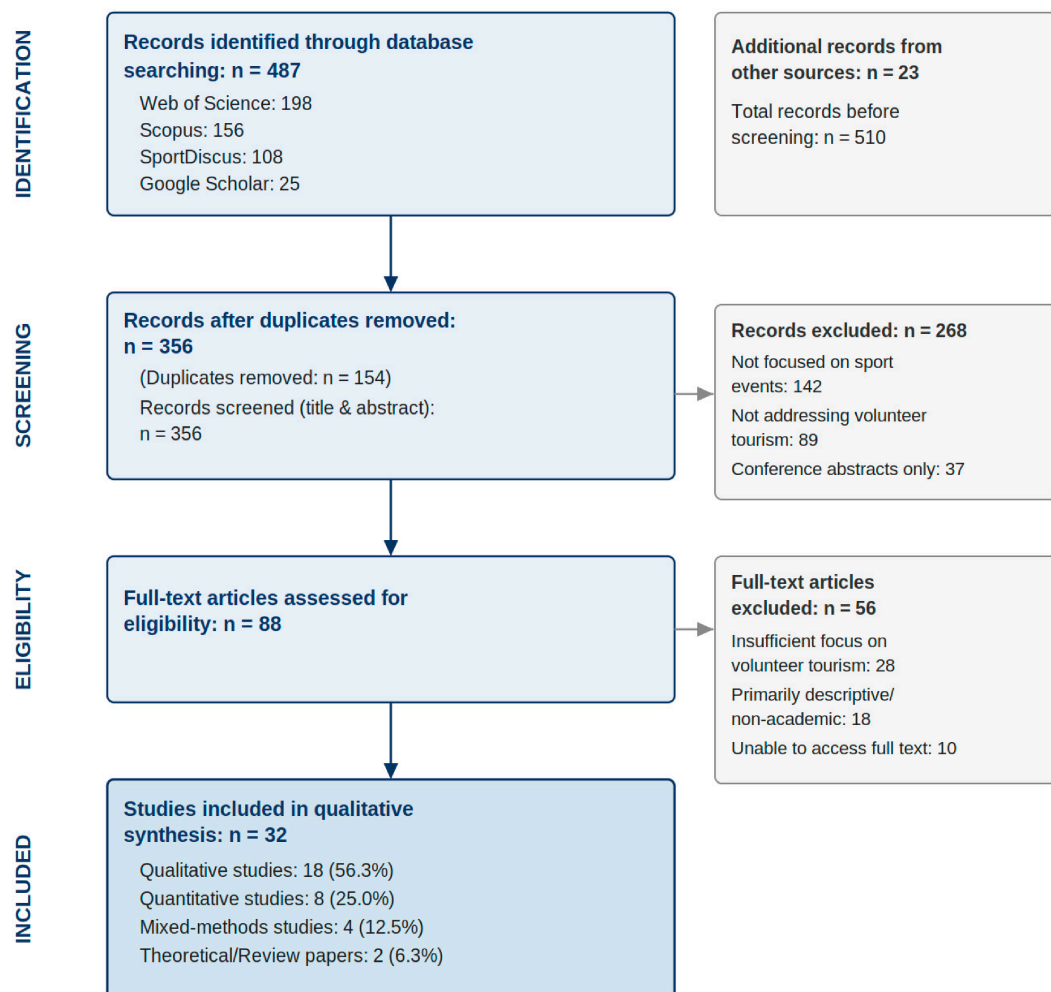


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.

Ultimately, 32 studies satisfied all inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the qualitative synthesis. The final sample exhibits considerable methodological diversity: qualitative studies constitute the majority ($n = 18$, 56.3%), reflecting the field's emphasis on the in-depth exploration of volunteer experiences, motivations, and organisational dynamics. Quantitative studies account for 25.0% of the corpus ($n = 8$), employing survey methodologies and statistical analyses to test theoretical relationships and to identify predictive factors. Mixed-methods studies represent 12.5% ($n = 4$), combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth to provide comprehensive understanding. Finally, theoretical and review papers comprise 6.3% ($n = 2$), contributing to conceptual development and knowledge synthesis within the field.

This systematic and transparent approach ensures that the review's findings furnish a reliable foundation for understanding the current state of knowledge on volunteer sport tourism and for identifying directions for future research.

3.4. Data Extraction and Analysis

A data extraction protocol was developed in order to capture systematically key information from each included study, encompassing bibliographic details, study characteristics (research design, methodology, sample characteristics, geographic context), theoretical frameworks, key findings relating to volunteer motivations, satisfaction, organisational practices, and outcomes, as well as the limitations acknowledged by the authors and the future research directions proposed.

A narrative quality appraisal of the included studies was carried out in parallel with data extraction, in line with PRISMA 2020 item 11. Given the methodological heterogeneity of the corpus (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and theoretical contributions), no single domain-specific risk-of-bias instrument (e.g., RoB 2, ROBINS-I, MMAT) was applicable to the full sample; instead, each study was appraised against three transparent criteria: (i) peer-review status and publication outlet quality; (ii) transparency of methodological reporting (clarity of design, sampling, and analytical procedure); and (iii) adequacy of sample description in relation to the claims advanced. Two authors appraised each study independently and recorded their judgements in a shared extraction form; disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, with no third reviewer required. No automation tools were used either for screening or for quality appraisal; all judgements were made manually by the two authors. The appraisal was used to inform the weight given to individual study findings during the narrative synthesis, rather than as an exclusion criterion at this stage.

A narrative synthesis approach was employed to integrate findings across studies. This approach was selected on account of the heterogeneity of study designs, methodologies, and results within the constituted literature, and the integration was organised thematically on the basis of emergent patterns in the literature:

- Theoretical foundations;
- Motivational dynamics;
- Volunteer experience and satisfaction;
- Organisational management;
- Destination and legacy impacts.

4. Literature Analysis and Findings

4.1. Descriptive Overview

The 32 reviewed articles (a list of which is provided in Appendix A) span the period from 1974 to 2024, with an exponential increase in publications observable in the present corpus from 2005 onwards, reflecting the growing academic and practical interest in mega-event volunteering following the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Geographically, the research is concentrated in Western contexts, particularly North America, Europe, and Australia, with comparatively limited representation from Asia, Africa, and South America (Table 1). Methodologically, qualitative designs (interviews, ethnography, and case studies) predominate ($n = 18$, 56.3%), followed by quantitative designs (cross-sectional surveys and structural equation modelling) ($n = 8$, 25.0%), mixed-methods designs ($n = 4$, 12.5%), and theoretical or review papers ($n = 2$, 6.3%). The majority of studies focus on mega-events, particularly the Olympic Games, world championships, and World Cup tournaments, with fewer examining medium-scale or community events.

Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Studies.

Region/Context	Frequency	Percentage
North America (USA, Canada)	9	28.1%
Europe	8	25.0%
Asia-Pacific	7	21.9%
Multiple regions/Global	5	15.6%
Other	3	9.4%

Source: own collection.

The reviewed literature demonstrates a concentration on mega sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup ($n = 12$, 37.5%), reflecting both the high vis-

ibility of these competitions and the substantial volunteer workforce they require (Table 2). Regional and national championships constitute the second largest category ($n = 8$, 25.0%), followed by recurring community events ($n = 7$, 21.9%); meanwhile, comparative studies examining multiple event types represent 15.6% of the corpus ($n = 5$). This distribution reveals a research bias towards prestigious mega-events, suggesting that smaller-scale sporting competitions and community-based volunteer sport tourism contexts remain understudied, notwithstanding their frequency and accessibility for many volunteers.

Table 2. Distribution of Studies by Sport Event Type.

Event Type	Frequency	Percentage
Mega sporting events (Olympics, World Cup, etc.)	12	37.5%
Regional/national championships	8	25.0%
Recurring community events	7	21.9%
Multiple event types/comparative studies	5	15.6%

Source: own collection.

The analysis of theoretical frameworks employed across the 32 reviewed studies reveals both the multidisciplinary nature of volunteer sport tourism research and the field's ongoing theoretical development. As shown in Table 3, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [13] emerges as the most frequently applied framework ($n = 8$, 25.0%), reflecting the field's sustained interest in understanding motivational dynamics along the continuum from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. SDT's emphasis on the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness provides a robust lens through which to examine why volunteers whose participation satisfies these fundamental needs demonstrate greater satisfaction and sustained commitment to future volunteering opportunities.

Table 3. Theoretical Frameworks Employed.

Theoretical Framework	Frequency
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	8
Social Exchange Theory	6
Volunteer Process Model (VPM)	5
Theory of Planned Behaviour	3
Environmental Psychology	2
No explicit framework	8

Source: own collection.

Social Exchange Theory constitutes the second most widely adopted framework ($n = 6$, 18.8%), conceptualising volunteer participation as a rational cost–benefit calculation in which individuals participate when the perceived rewards—both tangible (training, uniforms, event access) and intangible (social interaction, skill development, meaningful contribution)—outweigh the costs incurred, such as time commitment, physical demands, and opportunity costs [17,18]. This framework underscores the focus of researchers on volunteer satisfaction and retention as outcomes of balanced exchange relationships between volunteers and event organisations.

The Volunteer Process Model (VPM) [15,16] appears in five of the studies reviewed (15.6%), providing a comprehensive sequential framework that conceptualises volunteerism across antecedents (motivations, personality traits, social networks), experiences (actual activities, relationships, satisfaction), and consequences (skill development, identity formation, organisational outcomes). The VPM's temporal structure aligns particularly well with

the natural phases of volunteer sport tourism, namely pre-event anticipation, event-period participation, and post-event reflection, rendering it particularly valuable for longitudinal or process-oriented research.

Only three studies (9.4%) employ the Theory of Planned Behaviour to examine how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence volunteering intentions and subsequent behaviour, while two studies (6.3%) adopt environmental psychology perspectives, particularly the stimulus-organism-response model [19], which examines how physical and social event environments shape volunteer satisfaction and behavioural responses [4].

Notably, eight studies (25.0%) do not engage with any explicit theoretical framework, instead adopting exploratory or descriptive approaches. This substantial proportion of atheoretical research reflects both the relative youth of the field and its applied, practice-oriented character. Although such studies provide valuable empirical insights, particularly in relation to emerging contexts or understudied event types, the absence of theoretical grounding constrains cumulative knowledge building and theoretical refinement. This pattern highlights a critical research gap, namely the need for more theoretically informed research that explicitly tests, extends, or integrates existing frameworks.

The dominance of frameworks adapted from general volunteer research (SDT, Social Exchange Theory, VPM) rather than from tourism-specific theories reveals a significant theoretical limitation. Notwithstanding the inherent tourism dimensions of volunteer sport tourism—encompassing travel, destination experiences, and temporary residence away from home—few studies employ tourism theories such as destination image theory, travel motivation frameworks, or tourist experience models. This theoretical gap suggests insufficient attention to the manner in which the tourism component specifically shapes volunteer motivations, experiences, and outcomes, thereby differentiating volunteer sport tourists from local event volunteers. Future theoretical development should pursue greater integration, synthesising insights from the volunteering, sport, and tourism studies in order to construct frameworks that explicitly address the unique tripartite character of volunteer sport tourism.

To support a more analytical reading of the corpus, Table 4 summarises the methodological approaches encountered in the reviewed studies, alongside their typical contexts, strengths, and limitations. The table reveals that qualitative designs predominate in studies of volunteer experience and motivation, whereas quantitative designs are concentrated around motivational scale validation and satisfaction-continuance modelling; mixed-methods studies remain comparatively rare and are largely confined to mega-event contexts.

Table 4. Methodological Approaches in the Reviewed Literature.

Approach	<i>n</i> (%)	Typical Contexts	Strengths	Limitations
Qualitative (interviews, ethnography, case studies)	18 (56.3%)	Mega-events; experience and meaning-making; cross-cultural encounters	Depth; access to volunteer voices; suited to emergent themes	Limited generalisability; dependence on retrospective recall
Quantitative (cross-sectional surveys, SEM)	8 (25.0%)	Motivational scale validation (VMS-ISE); satisfaction-continuance models	Hypothesis testing; comparability across contexts	Common-method bias; cross-sectional designs preclude causal inference
Mixed methods	4 (12.5%)	Mega-event volunteer programmes; management evaluations	Triangulation; complementarity of breadth and depth	Resource-intensive; integration challenges
Theoretical/review	2 (6.3%)	Conceptual mapping; review of motivation literature	Synthesis; conceptual integration	Reliance on extant empirical base

Source: own collection.

Table 5 extends the analytical mapping by linking each dominant theoretical framework to its disciplinary origin, the constructs it foregrounds, the contribution it has made to the field, and the limitations identified through the present synthesis. This mapping makes visible an asymmetry in the literature: although tourism is a constitutive component of the phenomenon, no theory of tourist experience, destination image, or travel motivation has been systematically adopted within the corpus.

Table 5. Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks Applied in the Reviewed Literature.

Framework	Disciplinary Origin	Key Constructs	Contribution to the Field	Identified Limitations
Self-Determination Theory [14]	Psychology	Autonomy, competence, relatedness; intrinsic/extrinsic motivation	Explains variation in volunteer satisfaction and continuance	Underspecifies the tourism context (destination, travel)
Volunteer Process Model [16,17]	Social psychology	Antecedents–experiences–consequences sequence	Aligns with pre/during/post-event volunteer phases	Rarely operationalised longitudinally
Social Exchange Theory [18,19]	Sociology/management	Cost–benefit appraisal; perceived equity	Frames retention as outcome of balanced exchanges	Limited engagement with intrinsic/affective drivers
Theory of Planned Behaviour	Social psychology	Attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control	Models intention-formation prior to volunteering	Weak intention–behaviour link in event contexts
Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) [5,20]	Environmental psychology	Event environment, internal state, behavioural response	Highlights situational shaping of satisfaction	Limited integration with motivational theories
No explicit framework	—	Descriptive accounts of practice	Captures emerging contexts not yet theorised	Constrains cumulative theory development

Source: own collection.

Taken together, Tables 1–5 furnish the descriptive and analytical foundation upon which the thematic analysis that follows builds. They also make explicit the connection between the descriptive overview and the four research questions: the geographic and event-type distributions (Tables 1 and 2) speak to the evolution of the field (RQ2); Tables 3 and 5 address the dominant theoretical frameworks (RQ3); Table 4 addresses methodological maturity; and the asymmetries identified across these tables prefigure the research gaps consolidated in Section 6 (RQ4). The thematic analysis below addresses RQ1, structured around the five dominant themes inductively identified across the corpus.

4.2. Thematic Analysis

4.2.1. Theme 1: Motivations for Volunteer Sport Tourism

Volunteer motivations represented the most extensively researched theme within the literature reviewed, with studies consistently identifying multiple co-existing motivations rather than a single primary driver [7]. As noted above, the literature differentiates between altruistic motivations, which are oriented towards contributing to event success and supporting communities, and egoistic motivations, which centre on personal benefits such as skill development, networking, and unique experiences [16,22]. The majority of volunteers report moderate to high levels of both altruistic and egoistic motivations, suggesting that these orientations are complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Research utilising the VMS-ISE identifies six consistent motivational dimensions. The first is the expression of values, which encompasses the alignment between personal values

and event goals, as well as patriotism and community involvement, particularly salient in international competitions. The second is interpersonal contact and social interaction with fellow volunteers and event participants. A further dimension comprises career orientation, encompassing curriculum vitae enhancement and networking opportunities. Personal growth, embracing skill development and self-discovery, constitutes another dimension, alongside extrinsic rewards such as uniforms, training, and event access [14,23]. The relative importance of these dimensions varies across individuals, contexts, and event types, thereby underscoring the motivational heterogeneity within volunteer populations.

Event-specific factors significantly influence motivation. Mega-events such as the Olympic Games confer additional motivational appeal in the form of prestige, historical significance, and global attention, which smaller events cannot offer [11]. Volunteers report being drawn to the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate in globally significant events and to contribute to national representation on the world stage. This prestige factor appears strongest among first-time volunteers at mega-events and diminishes somewhat among experienced volunteers who have participated in multiple major competitions.

Destination attractiveness emerges as an important, albeit frequently overlooked, motivation. Volunteers who elect to participate at events in desirable tourist destinations report tourism motivations—including sightseeing, experiencing local culture, and visiting attractions—as significant factors in their decision; these findings underscore the tourism dimension of volunteer sport tourism and distinguish it from purely altruistic volunteering. Nevertheless, the relative importance of destination versus event characteristics varies, with some volunteers prioritising event contribution irrespective of location, while others specifically seek opportunities that combine desirable destinations with sporting events.

Career development motivations appear particularly prominent among younger volunteers and those undergoing career transition [24]; such volunteers regard sport event volunteering as an opportunity to gain experience in event management, hospitality, or sport administration while building professional networks within the sport tourism sector. Several studies indicate that career-oriented volunteers articulate distinctive satisfaction criteria and continuance patterns relative to volunteers driven primarily by social or altruistic motivations, thereby pointing to the importance of motivation-based segmentation in volunteer management. Smith and Holmes [25] argue that research on volunteers in tourism must move beyond simple demographic descriptions to consider the complex motivations, experiences, and social relationships that shape volunteer engagement, thereby underscoring the multifaceted nature of volunteerism within tourism contexts.

While the factors of destination attractiveness and career development are significant, it is equally necessary to address event-specific factors not only in the context of mega-events, but with particular reference to fan motivation. This concern relates directly to Gibson's [9] category of event sport tourism, in which travel is motivated by attendance at sporting events; volunteer sport tourists who identify as fans occupy an intermediate position between the spectator-tourist of Gibson's typology and the productive volunteer of the event workforce, which complicates any straightforward application of fan-based motivation models.

Kim et al. [26] argue that certain individuals develop a psychological attachment to a specific sport, a concept termed "domain involvement" by Gwinner and Swanson [27], rather than being tied to a single team or club. According to their framework, this broad sport identification serves as a crucial moderator that enhances the impact of an event's prestige upon a volunteer's satisfaction and commitment. Whether club-specific affiliation operates differently from broad sport identification, however, remains analytically distinct and warrants separate consideration.

Research by Schlesinger et al. [28] suggests that identification with a specific sports club indeed plays a vital role in sustaining volunteerism, often extending beyond a general affinity for the sport. Whereas broad “domain involvement” focuses on the sport as a whole, stable volunteering in environments such as soccer clubs is heavily rooted in an orientation towards collective solidarity. This sense of belonging to a particular club community functions as a primary driver of retention, whereby volunteers perceive their efforts as a contribution to a social group with which they personally identify. Furthermore, affective commitment—that is, the emotional attachment to a club’s specific values and traditions—has been shown to reduce turnover intentions significantly. Consequently, although a love for sport may initially generate interest, the transition to sustainable, long-term volunteerism is frequently consolidated by the “we-feeling” and the social ties unique to a specific club’s identity.

4.2.2. Theme 2: Volunteer Experiences and Satisfaction

Volunteer satisfaction operates as a critical mediating variable between organisational practices and outcome variables such as continuance intention and positive word-of-mouth [4]. The literature conceptualises satisfaction as a multidimensional construct encompassing satisfaction with the organisation, fulfilment with the assigned role, satisfaction with the social experience, and overall satisfaction with the volunteering experience [5]. These dimensions frequently correlate, although they may also vary independently, with some volunteers reporting high levels of satisfaction in certain areas while expressing disappointment in others.

Service quality and volunteer management practices significantly predict satisfaction. Effective practices include clear role definitions, competent training, harmonious communication, recognition of contributions, and responsive problem-solving [29,30]. Volunteers report frustration when confronted with role ambiguity, ineffective training, poor communication, or organisational disorganisation; in certain instances, the compressed timeframe of sporting events intensifies these management challenges, since organisations must rapidly train and coordinate large volunteer workforces with limited lead time. Studies comparing well-managed and poorly managed volunteer programmes reveal substantial differences in satisfaction, thereby highlighting the crucial role of management.

Cross-cultural encounters constitute a defining feature of volunteer sport tourism experiences, particularly at international competitions [11]. Volunteers report that interactions with people from diverse cultures represent a highlight of their experiences, facilitating cultural learning and broadening perspectives; however, cross-cultural interaction can also engender challenges, including language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and coordination difficulties within multicultural volunteer teams. Organisations that provide cultural orientation and language support enable more positive cross-cultural experiences, whereas those that neglect these dimensions risk volunteer frustration and intercultural conflict.

Organisational challenges identified by volunteers include inadequate information, last-minute schedule modifications, excessive physical demands, long working hours without adequate breaks or rest, and limited opportunities for sightseeing or tourism activities [5]. These challenges appear more acute at mega-events, where organisational complexity and scale generate coordination difficulties. Volunteers who anticipate that volunteering will allow time for tourism activities express disappointment when work schedules preclude destination exploration. This finding reveals tensions between the volunteering and tourism dimensions of volunteer sport tourism, suggesting the importance of realistic expectations and balanced scheduling.

Volunteers report that participation produces lasting memories, stories shared with friends and family, and enhanced affinity with the destination; these memorable experi-

ences encompass both the volunteering itself and the tourism activities undertaken before, during, or after events. The integration of volunteering and tourism appears central to the distinctiveness of volunteer sport tourism, with volunteers valuing opportunities to combine meaningful contribution with destination experiences. Organisations that facilitate this integration through flexible scheduling, organised group activities, or the provision of destination information enhance volunteer experiences considerably.

Sthapit et al. [31] identified novelty, meaningfulness, experience co-creation, and experience intensification as key antecedents of memorable volunteer tourism experiences, and demonstrated that such experiences exert a significant influence upon the psychological resilience and behavioural intentions of volunteer tourists.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Economic and Social Impacts

Volunteers contribute substantially to event success through the provision of labour across multiple functional areas, including spectator services, athlete support, logistics, medical services, and technical operations [17]. Research estimating the economic value of volunteer labour at mega-events calculates millions of dollars in cost savings, rendering events financially viable that would otherwise require substantial staffing budgets. This economic contribution constitutes a direct impact, while indirect impacts include enhanced service quality, extended operating hours, and the flexibility that paid staff alone could not provide.

Beyond their economic value, volunteers generate social impacts through community development, capacity building, and the formation of social capital [32]. Local volunteers acquire event management skills, organisational capabilities, and professional networks that endure beyond the events. International volunteers, by contrast, introduce new ideas, practices, and perspectives that stimulate innovation and learning within host communities. This knowledge transfer constitutes an important legacy outcome, particularly in developing nations, where the hosting of major sporting events provides exposure to international best practices (see, for example, the 2022 FIFA World Cup).

Post-event tourism represents a further significant impact dimension. Research demonstrates that volunteers frequently extend their stays beyond the event period, visit additional local attractions, and increase their overall tourism expenditure relative to their original intentions [33]. Moreover, volunteers report a high likelihood of returning to host destinations for future tourism, thereby effectively becoming destination ambassadors who promote these locations within their social networks. Such repeat visitation and word-of-mouth promotion generate further long-term tourism benefits extending years beyond the initial events, representing valuable but often unmeasured legacy outcomes.

Community development outcomes encompass enhanced community pride, increased social cohesion, and strengthened volunteer cultures within host communities [32]. Local residents observing successful volunteer programmes report heightened pride in their location and a greater willingness to volunteer in subsequent community initiatives; this cultural legacy may prove more valuable than physical infrastructure—as evidenced, for instance, by the Athens 2004 Olympics, where the stadiums remained largely unused—since sustainable volunteer cultures support continuing event-hosting capabilities and community resilience. However, research examining long-term community impacts remains limited, with most studies assessing immediate or short-term outcomes rather than tracking communities across multiple post-event years [33]. This temporal shortcoming aligns with Hiller's [33] broader observation that sport tourism legacy research has tended to capture immediate impacts rather than the gradual urban and social transformations that unfold over years following mega-events.

4.2.4. Theme 4: Organisational and Management Perspectives

The recruitment strategies employed by sporting event organisations encompass conventional approaches, such as media advertising, online registration systems, and institutional partnerships, alongside more innovative approaches including social media campaigns, referral programmes, and experiential marketing [30]. Effective recruitment is characterised by authentic messaging concerning both the service opportunity and realistic expectations regarding time commitments, working environment, and benefits provided. Organisers who exaggerate the opportunities or convey misleading information risk volunteer disappointment and the negative word-of-mouth that undermines future recruitment efforts.

Retention strategies focus on sustaining volunteer engagement through recognition, communication, and continued involvement opportunities [17]. Post-event communication that maintains relationships with volunteers proves particularly important for converting one-time participants into repeat volunteers at future events. Schlesinger et al. [28] further highlighted that the stability of volunteering in Swiss soccer clubs is influenced not only by individual attributes such as identification with the club and job satisfaction, but also by broader organisational and contextual factors within the club environment that affect volunteers' continued engagement. Organisations that establish volunteer networks, provide ongoing updates on event legacies, and offer opportunities for continued involvement demonstrate higher rates of volunteer retention. Recognition programmes that acknowledge volunteer contributions through certificates, experiences, or public recognition likewise strengthen volunteer commitment and foster positive organisational relationships.

Training programmes for volunteers range from brief orientation sessions to comprehensive multi-day training covering technical skills, safety protocols, customer service, and cultural competence [30]. Studies indicate that the quality of training significantly influences volunteer confidence, performance, and satisfaction. Extensive training that incorporates interactive practice, role-playing scenarios, and opportunities to ask questions prepares volunteers more effectively than lecture-based information transmission; however, the compressed timeframes preceding major events often constrain the depth of training, compelling organisations to balance comprehensiveness against the time available to volunteers.

Volunteer coordination at mega-events requires sophisticated organisational systems capable of managing thousands of volunteers across multiple sites and functional areas. Technology platforms that facilitate scheduling, communication, and logistics prove essential for coordination at scale [30]; however, technology alone is insufficient in the absence of effective human supervision, responsive problem-solving, and adaptive management. Research examining coordination challenges underscores the importance of volunteer supervisors who provide on-site support, address concerns promptly, and maintain volunteer morale during demanding event periods [17]. The ratio of supervisors to volunteers, the training provided to supervisors, and the empowerment of supervisors to make decisions all influence the effectiveness of coordination.

4.2.5. Theme 5: Destination and Legacy Dimensions

Volunteers act as destination ambassadors both during and after sporting events through their interactions with spectators, athletes, and one another [33]. Throughout the events, volunteers provide information about destinations, share local knowledge, and create positive impressions through friendly service. Following the events, volunteers communicate their destination experiences within their social networks, thereby effectively becoming unpaid marketing agents who influence others' destination perceptions and

travel intentions. This ambassadorial role proves particularly valuable for lesser-known destinations seeking to enhance international visibility through the hosting of sporting events.

The intention to return to the place of the event constitutes an important legacy outcome, with research consistently finding that volunteers express a high likelihood of returning to host destinations as tourists [33]. Such return tourism generates economic benefits while demonstrating that sporting events foster enduring destination relationships. Hiller's [33] analysis of post-event outcomes argues that the long-term destination effects of mega-events extend well beyond the event period itself and require a critical re-reading of legacy as a process of urban and social transformation rather than a one-off impact—a framing that locates volunteer return-tourism within a broader sport tourism legacy debate. The conditions that enhance repeat visitation intentions include positive volunteering experiences, opportunities for destination exploration during the events, favourable destination impressions, and the emotional connections formed with places and people. Destinations that facilitate these elements maximise the long-term benefits of volunteer sport tourism.

Social legacies for host communities include strengthened volunteer cultures, alongside enhanced civic capacity and increased social capital [32]. Communities that host major sporting events frequently experience incremental increases in volunteering rates in subsequent years, as volunteering becomes normalised and valued. Such cultural shifts represent sustainable legacies that support continued event hosting and community resilience. Nevertheless, negative legacies may occur where volunteer experiences prove disappointing, where concerns about exploitation arise, or where events divert resources from community needs, thereby indicating that legacy outcomes are not automatically positive but depend upon the manner in which events are planned and managed.

Sustainability considerations have received increasing attention in the contemporary literature, reflecting a growing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of sporting events. Research examines how volunteer programmes may contribute to sustainability goals through environmental education, the implementation of sustainable practices, and community engagement. Volunteers themselves frequently articulate environmental values and an interest in sustainable events, thereby creating opportunities for organisations to enhance environmental performance while satisfying volunteer values. Tensions may, however, arise between volunteer interests, event objectives, and resource constraints; how organisations resolve these tensions has direct implications for the legacy outcomes discussed above, given that perceived alignment between personal and event values appears to underlie volunteers' downstream destination ambassadorship.

5. Critical Discussion and Synthesis

5.1. Theoretical Development

Beyond the four theoretical traditions outlined in Section 2.4, the corpus reveals a structural limitation: these frameworks have typically been employed in isolation rather than in integration, thereby limiting theoretical sophistication [7]. The most promising integrations remain underexplored—combining SDT's motivational continuum with the VPM's temporal stages would clarify how motivation evolves across volunteer careers, while linking social exchange theory with environmental psychology could specify how organisational environments shape the cost–benefit calculations that influence satisfaction and commitment [4].

A more fundamental gap concerns the tourism dimension itself: although studies acknowledge that volunteers travel to destinations, few employ tourism theories to understand how destination characteristics, travel motivations, or tourism experiences influence volunteering. The development of theories that specifically address volunteer sport tourism,

rather than the adaptation of general volunteering theories, represents an important threshold for the field [1].

5.2. Contextual Considerations

Mega sporting events and recurring small-scale events generate qualitatively different volunteer contexts, with implications for experiences and outcomes [11]. Mega-events combine prestige, global significance, and once-in-a-lifetime motivational appeal with organisational complexity, intense pressure, and compressed schedules that limit destination exploration. Smaller-scale events offer the inverse profile—more intimate experiences, greater volunteer autonomy, and better volunteering–tourism balance, but without the prestige of mega-events. This structural inversion explains why findings rarely transfer between scales and argues against treating “the volunteer sport tourist” as a single empirical object.

The contextual variability outlined above has methodological consequences for how the present synthesis should be read, in line with PRISMA 2020 item 14. Because the corpus is qualitative and heterogeneous, formal statistical bias assessments (funnel plots, Egger’s test) are not applicable; instead, three reporting-related biases were appraised narratively. Publication bias may have favoured studies reporting positive outcomes (high satisfaction, strong continuance intention) over those documenting burnout, attrition, or perceived exploitation—a concern consistent with the imbalance noted in Section 5.3. Language bias arises from English-only inclusion (Section 3.3), under-representing work from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and compounding the geographic concentration discussed in Section 4.1. Accessibility bias is documented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1), where ten full-text articles could not be retrieved despite repeated attempts; their absence is reported transparently. Together, these biases inform the cautious interpretation below and motivate several future research directions consolidated in Table 6.

Table 6. Research Gaps and Future Research Directions in Volunteer Sport Tourism.

Research Area	Identified Gap	Suggested Research Questions	Methodological Approach
Volunteer trajectories	Cross-sectional designs dominate; volunteer careers across multiple events untracked	How do initial event experiences translate into sustained volunteer careers?	Longitudinal panel studies; life-history interviews
Cross-cultural comparison	Western mega-event bias; limited evidence from Asia, Africa, South America	Which motivational and satisfaction patterns are universal versus context-specific?	Multi-site comparative surveys; measurement-invariance testing
Negative experiences	Burnout, attrition, perceived exploitation under-investigated	Under what conditions do volunteer sport tourism experiences turn negative, and with what consequences?	Critical incident technique; exit interviews
Digital and hybrid models	Post-pandemic remote/hybrid volunteering largely unexamined	How does the absence of physical co-presence reshape volunteer experience and legacy?	Digital ethnography; comparative case studies
Sustainability	Environmental, social, economic dimensions only partially addressed	How do volunteer programmes contribute to event sustainability outcomes?	Mixed-methods evaluation; impact assessment

Table 6. *Cont.*

Research Area	Identified Gap	Suggested Research Questions	Methodological Approach
Small-scale/community events	Mega-event focus crowds out community contexts	How do volunteer experiences differ between mega-events and recurring community events?	Comparative ethnography; community-based participatory research
Tourism-specific theorising	Destination image, travel motivation, memorable tourism experience underused	How do destination-related constructs moderate the motivation–satisfaction–legacy chain?	SEM with tourism moderators; longitudinal mediation

Source: own collection.

Volunteer profiles vary systematically along three axes [4,24]: internationality (destination experience and cultural exchange among international volunteers, event participation and national pride among domestic ones), prior experience (realistic expectations and superior performance but lower enthusiasm among experienced volunteers, novelty-driven engagement among first-timers), and age (flexible schedules and altruistic orientations among older volunteers, career development and social interaction among younger ones). These heterogeneities justify segmented management approaches [30] and indicate that single-cohort empirical designs systematically underestimate the variability that any general theory of volunteer sport tourism must accommodate.

5.3. Contradictions and Debates

The debate concerning exploitation versus empowerment raises important ethical questions about volunteer sport tourism. Critics contend that unpaid labour at commercial sporting events constitutes exploitation, particularly where organisations profit substantially while volunteers receive minimal compensation. Defenders counter that volunteers participate freely, that they receive intangible benefits exceeding the costs incurred, and that they contribute to public goods rather than to purely commercial enterprises [34]. This debate remains unresolved and reflects broader tensions within volunteer tourism concerning power relations, economic justice, and volunteer agency.

The trade-off between economic benefits and social costs constitutes a further area of contention. While the literature emphasises volunteers' economic contributions and positive experiences [17], some research reports negative outcomes, including volunteer burnout, disappointment, perceptions of exploitation, and opportunity costs. These less prominent aspects receive less attention than positive outcomes, thereby producing a potentially incomplete understanding. Resolving this asymmetry requires not only the inclusion of negative-outcome studies in future syntheses but also a re-examination of the theoretical assumptions—typically rooted in social exchange equilibrium—that frame volunteer outcomes as net-positive by default.

5.4. Towards an Integrated Tripartite Framework of Volunteer Sport Tourism

The analytical mapping conducted across Sections 4 and 5 makes it possible to advance, by way of synthesis rather than mere description, an integrated tripartite framework of volunteer sport tourism. The framework's added value lies in three contributions that, to the authors' knowledge, have not been jointly articulated in the prior literature. First, it explicitly bridges the volunteering, sport, and tourism dimensions that previous reviews have addressed in isolation. Second, it relocates tourism-specific antecedents—destination image, travel motivation, and the prospect of memorable tourism experience—from the periphery, where they have featured as incidental variables, to the core of the explana-

tory model. Third, it specifies the temporal architecture of the volunteer sport tourism experience by linking three sequenced phases (antecedents, event participation, post-event legacies) to the theoretical mechanisms identified in the corpus.

Concretely, the antecedent phase combines three sets of inputs. Volunteer-side inputs include motivational orientation along the altruistic–egoistic continuum, autonomous versus controlled motivation per SDT, and intention formation per the Theory of Planned Behaviour. These are joined by destination-side inputs (destination image, travel motivation) and event-side inputs (event prestige, perceived once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, fan or domain involvement). The event-participation phase aligns with the Volunteer Process Model and the S–O–R logic: the event environment—organisational practices, supervisor support, cross-cultural composition, and tourism affordances—acts as the stimulus that mediates volunteer satisfaction and meaning-making, with social exchange dynamics governing perceived equity. The legacy phase comprises both individual outcomes (continuance intention, skill development, identity transformation) and collective outcomes (return-tourism intentions, destination ambassadorship, community volunteer cultures). Crucially, feedback loops connect the legacy phase to the antecedents of subsequent volunteer episodes, foregrounding longitudinal trajectories that the cross-sectional empirical literature has so far been ill-equipped to capture.

Theoretically, the framework offers added value beyond a descriptive summary in three respects. First, it exposes the tourism-theory deficit highlighted by Tables 3 and 5 and proposes specific tourism constructs to remedy it. Second, it reconciles the apparent tension between SDT (need-based) and social exchange (equity-based) accounts by treating them as complementary mechanisms operating at different points of the temporal sequence. Third, it generates testable propositions—for example, that destination image positively moderates the SDT–satisfaction link, and that memorable tourism experience mediates the path from event participation to return-tourism intention. Practically, the framework supports the segmented stakeholder recommendations developed in Section Practical Implications for Stakeholders by indicating where in the temporal sequence each stakeholder’s leverage is strongest.

6. Research Gaps and Future Directions

Several research gaps merit attention. First, longitudinal studies examining volunteer careers and trajectories would illuminate how initial event experiences translate into sustained volunteering. Second, comparative cross-cultural research would help to distinguish universal from context-specific factors within volunteer sport tourism. Third, the investigation of negative experiences and volunteer attrition would yield a more balanced understanding. In addition to these gaps, the examination of digital and hybrid volunteering models that have emerged in the post-pandemic period represents a timely research direction. Furthermore, sustainability dimensions—environmental, social, and economic—require systematic investigation. It should likewise be acknowledged that small-scale and community events warrant research attention, since they represent significant volunteering contexts with distinct characteristics. With regard to methodology, the field would benefit from innovations in the measurement of volunteer sport tourism experiences, including experience sampling methods, the digital ethnography of online volunteer communities, and longitudinal tracking studies that follow volunteers across multiple events and life stages. The development of validated, context-specific measurement instruments capturing the unique dimensions of volunteer sport tourism (as distinct from general volunteering or general tourism) constitutes a further methodological priority.

To translate these observations into a structured agenda, Table 6 consolidates the principal research areas, the specific gaps identified through the present synthesis, indicative research questions, and recommended methodological approaches.

Practical Implications for Stakeholders

The findings of this review offer actionable insights for the multiple stakeholder groups involved in volunteer sport tourism. For event organisers, the review highlights the importance of implementing segmented volunteer management strategies that recognise the diverse motivations across volunteer profiles. Organisations should develop differentiated recruitment messages, training programmes, and recognition systems that address the specific needs of career-oriented, socially motivated, and destination-focused volunteers; furthermore, the critical role of pre-event communication, comprehensive training, and post-event relationship maintenance in driving volunteer satisfaction and retention indicates that investment in volunteer management infrastructure yields substantial returns in terms of volunteer loyalty and performance.

For destination marketing organisations (DMOs), the review underscores the dual role of volunteers as both event workforce and destination ambassadors. DMOs should collaborate with event organisers in order to facilitate volunteer tourism experiences, providing destination information, organising volunteer-specific activities, and creating opportunities for destination exploration. The robust link between positive volunteer experiences and repeat visitation intentions suggests that well-managed volunteer programmes can generate long-term tourism benefits extending beyond immediate event impacts.

For policymakers, the review demonstrates that volunteer sport tourism generates economic, social, and cultural benefits that justify public investment in event hosting and volunteer programme development. Realising these benefits, however, requires attention to the quality of volunteer management, cross-cultural facilitation, and community engagement—areas in which policy frameworks and funding mechanisms can support best practices. The review further highlights equity considerations regarding who has access to volunteer sport tourism opportunities and who benefits from volunteer labour, thereby suggesting the need for inclusive policies that democratise access while ensuring fair treatment of volunteers.

For academic institutions and training providers, the findings indicate opportunities for the development of specialised courses addressing volunteer sport tourism management, cross-cultural competence in sporting events, and sustainable event practices. The gap between volunteer management theory and practice points to the value of practice-engaged research partnerships that bridge academic knowledge and practitioner expertise.

7. Conclusions

The present literature review has done more than catalogue the field of volunteer sport tourism. By combining a PRISMA-guided systematic search with an analytical content analysis of 32 studies and an array of synthesising tables (Tables 1–6), it has produced four contributions that collectively differentiate it from prior reviews. First, it provides the first integrated mapping of volunteer sport tourism as a tripartite phenomenon—volunteering, sport, and tourism—rather than treating these dimensions in isolation. Second, it diagnoses a hitherto under-articulated tourism-theory deficit, demonstrated through Tables 3 and 5, and proposes specific tourism constructs (destination image, travel motivation, memorable tourism experience) for incorporation into future theorising. Third, it advances an integrated tripartite framework (Section 5.4) that is temporally specified, theoretically integrative, and empirically testable, and that reconciles need-based (SDT) and equity-based (social exchange) accounts as complementary mechanisms operating across antecedents, event participation, and post-event legacies. Fourth, it converts the diagnostic findings into a structured research agenda (Table 6) and into segmented, stakeholder-specific implications (Section Practical Implications for Stakeholders). Volunteer sport tourism remains a complex phenomenon that requires multidisciplinary perspectives and diverse method-

ological approaches; nevertheless, the present synthesis demonstrates that the field is now sufficiently mature to move from descriptive accumulation to analytical integration. As sporting events continue to proliferate globally and volunteer labour remains essential for event delivery, the framework and agenda articulated here are intended to support that transition in both academic scholarship and professional practice.

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Abbreviations

FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
VSI	Volunteer Satisfaction Index
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisations

Appendix A

Ref.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal/Source	Vol./Issue	Pages	DOI/URL
[1]	Hoye, R.; Cuskelly, G.	2009	The psychology of sport event volunteerism: A review of volunteer motives, involvement and behaviour	In Volunteering and Managing Volunteers in Leisure and Tourism (Goodfellow Publishers, Oxford, UK)	—	—	https://doi.org/10.1079/9781845934767.0171
[2]	Karlis, G.; Stratas, A.; Hamidi, W.; Kantartzis, I.M.	2020	Conceptualizing sport volunteer tourism: Setting a direction for future research	Sport Journal	24	—	https://thesportjournal.org/article/conceptualizing-sport-volunteer-tourism-setting-a-direction-for-future-research/ (accessed on 9 May 2026)

Ref.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal/Source	Vol./Issue	Pages	DOI/URL
[3]	Caslavova, E.; Kraft, J.; Voracek, J.; Bartova, M.	2014	Economic context of volunteering and labour market in sport	Ekonomika	93	116–130	https://doi.org/10.15388/Ekon.2014.2.3543
[4]	Chiu, W.; Kang, H.-K.; Cho, H.	2024	The relationship between volunteer management, satisfaction, and intention to continue volunteering in sport events: An environmental psychology perspective	Nonprofit Management and Leadership	35	7–33	https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21600
[5]	Farrell, J.M.; Johnston, M.E.; Twynam, G.D.	1998	Volunteer motivation, satisfaction, and management at an elite sporting competition	Journal of Sport Management	12	288–300	https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.12.4.288
[7]	Kim, E.	2018	A systematic review of motivation of sport event volunteers	World Leisure Journal	60	306–329	https://doi.org/10.1080/16078055.2017.1373696
[8]	Wearing, S.	2001	Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference	CABI Publishing (Wallingford, UK)	—	—	ISBN 978-0851995335 (book)
[9]	Gibson, H.J.	1998	Sport tourism: A critical analysis of research	Sport Management Review	1	45–76	https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523(98)70099-3
[10]	Pigeassou, C.	2004	Contribution to the definition of sport tourism	Journal of Sport Tourism	9	287–289	https://doi.org/10.1080/1477508042000320205
[11]	Bang, H.; Alexandris, K.; Ross, S.D.	2008	Validation of the revised volunteer motivations scale for international sporting events (VMS-ISE) at the Athens 2004 Olympic games	Event Management	12	119–131	https://doi.org/10.3727/152599509789659759
[12]	Galindo-Kuhn, R.; Guzley, R.M.	2001	The volunteer satisfaction index: Construct definition, measurement, development, and validation	Journal of Social Service Research	28	45–68	https://doi.org/10.1300/J079v28n01_03

Ref.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal/Source	Vol./Issue	Pages	DOI/URL
[13]	Deci, E.L.; Ryan, R.M.	1985	Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior	Plenum Press (New York, NY, USA)	—	—	ISBN 978-0306420221 (book)
[14]	Ahmad, S.N.; Sulaiman, Z.; Khalifah, Z.	2020	Motivation and satisfaction at special sport event	International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering	8	4836–4842	https://doi.org/10.35940/ijrte.F8032.038620
[15]	Omoto, A.M.; Snyder, M.	1995	Sustained helping without obligation: Motivation, longevity of service, and perceived attitude change among AIDS volunteers	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	68	671–686	https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.68.4.671
[16]	Omoto, A.M.; Snyder, M.; Hackett, J.D.	2010	Personality and motivational antecedents of activism and civic engagement	Journal of Personality	78	1703–1734	https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00667.x
[17]	Cuskelly, G.; Taylor, T.; Hoye, R.; Darcy, S.	2006	Volunteer management practices and volunteer retention: A human resource management approach	Sport Management Review	9	141–163	https://doi.org/10.1016/S1441-3523(06)70023-7
[18]	Wisner, P.S.; Stringfellow, A.; Youngdahl, W.E.; Parker, L.	2005	The service volunteer-loyalty chain: An exploratory study of charitable not-for-profit service organizations	Journal of Operations Management	23	143–161	https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2004.07.003
[19]	Mehrabian, A.; Russell, J.A.	1974	An Approach to Environmental Psychology	The MIT Press (Cambridge, MA, USA)	—	—	ISBN 978-0262130905 (book)
[20]	Snyder, M.; Omoto, A.M.	2008	Volunteerism: Social issues perspectives and social policy implications	Social Issues and Policy Review	2	1–36	https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-2409.2008.00009.x

Ref.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal/Source	Vol./Issue	Pages	DOI/URL
[22]	Clary, E.G.; Snyder, M.; Ridge, R.D.; Copeland, J.; Stukas, A.A.; Haugen, J.; Miene, P.	1998	Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	74	1516–1530	https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.6.1516
[23]	Bang, H.; Chelladurai, P.	2009	Development and validation of the volunteer motivations scale for international sporting events (VMS-ISE)	International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing	6	332–350	https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSMM.2009.030064
[24]	Ratten, V.; Pauline, G.; Pauline, J.S.	2009	Volunteer motivation and demographic influences at a professional tennis event	Team Performance Management	15	172–184	https://doi.org/10.1108/13527590910964946
[25]	Smith, K.; Holmes, K.	2009	Researching volunteers in tourism: Going beyond	Annals of Leisure Research	12	403–420	https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2009.9686831
[26]	Kim, D.; Park, C.; Kim, H.; Kim, J.	2019	Determinants and outcomes of volunteer satisfaction in mega sports events	Sustainability	11	1859	https://doi.org/10.3390/su11071859
[27]	Gwinner, K.; Swanson, S.R.	2003	A model of fan identification: Antecedents and sponsorship outcomes	Journal of Services Marketing	17	275–294	https://doi.org/10.1108/08876040310474828
[28]	Schlesinger, T.; Egli, B.; Nagel, S.	2017	Determinants of stable volunteering in Swiss soccer clubs	Soccer & Society	20	543–559	https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2017.1355789
[29]	Cuskelly, G.; Harrington, M.; Stebbins, R.A.	2002	Changing levels of organizational commitment amongst sport volunteers: A serious leisure approach	Loisir et Société/Society and Leisure	27	191–212	https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2002.9651303
[30]	Alfes, K.; Antunes, B.; Shantz, A.D.	2017	The management of volunteers: What can human resources do? A review and research agenda	International Journal of Human Resource Management	28	62–97	https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1242508

Ref.	Author(s)	Year	Title	Journal/Source	Vol./Issue	Pages	DOI/URL
[31]	Sthapit, E.; Björk, P.; Coudounaris, D.; Barreto, J.J.; Vo-Thanh, T.	2023	Antecedents and outcomes of memorable volunteer tourism experiences	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights	7	56–75	https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-08-2022-0386
[32]	Jones, D.A.	2010	Does serving the community also serve the company? Using organizational identification and social exchange theories to understand employee responses to a volunteerism programme	Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	83	857–878	https://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X477495
[33]	Hiller, H.H.	2006	Post-event outcomes and the post-modern turn: The Olympics and urban transformations	European Sport Management Quarterly	6	317–332	https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740601154458
[34]	Stukas, A.A.; Snyder, M.; Clary, E.G.	1999	The effects of mandatory volunteerism on intentions to volunteer	Psychological Science	10	59–64	https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00107

Appendix B. PRISMA 2020 Checklist

#	Section/Topic	Checklist Item	Reported in
1	Title	Identify the report as a systematic review.	Title
2	Abstract	See the PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist.	Abstract
3	Rationale	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge.	Section 1
4	Objectives	Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	Sections 1 and 3.1
5	Eligibility criteria	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review and how studies were grouped for the syntheses.	Section 3.3
6	Information sources	Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched or consulted to identify studies. Specify the date when each source was last searched or consulted.	Section 3.3
7	Search strategy	Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.	Section 3.3

#	Section/Topic	Checklist Item	Reported in
8	Selection process	Specify the methods used to decide whether a study met the inclusion criteria of the review, including how many reviewers screened each record and each report retrieved, whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	Section 3.3
9	Data collection process	Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data from each report, whether they worked independently, any processes for obtaining or confirming data from study investigators, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	Section 3.4
10a	Data items	List and define all outcomes for which data were sought. Specify whether all results that were compatible with each outcome domain in each study were sought, and if not, the methods used to decide which results to collect.	Section 3.4, Appendix A
10b	Data items	List and define all other variables for which data were sought (e.g., participant and intervention characteristics, funding sources). Describe any assumptions made about any missing or unclear information.	Section 3.4
11	Study risk of bias assessment	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies, including details of the tool(s) used, how many reviewers assessed each study and whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	Section 3.4
12	Effect measures	Specify for each outcome the effect measure(s) (e.g., risk ratio, mean difference) used in the synthesis or presentation of results. Not applicable: this is a qualitative narrative synthesis, not a meta-analysis.	n/a
13a	Synthesis methods	Describe the processes used to decide which studies were eligible for each synthesis (e.g., tabulating the study intervention characteristics and comparing against the planned groups for each synthesis (item #5)).	Section 3.4
13b	Synthesis methods	Describe any methods required to prepare the data for presentation or synthesis, such as handling of missing summary statistics, or data conversions.	Section 3.4
13c	Synthesis methods	Describe any methods used to tabulate or visually display results of individual studies and syntheses.	Sections 3.4 and 4.1
13d	Synthesis methods	Describe any methods used to synthesize results and provide a rationale for the choice(s). If meta-analysis was performed, describe the model(s), method(s) to identify the presence and extent of statistical heterogeneity, and software package(s) used. Narrative synthesis was used; no meta-analysis was performed.	Section 3.4
13e	Synthesis methods	Describe any methods used to explore possible causes of heterogeneity among study results (e.g., subgroup analysis, meta-regression). Heterogeneity explored qualitatively across themes and contexts.	Section 4.2

#	Section/Topic	Checklist Item	Reported in
13f	Synthesis methods	Describe any sensitivity analyses conducted to assess robustness of the synthesized results. Not applicable to qualitative narrative synthesis.	n/a
14	Reporting bias assessment	Describe any methods used to assess risk of bias due to missing results in a synthesis (arising from reporting biases).	Sections 4.1 and 5.2
15	Certainty assessment	Describe any methods used to assess certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for an outcome. Discussed qualitatively as part of the critical synthesis.	Section 5
16a	Study selection	Describe the results of the search and selection process, from the number of records identified in the search to the number of studies included in the review, ideally using a flow diagram.	Section 3.3, Figure 1
16b	Study selection	Cite studies that might appear to meet the inclusion criteria, but which were excluded, and explain why they were excluded.	Section 3.3
17	Study characteristics	Cite each included study and present its characteristics.	Tables 1–3, Appendix A
18	Risk of bias in studies	Present assessments of risk of bias for each included study. Narrative quality appraisal applied; outcomes used to weight findings in the synthesis rather than reported per study.	Section 3.4
19	Results of individual studies	For all outcomes, present, for each study: (a) summary statistics for each group (where appropriate) and (b) an effect estimate and its precision (e.g., confidence/credible interval), ideally using structured tables or plots. Not applicable: qualitative narrative synthesis.	n/a
20a	Results of syntheses	For each synthesis, briefly summarise the characteristics and risk of bias among contributing studies.	Sections 4.1 and 4.2
20b	Results of syntheses	Present results of all statistical syntheses conducted. If meta-analysis was done, present for each the summary estimate and its precision and measures of statistical heterogeneity. If comparing groups, describe the direction of the effect. Not applicable: qualitative narrative synthesis.	n/a
20c	Results of syntheses	Present results of all investigations of possible causes of heterogeneity among study results. Addressed qualitatively across event types, geographies, and volunteer profiles.	Sections 4.2 and 5.2
20d	Results of syntheses	Present results of all sensitivity analyses conducted to assess the robustness of the synthesized results. Not applicable to qualitative narrative synthesis.	n/a
21	Reporting biases	Present assessments of risk of bias due to missing results (arising from reporting biases) for each synthesis assessed.	Section 5.2
22	Certainty of evidence	Present assessments of certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for each outcome assessed. Provided narratively through the critical discussion.	Section 5
23a	Discussion	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence.	Section 5

#	Section/Topic	Checklist Item	Reported in
23b	Discussion	Discuss any limitations of the evidence included in the review.	Sections 5.2 and 5.3
23c	Discussion	Discuss any limitations of the review processes used.	Section 5.2
23d	Discussion	Discuss implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research.	Section 6 and Section Practical Implications for Stakeholders
24a	Registration and protocol	Provide registration information for the review, including register name and registration number, or state that the review was not registered.	Section 3.2
24b	Registration and protocol	Indicate where the review protocol can be accessed, or state that a protocol was not prepared.	Section 3.2
24c	Registration and protocol	Describe and explain any amendments to information provided at registration or in the protocol. No amendments were made.	Section 3.2
25	Support	Describe sources of financial or non-financial support for the review, and the role of the funders or sponsors in the review.	Funding section
26	Competing interests	Declare any competing interests of review authors.	Conflicts of Interest
27	Availability of data, code and other materials	Report which of the following are publicly available and where they can be found: template data collection forms; data extracted from included studies; data used for all analyses; analytic code; any other materials used in the review. All data are derived from the publicly available studies cited in the references.	References

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