

Article

The Glocalization of Sport: A Research Field for Social Innovation

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Abstract: This article explores the emergence of the concept of glocalization in contemporary societies and more precisely, the glocalization of sport to highlight a social innovation borne through the interaction between global dynamics and local specificities in the development of sport. The glocalization, considered as a theoretical framework to rethink local social innovation which answered to the limit of the globalization, is examined in this article through an in-depth bibliographic analysis conducted using the Lillocat metasearch engine (covering 354 articles since 1992 across 11 thematic areas, 29 of which are related to sports). The use of IRaMuTeQ software version 0.7 alpha2 (Interface for Multidimensional Text and Questionnaire Analysis) enabled comprehensive textual and lexical analyses, including frequency analyses, hierarchical classifications, and principal component analyses (PCA). These analyses were presented in the form of figures such as histograms, dendrograms, and word clouds, thereby facilitating the identification of lexical co-occurrence relationships and the understanding of emerging trends. Findings reveal that glocalization enables sports organizations to integrate global strategies with local cultural identities, fostering fan engagement, economic sustainability, and cultural diversity. Global events such as the FIFA World Cup, the NBA's international expansion, and the Tour de France illustrate how global frameworks adapt to local contexts. Glocalization emerges as a strategic driver of social innovation, balancing internationalization with localized adaptation. This study provides insights for researchers and practitioners, considering glocalization as a theoretical framework useful for the analysis of a local social innovation in the context of globalization and sport as a propitious field of research.



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1. Introduction

1.1. Social Innovation in Sport: When Globalization Meets Its Limits in the Local

At the end of the 20th century, it was easy to reveal that “the global moulds the local” (Borja and Castells 1997, p. 6). The Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, or the Formula One championship are examples to demonstrate that a global culture of sport based on communication is structured. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the 1980s and even more at the turn of the 21st century, the globalization registered some limits and in the field of sport. The development of alterglobalization models (Harvey et al. 2009) has shown the development of social innovation and the necessity to integrate local culture and traditions in the globalization of sport (especially when the body is engaged in the practice of sport).

In this context, sport exemplifies a key domain where the interplay between the global and the local has catalyzed social innovation. On one hand, while transcending national boundaries to become a global social and cultural phenomenon (Saliaga and Kraja 2024),

sport plays a key role in promoting universal values such as fair play, respect for rules and others, as well as solidarity (Keys 2019). On the other hand, the diffusion of sport practice, and especially occidental sports spread in Asia (such as baseball, basketball, or football) face traditional cultures and habits that reveal the potential of resistance, hybridization, and even sometimes transformation of the global model (Robertson 1992; Roudometof 2016). Moreover, as a vehicle for social integration, sport creates cohesive communities centered around shared practices, regardless of differences in age, gender, or social status (Hylton and Totten 2013). This phenomenon is amplified by globalization, where international sporting events become moments of global cohesion, yet notably retain a distinct local dimension (Andrews and Grainger 2007). From the last part of the 20th century, this local aspect became more and more important in the field of global sport and explains the emergence of a social innovation phenomenon.

1.2. Theoretical Perspectives on Glocalization: Interactions Between Global and Local

In the 1980s, sociologist Roland Robertson (1987) identified both the limitations and the plurality of this concept. Thus, in 1992, he introduced the concept of glocalization. By bringing this new term into the sociological analysis of cultural exchange, he provided a way to describe the complex phenomenon of hybridization in which global and local influences interact to adapt global products or services to local needs (Robertson 1995).

That idea has been “modelled on Japanese dochakuka (deriving from dochaku, ‘living on one’s own land’), originally the agricultural principle of adapting one’s farming techniques to local conditions, but also adopted in Japanese business for global localisation, a global outlook adapted to local conditions” (Robertson 1995).

The concept was initially developed in his book *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, published in 1992. Robertson challenges the ultimately restrictive use of the term “globalization” (Robertson 1994) in sociological analyses, suggesting that the concept of glocalization reveals both local resistance to the homogenization induced by globalization and the growing importance of localities that adapt and transform the homogeneous vision of the Western-driven economic and cultural system.

The concept of glocalization has continually evolved through contributions from various fields of expertise. Swyngedouw (2004), a specialist in political geography, revisited globalization through the lens of glocalization, highlighting the interaction among local, regional, and transnational cultural practices within global networks. This geographic perspective was complemented by renowned globalization scholar Khondker (2005), who emphasized the significance of local dynamics in these global processes and thus differentiated glocalization from hybridization by focusing on the integration of local elements. However, the question of whether these local dynamics have been preserved or absorbed found a counterpoint in the work of Ritzer (2003), a sociologist known for his theory of “McDonaldization”. Along with Andrews (Andrews and Ritzer 2007), he explored “Glocalization”, a phenomenon of globalized homogenization aimed at assimilating the local to maximize growth.

In the field of business, Hoogenboom et al. (2010) explored the tension between local adaptation and global standardization in their study of business history, demonstrating how products and services are tailored to local specificities to meet consumer expectations. Finally, in linguistic and cultural studies, Tong and Cheung (2011) examined how cultural identity is shaped by the consumption of Western products, highlighting the assimilation of dominant cultural practices through language and culture within the framework of glocalization.

1.3. Glocalization (Of Sport) as a Social Innovation Framework

The concept of “glocalization” offers a lens to understand how sports navigate the complex dynamics between global and local dimensions. For example, Scottish supporters in North America often maintain stronger connections with fellow expatriates than with those in their home country, illustrating the effectiveness of “glocalization” (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007a), whereby global sports practices are adapted to local cultural contexts while preserving transnational ties. Furthermore, major sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup embody this fusion of the global and the local, as they not only foster sports nationalism but also enhance cultural interconnectedness on a global scale. More than just a word, glocalization is a concept that combines the terms globalization and localization, reflecting an era where globalization lacks uniformity (Robertson 1995, p. 28) and is surpassed by a societal trend that seeks to adapt products, services, or content to global standards while considering local cultural, social, and economic specificities. This approach allows companies and international organizations to enter new markets while remaining aligned with local identities, thereby ensuring greater acceptance of their offerings. In this context of interpenetration between the global and the local, glocalization needs to be considered as a social innovation that offers a way to rethink traditional approaches and foster meaningful change. Finally, glocalization reflects a dynamic where the global and the local are not oppositional but interact complementarily to create hybrid products tailored to specific environments, even reshaping the global when local culture resists the homogenization. The local social innovation challenges the global trends, especially when globalization is based on occidental culture, which standardize the needs without taking into account the traditions of local populations (Vadrot 2020).

Within this dynamic, the evolution of sports globalization is inextricably intertwined with the emergence of the essential strategy of glocalization (Maguire et al. 2021), a fusion that highlights the ability of sports to transcend borders while forging local connections (Beissel and Andrews 2022). The foundations of sports globalization were initially laid by early international competitions, such as the modern Olympic Games in 1896 (Young 2008). However, the decisive breakthrough occurred with the media expansion of the 20th century (Wilke 2015), profoundly transforming the broadcasting and follow-up of sports events on a global scale (Hutchins and Rowe 2012). Platforms such as television and the internet significantly extended the reach of competitions (Whannel 2009), enabling fans worldwide to follow major events live. The dissolution of economic (Nadeem et al. 2024) and political (Gallego et al. 2018) barriers coincided with the advent of digital connectivity. Athletes gained the opportunity to compete globally, while social media revolutionized how fans engage with sports on a global scale (Crawford 2004). Major events, such as the FIFA World Cup (Tomlinson 2021), the NBA, and the Olympic Games (Westerbeek 2021), reached vast international audiences, amplifying sports globalization. Simultaneously, some leagues adopted transnational approaches, organizing games and establishing franchises in different countries (Millward 2011). The emergence of glocalization as an essential strategy has enriched this evolution by integrating global and local dimensions. Indeed, sports organizations have tailored their strategies to meet local cultural specificities while maintaining global reach, thus expanding their fan base and strengthening their international presence (Yildiz and Eroğlu 2020; Huang 2013).

Thus, the glocalization of sports emerges as a strategic response to the challenges and limits of sports globalization (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007b). It celebrates cultural diversity (Jha 2016) while capitalizing on the opportunities presented by a globally connected audience, thereby shaping the contemporary sports landscape. Coinciding with the evolution of globalization in sports, it has materialized through structural, media, and economic changes, making sports a global phenomenon that transcends geographical and

cultural boundaries (Horton 2011). Today, glocalization has taken a predominant place within the current sports landscape, addressing a multitude of complex dynamics and varied challenges. Specifically, the analysis of glocalization by Giulianotti and Robertson (2007b) has demonstrated varying degrees of local adaptation of the global, enabling the construction of a typology of glocalization ranging from accommodation to assimilation, including hybridization and transformation. This strategy, blending the local with a global offering, has been progressively asserting itself since the late 1990s across sectors linked to internationalization, especially within the sports sector. Indeed, glocalization is redefining how sports organizations operate and thrive. It enables them to adopt more inclusive and adaptive approaches, fostering better integration in multicultural contexts and the creation of new local and international development opportunities (Rahal et al. 2021).

1.4. Glocalization as a Driver of Local Social Innovation

This article, titled “The glocalization of sport: a research field for social innovation”, explores how glocalization integrates into the current sports context. The study focuses particularly on a lexicographical analysis of the main international publications addressing this topic. The primary objective of this research is to identify glocalization strategies implemented in the sports field. This approach arises from the need to understand how sports organizations manage to reconcile the global dynamics of globalization with respect to local specificities. Glocalization, regarded as an essential strategy to prevent rejections of globalization, raises significant questions about how sports actors are embracing this growing cultural process and how local populations integrate their traditions and expectations in the global trends.

Our analysis will be built upon a lexicographical approach, enabling us to capture the terminological and conceptual nuances of glocalization in academic and professional works. Indeed, the terms used reflect the thinking behind them and are used to represent specific thinking strategies and scientific approaches. By analyzing key international reference articles, our goal is also to map the different dimensions and applications of sports glocalization. What specific terminology is used to describe these strategies in existing literature? How do researchers and practitioners theorize the interaction between global and local strategies in sports?

1.5. From Globalization to Glocalization: Cultural and Sports Dynamics

The concept of glocalization emerged as a counterbalance to the homogenizing tendencies of globalization. In an increasingly interconnected world, the flows of capital, goods, and services cross borders on an unprecedented scale, directly influencing economic policies, business strategies, and working conditions (Jindal and Kumar 2023). While globalization has transformed industries, it has also revealed its limitations, particularly in addressing culture and social diversity of local contexts. This interplay between the global and the local is where glocalization thrives, offering innovative approaches to adapt global practices to specific environments.

The sports industry exemplifies this dynamic. As globalization has radically reshaped the sports sector, transforming it into a global cultural phenomenon (Hargreaves 2014), it has also driven the growth of international markets and audiences. For instance, the global sports equipment market is projected to generate over 160 billion dollars in revenue by 2023 (Statista). This economic boom is accompanied by the commodification of sports, the intensification of event marketing (Riot et al. 2018), and the rise of sports as a massive commercial empire.

At the same time, globalization has fostered the exchange and integration of sports cultures (Light and Georgakis 2023), as sports from different regions interact, they produce

hybrid forms and styles, such as teqball, which blends traditional sports with new rules and structures (Csaba et al. 2023). This process, termed “glocalization” reflects the absorption and transformation of global practices by local cultures, creating hybrid innovations that resonate globally while addressing local needs (Robertson 2020).

Regarding the field of sports, Giulianotti and Robertson (2006) analyzed how football, particularly Scottish supporters in North America, has become a vehicle for cultural diversity, where local cultures were not merely opposed to others but interacted actively. For nearly 20 years now, the publication dynamics related to the topic of sports glocalization have accelerated, which we will now analyze through the systematic literature review presented below.

Through this methodological approach, this article aims to provide in-depth insights into how glocalization is not only conceptualized and defined but also applied within the contemporary sports world. By offering a multidimensional analysis, it seeks to enhance the understanding of practitioners, researchers, and professionals regarding emerging trends and best practices in glocalized strategies. The central objective of this article is to examine the concept of glocalization in greater detail, with a focus on its role in sports. This will allow us to identify major trends influencing glocalization within the sports sector. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn should not only offer a more nuanced description of this phenomenon but also open new avenues for future research in this rapidly expanding field and offer a theoretical framework to analyse local social innovation inside the global strategies.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

The construction of the corpus necessary for the lexicographical analysis of glocalization was conducted in two stages to ensure a comprehensive and systematic approach.

In the first stage, the literature review section was conducted by identifying and thoroughly examining literature related to glocalization as well as to the glocalization of sports. Starting with the concept of glocalization and then combining glocalization with sports, this initial stage concluded with a compelling illustration of the inevitability of sports glocalization in our era, through specific examples of sporting events, sports leagues, and sports merchandise.

In the second stage, the document research phase was completed by searching for academic articles that included “glocalization” and “sport” in their titles. The objective was to directly access the content of articles strongly associated with sports glocalization and to generate a textual database. In other words, the second stage of the qualitative analysis is better suited to demonstrating the coherence or divergence between the research topic, keywords, and article content. This stage is more targeted than the first, enabling the acquisition of more precise research results.

2.2. Corpus Selection and Criteria

Through these two stages, a database of articles on sports glocalization was created. For each article, the title needed to contain both “glocalization” or “glocalisation” and “sport.” The title is a key indicator, as it provides essential information about the overall text (Mack 2012); thus, the inclusion of subject-related words in the title serves as a search criterion (Hartley 2005). However, this title-based study remains limited (Theofanidis and Fountouki 2018), as some articles explore “sports glocalization” within certain paragraphs of articles on globalization. Ultimately, 29 articles met the selection criteria for sports glocalization out of a total of 354 articles addressing various forms of glocalization.

2.3. Procedure

From a methodological perspective, lexicographical analysis involves an in-depth study of the terms and expressions used within texts. For sports glocalization, this might entail identifying key terms such as “globalization”, “localization”, “interconnection”, “local adaptation”, etc. By analyzing the frequency and context of these terms, linguistic trends can be identified, major concerns can be highlighted, and conceptual nuances around how sports integrate both locally and globally can be better understood. This approach can provide valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of sports glocalization.

2.4. Data Processing

All articles are analyzed using the software IRaMuTeQ. The full name of IRaMuTeQ is “Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires”. This software is valued for its statistical precision, the variety of analyses it supports, and its intuitive and accessible interface. Additionally, it has the notable advantage of being free (Camargo and Justo 2013). The software enabled comprehensive textual and lexical analyses, including frequency analyses, hierarchical classifications, and principal component analyses (PCA). Visual representations such as histograms, dendrograms, and word clouds were generated to facilitate the identification of lexical co-occurrence relationships and emerging trends.

Regarding the corpus of studies on the phenomenon of sports glocalization, we conducted a detailed analysis of the full-text corpus of the 29 articles. For this, we used the open-source software IRaMuTeQ. Based on the R statistical language, IRaMuTeQ enables a range of multidimensional analyses, such as descending hierarchical classification, similarity analysis, and word co-occurrence analysis. Designed for processing large text corpora, it is particularly used in social sciences, linguistics, and psychology. IRaMuTeQ provides tools for lexical analysis, allowing for a statistical understanding of the structure of a text and the relationships between its elements. It is valued for its effectiveness in processing both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as for extracting trends, themes, or word networks (Caballero-Julia and Campillo 2021), which we employed in this study.

Quantitatively, the entire corpus of 29 texts can be subdivided into 3693 fragments, showing a diversified structure of textual content. The total number of occurrences (132,265 words) and unique forms (12,283) reveal the lexical variety used, which is expected given the different authors addressing the same topic—namely, glocalization and sports. The observation that hapax legomena (words occurring only once) represent 44.84% of the total word forms indicates a significant presence of specific terms, often linked to highly specialized themes or concepts. This high proportion of hapax is an important indicator of the diversity and specialization of language within this corpus, a common feature in texts on technical or complex subjects.

3. Results

3.1. General Point of View

To conduct the most comprehensive literature review possible on the terms “glocalisation” and “glocalization”, we used the Lillocat metasearch engine. This tool allows users to access a wide range of resources from multiple databases and collections, all from a single interface. It provides access to a broad variety of academic content, including books, scientific articles, theses, dissertations, online databases, and other documents available in university libraries (DVDs, journals, etc.). In our case, we primarily focused on international, English-language articles.

The 354 identified articles on glocalization span the period from 1992 to 2024. These articles were classified into 11 distinct themes (Figure 1); this categorization highlights the significance of interactions between globalization and local specificities across various fields of society. Notably, economics and management (116 articles) dominate the themes, followed by education (53 articles), social sciences (46 articles), and media and communication (44 articles). Sports sciences (29 articles) and health/medicine (18 articles) are also represented.

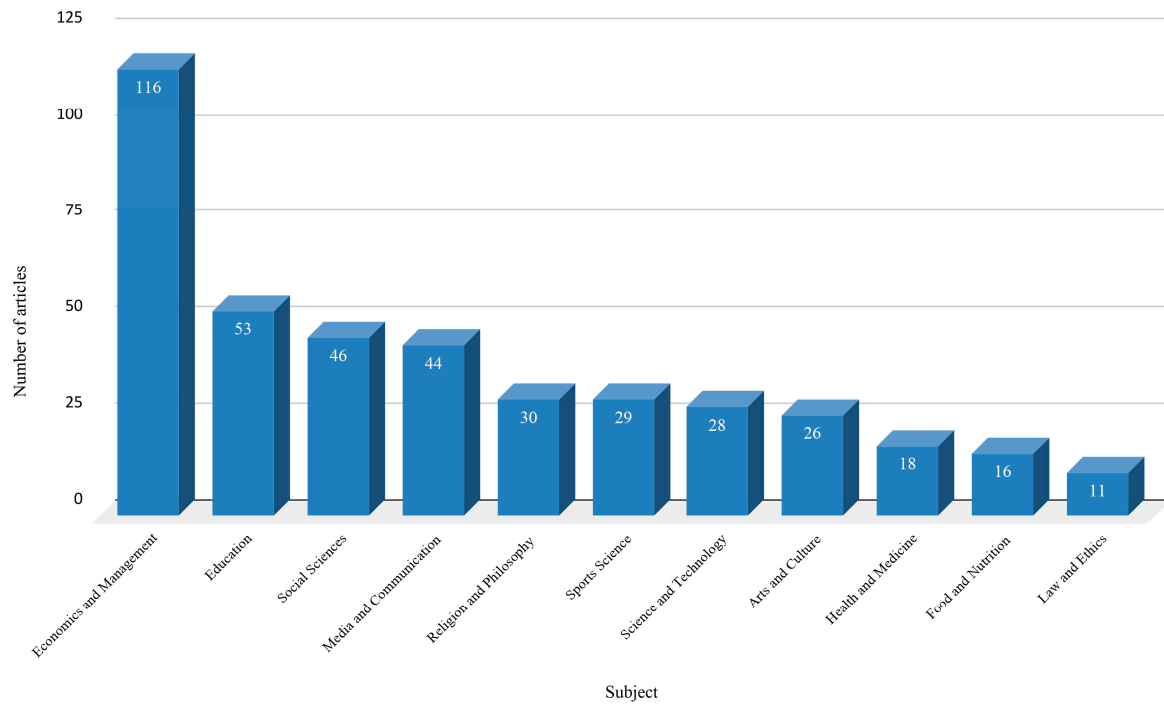


Figure 1. Breakdown of articles by theme.

Our study focused specifically on the 29 articles (Giulianotti and Robertson 2004, 2007b; Brawley 2009; Cho 2009; Cho et al. 2012; Shor and Galily 2012; Giulianotti and Robertson 2012; Jijon 2013; Andrews et al. 2014; Luo et al. 2015; Giulianotti 2016; Jijon 2017; Zhou et al. 2017; Khondker and Robertson 2018; Puddle et al. 2019; Alton and O’Sullivan 2020; Cho 2020a, 2020b; Igwe et al. 2021; Rahal et al. 2021; Lee 2022; Dai et al. 2022; Aijaz 2023; Han and Xiong 2024; Waquet and Mischler 2021) addressing glocalization in sports. The authors’ names, along with the year of publication and the sports/topics covered, are indexed in Table 1.

Regarding the location of analysis, Figure 2 illustrates the geographical distribution of the 25 articles (out of 29, as four articles do not specify geographic regions) that specified their region of analysis. Asia accounts for the majority, with 17 articles (approximately 65% of the total), followed by smaller contributions from Europe, North America, and other regions. Four articles did not specify a geographic focus and were excluded from this distribution.

This regional focus suggests a significant interest in studying how global sports are integrated into local cultures in Asia. The concentration of research on Asia coincides with the region’s hosting of major international events, such as the Beijing Olympics (2008, 2022), the PyeongChang Winter Olympics (2018), and the Tokyo Olympics (2020), as well as its rapid economic growth and cultural distinctiveness.

Table 1. List of publication years, authors, and research subjects.

Years of Publication	Authors	Sports Covered in the Article
2004	Giulianotti & Robertson	Football
2006	Giulianotti & Robertson	Football
2007	Giulianotti & Robertson	Football
2009	Brawley	Rugby
2009	Younghan	Baseball
2011	Horton	Football
2012	Cho et al.	Cultures, trends
2012	Shor & Galily	Basketball
2012	Giulianotti & Robertson	Concepts, cultures and theories
2013	Jijon	Football
2013	Huang	Basketball
2014	Andrews, Batts & Silk	Fitness
2015	Luo, Dai & Huang	Basketball
2015	Jijon	Football
2016	Richard	Concept, cultures
2017	Zhou et al.	Basketball
2018	Khondker & Robertson	Football
2019	Puddle, Wheaton & Thorpe	Parkour
2020	Altone & O’Sullivan	Football
2020	Cho	Baseball
2020	Cho	Baseball
2021	Igwe et al.	Football
2021	Rahal, Campillo & Richard	Concepts, cultures and theories
2022	Lee	Baseball
2022	Beissel & Andrews	Concepts, cultures and theories
2022	Dai et al.	Dance
2023	Aijaz	Cricket
2024	Han, Xiong	Football
Forthcoming	Waquet & Mischler	Ski

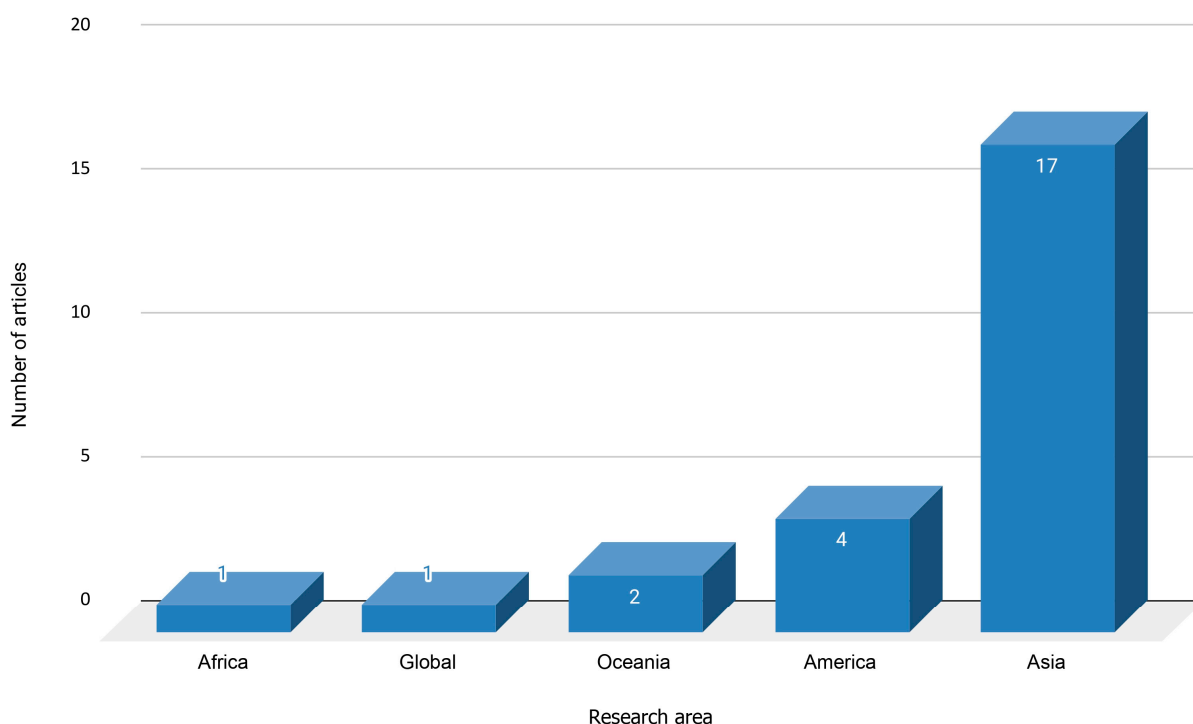


Figure 2. Number of Research Academy articles in the geographical area.

3.2. Content Analysis

3.2.1. Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

Using the open-source software IRaMuTeQ, we conducted a detailed analysis of the corpus of 29 articles. IRaMuTeQ allows for a range of multidimensional analyses, including principal component analysis (PCA), which provides a graphical representation of key terms. Based on the two main factors identified:

Factor 1 (Horizontal Axis, 38.35% Variance): This factor contrasts terms associated with globally popular sports (e.g., basketball, NBA, and China) and theoretical concepts like glocalization and globalization. This highlights the tension between global commercial aspects and the academic analysis of local integration.

Factor 2 (Vertical Axis, 26.37% Variance): This factor differentiates institutional terms (e.g., club, league) from cultural and identity-based terms (e.g., parkour, fandom). This suggests a divide between formal sports organizations and emergent cultural practices.

The four quadrants in the PCA graph highlight distinct thematic clusters:

Upper Right Quadrant (Red): Terms such as club, team, rugby, and league dominate this quadrant, emphasizing themes related to organized team sports, competition, and collective belonging. This cluster is particularly relevant for understanding traditional and institutionalized forms of sports glocalization.

Lower Right Quadrant (Purple): Terms such as China, NBA, and ski appear prominently, indicating themes of commercialization and the influence of global markets on sports. This cluster highlights how global brands and events adapt to local markets, especially in regions like Asia.

Lower Left Quadrant (Green): Key theoretical concepts such as glocalization, governmentality, and fandom dominate this area, reflecting a critical academic analysis of the interplay between local and global influences in sports. This cluster provides insights into how sports integrate within diverse sociocultural and political contexts.

Upper Left Quadrant (Blue): Terms like parkour and other alternative sports appear here, representing emergent cultural practices with a strong identity-building component. This cluster is associated with non-traditional sports that challenge conventional norms and embody localized cultural movements.

3.2.2. Distribution and Hierarchy of Themes

What is discernible in the five word clouds of Figure 3 are further detailed by the dendrogram (hierarchical clustering diagram), which categorizes the terms into five main identified categories (Figure 4).

First, Category 1 (red, 23.8%) focuses on terms related to team sports, such as club, team, and player, indicating that this theme occupies a central place in the text, which can be explained by the importance of structured sports organizations in the world of sports. Next, Category 2 (gray, 19%) addresses theoretical concepts like glocalization and globalization, demonstrating a strong interest in academic debates on the interactions between local and global aspects in sports. Category 3 (green, 18.5%) explores cultural dynamics with terms like cultural and flow, highlighting the influence of global processes on cultural identities. Furthermore, Category 4 (blue, 14.3%) covers specific cultural practices, particularly with terms like parkour and fandom, reflecting the rise of alternative and emerging cultures in sports. Finally, Category 5 (purple, 24.4%) groups terms such as NBA, China, and basketball, highlighting the global and local dynamics of a globalized sport (basketball) and its adaptation to a population rooted in local traditions in China. This example constitutes a key element of our corpus.

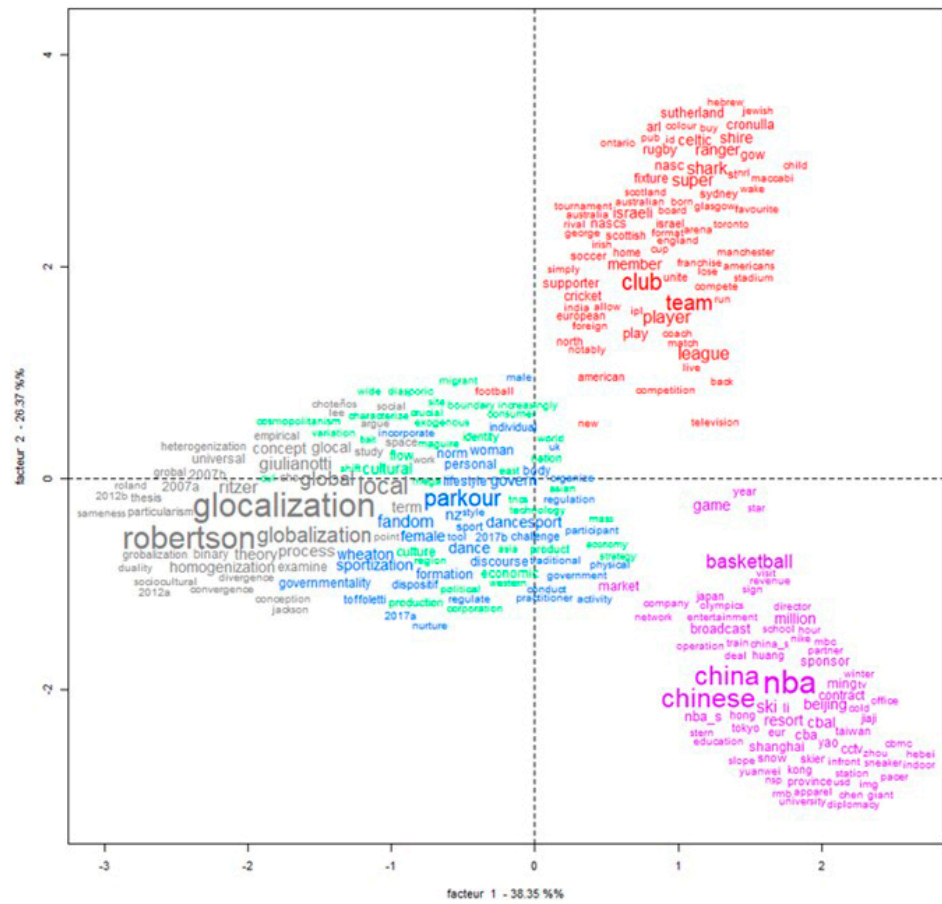


Figure 3. Principal component analysis (PCA).

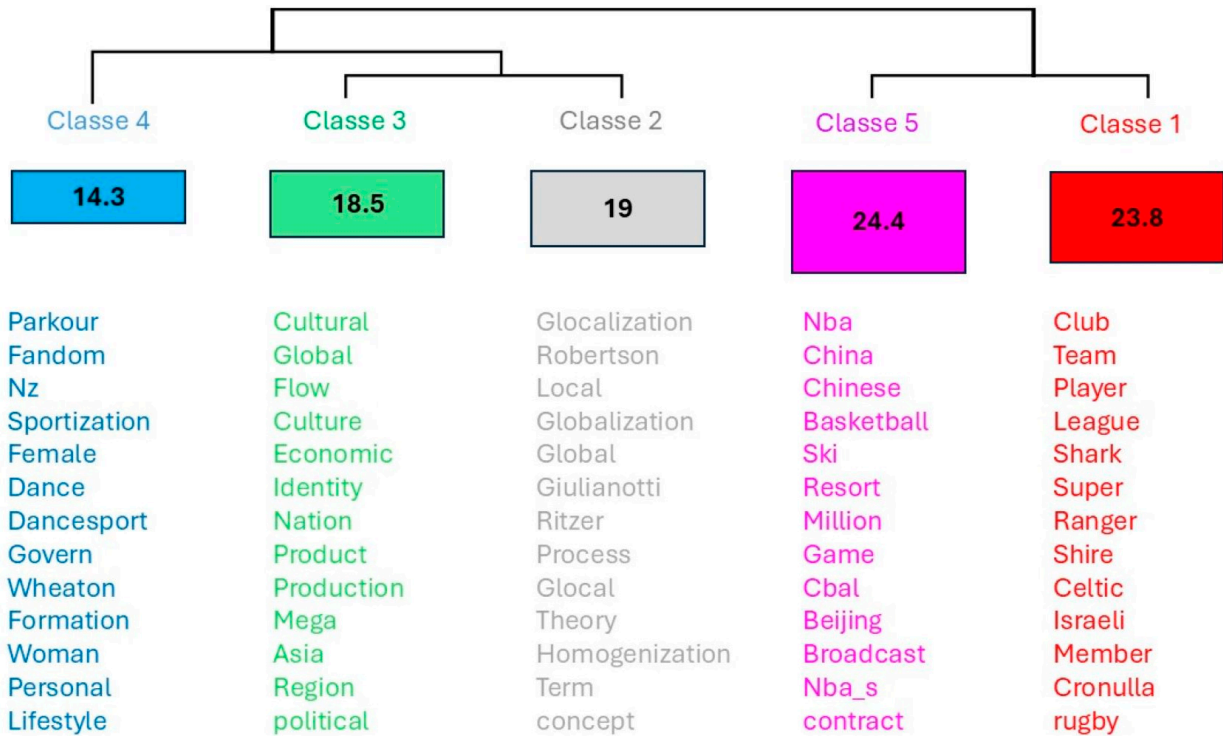


Figure 4. Dendrogram structure.

The analysis reveals a balance between theoretical discussions, cultural case studies, and the prominence of team sports in examining the glocalization process, particularly in Asia.

3.2.3. Lexical Co-Occurrence Relationships

Lexical co-occurrence relationships using IRaMuTeQ are obtained by analyzing the simultaneous occurrences of words within the same context. The program divides the text corpus into context units (sentences, paragraphs, or sections) called “elementary context units”. These units form the basis for co-occurrence analysis. The software identifies words that appear together within these context units and calculates the frequency of their co-occurrences. The more frequently words appear together, the stronger their link. Based on these co-occurrences, IRaMuTeQ generates a similarity graph, such as the one in Figures 5 and 6. Words that are closer in the graph share a high co-occurrence, and their connection is represented by lines (or “links”). Central terms like “sport” and “global” dominate the analysis, indicating their importance in discussions on glocalization. Peripheral terms, such as “NBA”, “China”, and “fandom”, reflect specific thematic clusters (e.g., basketball’s role in Chinese culture).

Clusters of related terms reveal key research themes, such as: Basketball and China (NBA, Chinese): Highlighting commercialization and local adaptation. Football and Europe (club, team, European): Focusing on global–local interactions in European football. Fan and Community (support, identity): The role of fandom in the glocalization process.



Figure 5. Lexical network.



Figure 6. Cloud of words in the lexical network.

4. Discussion

The results of our study demonstrate that glocalization in sports operates as a framework to analyse social innovation, enabling sports organizations to navigate the tension between global systems and local adaptations. By balancing these dynamics, glocalization fosters cultural inclusion, drives economic sustainability, and transforms global practices into locally resonant solutions. This process is particularly evident in how sports entities transcend geographic boundaries to engage local communities while maintaining global relevance.

Contemporary sports organizations exemplify this dual engagement, as seen in FC Barcelona and Manchester United, which leverage strong local identities to cultivate international fanbases through targeted marketing and global partnerships (Jackson and Andrews 1999). Wright (1999) highlights that this aspiration to transcend borders reflects a broader orientation in sports development, where entities simultaneously operate on local and global levels. Figure 3 highlights this tension between local identity and global reach, by grouping together terms such as “club”, “team”, and “league”, reflecting the strategies adopted by these organizations. The same dynamic is reflected in global leagues like the NBA and the English Premier League, where glocal strategies—such as international tours and locally embedded activities—enable deeper audience connections (Schulenkorf and Schlenker 2017). For example, Class 5 of the dendrogram (Figure 4) groups together terms such as “NBA”, “China”, and “basketball”, reflecting the integration of global sports into local contexts such as Chinese culture. As highlighted in the results, such initiatives bridge global opportunities and local preferences, creating a fertile ground for social innovation.

Our findings also emphasize how glocalization addresses the growing diversity of sports markets and consumption behaviours. By adapting strategies to cultural nuances, sports organizations can meet the unique expectations of each local context while maintaining their global appeal (Richelieu 2016; Karg and Funk 2020). For instance, financial opportunities—such as partnerships, broadcasting rights, and merchandise—are maximized when local identities are respected and hybridized into global models. This hybridization minimizes resistance and promotes cultural inclusion, ensuring the long-term economic sustainability of glocalized approaches (Wijanarko et al. 2022). Figure 5, with its lexical network, illustrates this hybridization through strong links between “sport”, “globalization”, and “local”, presenting the intersections between local practices and global strategies. However, as Dyreson (2018) highlights, some global sporting events, such as the Super Bowl, struggle to gain traction internationally because they fail to adequately

integrate non-American cultural contexts. This underscores the importance of deeply understanding local preferences to achieve success across diverse markets.

At the same time, major sporting events have emerged as prominent vehicles for showcasing how global–local interactions foster innovation. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics serve as a historical milestone where Japanese cultural heritage was seamlessly incorporated into the global sporting spectacle, creating a blueprint for future events (Tagsold 2010). Similarly, the 2008 Beijing Olympics skilfully integrated traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern visual presentations, producing an experience that resonated globally while maintaining strong cultural authenticity (Liang 2021; Traganou 2009; Collins 2012). These examples underscore how glocalized events transcend cultural boundaries and stimulate local pride, contributing to a broader social innovation framework. These approaches are reinforced by the categories identified in Class 2 of the dendrogram (Figure 4), which group together terms such as “glocalization”, “identity”, and “culture”, reflecting their integration into these global events.

The NBA’s international expansion further highlights this trend, particularly in its engagement with Chinese audiences. Through multilingual broadcasts, culturally tailored products, and localized events such as activities aligned with Chinese festivals, the NBA demonstrates how global sports brands adapt their strategies to local contexts to foster community engagement (Huang 2013; Secular 2019). This strategy is reflected in Figure 3, where the cluster associated with “China” and “NBA” highlights the importance of local adaptations in global sporting contexts. Such initiatives reveal how glocalization builds cultural and social bridges, illustrating its potential as a tool for fostering connectivity in diverse markets. Dickson and Santos (2016) argue that teams and leagues adopting glocalization strategies gain a competitive edge by expanding their audience and attracting international partners and talent, further reinforcing the success of these approaches.

This interplay between global influence and local adaptation is further reinforced through the results of our Principal Component Analysis (PCA). The analysis distinguishes themes of globalization and localized identity-building, highlighting clusters such as basketball’s deep integration into Chinese culture and alternative sports like parkour, which thrive as grassroots innovations (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007b). Parkour’s emergence as a cultural movement showcases how localized practices challenge conventional global norms, offering avenues for community-driven innovation and identity formation. The terms grouped together in Class 4 (Figure 4) reflect precisely this dynamic, with concepts such as “parkour” and “fandom” highlighting the importance of community initiatives. Fandom in sport is a propitious field for local social innovations inside global sport trends. This duality is also evident in events like the Tour de France, where each stage incorporates local cultural traditions while maintaining its status as a globally recognized competition (Varnajot 2020).

These findings point to the role of media and technology in amplifying the effects of glocalization. Especially through the social networks that allow the local (even the individual) to interact, moreover, to interpenetrate, into the global. Sports broadcasting has evolved to align with local contexts, providing tailored content that enhances fan engagement and strengthens community ties (Ranachan 2013; Baena 2019). For instance, global brands like Nike adopt culturally resonant strategies (Lorente Barroso et al. 2018), as seen in their varied product launches—such as the Quai 54 collection in Paris and Chinese New Year-themed designs. The clusters, identified in Figure 5, also show the importance of terms like “brand” and “community”, offering the impact of marketing strategies on local and global connectivity. Similarly, Lululemon’s expansion in China through culturally relevant marketing campaigns highlights how localized approaches can drive economic success while responding to the unique needs of diverse audiences (Yang 2022).

Our analysis further reveals Asia as a key focal point for glocalization-driven innovation, with 17 out of 29 studies highlighting this region's prominence in the global–local dynamic. This geographic focus reflects Asia's rapid economic growth, its hosting of major global events, and its cultural distinctiveness. Figure 3 confirms this importance, with clusters such as “China” and “NBA” demonstrating the successful integration of global sports into Asian markets. The success of the NBA in China serves as a prime example of how glocalized strategies align with local cultural practices, fostering not only economic opportunities but also deeper social connections. Such examples position Asia as a laboratory for social innovation, where global sports systems are actively reshaped through localized adaptations.

Ultimately, our findings suggest that glocalization is more than a strategic tool—it represents a socially innovative mechanism for bridging the global–local divide. By fostering cultural inclusion, enabling economic sustainability, and promoting localized transformations, glocalization empowers communities to actively shape global systems in ways that honour their cultural identities. The connections in Figures 3 and 5 show how concepts such as “globalization”, “culture”, and “local” interact to support these transformations. Events like the Beijing Olympics, the Tour de France, and the NBA's engagement in China demonstrate how sports organizations can transcend the limitations of globalization, creating platforms that resonate deeply with local audiences while achieving global reach.

5. Conclusions

This study analyzed glocalization in contemporary sports through a systematic lexicographical and bibliographic approach, revealing its transformative role as a driver of social innovation. Through lexical analysis, our results highlight key themes, such as the integration of local identities into global frameworks and their importance in community and economic engagement. By harmonizing global visibility with local relevance, glocalization enables sports organizations to integrate local cultural identities into global frameworks, fostering inclusive participation, cultural exchange, and economic sustainability.

The findings emphasize that team sports, such as football leagues, the NBA, and major events like the Tour de France and the Beijing Olympics successfully adapt global practices to local contexts. These examples illustrate how glocalization bridges cultural divides, strengthens community engagement, and empowers local innovation while ensuring global reach. Lexicographical analysis has shown that expressions such as “NBA” and “China” (Figure 3), as well as “glocalization” and “identity” (Figure 4), highlight these dynamics, reinforcing the importance of glocal strategies in the success of sports organizations.

This study contributes to the discourse on social innovation by demonstrating how glocalization provides practical solutions to global challenges through localized strategies. In this, our approach offers an innovative methodological framework for exploring modern sports transcending cultural and economic boundaries. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can leverage these insights to design local inclusive sports initiatives, foster local economic opportunities, and further investigate glocalization's role in creating connected, resilient local communities connected and/or integrated to global strategies.

Glocalization is more than a strategic necessity; it is a mechanism for driving social innovation development in sports. By embracing locally rooted adaptations, sports organizations can thrive in an interconnected world while honoring cultural diversity and addressing global challenges. Thus, glocalization, as a social and economic phenomenon, redefines the role of sports in a globalized world, positioning them as essential tools for inclusion and cultural connectivity.

6. Limitations and Future Research

The implications of this research are manifold. Firstly, it helps to understand how sports organizations can navigate a globalized environment while remaining locally relevant. Secondly, it demonstrates the importance of cultural and geographical adaptation for success in international markets. Lastly, it highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing glocalization strategies in sports, offering potential directions for future research and practices in this field.

Despite the positive aspects of this study, several important limitations must be highlighted. The selection of 29 articles may limit the comprehensiveness of the analyses, restricting the diversity of perspectives addressed. By way of example, our corpus is heavily focused on studies concerning globalized sports such as soccer and basketball, reflecting a biased orientation of current academic publications. To mitigate this limitation, expanding the corpus to include studies from other sectors could reveal common and specific patterns of glocalization across different fields. Additionally, the uneven coverage of sports disciplines, with an overrepresentation of globalized sports like football and basketball, introduces potential bias. Comparing these results with less-publicized sports would allow for more nuanced conclusions. Moreover, an analysis based solely on lexical frequency may not capture the full complexity of underlying local and global dynamics. Although the resulting figures (Figures 3–5) highlight recurring themes, they remain limited in their ability to capture discursive nuances or contextual relationships. Integrating complementary qualitative analyses, such as thematic or discourse analysis, as well as historical or even ethnographic approaches, would offer a deeper understanding of the contexts studied.

Finally, the rapid evolution of glocalization phenomena in a constantly changing environment may render certain conclusions outdated. The dynamics of the clusters identified (for example, “Chinese” and “NBA” in Figure 3) underline the evolving nature of these interactions, requiring ongoing monitoring to assess their evolution. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct future research that is more precise and multidimensional to refine analyses in this emerging field of study. In conclusion, while this study offers a significant contribution to the discourse on glocalization in sport, its limitations also open up important avenues for future research, aimed at delving deeper into the relationships between globalization and local adaptation. Such investigations will not only address the methodological challenges raised but also strengthen our understanding of the mechanisms of social innovation in increasingly diverse sporting contexts.

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