

A Study on the Coupling Mechanism of Economic and Social Benefits in the Effective Operation of Sports Venues in Zigong City

Huan Liang ^{1,*}, Jianhui Zhou ¹, Haixia Wang ¹, Youjian Yang ²

¹Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Zigong, 643000, China

²Yibin Medical and Health Vocational College, Yibin, 644000, China

Corresponding author's email: 1910540553@qq.com

Abstract

The separation and imbalance between the economic and social benefits of sports venues have long hindered the high-quality development of public sports services in cities in the central and western regions. This study takes four typical sports venues of different types in Zigong City as cases to explore the coupling mechanism of economic benefits and social benefits under effective operation conditions. Research findings show that: (1) there are four pathways for the synergistic development of sports venues in Zigong City – institutional-driven, service-integrated, spatial revitalization-based, and brand-enhancing; (2) the main obstacles to furthering this synergy include cognitive disconnects, insufficient capabilities, and misaligned evaluation methods. Based on the findings above, to get the most out of both economic and social returns, we propose optimization strategies at the theoretical, institutional, and operational levels to address the issues identified. This study also offers a context-sensitive framework—both theoretically and practically—for how similar city sports venues can move beyond low-level equilibrium toward a more symbiotic payoff.

Keywords

Zigong City, economic benefits, social benefits, coupling mechanism.

1. Introduction

General Secretary Xi Jinping attaches great importance to the development of the sports industry. He pointed out that "we should promote the high-quality development of the sports industry." He also emphasized that "sports are an important way to improve people's health, an important means to meet people's desire for a better life and promote their all-round development, an important driving force for economic and social development, and an important platform to show the country's cultural soft power". These remarks point the way for the sports industry and highlight its important role in improving people's health, satisfying their desire for a better life, and boosting economic and social growth. According to the *National Fitness Plan (2021–2025)*, we should improve the service quality of venue opening, better manage the performance of free or low-cost opening, and increase performance evaluation on how well venues serve young people, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Sports venue facilities play a basic role. They are the physical carriers of national fitness and help improve quality and increase efficiency. However, under the current social background of financial pressure and limited resources, it is hard to keep venues running and developing normally just by relying on government subsidies and public welfare services. As public goods, venues also need to take on the social responsibility of serving national fitness. While serving society, venue operations should also stimulate consumption and raise economic benefits through diverse business methods.

Zigong is a city with strong sports development. National fitness activities are now in full swing, people's enthusiasm for exercise keeps rising, and the overall atmosphere for fitness is good. According to the *Zigong City National Fitness Implementation Plan (2021–2025)*, we should improve the service efficiency of public venues, make financial subsidy policies better, provide subsidies for free or low-cost opening of public sports venues, and strengthen performance evaluation on how well venues serve the public. Meanwhile, the Zigong City Education and Sports Bureau has been working hard to speed up the development of the sports industry. They are creating new consumption scenes, sparking new momentum for sports consumption, and making good use of the sports industry's driving effect on the local economy. Sports venues have two roles: they provide public services and also serve as economic tools. They can meet people's exercise needs and bring in economic benefits at the same time. But in Zigong, the balance between economic and social benefits is not well kept. To deal with this, we chose four different types of sports venues in Zigong to study and compare their operation models. Our goal is to find the best way to combine the two benefits and make the venues better serve the national fitness strategy, so that people can feel more satisfied.

2. Case selection strategy

In the daily management and operation of sports venues, economic benefit is a hard indicator, while social benefit is a soft one. Social benefit is the foundation that ensures the normal development of sports venues, and economic benefit is the key to their healthy survival. Four different cases were chosen in Zigong using a method that maximizes differences among them. The sports venues selected are all typical and representative. For simplicity and clarity, they are referred to as Venue A, Venue B, Venue C, and Venue D. Venue A is a large-scale sports center with a strong public service orientation and under direct government management – the Nanhu Sports Center in Zigong; Venue B is a fitness center focused on market dynamics, operated by private enterprises – the Rongxian Citizens' Fitness Center in Zigong; Venue C operates on a mixed model and serves as an auxiliary facility attached to a school or community – Gymnasium Sichuan University of Science and Engineering; Venue D is a typical example of a venue that achieves good dual benefits – the Tanmulin Stadium in Zigong.

3. Qualitative description of the operation practices of sports venues in Zigong City

3.1. Operating models of the four venues in the case study

There are various models for operating sports venues, which can be classified based on their functional purpose, market demands, and management strategies. Traditional models include government-led public service management, market-oriented commercial operation, and hybrid multi-model management approaches. Below is a brief introduction to some of the venues that have been selected as examples:

Venue A, the Nanhu Sports Center in Zigong City, is under the jurisdiction of the city's Sports Bureau. It served as the main venue for the 11th Sichuan Provincial Games, and it features a standard stadium with a capacity of over 20,000 spectators, a tennis center, and a public leisure square. This center is the only large-scale, modern multi-functional sports facility in Zigong, offering various services such as sports competitions, recreational activities for the public, artistic performances, and exhibition events. In December 2024, it was recognized as one of the first batch of five-star sports service complexes in Sichuan Province. It serves as the home stadium for the Zigong Dengcheng Shenlong team in the Sichuan City Football League, and has also hosted commercial concerts. After the provincial sports games, adhering to the principle of maintaining the public service role of sports venues, various sports associations and cultural

projects were brought in to fully utilize these venues for activities such as promoting fitness among the public, organizing competitions, and providing training, thereby increasing their utilization rate effectively.

Venue B is the Rongxian Citizens' Fitness Center in Zigong; it is operated by a professional third-party team from Chengdu Derek Sports Industry Group. It features swimming pools that meet competition standards, badminton courts, table tennis courts, basketball courts for children, fitness centers, training facilities for teenagers, yoga studios, and dance training classrooms. Li Shijie, the person in charge of the operation, said openly that "they must strive to reduce their profit margins and improve management levels in order to achieve a balance between philanthropic activities and commercial interests." The Rongxian Citizens' Fitness Center was awarded the title of "Four-Star Sports Service Complex in Sichuan Province" in March 2026.

Venue C is the gymnasium of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering; taking the Li Baihe campus as an example, the existing indoor and outdoor sports fields as well as the modern gymnasium have greatly enhanced the university's capacity to host sporting events and its infrastructure standards. There are also two 400-meter running tracks, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, volleyball courts, badminton courts, as well as a gymnastics hall and dance studios. The cooperation between the School of Physical Education at Sichuan University of Light Industry and Chemical Technology and the city of Zigong aims to foster deeper collaboration in areas such as the planning and organization of sporting events, as well as the construction and management of sports facilities.

Venue D is the Zigong Sandalwood Forest Sports Stadium; it is the first comprehensive sports venue in Zigong city. Its funding comes primarily from government grants, and its main purpose is to provide public sports services rather than to generate profits. The Sandalwood Forest Stadium is used for outdoor activities, while the Sandalwood Forest Gymnasium is used for indoor competitions and training sessions.

3.2. Cross-case comparison: Three sets of core dimensions

Table 3-2 Comparison of core dimensions of four sports venues

Name of the venue	Operational model (Governance and decision-making)	Public welfare model	Business strategy
Nanhu Sports Center in Zigong City (A)	The Municipal Education and Sports Bureau makes unified arrangements.	Adopt a free/low-fee access system	"The ticket stub economy," "the youth economy"
Zigong Rongxian Citizens' Fitness Center (B)	Professional third-party team operation and management	"Three-time-period" tiered pricing model	Organizing various types of business competitions
Gymnasium of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (C)	Autonomous management of the school	No public information available.	Organizing professional sports events and nurturing athletic talent
Zigong Tanmulin Gymnasium (D)	The Municipal Education and Sports Bureau makes unified arrangements.	It is available at no cost or at low fees, and provides facilities for young people.	Relied primarily on financial subsidies, with the economic benefits brought about by competitions being indirect.

3.2.1. Public welfare provision model

Venue A is located at the Nanhu Sports Center in Zigong City; it operates on a free or low-fee basis, being open to the public at no cost or at reduced fees for at least 330 days per year, with at least 35 hours of opening time each week. On public holidays, legal holidays, and during

school winter and summer breaks, the venues should be open for at least 8 hours a day. The prices for low-charge services should be no more than 70% of the market price. Also, half-price discounts should be offered to special groups like the elderly and young people, as well as for public sports events and activities.

Venue B is the Zigong Rongxian Citizen Fitness Center. It uses a "three-period" pricing model, which divides the daily opening hours into free periods, low-fee periods, and regular-price periods. From 9:30 to 12:30 every Monday to Friday, basketball, badminton, and table tennis are free for citizens. Also, the 18th of each month is set as National Fitness Open Day, when the swimming pool, gym, and badminton courts are all open to the public for free.

Venue C is the gymnasium of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering. It uses sports competitions to educate students and serve the community, and it has a strong campus sports culture. The school regularly holds more than 600 school-level sports events each academic year, with about 3,500 participants taking part every year on average. There are 17 varsity teams that train on a regular basis. In the past three years, they have won over 60 national-level awards and more than 100 provincial-level awards. The gymnasium has also hosted several national and provincial sports events. However, there is no public information about it being open to the public for free.

Venue D is the Zigong Tanmulin Gymnasium, and it's a great example of a place that offers free and low-cost public access. It is open to the public for free or at reduced prices for 360 days a year, with 85 hours of opening time each week. On public holidays, legal holidays, and during school winter and summer breaks, it stays open for up to 12 hours a day. It also provides sports facilities and courts for free or at low prices to young people aged 18 to 35. And the sports organizations based there are open to the public for free as well.

3.2.2. Business Strategy

Venue A is the Zigong Nanhu Sports Center. In 2026, the Zigong division of the Sichuan Super League held three home games there, which directly boosted local consumption by over 1.4 billion yuan. Zigong also came up with a "ticket stub economy," where a single ticket links together a whole chain of spending on food, accommodation, sightseeing, and shopping. At the same time, large events like the 2025 New Year's Eve concert also gave a big push to spending on nearby hotels and restaurants. Outside the Nanhu Sports Center, there have also been some creative attempts at a "youth economy." More than 20 stalls labeled as "Youth Managers' Shops" were set up outside the stadium, offering delicacies such as the specialty cold dishes from Zigong as well as creative cultural products, thus blending the passion of football with the energy of youth-oriented business.

Venue B is the Rongxian Civic Fitness Center in Zigong; it promotes consumption through sports events and has hosted the "Second Sichuan Provincial Senior Cultural and Art Festival Fitness Events" the "Sichuan Province Derek Cup 'SC' National Swimmers Competition" and the "Seventh Sichuan Provincial National Fitness Ice and Snow Season Skateboarding Open Competition."

Venue C is the gymnasium of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering; it facilitates the integration of event organization with the local economy, creating a sustainable development model based on using competitions to build facilities, using those facilities to support education, and integrating competition and education. Various collaborative projects have been established between the university and local enterprises, which not only generate economic benefits for the university but also contribute professional expertise to the local sports sector.

Venue D is the Zigong Tanmulin Gymnasium; it achieves balance under financial constraints, with government funding being the main source of income. The indirect economic benefits arise from the use of the city as a platform to host events. The "Head to 2026" Sichuan Super League

Celebration event in 2025 is a typical example of this approach – it not only boosts the city's reputation but also stimulates consumption in areas such as tourism, catering, and hospitality.

3.2.3. Governance and Decision-Making Mechanisms

Venue A is located at the Nanhu Sports Center in Zigong City; under the unified planning of the city's Education and Sports Bureau and with financial support, it focuses on carrying out basic repairs to the facilities, updating convenience services, upgrading fitness equipment, and developing smart pathways, thereby continuously improving the appearance and diversity of the fitness facilities.

Venue B is the Rongxian Citizens' Fitness Center in Zigong; it is operated and managed by a professional third-party team. A tiered pricing system based on three different time periods is applied here, with the annual membership fee kept at around 1300 yuan. The operators state that this price level is achievable by reducing profit margins and using the savings resulting from reduced rent costs to benefit members, thus balancing both public welfare and commercial interests.

Venue C is the gymnasium of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering; compared to the other two types of venues (those under direct government management or operated by private companies), the effective operation of this gymnasium allows for a complementary use of resources with public sports venues. The advantage of the university's gymnasium lies in its ability to host professional competitions and train sports talents, while public venues excel at serving the general population.

Venue D is the Zigong Sandwood Forest Gymnasium. Thanks to the government's active involvement and coordinated management of public sports services, as well as the unified plans put in place by the Municipal Education and Sports Bureau, public sports facilities are made available at no cost or at reduced fees through government-funded purchases of such services. A subsidy of 600,000 yuan has been allocated to ensure that more citizens can benefit from these public sports services.

4. Zigong Sports Venues: An Analysis of How Economic and Social Benefits Work Together

4.1. The Path of Coupling between Economic and Social Benefits

4.1.1. Rule Embedding: Institution-Driven Coupling

The coupling that comes from institutional rules is the most basic way to make sure that sports venues in Zigong can effectively bring together economic and social benefits in how they run. This path starts with national policies, is supported by local government financial investment and management innovation, and uses detailed venue operations as the means of implementation. Together, these form a top-down institutional transmission chain. In this mechanism, social benefit comes before economic benefit. This doesn't mean there is no profit. Rather, there is room for flexible adjustment. It works on a "cover costs with a small profit" basis, rather than "maximizing profits." This provides institutional protection for the public welfare nature of sports venues. It becomes an "institutional commitment" that has clear rules, financial support, and performance evaluation. This institutional foundation sets the stage for other types of coupling paths to play their roles.

4.1.2. Transforming Value through Service-Embedded Coupling

They use public welfare services as the front door to draw people in. Then, professional commercial services turn that attention into real value. This creates a closed-loop cycle: public welfare brings in visitors, commercial services generate revenue, and that revenue goes back to support public welfare. Venue A is the Zigong Nanhu Sports Center. Unlike the Rongxian Citizen Fitness Center, which embeds services into everyday operations, Nanhu's service-

embedded coupling mainly plays out through the transformation of sports events. Using the "ticket stub" as a physical link, it directly connects the social benefits of sports events—like tens of thousands of spectators and a stronger sense of city pride—with the economic benefits of the business system, such as spending on food, accommodation, and tourism. Beyond the Nanhu Sports Center itself, Zigong has also created several "second viewing zones" at places like Huashang International City, Wanda Plaza, and Nanhu Stadium, forming an extended network for the event's impact. This service brings a social benefit—more people get to join in and feel the excitement of the games—while at the same time, the economic benefit—more foot traffic and higher spending in the commercial areas—grows right alongside it, all in the same space and feeding off each other. Venue B, the Rongxian Citizen Fitness Center, is built around a "three-period tiered pricing" model. This creates a complete business loop that starts with free access, moves to low-cost services, and ends with regular pricing. The free periods and the National Fitness Open Day act as the entry point to bring people in—they help lower the barrier for citizens to give it a try. For the same user, the two benefits are delivered at different times. First, public welfare services build trust and develop habits. Then, commercial services meet deeper needs. Venue C is the gymnasium of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering. For this venue, service-embedded coupling mainly comes through in the form of professional capacity. The real strength of a university-affiliated venue is not about how widely it opens to the public, but about its ability to host high-level competitions and train sports professionals. Venue D is the Zigong Tanmulin Gymnasium. It targets its public welfare services precisely at young people. On one hand, this ensures that social benefits are delivered exactly where they're needed, meeting young people's needs for fitness and social interaction. On the other hand, it helps young people build a sense of connection with the venue and get into the habit of using it, eventually turning them into regular customers in the long run.

4.1.3. Time-Based Differentiation: Space-Activation Coupling

By carefully dividing time slots, sports venues act as public goods during public welfare hours and take on market-oriented functions during commercial hours. In the same physical space, they can switch between social and economic benefits and make them coexist in a healthy way. Firstly, a hierarchical structure based on "three time periods" is employed: free services to attract users, low-cost options to maintain them, and paid services to generate revenue. Secondly, a reservation system serves as a mechanism for coordinating timing and improving efficiency; when there are conflicts between the needs of different users within the same time period, an effective system for expressing those needs and allocating resources is necessary. Thirdly, through intelligent management, the efficiency of resource allocation, user experience, and management transparency are improved. Fourthly, the concept of activating space is applied creatively beyond the venues themselves; the expansion of off-venue areas such as those represented by the Sichuan Super League's "second viewing areas" represents a shift from allocating time resources to allocating space resources.

4.1.4. Capitalization of reputation: Brand synergy through mutual promotion

Brand-driven mutual promotion represents the most advanced form of the dual-benefit integration mechanism in the sports venues of Zigong City. It does not start with direct economic benefits, but rather relies on the long-term buildup of social reputation; its outcome is not only the economic gains for the venues themselves, but also an overall enhancement of the city's brand value. Sports venues build up their social reputation through high-quality public services such as making facilities available for public use, organizing events, and providing support for professional training. This reputation is then transformed into brand value through market mechanisms, in the form of rating systems, attraction of events, commercial sponsorship, and the enhancement of the venue's image as a symbol of the city. In this way, social benefits are converted into economic benefits, while those economic benefits

further contribute to the development of the venue's brand and its capacity to provide social services, creating a virtuous cycle of reputation building, brand enhancement, and mutual promotion of benefits. From the five-star certification of the Nanhua Sports Center, to the "champion hub" status of the Southwest Cycling Center, and then to the role of the Sichuan Super League as a means to enhance visibility, Zigong is demonstrating through practice that sports venues are not merely physical spaces; they represent brand capital as well. They are strategic assets through which social and economic benefits can be achieved by building reputation, managing brands, and converting value.

4.2. Coupled "obstruction": A qualitative diagnosis of mechanism failure

4.2.1. Cognitive fragmentation and the "polarization" in the understanding of benefits

As the central city in southern Sichuan, Zigong's sports venues were mostly built from the facilities left over from previous provincial sports games; the separation of ownership rights from operational rights is a prominent issue, which exacerbates misunderstandings and inaccurate evaluations. For government officials, social benefits mean free opening hours and visitor numbers. For venue operators, economic benefits mean rental income and cash flow. The two sides are looking at things from different angles, and neither fully understands the whole chain—from social benefits to brand value, to long-term consumer loyalty, and finally to indirect economic returns. As a result, decisions tend to be made in an either-or way. Adding more public welfare sessions is seen as a loss of revenue, while raising fees is worried to go against the public welfare nature. This gap in understanding between the two sides takes away the logical starting point for any kind of coupling.

4.2.2. Skill Gaps: Where Consensus Fails to Translate into Action

Both the government and venue operators see the need to balance economic and social benefits. But in reality, the venue teams often don't have the skills to pull it off. They can't come up with good plans for mixing free services, low-fee options, and commercial events. They struggle to get local companies to sponsor public sports programs. They're not good at using data on visitor numbers to figure out how to boost spending. And they don't really know how to convert the people who come for free events into paying customers, or put a dollar value on social benefits in a practical way. For example, they can't design activities that are low-cost but attract lots of people. They don't know how to work with brands. And they're not good at using digital tools to connect public welfare with commercial services. These skill gaps make it hard to turn the research on combining both benefits into a sustainable business model that actually works.

4.2.3. Misaligned Evaluation: Different Performance Metrics for Different Sides

When evaluating the operation of sports venues in Zigong, separate performance indicators are often used. Social benefits are assessed by the sports department, while economic benefits are measured by different standards. The two sets of indicators are not linked to each other, and their weight often shifts depending on where the funding comes from. Venues that receive a larger share of government subsidies are judged mainly on social benefits, which makes them afraid to generate revenue. On the other hand, venues that are more market-oriented are judged mainly on economic benefits, which leads to a cutback in public welfare services. This mismatch in evaluation goes against the goal of achieving positive coupling between economic and social benefits for the venues. If the evaluation system is not improved, and no coupling metrics are set up—such as the extra economic returns brought by social benefits, or the share of economic profits that goes back to public welfare—the problem will be hard to fix.

5. Suggestions for Optimizing the Coupling Mechanism of Economic and Social Benefits of Sports Venues in Zigong

5.1. Bridging the Cognitive Gap: Building a Shared Understanding of Dual Benefits and the Logic of Their Conversion

We need to set up cross-sector meetings for joint discussions. The Zigong Sports Bureau should take the lead and regularly bring together venue operators, the finance department, community representatives, and typical fitness consumers to talk about how social benefits can be turned into economic benefits. They need to understand more clearly how a series of social benefits—like free public access, group events, and health promotion—can be translated into economic returns through things like brand value, the build-up of a regular user base, and government-business relationships. First, every workshop should be documented and turned into written records. These records will serve as a reference for venue planning and evaluation. Second, we should create visual benefit maps. Using one or two typical venues—like Nanhu Sports Center and Tanmulin Gymnasium—as examples, we can draw a clear diagram showing the flow from inputs to activities to outputs and finally to benefits. This chart can visually show how the same operational spending generates both economic returns (such as ticket sales, rental income, and advertising) and social returns (such as population coverage, health improvement, and community satisfaction) at the same time. This map can serve as a basic tool for government decision-making and public communication. At the same time, the organizations in charge of sports venues should take a broader view and build a performance evaluation system around the ideas of hosting events, meeting public needs, and digital operations.

5.2. Filling Skill Gaps: Improving Comprehensive Operational Capabilities

First, we need to train or bring in professional talent. We can work with local universities—like the School of Physical Education and the School of Economics and Management at Sichuan University of Light and Chemical Technology—to set up a micro-major or short-term training programs in sports venue operations. The focus should be on teaching practical skills such as "how to turn public welfare activities into commercial designs," "visitor flow data analysis," and "sponsorship negotiation." At the same time, we can bring in mid-level managers from Chengdu and Chongqing who have experience in market-oriented operations of large sports venues. We can adopt a model where these experienced advisors work on projects together with local teams, and the local teams learn by following their lead. Second, develop a product mix that combines public welfare, low-fee, and commercial activities. In terms of time coupling, social benefits are shown by offering free or low-fee services during fixed daily periods like 6:00–9:00, while economic benefits come from dynamic pricing during other hours. In terms of activity coupling, social benefits help boost commercial revenue—for example, when holding community events, we can also bring in local business sponsorships, sell related merchandise, and offer sports recovery experiences. In terms of membership coupling, we turn public welfare participation into loyal customers. Citizens who take part in the annual public fitness check-in activity for a certain number of times will get discounts on paid courses or venue services. Third, develop and use digital operations. With the help of Zigong's "Smart Sports" platform or the venues' own systems, we can connect data on visitor counts, user profiles, spending records, and public service hours. This allows us to work out how much extra spending each public welfare event brings, and gives us data feedback to help improve our operations over time.

5.3. Correcting Evaluation Misalignment: Designing a Coupling-Oriented Assessment System

First, a core indicator for measuring the degree of dual benefits should be established; the practice of evaluating economic benefits and social benefits separately should be abandoned.

Three types of coupling indicators will be used for assessment: an efficiency indicator that measures the increase in the number of people engaging in physical activity as a result of each unit of financial subsidy or operational cost, as well as the amount of commercial sponsorship or consumer spending generated; a proportionality indicator that determines what portion of the venue's annual operating income is allocated to subsidizing the free or low-cost access to facilities and the maintenance of community sports infrastructure; and a structural balance indicator that shows what percentage of the total available time the facilities are open at no cost or at low fees, with this indicator being evaluated in conjunction with economic metrics such as the vacancy rate and revenue per unit area, in order to avoid extreme situations. Secondly, a systematic assessment system combined with dynamic weighting is employed; depending on the role of different venues in Zigong City, for venues that serve purely charitable purposes such as community fitness centers, the weight assigned to social benefits is 70% while that assigned to economic benefits is 30%. However, it is necessary to assess their ability to boost commercial activity in the surrounding area. For market-oriented venues such as commercial sports complexes, the weight assigned to economic benefits is 70%, but there is a criterion related to social benefits that can result in rejection of such venues – for example, they must provide free access to certain areas for a set number of hours each day. Thirdly, a cross-departmental mechanism for joint assessment and incentive alignment should be established. Government departments such as the Zigong Sports Bureau, Finance Bureau, and State-owned Assets Supervision Commission will be responsible for evaluating the dual benefits of these venues on an annual basis. Positive incentives will be provided to the top 30% of venues in terms of performance, in the form of additional operational subsidies, priority in policy implementation (such as the ability to expand their commercial space), or rewards for team performance. As for negative constraints, those venues that rank at the bottom in terms of performance over a period of two years without any signs of improvement will have their operating entities changed or will lose their financial subsidies.

6. Conclusion

The economic and social benefits of sports venues are not inherently contradictory, nor are they automatically linked. This paper takes Zigong as a case study and proposes a three-part framework of mechanism failures—cognitive gap, skill shortage, and evaluation misalignment—to explain the underlying logic of why the coupling between economic and social benefits gets stuck. The study found that at the cognitive level, different parties lack a shared understanding of which benefit should come first and how to convert one into the other. At the skill level, venue teams lack the versatile skills needed to turn public welfare traffic into commercial value. At the evaluation level, separate assessment systems cause individual goals to drift away from the overall system goals. These three problems are interwoven and form a low-level balance with weak coupling in the way venues operate. To address these issues, this paper suggests building a consensus map, bringing in skilled professionals to improve combined capabilities, and designing coupling-oriented assessment indicators. These suggestions take into account both Zigong's local feasibility and general theoretical logic, so they can serve as a reference for similar medium-sized cities looking to improve their sports venue operations. In summary, if Zigong's sports venues want to truly run effectively, they need to remove the barriers at the system level—in cognition, capacity, and evaluation—so that economic and social benefits can move from zero to mutually reinforcing each other. This is not only an internal requirement for the sustainable development of the venues, but also an essential part of the high-quality development of public sports services.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the National Physical Fitness and Sports Industry Research Center, which is part of Zigong City's key research base for philosophy and social sciences (project number: GT-03202506).

References

- [1] Theoretical Study Group of the Party Leadership Group of the Municipal Sports Bureau. (2021, September 7). The implementation in Huzhou of General Secretary Xi Jinping's views on the "four key aspects" related to sports. Huzhou Daily, p. A06.
- [2] General Administration of Sport of China. (2021). Notice from the State Council on the issuance of the National Fitness Plan (2021–2025).
- [3] Zigong Municipal People's Government. (2021). Zigong City's plan for promoting physical fitness among all citizens (2021–2025).
- [4] Zhi, Q. (2017). A study on the relationship between the social and economic benefits of sports venues. *Economist*, (4), 167-168.
- [5] Wu, J. L. (2024). Analysis of the economic and social benefits of the operation and management of sports venues. *Sports Goods and Technology*, (13), 58-60.
- [6] Wang, X. (2026). Research on the theoretical mechanisms and implementation approaches for the intelligent transformation of sports venues in Hunan. *Journal of Taiyuan City Vocational and Technical College*, (2), 68-70.