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Redesigning Sports Tourism as an Experience

Dhirendra Singh Chauhan¹

¹Assistant Professor Physical Education, Government Girls P.G. College, Bindki, Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

The definition of sports tourism goes beyond the traditional "sports away from home" and, based on experiences, this study shows that sports tourism is formed by the interaction between sports, people and places. It is possible to have meaningful experiences, and the long-term outcomes of these experiences can include economic impact, destination image, and social legacy. Finally, this study provides theoretical and practical suggestions for the development of sustainable and inclusive sport tourism strategies and highlights the need for further research towards an experience-based understanding of sport tourism.

Keywords - sports tourism, meaningful experiences, destination image, social legacy, tourism strategies

Introduction

Sports and tourism are closely intertwined, and the important field of sports tourism moves from participation in sports to spectatorship. The idea that sports tourism means traveling outside the environment for sport is often expressed. Such an activity-based definition is crucial in legitimizing sport tourism as a distinct subject of study. For example, Gibson (1998) proposed a broad definition of sport tourism as "the taking of individuals outside their homes for the purpose of temporarily taking part in a sporting activity" where they are viewed as overlapping with each other, focusing on the type of activity or primary motivation of the traveller.

Over the past two decades, scholars have called for a better understanding of what happens when sport and travel come together, and to think of sport tourism as a holistic experience, not just travel. Mike Weed (2008) was one of the first to explicitly say that sport tourism should be defined not by travel activity or purpose, but by experience. Instead, "What experiences do people have when games are part of the journey, and how does that experience affect them?" This shift is consistent with the broader concept of the "experience economy" of tourism, which argues that consumers seek memorable experiences in addition to services and places (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Sometimes we must put in a lot of effort to get the most out of our house, and we're going to be able to put ourselves in a position where we're not going to be able to do that.

Viewing sport tourism as an experiential phenomenon also implies the need to integrate a framework for analysis. Rather than treating sport travel in isolation, recent models suggest examining the interplay of events, people, and places that shape sports tourism experiences (Weed & Bull, 2004), within this framework, any of these components, a sport activity (game, spectator, host), and social infrastructure (host, fan friends) settings and destinations can create experiences. Often, it's a combination of these that gives the experience character. It aims to show how a synthesis of contemporary research focusing on qualities and the context of experience can enhance our understanding of sport tourism. We begin by reviewing the definitions and conceptual frameworks of activity-based experiences. Next, we explore the sociocultural, spatial, and emotional dimensions of the sport tourism experience. Several case studies are then presented to illustrate what these concepts look like in practice and what the results are for destinations and communities, and finally, we reconstruct sports tourism challenges and opportunities for inclusive and sustainable development consultations before offering implications and recommendations for future research and practice.

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Literature Review

The development of the sector to define “sports tourism” has become a central debate. The pioneering works of the late 20th century generally defined sport tourism based on the activity or purpose of the trip. For example, Gaiman and Robinson’s (1997) framework distinguishes between hard and soft definitions of sport tourism. Gibson (1998) defines sport tourism as attending a sporting event, watching a sporting event, and viewing a sport-related attraction. Classifying a city as to why a tourist visits. (Whether for sport or not.) This has contributed to the establishment of sport tourism as a legitimate field of study in tourism research, although sport tourism has been defined as a criterion for mainstream tourism. From activity-based definitions to experience frameworks.

In the early 2000s, scholars rejected such a definition, arguing that they did not know what made sport-related travel unique. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been involved in any of the activities that I’ve been involved in. I’ve been involved in a lot of things, I’ve been involved in a lot of things, I’ve been working on a lot of things, and I’ve been working on a lot of things,” he said. framework. In other words, they care about the quality and meaning of the sport tourism relationship.

This review is supported by a major shift in tourism theory at the turn of the century. Pine and Gilmore (1999) refer to the “experience economy” as a transaction that focuses on delivering memorable experiences rather than transactional goods and services. Weed (2008, 2009) sees that sport and tourism management debates are moving in this direction, about experience management and the expectations and memories of events. As part of this development, Weed & Bull’s (2004) model of sport tourism gained traction as an intersection of events, people, and places: According to the model, the sport tourism experience consists of (a) the sport activity (participants, or spectators) and (b) their partners, participants, and/or spectators. hosts) and (c) stems from places and settings. For example, on some trips, activity is central. The skier’s experience is dominated by the challenge and excitement of skiing, while the social aspect is dominant in other contexts. In other cases, location is key. Often these three factors are linked in complex ways. The spatial framework of events and people encourages researchers to explore how these dimensions interact. By focusing on experiences, researchers can better capture the complexities of emotion, social relations, and sense of place.

Higham and Wada (2024) see that broadening the perspective aligns sport tourism research with contemporary human geography and sociology: In their review of sport tourism landscapes, Higham and Wada argue that sport and tourism evolve with social changes. Achieve this goal, researchers need to consider how social context and space influence these experiences. Sport tourism cannot be studied solely as a segment of marketing. It is perceived as a rich field for examining cultural trends, identities, and spatial patterns. (Higham & Vada, 2024) In summary, the literature has moved on from asking “what counts as sports tourism?” to “What happens during sports tourism and why is it important?” Clear shift from definition to experience.

Sociocultural perspectives: identity, lifestyle, and fan culture.

This experience-focused approach reflects the social and cultural context of sport tourism. “Sport is a social phenomenon, where people build bonds through participation and passion, and tourism experiences are deeply embedded in cultural identity,” he said.

One important area is lifestyle sports tourism. Other lifestyles or sports include surfing, mountain biking, rock climbing, kitesurfing, etc., which are often characterized by informal structures and strong subcultures. They are integral to participants’ identities and lifestyles (Wheaton, 2004), commonly referred to as “lifestyles” by

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lifestyle sports enthusiasts, as they travel and engage in these activities in favourable or iconic locations. Wheaton's (2004) findings suggest that participants experienced mixed cultures in the program. Part of the experience is the wave or rock face itself.

Research has shown that these experiences are indeed co-created by people and place. Weed (2009) argues that in the case of lifestyle sport tourism, sport activities are enhanced by local resources, aesthetic qualities, and cultural exchange with other participants such as mountain environment, fresh snow, mountain scenery, mountain community, sense of belonging to a subculture. Some destinations are "meccas" for specific sports. The community aspect is just as strong meeting with local experts to learn, share stories with colleagues from around the world, and take part in subcultural rituals. Unfortunately, in the game of life, the travel experience is not only an opportunity to do activities in different places, but also a cultural adventure.

Even in the context of traditional sports, identity and community play a key role. Many sport tourists define themselves at least in part through sport-related travel. For example, recreational distance runners see completing large marathons in different cities as a badge of honour. In Shipway and Jones' (2008) study of participants in the London Marathon, runners spoke of a "marathon community" in which they shared an attitude of perseverance and mutual support. They described common rituals attending the show, eating dinner, photographing famous landmarks on the course, and high spirits on race day all of which were integral to what made the experience so special. (Shipway & Jones, 2008); It's becoming a part of who they are.

Similarly, sports fan tourism has a deep social and emotional significance for attending a sporting event. Fans often travel in groups and form a supportive traveling community in partnership with foreign compatriots. It's rich with culture and meaning, whether it's the national team traveling to the World Cup or a trip to a game in a nearby city. Morgan (2007) introduced the idea of co-creation into the fan experience, arguing that fans do not simply consume an event. They actively create conditions and meanings through their participation. While fans travel, the co-production extends to navigating new cultures and making friends in unfamiliar places. Football fans, for instance, describe an away game or an international tournament as one of the most memorable experiences of their lives. high emotions (e.g., singing the national anthem in the stadium).

Repetition over time can also create a sense of pilgrimage. Some sports venues are considered sacred by fans, such as the Wimbledon tennis courts in Brazil or the Maracana. If you're looking for a way to put yourself out there, you're going to have to make sure you're doing the right thing.

In summary, sociocultural factors, including identity, community, subculture, and fan, are integral to the sport tourism experience. In the early 1990s, I took part in various activities of the National Association of Education and Training Centres, including the National Association of Education and Training Agencies. Also, whose experiences are accessible and celebrated in the sports tourism industry? For example, sports tourism experiences focus on making sports tourism experiences accessible to people with disabilities, women and older people.

Spatial Dimensions: Place, Space, and Heritage.

Sports tourism involves travel, which involves traveling in space and experiencing in a natural setting. Where it is may matter as much in sports tourism. Two spatial considerations in the literature are particularly noteworthy.

Sports geographers have introduced the concept of "sport contexts" to describe the physical and organizational arrangements of sport experiences. (Bale, 1989) As sporting events have become more global, the design and

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facilities of major venues have been standardized for efficiency and comfort. Research has examined the effects of homogenizing sports venues on the quality of play. The spatial challenge, therefore, is to preserve or highlight and balance the local flavour of modern infrastructure.

Sports tourism can positively shape destinations through event heritage and destination image. Cities and regions often pursue programs with the dual goals of short-term tourism and long-term tourism promotion or urban development. The term legacy covers all the consequences, intended and unintended, good and bad, tangible and intangible, which remain after an event. Tangible legacies include stadiums, hotels, transportation improvements, or new sports facilities built for the event. The 1992 Olympics successfully transformed Barcelona's global image, with its waterfront and sports facilities continuing to be used by local tourists.

However, research shows that the results of legacy vary. Organizing large-scale events is a high-risk, high-reward proposition. They have great potential to attract worldwide attention and visitors, but they also bring high costs and complexity. Many studies have been critical of whether the promised economic benefits are being realized and who is receiving them. Often, following a surge in tourism during an event, tourism quickly returns to normal levels, and any long-term tourism benefits must be exploited carefully. (Chalip, 2014; Preuss, 2015) The economic benefits of certain locations (such as city centres or affluent districts) bypass poorer neighbourhoods and rural areas, for example, criticizing many Olympic Games for creating a "two-speed city." As communities prepare for the event, they often see little progress or are forced to move.

On the other hand, smaller or recurring events are more easily integrated with local needs. Research on regional sports programs shows that they can provide more sustainable benefits. For example, Schnitzer, Schlemmer, and Kristiansen (2017) conducted a study of youth multi-sport events in the Tyrol region of Austria, including the 2012 Winter Youth Olympic Games and other European youth festivals, and even if not mega-events and events, sports had the most significant impact on the nights they currently see in the thousands. Extensive use of habitat has reduced the vulnerability of white-tailed deer facilities. The main limitation is the lack of a formal strategy. These findings highlight the importance of proper measurement planning. A smaller destination may receive help from frequent smaller events in the off-season, rather than pouring resources into hosting large events that exceed local capacity.

The spatial analysis approach has also advanced our understanding of how sport tourists visit and spend in hospitality destinations. For example, Congelio (2025) used mobile phone data to assess the local economic impact of a Bassmaster Elite commercial fishing tournament in the U.S. South: During tournament weeks, tourist traffic concentrated in certain cities, and thus higher spending at hotels, restaurants, and retailers in those areas. Over the past few years, we have been actively involved in the field of education and training and have been involved in the programs of the United Nations since the beginning of the 20th century. It introduced new customers to local establishments and put lesser-known rural areas on the tourism map. Such economic evidence suggests that the sport tourism experience is diverging from the core activity. In the last quarter of 2020, the country's economy has been increasingly affected by the pandemic. Some are more athletic-focused. (Tournament anglers, for instance, are more competition focused.) But the majority are sport tourists. They take part in activities and seek out leisure and recreational opportunities in the area. (For example, a fishing family turns it into a vacation).

Finally, the sport tourism landscape is expanding into new frontiers. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (e.g., Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia) represent prime examples of sports tourism destinations facing location and climate challenges. In the early days of the 20th century, the 2012-2014 annual review of the

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2013-2014 program gave a unique opportunity for users to take part in the program. “They are using huge amounts of resources to tackle environmental problems,” he said. In the early days of the 20th century, the 2012-2014 annual review of the 2013-2014 program gave a unique opportunity for users to take part in the program. New landscapes are being designed to attract and attract sport tourism. How do visitors perceive these spaces? Is it culturally rich or common? Rather than importing an international game, it depends on how the experiences engage local cultures and communities.

Emotional and experiential elements.

We are looking forward to seeing more of our customers and customers in the US, as well as our customers. Sports tourism often involves intense emotions, joy, pride, stress, or stress. Such emotions are not just by-products. It’s central to what people continue to value and continue to look for in the sports tourism experience.

Most sports tourism experiences create peak moments or transformative experiences for participants. We are looking forward to seeing more of our customers and customers in the US, as well as our customers. The concept of flow (a state of deep immersion and enjoyment in an activity) is often used to describe the lure of sports tourism. We are looking forward to seeing you in the future, and then you will be able to get your firsthand some of the biggest challenges you face in the future. An unfamiliar environment adds layers of unpredictability and novelty, stimulating motivation and ultimately providing emotional rewards.

The psychological journey of sports tourists typically begins with anticipation, planning, and anticipation for the trip. We are looking forward to seeing more of our customers and customers in the UK, and we are looking forward to seeing them become a part of the digital ecosystem. After a trip, nostalgic and nostalgic visitors treasure souvenirs, photographs, and stories. Often “do it again” or inspire friends to take similar trips. The recall phase following a trip is crucial for sustained engagement, which may lead to repeated or involvement in sports at home.

Empirical studies confirm the extent to which emotions are related to sport spectators’ satisfaction. A study of college basketball fans who attended a national tournament showed higher overall satisfaction than those who attended games (Funk et al., 2017), with the difference being the depth of emotional and social engagement. Similarly, research on sports tourism has shown that visitors to sports museums or pre-Olympic sites tend to relive the emotions associated with past sporting moments.

Understanding the mental components is also important in practical terms. For example, sports event organizers design ceremony and fan zones to evoke emotion. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been involved in any of these activities, but I’m not sure if I’m going to be able to do that,” he said. This example shows that marketing itself cannot kill the spirit of aggression. If you think about it, you can have emotional experiences for different people.

Unfortunately, rethinking sport tourism as an experience must take emotional and psychological factors into account. The thrill of victory, the agony of defeat, the camaraderie of a shared journey, and the awe of a beautiful sporting environment define the value of sport tourism for individuals rather than accidents and this in turn affects behaviour. The sports tourist becomes an ambassador for the event, planning the trip through word of mouth, but disappointingly does not return. Later in this paper, we discuss how successful sport tourism strategies can be developed to meet these psychological and social needs (e.g., through event “bundling” or inclusive practices).

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Economic Significance and Contemporary Trends.

The shift to an experiential perspective does not diminish the importance of economic analysis of sport tourism but provides a context for understanding how economic benefits arise from meaningful experiences.

According to industry analysis, sports tourism accounts for the largest part of global tourism expenditures, with some estimates as high as 10%. PwC recently reported that sports tourism is expected to grow at a rate of 17.5% annually, reaching a global market value of more than \$2 trillion by 2030. Enabling travel, globalization of sports media, and increasing awareness among governments and investors that sports can drive tourism development; Regions such as Middle Eastern Gulf countries see sports tourism not only as part of their economic diversification strategy, but also as part of their power and international status. From stadium construction to archery, auto racing, and sports, billions of dollars are invested in sports. Two decades ago).

Another major economic trend within sport tourism is the rapid growth of youth and sport leisure travel. The Youth Sports Market Report (2025) notes that youth sports tourism has become a multi-billion-dollar business industry engine” with families traveling to children’s tournaments, exhibitions, training grounds Before local and regional tournaments were held nationally, at major sports venues Let’s go, we have this great opportunity in them.” Destinations compete for these events by building top-notch facilities, accommodation, tourist attractions and event records. This brings in direct spenders (hotels, hotels, etc.) and introduces new tourists to the destination Parents’ willingness to invest in their children’s sporting opportunities also has an emotional pull, a sense of pride and support for their child, which is a great motivator for travellers.

With these trends, the industry has shifted towards more “premium” and exclusive experiences. Today, sport tourists are often looking for unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities. Sometimes we must put a lot of effort into the process of finding the underlying cause of the page, and we're going to be able to do a lot of things like that. Not only to go skiing, but to ski Heli on untouched powder with expert guides. “It’s been a long time since I’ve been involved in any of the activities that I’ve been involved in, but I’ve been involved in several different types of events.

In terms of economic development, these trends present opportunities and require strategic planning. There is so much competition to host events and build the next big sport tourism destination, which can lead to oversupply or underinvestment. One argument from the literature is that to maximize economic benefits, sport tourism activities need to match the strengths and social needs of the destination, for example, a large city focuses on being a “youth sport hub” by hosting multiple tournaments each year.

Policy Convergence and Public Health

One new lens through which the sport tourism experience can be conceptualized is its intersection with public policy, particularly around physical activity and health. If sport tourism seeks to encourage people to engage in sport in the context of travel, there is potential for collaboration with those committed to promoting active lifestyles among populations The case of Gulf Cooperation Council countries provides a case study in which policy frameworks can support or hinder sport tourism.

Alzahrani et al. (2025) comprehensively reviewed physical activity policies in six GCC countries. The government has recognized this as one of the biggest public health challenges in the country and has started implementing various initiatives. However, Alzahrani et al. In these health-related policies, tourism companies were rarely found. Almost none of the 39 policy documents analysed explicitly linked tourism development and physical activity promotion. Instead, the ministries of health and sports ran separately from the ministry

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of tourism and shelved policies. These governments have invested heavily in sports tourism infrastructure to attract international tourists, and due to lack of coordination, opportunities to achieve both goals simultaneously are missed. For example, the policy requires that any new stadium built for tourism/activity purposes must include activities for use by the local community and include elements that ease public participation.

The study also highlighted participation and evaluation issues. Many sports programs in the GCC lack funding for marginalized groups such as women, persons with disabilities, and migrant workers (Alzahrani et al., 2025), and policy documents fail to assess the social impact of sports investments and tourism impacts, focusing on the number of participants and the number of facilities. Alzahrani et al. It called for transparency and cross-sectoral collaboration, advocating for a comprehensive approach where sport tourism is seen as part of a larger ecosystem of health, education and urban planning. Although the study is region specific, the global benefits of each can be multiplied if sport tourism is integrated with public policy.

Places like the UK and Australia have had similar discussions about the legacy of hosting events like the Olympics or Commonwealth Games. Hopefully hosting an event will inspire a generation. For example, in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, increasing sports participation among young people and people with disabilities was mentioned as a key aim. Brown and Pappous (2024) examined how the Paralympics influenced disability sports participation in England, where after 2012 most local sports clubs did not see an increase in disabled membership. Attract new participants, Paralympic advertising teams are likely to recruit and retain PwD in later years. (Brown & Pappous, 2024) This suggests that despite the intense experience of an event (e.g., attending the Paralympics as a spectator), it is necessary to examine the effects of broader social outcomes at the societal level. I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to do that, but I'm sure it's going to be a lot easier for us to find the underlying cause of the list, but we're going to be able to do that.

In summary, the literature suggests that reconceptualizing sport tourism as an experience intersects economic, social and cultural policy dimensions Experiences do not occur in a vacuum, they are influenced by infrastructural decisions, cultural norms and policies from different sectors. The themes of integration, participation and reflexive design will recur throughout our specific case study, showing how this experience-based approach can lead to best practice.

Case Studies

Anchor the theoretical discussion in a real-world context, this section presents case studies that show how sport tourism experiences are constructed and operationalized. policy) is declared.

Youth multisport program in Austria.

In the 2010s, several international youth multisport events were held in Western Austria. Schnitzer, Schlemmer, and Kristiansen (2017), whose sport tourism is generally active in mountain towns only during the ski season, analysed whether these activities constitute a tourism strategy or a monolithic one, as the tourism mode is not well-documented and the region frequently hosts these activities. children's play), and international media exposure (Schnitzer et al., 2017).

The program set up the region as a hub for the development of winter sports and youth sports, which matched Innsbruck's legacy as a two-time Olympic host city Interviews with local tourism and sport officials Schnitzer et al. While they have not formally incorporated a youth sports plan, they recognize the value and share their experiences and aim to host more events, he said. Even smaller events can add up to a great sport tourism

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experience if they happen regularly. Each event introduced young visitors to the Tyrolean winter sport traditions. Many players and families said they want to come back for the holidays. The festival atmosphere also created a great community experience for the local community, involving both volunteers and spectators. However, a lack of strategic clarity prevented some opportunities from being exploited. This study finds that making such strategies more explicit (collaborating with sport and tourism stakeholders to distribute budgets for events) can maximize long-term benefits to bridge the gap between running events and beyond, there is a lesson in sustaining tourism experiences.

Fishing tournaments in the United States. Spatial and economic impacts.

Professional fishing tournaments may not be thought of as sport tourism at first, but competitors, fans, and media frequent them, especially in parts of the U.S. The Bassmaster Elite Series is an upscale fishing line with events on lakes and rivers, often in rural or small towns. Congelio (2025) studied races in South Carolina to quantify the economic impact of races, using a novel method using mobile geolocation data to track crowd movement during and after the race “Business activity near race start points showed increased business activity not only during the race, but three months later,” he said Comparing activity patterns with the baseline period, this study shows that local towns along the lake became temporary tourist hubs, and some activities continued because fishing enthusiasts and participants returned later or through positive word-of-mouth

One race, for instance, saw a spike in patronage at the city’s hotels and restaurants. (20% to 40% of normal levels for that period.) And even after the tournament ended, weekend traffic improved slowly as some visitors came to fish for recreational purposes or take part in related activities. The effect of agglomeration is that neighbouring businesses have grown, and visitors can concentrate their spending in a walkable circle, effectively integrating various traffic issues (Congelio, 2025), which means that if a city can focus on multiple attractions around sports events, it can focus on multiple attractions.

For the sport tourism experience, these fishing tournaments offered more than competition. There are often fan shows, seminars with anglers and family-friendly festivities with weigh-ins. Participants said the sense of community, meeting well-known anglers, local baits and fishing the same waters was a big part of the tournament, with people fishing at the centre but enjoying the Bassmaster experience mixed with friendly locals living in the lake community Attention, it is argued, can bring significant economic and reputational benefits for destinations. Small towns have well-designed sporting events that attract visitors who come and see the beauty of the place and are more likely to return. Sport tourism in the community may be less expensive than larger events, but it means more to those involved and helps the local economy.

Inclusion to experience the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

Major events such as the Olympics have been proven based on legacies, including promises to increase participation in sports. We conducted a survey of 433 voluntary sports clubs across the country in 2012 to investigate whether sports clubs in England had taken advantage of this opportunity. There was no significant change in the number of PwD members in those groups.

However, only 16% of teams contributed significantly to the Paralympics. Common approaches include holding open days or invitations for people to try sports, promoting Paralympic brands or athletes, or partnering with disability organizations to invite new participants. “It’s very likely that disabled membership will increase in 2012,” he said. On the other hand, disadvantaged groups often cite barriers such as lack of

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ability in the inclusion of people with disabilities, inadequate adaptation materials, and lack of networks for interaction in the disability community.

What does this mean from a sport tourism experience perspective? Firstly, participation in the Paralympic Games is an inspiring experience for many spectators, with studies showing high levels of motivation and changes in attitudes towards disability sport. Nevertheless, the motivation to become a true participant (experienced and active) requires a deliberate and deliberate effort. Teams that offer the simplest "come in and play the game you see on TV and we'll show it to you." It helped people translate the audience's memory into a powerful and personal experience. In doing so, it has not only gained new members but has also helped foster inclusion in the community. Participating in London in 2012 encouraged participants to take part in sport at home, improved their lives and made them more likely to become sports tourists or volunteers in the future.

This case also highlights the importance of capacity building. If destinations or organizations are to receive help from sport tourism activities in the long term, they need the capacity (knowledge, resources, coordination) to engage new participants. From an experiential perspective, the goal is to translate the positive experience of a major event into everyday life. Someone with a disability who has had a positive experience as a Paralympic spectator can become a sports tourist and gain the confidence to join a local club. Brown and Pappas (2024) suggest policy measures to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities in groups, such as funding and connecting event organizers with grassroots groups.

“Come Alive in '85”: Isle of Man Year of Sport and the Birth of the Island Games

In 1985, the Isle of Man, a small island in the Irish Sea known for its motorcycle races and tranquil tourist destinations, launched a major campaign called "Year of Sport." This was essentially a year-long series of sporting events at various levels, deliberately organized to revitalize the island's struggling tourism industry. McDowell (2021) provides a historical account of this initiative, which serves as an early example of a place deliberately using sport to enhance its appeal. The Manx government recognized in 1985 that traditional tourism (seaside holidays from the UK) was declining, so they sought to capitalize on and expand the island's existing sporting reputation (the annual TT motorcycle races). That year, the Isle of Man hosted events ranging from the Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships to motorcycle trials, golf tournaments, and the inaugural Island Games (a multi-sport event for small islands worldwide).

In particular, the Island Games proved to be the most enduring legacy. It became a biennial event, rotating among different islands, and continues today as a kind of mini-Olympics for island communities. For the Isle of Man, hosting the inaugural edition in 1985 at once attracted a surge of athletes and supporters from 15 islands, filling hotels and generating media coverage. McDowell (2021) notes that local stakeholders benefited in two ways: visitors spent money and boosted visitor numbers during the tourism off-season, and hosting an international event fostered a sense of pride and volunteerism within the community. Overall, the "Year of Sport" helped mitigate a decline in tourism that year and gave the Isle of Man a new identity as a sports destination. While visitor numbers didn't increase dramatically overnight, the campaign provided a template for using themed event programming to enhance a destination's image.

From an experiential perspective, the Isle of Man's strategy was ahead of its time, recognizing that diverse, participatory events could attract different types of tourists. Instead of one large mega-event, they offered a series of smaller experiences: competitors came for their specific sports (table tennis players, golfers, cyclists, etc.), and each event brought with it its own small community and atmosphere. Many athletes had likely never

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been to the Isle of Man before, so in addition to competing, they explored the island, experienced Manx culture (the organizers included cultural festivals and social events as part of the program), and took home stories about this unique place. In essence, the island created a tapestry of sports tourism experiences that collectively put it on the world map in a new way.

In the last few years, we've had a lot of fun with our teams, and we've been working on a lot of things that we've been working on for years, and we're going to be able to do a lot of things. It's an authentic experience for both visitors and locals, as many of the activities involve local groups and volunteers, and visitors interact with the locals. This enhanced the sense of camaraderie and community experiences that are often lost in large-scale events, a case that highlights the impact of sports tourism experiences beyond economics. The Island Games movement was community-oriented, providing opportunities for friendly competition between small islands today, and forging strong ties between distant communities. The island is proudly promoted as the birthplace of surfing, which has become part of the island's identity.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Physical Activity Policies: Challenges for Sport Tourism Development

As mentioned earlier, the oil-rich GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) invest heavily in sports tourism infrastructure and events. However, these countries face internal challenges such as low participation in physical activity programs among their populations. A qualitative policy analysis by Alzahrani et al. (2025) highlights how these countries address these issues. They found that by 2024, there were 39 policy documents covering physical health or sport in six countries. Most are led by the Health and Sports Authority and sometimes have broad aims such as increasing physical activity levels or creating more sports facilities for the public.

However, surprisingly, in the absence of policies specifically targeting lifestyle factors, physical activity was promoted but not significantly changed in lifestyle behaviours, such as reducing time spent and increasing walking. Again, the tourism industry is not included in these discussions. For instance, countries like the UAE have sports tourism strategies (event organizing, sports theme parks, etc.) but are not linked to health policies that encourage locals to be active. Such a crisis could lead to a city hosting a world-class sporting event, but with little local participation or interest.

This situation is both a threat and an opportunity for the sport tourism experience. The danger is that the investment risks becoming a luxury experience for international tourists and elites. The opportunity lies in carefully coordinating policies to ensure that programs and infrastructure can help citizens as well. Following the 2022 World Cup, Qatar has announced a community initiative to use the stadium as a public park and sports centre. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has a section focused on improving the health of its citizens, including creating "sports trails" in Riyadh where people can take part in cycling, jogging and activities. He suggested that the best legacy of sports tourism development is a healthy and hardworking community dedicated to welcoming guests.

As a member of the National Education and Training Authority Council, the Ministry of Health has actively taken part in the activities of the National Economic and Social Council. The increase in domestic participation will improve the event atmosphere for tourists and the facilities will be used all year round. In terms of experience, a place with a thriving sports culture provides an authentic experience for sports tourists. For example, if a foreign runner is traveling to Dubai for a marathon, he or she will have a better experience if he/she finds a running community and team training runs there.

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In short, the case of the GCC highlights the importance of a supportive policy environment that integrates tourism, sport and health for sustainable and meaningful sport tourism experiences, especially in new markets. Otherwise, there is a gap between the experience offered to tourists and what is available or valued by locals. In the next section, we will discuss whether a new approach based on the experience of these studies can lead to better solutions.

Discussion

Experience as the Core of Sport Tourism

The above review and cases prove that sport tourism cannot be defined to achieve a holistic and more human understanding of sport tourism, which encompasses several important meanings. Traveling to play sports or watch sports is a key part of this concept. Instead, experiences become a primary means of understanding events and the relationship between people and places. By focusing on experiences.

First, the experience-focused approach broadens how success and impact in sport tourism are conceptualized and measured. Traditionally, the success of a destination's sports tourism can be measured by counting the number of visitors or visitors and expenditure. These metrics are important, but they do not reflect the quality or value of visitor experiences. If a sporting event involves 10,000 people, the event-based approach will stop at that number. The experience-based approach asks 10,000 people what they experienced and what they learned. The case study illustrates this. Instead, it provided participants with a memorable experience, creating a positive image for the region and increasing their likelihood to return. The Bassmaster's competition was successful not only because it was at once cost-effective, but also because it proved that visitors could interact with the destination in a variety of ways.

This suggests that destinations and event organizers should evaluate sport tourism activities based on experience criteria. Visitor satisfaction surveys, the emotional impact on their likelihood to return or recommend, and the stories people share on social media can provide insight into the value of the experience. For example, measuring the appeal or attendance of an event is just as important as measuring how many tickets were sold. The emphasis on experiences over short-term economic outcomes forces consideration of broader social, cultural, and health contexts. At the Paralympic Games, for example, spectators or the media cannot declare whether the experience leads to greater participation in sport by people with disabilities, but motivation is a transformative outcome, but it is difficult to measure.

Second, prioritizing experience encourages a participant-centred and needs-based approach to the development of sport tourism products. Rather than defining the product in terms of sport (e.g., "we offer skiing holidays" or "we organize marathons"), providers think in terms of the end-to-end journey of sport tourists. What does the visitor think and want at each stage: expectations, site engagement, post-event memories? By stepping into the shoes of tourists, destinations can deepen their offerings. For example, as mentioned earlier, fans derive greater value from social interactions, increased fan participation at sporting events and music festivals, and opportunities to meet athletes. These enrich the experience beyond the actual event itself. Newcomers to the tour may feel a sense of accomplishment, but safety allows agents to create a satisfying "road challenge" through sponsorship. Across the board, the idea is that tourists consume only one sport and venue. They create narratives and memories together. Sports tourism facilities can enable collaborative innovation.

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Focusing on experience from a theoretical perspective breaks down some of the long-standing barriers in sport tourism research. Previously, "event tourism", "sports tourism" and "nostalgic sports tourism" could be studied separately. The experiential perspective covers these categories as taking a break from mundane activities, engaging in leisure activities to fulfil people's interests, challenges, social relationships, and identity. Whether a person is playing in the expert's or attending the World Cup, they are looking for exciting leisure experiences that often have one thing in common. This doesn't mean that all sport tourism is the same, but it does mean that we can change our theories. We can talk in the language of motivation, satisfaction, and achievement, and acknowledge differences due to context.

Finally, an experience-based approach naturally draws attention to the qualities and ethical implications of that experience. When we say, "The goal is to create memorable experiences," we must also ask, "For whom are these experiences memorable or accessible?" This brings an important perspective. For example, will an expensive sport tourism product succeed if it provides a luxury experience for affluent tourists but relies on low-paid local workers or excludes locals from certain areas? While an activity-based approach can ignore these issues, an experience-based approach must incorporate the experiences of all stakeholders, including principals, especially in educational settings. Thus, this discussion encompasses a broader range of sustainability and inclusion, which we will explore in the next section.

Mega-events and grassroots sports tourism: Methods and evidence.

Our in-depth analysis of sports tourism shows that sports events, whether large or small, have a significant impact on tourism experiences, emotional engagement, cultural interaction, economic impact, and long-term development strategies. The Olympics, FIFA World Cup and other major international competitions offer tourists the opportunity to experience extraordinary attractions and be a part of history in the presence of one of the largest crowds of enthusiasts in the world. Millions of people gather to see the country's culture, traditions and glory, creating a pilgrimage-like experience for tourists, providing them with feelings of globalization, pride, excitement and nostalgia. But behind it lies a large corporate structure that controls and standardizes programs and often makes them irrelevant to the local context. Tourists are confined to safe havens, playgrounds, and five-star hotels, rarely interacting with the locals and their real lives. This situation creates two halves, as seen in Rio 2016. In this process, the authenticity of the Indigenous culture is eroded by the aestheticization of it. Micro-community gaming programs offer a different perspective. Instead, they offer experiences that are immersive in nature, place, and emotion. Visitors can experience authentic food, customs, language and traditions by staying in a local home and forming direct relationships with players, families and locals that will last for years. The economic benefits of these programs flow directly to local shops, restaurants, and services, resulting in increased community participation and community cohesion. As a member of the Board of Directors, you will be asked to take part in the annual meeting of the National Association of Education and Training Authorities (NYSE: 2014) and to take part in the activities of the United Nations. I'm not sure if you're going to be able to do that, but I'm sure you'll be able to do that. I'm not sure if you're going to be able to do that, but I'm sure you'll be able to do that. It adopts a balanced and long-term approach between authenticity, economic benefits, community engagement and visitor satisfaction.

Balancing Commercialization with Authenticity and Inclusion

The increasing economic importance of sport tourism has generated heated debate in the literature, highlighting that there is not always a tension between marketing and actual experience. Over the past ten years, we have been involved in some of the most important initiatives of the 2020-2014 pandemic. In this

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context, Worley (2006) refers to an “adventure commodification continuum” in which tourism is unplanned and unpredictable, but ultimately controlled and safely packaged for commercial purposes. Critics argue that as tourism becomes big business, feel-good, there is a growing trend to offer certificates, t-shirts and safe experiences. The company offers a wide range of services to managers in the private sector who are increasingly involved in professional development. This phenomenon can also be seen in cruise tourism, where cruise resorts and package tours ease visitors, but can have detrimental effects on local maritime culture, coastal peace and human rights. Businesses fill the gap by providing equipment, training, security and logistical support. Therefore, even given the arrangement, there must be a preserved equilibrium that can preserve the integrity of the experience. Best practices for this include involving local communities in developing tourism products, limiting group sizes in environmentally sensitive areas, implementing low-impact guidelines, and allowing visitors to customize nature experiences and personal experiences happen. If tourists are detached from the local community by corporate hospitality complexes, the experience is artificial. Solutions include stay-at-home programs, safe and affordable stadiums for local fans, and engagement with the local community. Participation is equally important because if sport tourism only helps the rich, it risks increasing social inequality. Sustainable ethical sport tourism requires economic access, physical access (facilities for people with disabilities), and cultural access (including women, families and marginalized groups) as, if not including the Paralympic Games, even incentive programs can exclude most beneficiaries. In contrast, women-only travel groups frame tourism as a means of community empowerment. Public-private partnerships and community-led governance systems are proving more effective in achieving this balance. In the early days of the 20th century, the 2013-2014 annual event was held at the University of Pennsylvania, where the 2013-2014 annual event was held at the University of California, Berkeley. Even if a sporting activity produces only economic benefits, if it causes social and environmental damage, the consequences of its success must be reassessed. Therefore, the real progress in sport tourism is to adopt a balanced, sensitive and balanced approach between business, authenticity, participation and sustainability.

Toward Sustainable and Inclusive Sport Tourism Strategies

Take sport tourism in a sustainable and inclusive direction, it is essential that destinations and organizers consider sport tourism not only as an economic activity, but as an experience that enriches tourists and creates positive outcomes for host communities. It can stay. This concept of legacy ensures benefits like facility reuse, community-oriented programmes, sports training for youth, city improvement schemes, long-term tourism branding etc. Many successful examples, such as transforming Olympic parks into public spaces or launching new programs for disabled after London 2012 Paralympics

The role of the community in sport tourism is critical, and sustainable development is only possible when the local community is a co-creator of the experience. This means not only making local people service providers but also ensuring their active participation in the planning, management and presentation of the event. When local clubs are involved, when local music, dance, food, and cultural elements are included in the event, and when residents can connect with tourists, the experience is authentic, broadening the perspectives of tourists and locals.

Diversity is an essential part of a sustainable sport tourism strategy. Relying on a single major event or popular spotlight is dangerous for the future. Therefore, destinations need to offer a variety of sport experiences to attract tourists and their economic support throughout the year. If one sector falls short, others can compensate, as the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly proved. When large-scale events are cancelled, other options such as

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local and domestic tourism, hiking, cycling or rural sports activities can help keep the economy stable and supportive.

Innovations and technologies can also encourage sports tourism if used in a balanced and thoughtful way. Technology tools like AR and VR can enhance the gaming experience. However, technology should complement, not replace, the physical experience and encourage visitors to visit the destination and take part in the activities. Effective use of digital technologies also provides experiences for those who are unable to travel, for example, through extended experiences such as virtual events, increasing visitor attraction.

Environmental responsibility is also important for sustainable sport tourism. Climate change has directly affected sport tourism. Therefore, destinations should adopt policies to reduce carbon emissions, such as green transportation, plastic-free activities for tourists, eco-friendly construction, population management in natural areas, and encouraging tourists to take part in environmental protection activities. Environmentally sensitive tourism is not only a moral requirement but also part of the expectations of today's young tourists who prioritize sustainable and responsible destinations.

Promoting inclusivity is one of the key principles of sustainable sport tourism. Restricting sports tourism to only the wealthy will worsen social inequalities. Therefore, tourism products need to be designed with social, economic, physical and cultural diversity in mind. These include facilities for people with disabilities, proper programs for senior tourists, financial aid for low-income youth, and safe and special sports trips for women. For example, in the Paralympic Games model, the motivation is that participation is real and only makes sense when people with disabilities have access to opportunities and resources to take part in sport.

Successful implementation of all these strategies can only be achieved when governance is based on multiple stakeholders and works with the private sector, local communities, governments, and nonprofits. While the private sector alone can prioritize profit, which is a barrier to authenticity and participation, public-private partnerships can create fair and sustainable impacts. The Year of Sport has proved that the purpose of an event is community renewal, which can lead to solidarity, inclusion and impact.

Finally, it is important to view sport tourism as a human and cultural experience rather than as an economic activity. When organizers connect sport events to people's stories, aspirations, and cultural identities, sport tourism can produce positive economic, social, and environmental outcomes. Through this approach, sports tourism of the future will be responsible, social, and inclusive for visitors, local communities and destinations.

Conclusion

Sports tourism has moved beyond the traditional definition of "sports away from home" into territory that is better understood in terms of multidimensional, human-centered experiences. When sport tourism is viewed as an experience created by the interaction between sport, people and place, its true value, emotional impact, social responsibility and cultural depth become clear. In the review, it was pointed out that sports tourism is not just about sightseeing, travel and sports activities. It is a complex experience shaped by social interactions, cultural meanings, emotional journeys, spatial heritage, and social relationships. These experiential findings reveal that sports tourism offers more than just sports. It evokes a sense of identity, pride, connection and community among travellers, whether it's a large global event or a small local one. Here, the role of scale and context is crucial. Large events provide global coherence, visibility and international prestige, but they must be managed authentically and deliver real benefits to local communities. But smaller events, while having a limited global impact, create experiences of camaraderie, authenticity, and local benefit. Experience-based

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approaches question who creates experiences and at what cost, as mass marketing diminishes authenticity and excludes poor groups. Therefore, to make sports tourism memorable for visitors and meaningful for local communities, it is important to prioritize participation, local culture, participation by people of different abilities and ages. Tourism agencies, sports agencies, urban planners, and healthcare organizations have achieved positive results when developing joint programs. This approach also opens a new avenue for future research. Ultimately, this experience-based approach reminds us that on every sporting journey, whether it's a young person's first outdoor competition or an older person's first trip to the Olympics, people are looking for fun, challenge, connection, and attention. When destinations and organizers see themselves as "custodians of the experience" rather than service providers, sports tourism can help society not only economically, but also socially, culturally, and individually. Thus, redefining sport tourism as an experience is not only a theoretical perspective, but also a guiding principle that can make sport-based travel a positive force for economic, social and personal development in our interconnected world.

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