

## Revisiting Sport Tourism: A review of definitions

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### Abstract

*The development of sport tourism as a dynamic tourism form has engaged authors over thirty years in an effort to map its magnitude and nature. A plethora of different approaches and epistemologies have been recorded aiming to clarify the phenomenon that puzzled both academics and the tourist industry due to the broad and idiosyncratic features it presents. The present study aims to facilitate this effort of delineating the field by producing assumptions deriving from different definitional attempts since the emerging of sport tourism as a specific tourism expression. Gaps in the literature review are examined aiming to guide future research towards understanding all dimensions involved in a comprehensive definitional theoretical platform. The intention of the paper is based on the notion that the rapid growth of sport tourism is in need for theoretical clarification in order to advice scholars as well as policy developers on different sport tourism expressions and types. The analysis of sport tourism definitions produced here can be fruitful in redefining sport tourism and its key components in order to produce successful relevant developments and destinations.*

**Keywords:** *Sport Tourism, Energetic Sport Tourism, Events Tourism, Sport Tourism Definition*

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**JEL Classification:** Z320 Tourism and Development

### 1. Introduction

A social science based definition is of rather temporary value facing the dynamic state of research and theory making. Operating in an everchanging social and tourism environment, the largely synthetic sport tourism form needed more than thirty years to reach a comprehensive terminology. Forecasting a confusing definitional future for sport tourism Pigeassou, Bui-Xuan and Gleyse (1998) emphasized the need to work towards an ‘epistemological rupture’ in order to “prevent any confusion between sport, tourism and sports tourism”. The present theoretical analysis intends to facilitate the understanding of the sport tourism phenomenon as defined throughout the literature, leading to a definitional guide and advising research for further development. An extended model of definitional parameters will hopefully suggest a guiding tool expanding the theoretical expressions of sport tourism in need for terminological clarification. The analysis provides a conceptual platform of re-examining previous definitional attempts formulating a comprehensive body of knowledge for sport tourism.

### 2. Theoretical Considerations

Segmented tourism offer became the new tourism reality following the collapse of the mass tourism model and the emergence of active tourism behavior. Krippendorf (1987) very early forecasted that “alternative tourists unwillingly become the vanguard of mass tourism from which they want to escape. Unwittingly they

set new market mechanisms going, although many of them, especially the young, are professed opponents of consumer ideology. But they, themselves have become a market!’’.

Sport has been early identified as a significant motive to travel for leisure purposes. From ancient expressions of travelling to participate to sports competitions in Olympia, to visiting first modern Olympic Games and planning the 19th Century the Grand Tour for educational and recreational reasons, the phenomenon of sports tourism was early recorded and appreciated for its appeal and dynamic nature (Mill, 1990; Standeven, 1992; Tomlinson and Walker, 1990 in Jackson and Glyptis, 1992). In the 1930’s almost 10 million people in Britain “combined cycling with their holidays”, with sport being the “recipe for total family fun in British holiday camps” by the 1950’s and 1960’s (Redmond, 1991).

Despite the fact that De Knop in 1990 characterized the trend as ‘new’, he implied that “new is the offer and the practice of new sports during holidays; new is the planning of sport activities in the holiday period; new also is the fact that today people choose a particular holiday resort just because of its specific sport facilities and possibilities”. Redmond (1991) added that “one of the most obvious and popular manifestations of sport being the focus for holidays is Club Med”. Club Med became the first organized development that promoted sport and active holidays within the resort operation proving that sport tourism is here to stay. De Knop (1990) then attempted to map the role of sport into the new expression encompassing numerous new theoretical areas for study and proposing three broad types. Namely, ‘pure sport holiday’ suggests that sport is the primary goal for holidays organized or individually undertaken. Then, ‘sporadic acceptance’ implies a supplementary role for sport usually offered to make the holiday experience more attractive found in both recreational as well as advanced form. The third element of the ‘private sporting activity’ praises sport as the favorite activity during holidays still at a recreational level i.e. walking and swimming.

Authors in the same decade are attracted by this tourism activity that presents a fruitful theoretical future. Authors such as Redmond in 1991 suggested sub-categorizations based on the ‘holiday experience’ or the ‘destination setting’ for sports tourism development. Firstly, he suggests that the ‘resort’ or ‘a vacation centre with facilities for recreation’ becomes the most possible setting to accommodate sport tourism forms. Similarly, ‘Hotels’ would also accommodate an adapted active offer since their environment is always in seek for innovative additions, quality upgrading and product differentiation, here usually through new health and fitness infrastructure. Redmond placed special attention to the element of ‘clubs’ vividly emphasizing their ability to focus in the sport dimension during holidays as well as their capacity to both satisfy the accommodation and hospitality demands such as ‘Club Med’.

The sport tourist category of “travel to participate in sport holidays” has been reviewed by Hall (1992). He describes ‘activity participants’ as those who “pursue sport as a form of leisure for the development and expression of skills and knowledge, and for personal enrichment”. A second category he sees as ‘players’ who include “hobbyists who are competitive” at an amateur level, with the aim “to acquire and maintain the knowledge and skills enabling the individual to experience uncommon rewards from the endeavor”. The extreme end of sports holidays, defined as ‘adventure’, includes that special group of people that “deliberately seek risk and danger in outdoor activities”. Here, Hall has provided a definition of adventure tourism as: “a broad spectrum of outdoor tourist activities, often commercialized and involving an interaction with the natural environment away from the participant’s home range and containing elements of risk; in which the outcome is influenced by the participant, setting and management of the tourist experience”.

In the same lines, Jackson and Glyptis (1992) provided a similar developmental platform for sport tourism with the main focus placed on the tourist participation in sport activities again suggesting the ‘resort’ as able to become the sport holiday site based on their established tourism status and ability to promote effectively their new sport related offer. Emphasis is also placed on the hotel power to upgrade the tourism experience through sport products and facilities in the process of building a quality and upgraded offer. In addition, the same authors, broaden the theoretical boundaries of participative sport tourism proposing that even elite sportsmen and sportswomen will be engaged in sport-related travelling for their training or competition needs, developing in this way a sport-specific tourism market expanding in this way the tourism industry. Tallantire (in Glyptis, 1993) takes discussion a step further suggesting that all levels of sport participation can be

satisfied with the emerge of 'risky holidays' developed in remote non tourism areas with the use of technology and special equipment.

The appreciation by the European Commission in 1993 that sport tourism suggests a 'suitable product' to spread tourist activity evenly thus creating 'all season tourism' becomes a significant development for sport tourism.

It is characteristic that in these early years of theory making, the attempts to enlighten the appealing of the sport related tourism trend are heavily focused on the level and nature of sport participation during holidays rather than on a sport spectating behavior that became the second major dimension of the sport tourism form. Jackson and Glyptis (1992) detected promising sport tourism developments deriving from 'sports tour opportunities and sports events of various scale and type'. Hall in 1992, reacting fast to the rapidly increasing events-related tourism theoretical work attempted to expand sport tourism definition suggesting sport tourism motives such as "travel for non-commercial reasons, to participate or observe sporting activities away from the home range" and therefore setting the base for a wider conceptual discussion.

Eversince, definitions related to sports tourism incorporate tourism generated by events' spectating or participating contributing to a great volume of research, theoretical and practical knowledge (Leisure Consultants, 1992). Authors like Ritchie (1992, 1994; Roche, 1994; Rooney, 1988), present loyalty in the mega events' power as tourism generators focusing on 'hallmark events', as "major one time or recurring events of limited duration, developed primarily to enhance the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination in the short and/or long term. Such events rely for their success on uniqueness, status or timely significance to create interest and attract attention". This 'event tourism' literature growth extends to "the roles that festivals and special events can play in destination development and the maximization of an event's attractiveness to tourists" (Getz, 1991).

Getz (1994, 1998, 2001, and 2004) will play a decisive role in promoting local and large scale events with local or international significance, in their capacity to expand tourism activity, and build a positive image for localities. He early suggested that "events have the potential to foster tourism, conservation, heritage, leisure, community development and ... can be catalysts for economic, and infrastructure development, and they can support urban renewal efforts" (1991).

Similarly, the emergence of the Tourism Sport International Council signified the importance placed on the clarification of sport tourism terms and forms. Their categorization produced five major sub-categories: Attractions, Resorts, Cruises, Tours and Events. The suggested categories built a questionable and rather immature spectrum of sports tourism expressions which indicate however, the theoretical appetite for formulation of typologies and definitions that would affect the era to follow.

### **3. Methodology**

Conceptual analysis of available definitions and theories becomes the main focus of the present study. International publications since the genesis of sport tourism are examined for definitional roots. The review aims to highlight the conceptual transformation occurring for sport tourism through theoretical suggestions over the last thirty years dominating all relevant literature and knowledge. Theory analysis is employed here to reach knowledge on the driving elements extracted from the literature. To become of applicable value the study concludes with the mapping of the basic conceptual dimensions as repetitively found in relevant studies since the begging of the sport tourism form. The present study through the examination of the available conceptual paths hopes to influence the mechanisms of theory making in the future.

### **4. Attempting to structure basic conceptual columns for sport tourism**

Following the basic body of literature already been produced in early '90s, Gammon and Robinson (1997) focused on the main 'motive' in sport tourism, separating 'sports tourists' where sport is the primary purpose for travelling to 'tourism sportists' who prioritize tourism as the primary purpose to travel. In 1999, Standeven and De Knop produced the most influential definition to guide researchers for years to come stating that: "all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organized way for noncommercial or business/commercial reasons, that necessitate travel away from home and work locality". Despite its evident inability to enlighten this leisure expression in depth, still remains to date the guiding tool that basically distincts the two theoretical pylons of the sport tourism form. It was probably the most fruitful era of theoretical work being built around these two separate fields of "energetic" and "passive" sport tourism forms. Energetic participation in sport activities during holidays becomes a promising theoretical area for research also attractive to the eyes of the tourism industry searching for product regeneration mechanisms or nations in need for tourism product differentiation overall (Vrondou, 1999). On the other side, passive sport tourism attracts passionate authors producing great research work on the power of sport events over image alteration, urban regeneration and holistic local redevelopment (Gibson, 1998, 2006; Hall, 1989 a, b, c, 1991; Kurtzman, 2005).

Clouds over the clarification of sport tourism become to gather when authors realize that they face a much more puzzled theoretical task. Hinch and Higham (2004), with Costa and Chalip (2005) also agreeing, set the problem: "the complexity of sport when combined with the complexity of tourism leads to countless diverse variations of the sport tourism phenomenon". The authors making it more complicated they initiate the discussion of seeking authenticity and 'meaningful experiences' within the tourism experience.

In 2004, it is the era of Weed and Bull's realization that "sports tourism is a social, economic and cultural phenomenon arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and places". Social partners, economic activity, tourism business and personal motives all interact to produce different and diverse sport tourism related expressions in need for definitional guidance. The two authors base their conceptualization on attributing significance in both sport as well as the tourism element implying that a plethora of social factors should be included in the discussion. Weed's work (2008a, b) urges for research on "understanding of which aspects of experiences are positive and why, thus broadening our understanding of participation". He adds the importance of understanding of how impacts and experiences can be incorporated into policy initiatives to realize sport tourism developments.

Revisiting Jackson and Reeves' (1996) work over the factors affecting participation to sport tourism related activities Weed and Bull (2004, 2009) produced a detailed theoretical model that marked vividly the '00s relevant literature. All intention variables to participate in sport tourism are revealed between the two main axes, those of: a. horizontally, the level of commitment towards including sport into the tourism experience on one hand and b. vertically, the factors directly or indirectly affecting the decision to participate in a sport tourism experience. Highly loyal followers are proposed here at the higher end of the spectrum when the decision to participate is essential and commitment to travel is strictly based on the sport element. This characteristic map of behaviors revealed different tourist profiles from 'incidental', 'sporadic' and 'occasional' to more 'committed' and 'driven' that suggest loyal relationships. Vertically the factors affecting participation: convenience, family and group relations, fun and relaxation preferences, economic constraints and overall lifestyle fluctuations are examined extensively. This model thoroughly focusing on decision making for sport tourism participation can be utilized to different cases as a guiding tool of mapping tourists' intentions. However, it remains questionable if it can be applied to all different facets of energetic and passive sport tourism to produce reliable conclusions. Weed's (2008a, b) dedication to clarify the conceptual complexity of sport tourism is evident through the long-term study of parameters that could create a comprehensive typology. Weed and Bull (2004, 2009) proceeded into the diagrammatic illustration of this modeling of intentions and behaviors where evidently the 'driven' followers are obviously positioned at the nose of the pin suggesting the most loyal and frequent group of sport tourists. Still, and despite the undoubtful theoretical and empirical value of the model, questions remain untapped. Weed's concerns over the limited reached understanding of sports tourism as a phenomenon are still active.

The present discussion appreciates the difficult task of authors to produce a holistic theoretical platform realizing the complex nature of the phenomenon. All definitional efforts met in the sphere of sport tourism tend to reflect the certain author's angle or are usually too broad to be useful in terms of policy design,

business initiatives or programs mapping. Aiming to guide definitional and conceptual efforts further or the least sum the proposed theories overtime, five distinct dimensions are offered in the following outline:

<b>Axes of sport tourism development</b>	<b>Factors affecting level and nature of materialization</b>
Decision to participate	Tourist intention and behavior Factors affecting participation Fluctuating sport lifestyle
Facilitation	Easiness to participate Accessibility Hospitality infrastructure Sport related services
Local setting	Urban appeal Natural advantages Remote – risky segments Built environment/sport facilities
Provision scheme	Providers organizational efficiency Social partners involvement Sport bodies influence Leisure market's innovations
Local tourism establishment	Sport specific local characteristics/profile Established local image Existing local tourism operation Competitive/supplementary cultural/leisure elements

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Whilst sport tourism has produced a great volume of related literature attempting to examine the impact deriving from the sport and tourism sectorial combination, little confidence is built around extensive theoretical models and holistic definitional vehicles. The complex character of the phenomenon encompassing the majority of the social aspects to be materialized, in parallel with the infinite tourist perceptions and idiosyncrasies on sport tourism participation makes the task of producing a concrete and complete definition a difficult and challenging task. Authors, often influenced by their theoretical stance and sport relation tend to focus either on the sport participation side or on the tourism experience failing to face sport tourism as an autonomous while complex development having its unique intrinsic nature. It took more than thirty years of thinking and theoretical formulating to finally reach the assumption that contemporary literature has to adopt a holistic new perspective when examining sport tourism. Still, it remains difficult to tap all aspects and facets of this tourism form since it combines personal perceptions towards sport involvement that fluctuate in time, tourism preferences that change within a diversified tourism market and sport expressions developing constantly to match different leisure tastes. The definitional challenge for sport tourism remains still today a conceptual reality.

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