Sport Tourism Development

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Local to Global Perspectives

Edited by

Alexander Hodeck, Derek Van Rheenen
and Claude Sobry

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INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK IN SPORT TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION

SPORT TOURISM: LOCAL TO GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. THE IRNIST RESEARCH AGENDA

DEREK VAN RHEENEN, RICARDO MELO, OLIVIER NARIA, AND CLAUDE SOBRY

Sport tourism as an emerging academic discipline or field has faced both epistemological challenges and cultural biases, often reifying a professional rift between scholars and practitioners, as well as among scholars from different disciplines and regions of the world. This tension has created an artificial dichotomy between those who claim "to know" the field and those who aspire "to do" the practical work within the sport tourism field or industrial sector. Scholarship developed in isolation seldom leads to mastery, relying on a limited context of experience and reflection, as well as a lack of understanding of other perspectives.

These challenges have been acknowledged as endemic to the emerging discipline's intellectual growing pains. Nearly a decade ago, the *Journal of Sport & Tourism* (*JS&T)* celebrated its 20th anniversary as one of the central journals in the field. Published initially in 1993 as the *Journal of Sport Tourism*, *JS&T* (2014) announced a call for papers for a series of special editions, challenging contributors to reflect on the big questions in the field to date—what do we know, what don't we know and what do we need to know?

This kind of disciplinary self-reflection prompted innovative scholarship and contributed to the emergence and growth of the International Research Network in Sport Tourism (IRNIST). Since its establishment in 2010, IRNIST represents an international research network of academics and professionals working in the sport tourism field. The purpose of IRNIST is to develop international, inclusive and interdisciplinary collaborations to

create strategies and methodologies to enhance local sustainable development. Over the past decade, members of this research community have developed and honed a theoretical framework and proposed a comparative methodology. This chapter chronicles this historical effort.

Underlying the increased call for empirically rigorous comparative study has been the desire to better understand the historical, cultural and political circumstances and nuances of this global phenomena. Van Rheenen, Cernaianu, Sobry, and Wille (2017, 26) argued, "as participants in this research network, we are hopeful that such a group may communicate, collaborate and effectively expand our understanding of the sport tourism phenomena. These efforts will build on the foundation for a dynamic and promising research agenda. Ultimately, we seek to envision future prospects for an evolving epistemology".

This chapter, then, documents this international network's discovery since its establishment, situating sport tourism and the establishment and growth of IRNIST along a historical and cultural trajectory. The outline of the text is loosely organized chronologically, recognizing where we have been, where we find ourselves currently and where we are headed within this field of inquiry. The text reviews the challenges of the field, as well as proposed remedies for these challenges. The chapter begins with an early description of the emerging field and the need for the development of a more cohesive and coherent body of knowledge. It then proceeds with an effort to define the sport tourism terrain anew and the articulation of novel approaches to study this shifting terrain, with a particular focus on sustainable development. The chapter concludes with our international network's future plans for exploration of new terrains at the intersection of sport and tourism in support of local sustainable development. We invite fellow travelers, both scholars and practitioners of sport tourism, to join us on this journey.

A Field Mired by Obstacles

As an academic discipline or field, sport tourism has encountered several historical and ontological obstacles to date. In essence, it has been a field mired by too many distinct ways of doing research across too many locations, while studying too many different sport tourism activities and events. The two primary challenges to the field have been how to accurately define sport tourism (what is it?) and how to best study it as a dynamic social practice or phenomena, once properly defined. Broadly speaking, these two challenges include definitional and methodological quandaries, critical components of an evolving research agenda.

In his meta-review of the emerging body of literature to date Weed (2006) utilized the analogy of a brickyard[1], comparing the collection of sport tourism studies to a disparate and random assemblage of bricks. He asked whether the extant collection of bricks combined to build a conceptual foundation or coherent edifice of knowledge. Nearly a decade later, Van Rheenen et al. (2017) argued that sport tourism as an evolving epistemology requires both bricks and mortar to buttress this distinct edifice, recognizing strong commonalities and coherence within this maturing field. As a global practice and area of inquiry, there has been little agreement on a similar approach to building this edifice or base of knowledge. In other words, there has been little to hold the field together conceptually.

Weed (2006) likewise found a lack of methodological heterogeneity or diversity in sport tourism research. Specifically, nearly three quarters (71%) of the reviewed research articles he analysed over a four-year period (2003-2006) utilized a positivist approach. While these quantitative studies may have been technically sound and provided value to the agencies that may have funded them, Ryan (2005) questioned the contribution of these studies to the broader body of sport tourism knowledge. For example, many of these studies revealed little understanding of sport tourism participation, behavior, or motivation. Additionally, these studies have done little to inform future sport tourism policy (Van Rheenen 2017). This methodological challenge has been compounded by the diffusion of disciplinary forays into the field, accompanied by their unique biases, thus limiting the ability to evaluate the scientific rigor and generalizability of espoused findings or results.

This is particularly problematic within this field due to an over-reliance on case studies, where the results tend to be limited to a particular location, event or type of practice (Melo, Sobry, and Van Rheenen 2021). As noted by Lapeyronie (2009, 39) in his analysis of multiple marathon events in France, "few studies address the plurality of events around a specific sport practice. A field of exploration of sports tourism generated by sports events linked to a specific activity seems almost untapped". Despite these obstacles, scholars in the emerging field have been enthusiastic and hopeful. Gammon, Ramshaw, and Wright (2017, 71) said it well: "We should not shy away from such ontological inconsistencies, but rather see them as an opportunity to not only explore hitherto unapplied theories but

[1] Weed (2006) adopted this analogy from Forscher's (1963) "chaos in the brickyard" and applied it to sport tourism research in the early 21st century. See also Abbott's (2010) *Chaos of Disciplines* and Van Rheenen, Cernaianu, Sobry, and Wille's (2017) discussion of "traveling concepts".

to have the confidence of adding to them, or even to develop new ones". In this hopeful spirit of creativity and collaboration, IRNIST has taken up this untapped opportunity for exploratory research. The following sections highlight our efforts since the establishment of the research network over a decade ago.

Defining the Terrain Anew

In their editorial introducing one of several special editions of the *Journal of Sport & Tourism* noted above, Gammon, Ramshaw, and Wright (2017, 69) wrote, "it could be argued that the field of sport tourism remains at the pre-paradigmatic phase of its development. Henry (1964), Echtner and Jamal (1997), McCartney (2005), Chalip (2006), and Stebbins (2011) have all shared similar misgivings relating to their own fields of study (e.g. physical education, tourism, event management, sport management and leisure studies)". In that special issue, founding IRNIST members Van Rheenen, Cernaianu, and Sobry (2017) conducted a systematic content analysis of all texts between the journal's establishment in 1993 through its publications in 2014 (n = 517), collecting all efforts to define sport tourism, even when these definitions were initially published outside of the journal. These authors found 30 distinct definitions of sport tourism over this 21-year period.

The lack of any agreement on a working definition suggests that early efforts to conceptualise sport tourism grappled with the relative primacy of the two constructs—sport and tourism—seeking to acknowledge the complex and polysemic nature of these dynamic constructs while seeking to understand it as more than the sum of its parts (Downward 2005; Pigeassou, Bui-Xuan, and Glese 2003; Weed and Bull 2009). Van Rheenen, Cernaianu, and Sobry (2017) found five paradigmatic dimensions underlying the definition of sport tourism within the data they analysed. These parameters included: (i) time (the duration away from a home environment), (ii) space (encompassing travel away from a home environment), (iii) sport as motivation for travel (type, level and extent of sport practice or activity), (iv) participant experience of the sport tourism activity, and (v) economic motivation (reference to the development of an economic supply or niche market). Utilizing content analyses, the percentage of paradigmatic presence was calculated within the conceptual composition of the thirty articulated definitions of sport tourism found in this journal over more than two decades.

The majority of these definitions (90%) contained sport as the primary motivation to travel, followed by explicit reference to space (70%), time

(37%), participant experience (33%) and the supply or production of a unique economic market or niche (13%). These findings demonstrated that there has been a far greater emphasis placed on the demand for (or participation in) sport tourism than on the production or supply of the sport tourism experience, indicative of the historical foundations of the academic field.

To be sure, the literature to date has recognized that demand is multifaceted, both in its motivational intensity (primary, secondary, tertiary), as well as in the range and competitive level of the sport tourism activities or events (Gammon and Robinson 1997; Robinson and Gammon 2004; Sobry, Liu, and Li 2016). For example, the dramatic growth in running tourism has been the result of far more recreational, rather than competitive, runners participating in the global activity (Van Rheenen, Melo, and Sobry 2021). Even in specific areas of sport tourism, such as nature sports, there is a diversification of these practices based on challenge, novelty, social connectedness and a desired affinity with the natural world (Melo and Gomes 2017; Melo, Van Rheenen, and Gammon 2020a, 2020b; Melo, Sobry, and Van Rheenen 2021). These sports are performed in a variety of natural contexts, including on land (mountain biking, rock-climbing, etc.), in the air (paragliding and hang-gliding, etc.), and in water (kayaking, surfing, windsurfing, etc.). These unique and diverse activities require a unifying conceptual framework while still recognizing that there are a number of sub-areas or academic specializations within the sport tourism scholarship that have focused on particular practices and cultures, such as surfing tourism (Doering 2018; Fluker 2003; Lopes and Bicudo 2017; Martin and Assenov 2012) or cycling tourism (Han et al. 2020; Holden, Shipway, and Lamont 2019; Kulczycki and Halpenny 2014; Lamont 2009; Weed et al. 2014).

Just as there is a tremendous range of activities and events included within the sport tourism phenomena, there are likewise myriad places which comprise the spatial and/or geographical dimension of the field, including virtual spaces (Berridge 2012; Gaffney and Bale 2004; Geffroy 2017; Kapstein 2017). Higham and Hinch (2006) articulated a unifying approach of sport tourism research based on geography. Specifically, these authors developed the concepts of space, place and environment to help frame future research questions. In his first IRNIST keynote speech, Sean Gammon (2015, 427) described the sport tourism participant's experience as spatially, and thereby phenomenologically, nuanced, "embracing the familiar within and around the unfamiliar".

These social-geographic and historical analyses of sport tourism have likewise led to more critical studies of place as complex, situated and

relational sites (Kapstein 2017; Kothari 2015; Salazar 2012; Saldanha 2002), offering postcolonial and decolonial understandings of tourism broadly and sport tourism more specifically (Hall and Tucker 2004; Sofield 2003; Sykes 2016; Van Rheenen and Roberson 2023). Many of these scholars see modern tourism as a colonial project and process. Sykes (2016), for example, argues that mega-sporting events, such as the Olympics or FIFA World Cup, constitute "roving colonialization." According to her, roving colonialization refers to the political and economic processes and corresponding impact of the temporary, mostly First World, occupation of a non-Westernized space of industry, a recent trend witnessed when selecting host cities for these mega events from the Global South (Cape Town, South Africa and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).

This effort at defining sport tourism from a decolonial framework is a significant departure from earlier efforts at defining the term paradigmatically (Gibson 2013; Hinch, Higham, and Sant 2014; Pigeassou 2004; Sobry, Liu, and Li 2016; Van Rheenen, Cernaianu, and Sobry 2017; Weed 2006), adopting a critical perspective on the social relations inherent to this political-economic sector and field of study. Rather than focusing on the temporal aspects of travel that incorporate sports consumption and/or participation as a primary, secondary or tertiary motivation for the tourist trip (Gammon and Robinson 1997; Robinson and Gammon 2004), this conceptual approach highlights the power differential in the social and historical relationships underlying this global practice (Van Rheenen and Roberson 2023).

One might argue that a focus on these social and historical relations is nothing more than another way of describing participant experience; we contend, however, that structures of dominance or matrices of power (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, etc.) inform and differentially impact the sport tourism experience. They must therefore be made visible, revealed and studied from a particular theoretical framework.

This novel approach of defining sport tourism *relationally* has occurred as IRNIST has likewise sought to reconceptualize the *supply* of this growing economic market. The over-reliance on participation demand and the motivating factors underlying sport tourism consumption have led scholars to challenge the reigning definition(s) of the term. In particular, these scholars have called for greater emphasis to be placed on the production or supply of sport tourism opportunities. In his analysis of modern sport and the field's production of supply and logic of demand, Bourdieu (1978, 820, author's original italics) noted "it is possible to consider the whole range of sporting activities and entertainments offered to social agents…as a *supply* intended to meet a *social demand*". As such,

many studies over the past decade have argued that the supply of sport tourism must be studied with equal measure if we seek to fully grasp the growing field and industry (Bouchet and Bouhaouala 2009; Bouchet and Lebrun 2009; Bouchet and Sobry 2019; Bouhaouala 2018; Melo and Gomes 2017; Sobry 2003; Sobry, Liu, and Li 2016).

For example, Sobry et al. (2016, 14) argued that previous definitions or approaches "ignore the efforts made by professionals within the sector, including the federations, and the Non-Governmental Sport Organisations (NGSO) that propose services, improve their products, and create direct and indirect activity, all of which come from the supply side". Bouchet and Bouhaouala (2009) emphasised that many micro and small companies subsist entirely on sport tourism by offering a secondary or tertiary tourist experience to travelers in a particular location. Sobry et al. (2016) referred to this supply as "opportunity sport tourism," akin to Gammon and Robinson's (1997) earlier reference to "tourism sport." As a modern addendum, Sobry et al. (2016) proposed a socio-economic index system to more accurately measure this highly diversified and growing sport tourism economic market that ranges from mega-events to small-scale producers of activities that represent tertiary excursions for travelers.

These definitional efforts anew are not meant to devalue the demand for sport tourism participation, but rather to acknowledge the entire field and extensive efforts that have been developed to promote and market one of the largest economic sectors in the global economy. This recognition is also critical if we hope to have any real effect on an international commitment to sustainable development within sport tourism. This effort cannot rely solely on consumers, hoping that their purchase of green products and patronage of eco-friendly brands and companies will change the world[2]; it must become a central component of planning and implementation connected to the supply of these diverse offerings at scale. This has led IRNIST to move towards more pragmatic efforts to support sustainability at the local to global (glocal) levels. For example, IRNIST has begun work with the United Nations and Small Island Developing

[2] While the concept of sustainability and "going green" have become of paramount concern within the global tourism industry over the last several decades, Bučar, Van Rheenen and Hendija (2019) found a disconnect between sport tourism research into the subject and the expanding practice of "ecolabeling." The authors found that there are more than two hundred distinct ecolabels within the global tourism today; any yet, there is no standardized set of criteria relative to environmental sustainability practices. This disconnect has led consumers to be highly skeptical of green designations on products and services, as these labels have become a convenient marketing tool but a rather meaningless designation if one seeks actual evidence of genuine sustainability efforts.

States (SIDS) as part of a larger effort to enhance public-private partnerships (PPP). For example, IRNIST members recently attended the fourth International Conference for Small Island Developing States held in May 2024 in Antigua and Barbuda. There, Van Rheenen and Naria presented findings and recommendations from our most recent publication, *Sport Tourism, Island Territories and Sustainable Development* (Van Rheenen, Naria, Melo, and Sobry 2024).

Studying a Shifting Terrain: A Focus on Sustainable Development

It might seem ironic that IRNIST calls for greater attention be paid to the economic aspects of sport tourism research (well, perhaps not, given that the founder and President of this international network is an economist!), as many early studies in the field were criticised for their myopic focus on the economic bottom line of these emerging markets. These studies were highly critical of sponsoring and organizing major sport tourism events with a singular focus on revenue generation (a single-bottom-line) while disregarding the potential impacts on people (social sustainability) and on the environment (Gibson 1998; Hall 2004; Higham 1999; Sack and Johnson 1996). Roche (1994, 1) argued, for example, that "mega-events are short-term events that have long-term consequences for the cities that stage them".

Due to these significant costs and negative impacts associated with hosting these major events, scholars began to suggest that smaller scale tourism events and activities may be more manageable and sustainable financially, while causing far less disruption and destruction to peoples and their environments (Gibson, Kaplanidou, and Kang 2012; Higham 1999; Horne 2000). Walo, Bull, and Breen (1996) argued, for example, that a significant difference between large and small sport tourism events is that smaller events improve the quality of life of the host community, increasing community (psychic) pride and the income of its residents. Of course, this finding may not be generalizable across all small tourism events or activities and their varied hosting sites, relying on single case studies as success stories. Such assertions, however, have underscored a gap in the existing literature and created the impetus to study small-scale sport tourism events comparatively and to empirically test these hypotheses, particularly as these events impacted a more holistic understanding of sustainability.

As one of the fastest growing sectors in the world in the 21st Century, the global tourism industry has been challenged to confront the ethical and

legal mandates regarding sustainability. Certain sectors of tourism, such as sport tourism, are particularly scrutinized concerning responsible sustainability, given the high-profile nature of international mega sporting events. Because few sport tourism events would occur without public support and subsidies (Burgan and Mules 2001; Mules and Dwyer 2005), local leaders, organizing sponsors, government agencies, and domestic and international sport federations become primary stakeholders in the production of these events. These stakeholders therefore have a moral obligation to promote responsible sustainability and to protect the quality of life of local residents (Fredline 2005; Van Rheenen 2017).

This moral obligation led Getz (2009) to call for a paradigm shift that includes a triple-bottom-line (TBL) evaluation both in selecting and evaluating events. The TBL approach as a framework for sustainable tourism development takes into consideration the social and environmental impacts of a business venture in addition to the traditional measures of profit generation, such as return on investment and shareholder value (Brown, Dillard, and Marshall 2008; Dwyer 2015; Stoddard, Pollard, and Evans 2012; Van Rheenen 2017). This was not a new concept. The idea behind the triple-bottom-line first received attention in the Brundtland Report, entitled *Our Common Future* (1987). The report emphatically made a call to action to address the "global problématique" and proposed several long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond. These strategies and sustainable development goals articulated within this important report remain a significant work in progress.

During the 21st century, then, environmental sustainability has become one of the most commonly discussed dimensions in terms of sport tourism impact (Carneiro, Breda, and Cordeiro 2016; Van Rheenen et al. 2024) but not a particularly well-researched dimension of sustainability (Gibson et al. 2012; Hinch, Higham, and Moyle 2016). Even in relatively small-scale sport tourism activities and events, potential negative environmental impacts may occur as a by-product of these activities, such as noise, water and air pollution, soil erosion, natural landscape destruction, fauna and flora destruction, and the deterioration of monuments and historic sites (Fredline 2005; Higham 2005; Markwick 2000; Melo and Gomes 2016; Orams 2005; Van Rheenen and Melo 2021).

The call from the research community for greater emphasis on small scale sport tourism events and activities and their impact on local sustainable development prompted the establishment of IRNIST as an international network of scholar and practitioners. While IRNIST has sought to better define the term, as noted above, the research network also

endeavored to design a more rigorous methodology to empirically evaluate the relationship between sport tourism and sustainability comparatively. This prompted IRNIST to initiate a research project analyzing half marathon races in three continents and nine countries (Melo, Sobry, and Van Rheenen 2021). Utilising a TBL approach, this study focused on the tripartite impacts of a like sport tourism event, analyzing economic, environmental and sociocultural indicators comparatively. As noted in the following section, however, the tourism field generally, and sport tourism specifically, must advance beyond the tripartite conceptualization of sustainability, underscoring a need for a more nuanced understanding of the social, environmental and economic indicators of sustainability.

All contributors (individual, co-authors, or teams of researchers/scholars) studied a half marathon event in their respective countries. The sport tourism event was to be hosted in a small to medium-sized city with between 2,000 and 10,000 participants. The main purpose of this study was to examine and compare the varied experiences and impacts of a sport tourism event on local sustainable development across several unique sites. All contributors to the project agreed on a common methodology, with the intention of comparing results.

Thus, for the purpose of this global project, the unit of analysis was a small-scale sport tourism event (e.g., half marathons). Geographically, the comparison was local and/or urban rather than national, often focused on small and medium sized cites or locales, although the collection also includes several major cities. This methodological approach included a survey instrument or questionnaire to collect information from key stakeholders involved in the event. Additionally, researchers utilised semi-structured interviews to gather further data regarding the organizational and management processes of the event, particularly as it pertained to the perceived and actual impact on local sustainable development. Direct observation was the final aspect of this methodology, a means to triangulate all of the collected data.

The data was then analyzed according to a mixed-method approach. Participant responses were compared with what was reported by key stakeholders (e.g., the organizers or sponsors of the event) during semi-structured interviews. Researcher observation tested the claims relative to reported impacts on local sustainable development. This comparative methodology, organized according to an interdisciplinary and systemic model, was tested for the first time during this international research project.

This comparative approach enabled researchers and practitioners to recognize differences and similarities within, as well as across, boundaries

(e.g., nation states, small island states, territories), seeking to avoid the pitfall of drawing broad, often superficial, conclusions from such comparisons. In the preface to this book, *Small Scale Sport Tourism Events and Local Sustainable Development* (Springer 2021), Gammon wrote (vi), "devising a transformative methodology for assessing small scale sports events is the key achievement of this book…The idea of concentrating on a similar event across towns and cities spanning the globe allows for an insightful study that reveals both differences as well as similarities between quite different urban locations."

In comparing a like event across several distinct locations, the authors claimed that they were better able to propose best practices relative to future planning and implementation. As such, the data and corresponding findings might likewise be used as a benchmark for future longitudinal studies, comparing across time as well as space. As noted by the authors of this study, "this methodology provides an accessible tool for scholars and practitioners to share a common language in promoting and then evaluating local sustainable development efforts associated with these events. The methodology, adopted by researchers from nine countries, expanded our understanding of small-scale sport tourism events beyond singular case studies, thus refining the rigor of the field" (Melo, Sobry, and Van Rheenen 2021, 37).

The Conceptual Path Ahead: Hope and Action for a Future Perfect

Future perfect is a grammatical conjugation or tense of verbs that express promised completion in the future (Oxford Dictionary 2014). In the English language, this verb tense is used to express what one *will have done*, an intentionality of successful action. The idea connotes an ideal state of being-once-become, a future state of performative perfection. Philosophically, future perfect is optimistic, the ontology of hope so beautifully envisioned by critical scholars across the globe (Freire 2021; Hooks 2013; Hahn 2010).

Conceptualising a more perfect future inspires IRNIST to refine and retest the comparative methodology utilized in this international research project on road races. As a follow-up to this work, a new project was launched under the leadership of Dr. Olivier Naria of the Université de La Réunion, a French colleague and IRNIST member from Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean. He and his colleagues studied the observable or potential impacts of sport tourism on small islands within this island archipelago (Naria, Van Rheenen, Melo, and Sobry 2022). Instead of using

a sport tourism event or activity as the unit of comparative analysis, this study examined a particular territory—small island states—in which sport tourism practices exist and/or are being intentionally developed and promoted.

This inquiry led to a large-scale global research project at the intersection of sport tourism and small island states or territories, comprising 20 island case studies across multiple seas and oceans. As IRNIST had done with its previous road races book (Melo, Van Rheenen, and Sobry 2021, this comparative study (Van Rheenen et al. 2024) adopted a common methodology to determine the conditions for successful sustainable territorial development. The unit of analysis shifted from a sport tourism event or activity to a like territory, assessing the impact on sustainable development goals.

As IRNIST has sought to refine its comparative methodology for broader use within the field and industry, it is also critical to recognize that the concept of sustainability has developed over time, whereby the triple-bottom-line has become too simplistic a model to grasp the complexity of planetary protection and preservation. Changes in the socio-political context have led the United Nations (UN) to weigh in on the pressing issue of sustainable development, further expanding our understanding of the concept to include 17 distinct sustainable development goals (SDGs) (UNCSD, 2012). These SDGs, such as *Responsible Consumption and Production (*SDG# 12,), *Climate Action*, (SDG# 13), *Life Below Water (*SDG# 14) and *Life Above Land (*SDG# 15), loosely map onto the three overarching sustainability goals of the triple bottom line first referenced in the Brundtland Report (1987) thirty-five years ago.

The goal of this comparative research project, then, was to add to the existing sport tourism literature and determine a set of best practices to implement elsewhere in the world, where the local, regional and national context warrants. These contexts must assess the varying levels of vulnerability, adaptability or adaptive capacity and myriad types of public-private and core-peripheral partnerships that could successfully be forged to accelerate small island development through sport tourism. This significant contribution to the literature offers an opportunity for global to local (e.g., glocal) stakeholders to reimagine sustainable development through a more just and intentional ethic of care for the health and biodiversity of the environment.

The scaling of sustainability studies acknowledges the dialectical relationship between the local and the global, where, for example, climate change impacts local communities, while local communities, industries and practices may well contribute to a larger carbon footprint. IRNIST's

most recent islands project provides ample evidence of this global phenomena. Such examples reinforce the adage to think globally and act locally[3]. This adage has been modernized by social and environmental activists today who emphasize the urgency for all citizens of the world to take broad-based action in support of planetary health and well-being, acting locally *and* globally.

The UN has now included sport in its global climate action framework and is aiming for carbon neutrality for sport by 2050. And yet, only a tiny fraction of the world's thousands of sporting bodies, federations, tournaments, leagues and clubs have signed up to the UN Sport for Climate Action Framework; even fewer have actual carbon targets and plans to deliver on these commitments[4].

And yet, the notion of sport tourism as an innovative tool for sustainable territorial development continues to gain purchase within the literature, supporting IRNIST's evolving definition of the term. While small island states represent distinct socio-geographic territories surrounded by water, sport tourism territories may emerge in numerous locations, islands of commerce and touristic experiences within nation states or natural environments (parks, mountain ranges, etc.) that traverse traditional borders and boundaries.

Examples include equestrian activities in France as a potential "vector for sustainable development" (Pickel-Chevalier 2015). Territorial development has also been discussed in relation to global walking and running events, such as the North Cape Walk in northern Norway (Gjertsen 2017) or the extreme North Face Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc (Bessy 2011; Perić and Slavić 2019) that traverses three European countries (France, Italy, and Switzerland) and numerous mountain peaks over approximately 171 kilometers (106 miles). This focus on sport tourism as a mechanism for promoting sustainable territorial development also includes cycling and mountain biking opportunities across the globe, such as in Austria (Pröbstl-Haider et al. 2018), Greece (Bakogiannis et al. 2020; Taylor et al. 2019), and Italy (Gazzola et al. 2018; Sagliocco, Celestino, Izzo, and Bonetti 2022), to name but a few examples of this growing trend.

[3] There is some dispute to the origin of this phrase, although most attribute the expression to Scottish town planner and social activist Patrick Geddes (Boardman 1978; Stephen 2004).

[4] With far greater urgency, Goldblatt (2020) has proposed that by 2030, any global sports events or tours that are not carbon neutral be canceled or postponed. Additionally, sports federations that do not adhere to these environmental standards be excluded from the Olympic Games.

In the case of the Terre di Casole Bike Hub in the Tuscany region of Italy, Sagliocco et al. (2022) examined the process of creating an innovative cycle tourism opportunity or offer (supply) from a sustainable development perspective. These authors argued that a territorial destination that aims to realize its full potential by maximizing sport tourism opportunities must engage in several intentional steps. These include a successful coordination of both public and private stakeholders in a given destination, such as local authorities and businesses, hotel owners and hospitality facilities, as well as tourist boards and associations. In coordination, these public-private partnerships (PPP) seek to enhance the role of sporting activities in the area and market the area as an authentic, high-quality destination to draw both domestic and international tourists (Gammelsæter 2021; Herbold, Thees, and Philipp 2020; Shariffuddin, Azinuddin, Hanafiah, and Zain 2022). As Deodat Maharaj, Executive Director of the Caribbean Export Development Agency, noted at the Preparatory Meeting for the SIDS Global Business Network Forum 2024, "we seek to develop a premium product for a premium market at a premium price."

In partnership, these stakeholders must provide innovative and efficient services and build a brand by enhancing the image of the destination. This is best accomplished by intentionally linking specific sport activities and events to a particular place as an expression of its identity. This effort seeks to connect the sport tourism opportunity to sustainable development goals and positive perceptions of the local quality of life (Happ 2021; Jamal and Camargo 2014; Sagliocco et al. 2022; Shankar 2018; Yang, Li, and Choe 2022).

Adopting the definition and comparative methodology refined by this international research network, we will continue to explore a more perfect world, hoping to study and promote sport tourism and local sustainable development globally. It is a quest of hope and optimism, but also a call to action to make the world a better and more equitable place for all to thrive rather than simply survive. The past decade has brought together sport tourism scholars and practitioners from around the world, seeking to share a common theoretical and methodological language. We will build upon this short but productive history and continue to learn from one another in the growing field and industry of sport tourism. We invite you to join us on this exciting journey!

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