

Sports Tourism Research 2000-2003: A Systematic Review of Knowledge and a Meta-Evaluation of Methods

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Introduction

A range of authors have made claims about the state of the 'field' of sports tourism. The general consensus seems to be that it is a field in which cooperation is growing. There have been a number of narrative reviews of the field in the last five years, each of which have sought to outline the extent and nature of sports tourism, and to identify salient issues (Gibson, 1998; 2002; Jackson and Weed, 2003; Weed, 1999). However, Weed and Bull (2004; xi) note that 'many papers at academic conferences and in peer-reviewed journals [are] isolated studies of impacts that do little to contribute to the advancement of knowledge or theory in the field'. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to assess the recent development of knowledge in the field and, second, to evaluate the basis of that knowledge by examining the methodological approaches applied to the study of sports tourism.

Method

Two inter-related but separate methods are used in this paper: systematic review and meta-evaluation. Systematic review is increasingly being applied to the synthesis of data from both qualitative and quantitative studies, and aims to provide a systematic comprehensive coverage of research in a particular area (Dabinett, et al, 2001). Meta-evaluation, whilst having a number of applications, aims to report on the validity and usefulness of methods (Woodside and Sakai, 2001). The target for the systematic review was articles directly relating to sports tourism published in hard-copy peer-reviewed journals between 2000 and 2003. An initial search was made of Sports Discus and of Tour CD, which returned 57 and 37 potentially relevant articles respectively. On the basis of a review of abstracts, 56 of these articles were excluded from the review for a range of reasons, but mostly because there were not of direct relevance to sports tourism. A further hand-search of 31 journals in the field added another 11 articles to the review. Finally, the reference lists of the 46 articles returned so far were reviewed and a further 8 journals identified, each of which were hand-searched and a further 4 articles added to the review. Consequently, the final total of articles included in the analysis was 53. These articles were subject to a detailed content analysis, and to a meta-evaluation of methods.

Results

In a short abstract such as this the detailed results of this review cannot adequately be covered as they will be in the full paper. Consequently, a brief summary is presented. Some basic quantitative results from the review are as follows:

- 31 articles were in tourism journals, 9 articles were in sports journals, whilst 13 articles were in generic leisure or 'other' journals.
- The articles covered the work of 44 different 'first authors'
- 3 authors had published 3 articles during this period, while a number of other authors could also be identified as 'key players' having published two articles alongside other significant outputs (eg books).
- There is a clear indication of growth in the field as 5 articles were published in 2000, 9 in 2001, 17 in 2002, and 22 in 2003, although the latter two figures include special editions of Current Issues in Tourism and Journal of Sport Management respectively, thus perhaps inflating the figures.
- Despite the search of 39 journals, only 18 journals published sports tourism articles.
- With the exception of the special editions noted above, and of the Journal of Sports Tourism, which was launched in hard copy during 2003, the Journal of Travel Research and Tourism Management published the most sports tourism related material during the review period, each containing 5 articles.

The full paper will present a detailed qualitative review of the content of the articles. However, a preliminary summary shows that by far the largest topic for research is some aspect of sport event tourism, including research on impacts, motivations, information and promotion, and safety concerns. Other significant topic areas were outdoor adventure sports tourism, golf tourism, ski tourism, general economic impact studies, and studies of sports tourism policy. Each of these areas are what might be seen as the 'obvious' areas of the sport-tourism link, and although there are a number of innovative studies within the cohort, there are few articles that contribute to a demonstration of the broad and multi-faceted nature of the sport-tourism link.

The full paper will also present a detailed evaluation of methods employed. However, a basic preliminary overview shows that around two-thirds of the articles employed empirical methods. Of the empirical studies, the majority were impact studies and a significant proportion of those were quantitative economic studies. Other studies used a range of methods, including: convenience survey sampling, focus groups and interviews based on a positivist methodology, focus groups and interviews based on an interpretive methodology, grounded theory, and content/media analysis.

Discussion

The review reveals a growing field that is published in a relatively narrow range of journals in the sport, leisure and tourism area. Whilst four or five authors can be identified as key players in developing contemporary sports tourism knowledge, there are an encouragingly large number of authors publishing in the area relative to the total number of journal articles. While there are a small number of innovative studies, by far the largest proportion of work is focussed on events, with outdoor/adventure, golf, and ski tourism covering the vast majority of the remainder of work. This is indicative of a field that is still maturing and, despite a number of non-peer reviewed works that demonstrate the broader nature of the sport-tourism link (eg Hinch and Higham, 2004; Weed and Bull, 2004), the general topic focus of peer-reviewed work is still relatively narrow. There is also a lack of methodological diversity, with the majority of empirical works using quantitative impact approaches of some kind. While there are some examples of methodologically robust studies that can contribute to the ongoing 'advancement of knowledge and theory in the field', there are too many studies that, whilst internally valid, do little to contribute to the ongoing development of knowledge. Unfortunately, there are also a number of studies that appear to have been based on convenience rather than methodological rigour.

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