

SPORT TOURISM AS A DRIVER FOR CULTURAL AND TERRITORIAL IDENTITY: REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF A RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

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Abstract:

Sports linked to Tourism represents according to the World Tourism Organisation (2013), the fastest growing sector in global tourism as several National Tourist Offices (NTOs) are working towards promoting their destinations for Sport. It generates €450billion to the global tourism industry annually. From a sociocultural point of view sport tourism allows individuals to celebrate identities they share with others who also have an interest in a particular sport or event (Green, 2001). The main purpose of this paper is to present the application of the Delphi method as a technic for the analysis of sport tourism as a manifestation of cultural and territorial identity. To achieve it, the information is based on a double process. On a first phase, we conducted an approach to the sector through a deep review of updated academic papers, sectorial and institutional reports. After that, we elaborated a first draft where we stated the last detected tendencies and novelties on Sport Tourism. This draft was used to applicate a Delphi Method to sport tourism experts around the world. We choose this technique because despite there is an

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important scientific production on sport tourism at world level, there is a need for deep discussion on issues relative to the opportunities and the future of this phenomena as a driver for tourism and culture.

Keywords: Sports, Tourism, Culture, Territory, Methodology,

TURISMO DEPORTIVO COMO FACTOR DE IDENTIDAD CULTURAL Y TERRITORIAL: REFLEXIONES SOBRE ASPECTOS METODOLÓGICOS DE UNA INVESTIGACIÓN EN CURSO

Resumen:

El deporte vinculado con el turismo representa, según la Organización Mundial del Turismo (2013), el sector de más rápido crecimiento en el turismo mundial y, cada vez más, las Oficinas Nacionales de Turismo (ONT) están trabajando para promover sus destinos vinculados con el deporte. Se considera que genera alrededor de 450 mil millones de euros a la industria turística mundial anualmente. Desde un punto de vista sociocultural, el turismo deportivo permite a las personas celebrar identidades que comparten con otras personas que también tienen interés en un deporte o evento en particular (Green, 2001). El objetivo principal de este trabajo es presentar la aplicación del método Delphi como una técnica para el análisis del turismo deportivo como una manifestación de la identidad cultural y territorial. Para lograrlo, la información se basa en un doble proceso. En una primera fase, llevamos a cabo un acercamiento al sector mediante una revisión profunda de documentos académicos actualizados, informes sectoriales e institucionales. Después de eso, elaboramos un primer borrador donde expresamos las últimas tendencias y novedades detectadas en Turismo Deportivo. Este borrador se utilizó para aplicar un Método Delphi a expertos en turismo deportivo de todo el mundo. Elegimos esta técnica porque a pesar de que existe una producción científica importante sobre el turismo deportivo a nivel mundial, existe la necesidad de un debate profundo sobre los problemas relacionados con las oportunidades y el futuro de este fenómeno como motor del turismo y de la cultura.

Palabras clave: Deporte, Turismo, Cultura, Territorio, Metodología

1. ON SPORTS AND TOURISM

Sport has become an increasingly common practice in society, at the same time as becoming a common leisure alternative for a broader social class. Along with tourism, it is one of the most popular leisure practices in the contemporary world. The intersection of the two spheres, the physical and sporting activities linked to tourism, is now becoming an element of significant importance associated with specific local development projects and especially in inland regions and territories where its combination with cultural tourism and/or the natural environment, for example, can give very interesting results.

According to Pigeassou (2004), sport tourism appears as a combination of services, as well as a set of services presented or sold in various ways. As the author stated, the more common indicators of these experiences are: type of activities, level of expertise, and investment in the activity, context and status of the participants. However, an in-depth discussion and analysis about what sport tourism is, its modalities and its impact on destinations worldwide is needed.

The worldwide popularity of Sport Tourism has encouraged destinations and tourism companies to formulate and commercialize more products and services linked to this tourism niche. The challenge for practitioners and anyone interested in sport tourism lies in the establishment of alliances and partnerships among the public and private sectors in order to understand and meet tourists' and locals' expectations and needs.

Nevertheless, and even if literature and research on sports and tourism is actually moderately but increasingly important, it is necessary to identify the opportunities offered by Sport Tourism to invigorate local territories in a global context and how this can contribute to a sustainable development of destinations. In this regard, we designed a project in order to harness the potential of the link between sport and tourism at local, national and international levels, which this methodological article is a first step.

In this sense, the aim of this paper is to present briefly, as one of the first moments of the research, the application of the Delphi method as a technique for the analysis of sport tourism as a expression of cultural and territorial identity. In the next pages we will develop the aspects, potentialities and limitations regarding this methodology in a complex field like the link between tourism, sports and leisure.

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES: ON THE DELPHY METHOD

The Delphi method as a research approach was introduced in the late 1940s. The main premise of the Delphi method is based on the assumption that group opinion should be more valid than individual opinion. In this sense, the Delphi technique has been defined as a multi-staged survey which attempts ultimately to achieve consensus on an important issue (McKenna, 1994).

Following Linstone and Turoff (2002: 3), the Delphi method may be characterized as a technique for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem. To accomplish this "structured communication" there is provided: some feedback of individual contributions of information and knowledge; some assessment of the group judgment or view; some opportunity for individuals to revise views; and some degree of anonymity for the individual responses.

Following the same authors (Linstone and Turoff, 2002: 5; Hsu & Sandford, 2007: 1-2), the most common Delphi process is the "conventional or classical Delphi" version, where a small monitor team responsible of the research designs a questionnaire which is sent to a larger respondent group of experts having knowledge of the area requiring decision making. After the questionnaire is returned, the monitor team summarizes the results. After this step, and based upon that results, the monitor team develops a new questionnaire for the respondent group, and restart the process.

The respondent group is usually given at least one opportunity to reevaluate its original answers based upon examination of the group response. To a degree, this form of Delphi attempts to shift a significant portion of the effort needed for individuals to communicate from the larger respondent group to the smaller monitor team.

Usually Delphi undergoes four distinct phases (Linstone and Turoff, 2002: 5-6):

- the first phase is characterized by exploration of the subject under discussion, wherein each individual contributes additional information he feels is pertinent to the issue.
- the second phase involves the process of reaching an understanding of how the group views the issue, it is: where the members agree or disagree and what they mean by relative terms such as importance, desirability, or feasibility.
- if there is significant disagreement, then that disagreement is explored in the third phase to bring out the underlying reasons for the differences and possibly to evaluate them.

- the last phase, a final evaluation, occurs when all previously gathered information has been initially analyzed and the evaluations have been fed back for consideration.

We have also to remark that the "e-Delphi" method is similar to the conventional or classical Delphi, but administered by e-mail or online web survey. Nowadays, it's not a novelty to say that the e-Delphi method has almost completely substituted the conventional one.

As Hsu and Sandford (2007 1) points out, the Delphi technique is well suited as a method for consensus-building by using a series of questionnaires delivered using multiple iterations to collect data from a panel of selected subjects. Subject selection, time frames for conducting and completing a study, the possibility of low response rates, and unintentionally guiding feedback from the respondent group are areas which should be considered when designing and implementing a Delphi study. Thorough pre-planning and rigorous management of the survey, the Delphi technique can provide information that other conventional extrapolative methods cannot reliably forecast (Cunliffe, 2002: 31).

The following items will explain more specifically the use of the Delphi method in our research on sports and tourism and the different steps of the investigation using this technique.

3. DEFINING SPORTS TOURISM

The definition of sport tourism has been an issue throughout the short history of this field, and it still can generate lively discussions among academics and professionals. The first academic publication about sports tourism appeared in 1966 thanks to the British Central Council for Physical Recreation (Anthony, 1966). In 1970, Williams and Zelinsky studied the generation potential of mega-sport events. During the eighties, academics focused on the economic benefits of this kind of sport events. Since the nineties, the field has grown and diversified its interest, although the definition of this field is still somewhat confused, and as Gibson predicted in 1998, both as an academic field of study and as a distinct component of the tourism industry, it has grown in a fragmented manner (Gibson, 1998).

Sport tourism was primarily considered only related to trips to witness sport events. It was Redmond, between 1990 and 1991, who pointed out that spectators are only one type of sport tourist. Redmond described sport participants and visitors to sports attractions (i.e., famous stadia and halls of fame) also as actors of sport tourism. Hall (1992) divided sport tourism in two big types of behaviours:

- travelling to *observe* sports, and
- travelling to *participate* in sports.

Following this definition, we can glimpse three different types of destinations:

- those that host a sport event;
- those that offer the possibility of practising a given sport activity, and
- those that offer some attraction related to sports.

In 1998 Gibson gave probably the most accurate and comprehensive definition of sport tourism:

“Leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities” (Gibson, 1998: 49).

With this definition, Gibson unifies the aforementioned and indicates three different subcategories of sport tourism:

- Active Sport Tourism
- Event Sport Tourism, and
- Nostalgia Sport Tourism.

Accordingly, we can use this definition to think of three ideal types of destinations.

In 2002, Gibson insisted on this idea, describing sport tourism as a “trip with the purpose of a) taking part, b) watching, or c) venerating or celebrating sport” (Gibson, 2002: 115). In this way, sport tourism reveals itself as “a unique area of study derived from the interaction of activity, people and place” [...] “an activity in its own right, related, but not subordinate to sport and tourism” (Weed & Bull, 2004: 15). Along the same lines, Standevan (1998) noted that sport tourism should be understood as a two-dimensional concept:

- Sport, “a cultural experience of physical activity”, and
- tourism “a cultural experience of place”.

Applied to destinations, this means that sport tourism can open up a new way to build and rebuild tourism offers.

In any case, there are multiple ways of categorising sport tourism. For example, Lisbona, Medina & Sánchez (2008), like to differentiate between

- sport during holidays, involving sports activities performed while on a tourism trip, which can enrich the offer of a particular destination, but is not the central attraction; and
- sport holidays, those that implies sport as the main aim of the trip.

This kind of tourism is relatively recent and still represents an extraordinary opportunity to new, stagnated and declined destinations. Moreover, the authors point out that we could even distinguish the purposes of the last type between competition sport and recreational sport. However, the authors admit that above all the differentiations, sport tourism includes every one of the contemporary aspects of leisure, such as recreational, environment-ecological, creative, festive, volunteer and cooperative, etc.

4. A SURVEY ON SPORTS TOURISM BY EXPERTS

In order to contribute to a better understanding of the link between sport and tourism and its future implications, a cross-dimensional approach was designed by our research group as a monitor team.

In a first phase, an in-depth review of updated academic papers, sectorial and institutional reports was conducted. After that, a first draft was elaborated where the last detected tendencies and novelties on Sport Tourism were identified. This draft was used to apply the Delphi Method to sport tourism experts identified around the world.

This method was chosen because despite there being an important scientific production on sport tourism on a global scale, there is a need for an in-depth discussion on issues relative to the opportunities and the future of this phenomenon. Apart from this, our research seeks to create a consensus about the challenges, opportunities and perspectives of Sport Tourism and, to achieve this objective, the Delphi technique should be a very useful method.

4.1 Designing the Delphi survey

In designing the Delphi survey, a panel of experts was chosen, considering their experience and knowledge on the topic. Firstly, forty-five respondents with experience in Sport and Tourism were selected and contacted by email, inviting them to collaborate in the study. The Delphi iterative questionnaire survey process was conducted online, so we have to define our technique as an e-Delphi method.

The survey was structured in four sections:

- 1) Section I. Sport tourism projects and their regional link;
- 2) Section II. The impact of sport tourism projects;
- 3) Section III. Opportunities of sport tourism projects and
- 4) Section IV. The academic approach.

We consider that the subject of study is complex and multifactorial, and for this reason all the questions were multiple-choice.

The first round was developed between January 24th and February 8th 2017. Twenty panel members replied to the first iteration providing a response rate of 47.61%. From their responses, the ones most voted were selected for inclusion in the second round Delphi questionnaire.

The second round was conducted between February 13th and February 27th 2017. The second questionnaire was sent to the twenty panelists who finally answered the first round. Fifteen panel members replied to this second iteration, which means a response rate of 75% in which 66.6% were from Europe; 20% were from the Americas and 13.3% were from Asia and the Pacific. All the answers received were valid. The majority of respondents represented private sector businesses (33.3%), governmental Departments (26.6%) and educational institutions (40%).

4.2 Complementing the research

In order to contrast the information provided by the panel of experts, a second phase was conducted based on the same questionnaire sent to the panel of experts. However, in this phase the questionnaire was sent as an online survey addressed to 114 organisations and institutions in which their main activity is sport tourism. All this organizations were identified after phase one. The nationalities of these institutions are distributed as follows: 59% corresponds to Europe, 21.9% to the Americas, 16.2% to Asia and the Pacific and 2.9% to Africa. The majority of institutions represent private sector businesses (88.5%) and the response rate was the 13.15%.

In a third phase, the results gathered were complemented with international cases studies identified as a good practices during the first phase, and 114 organizations and institutions related with sport tourism worldwide were selected.

5. CONCLUSIONS: ON OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Our study attempts to improve the knowledge, the discussion and the consensus around the opportunities and the future of sport tourism. On no account should we forget that sport tourism is

one of the more vigorously growing sectors of the tourism industry, with new products and services positioning and revitalising destinations all around the world. As with other sectors of the industry, sport tourism is not always used in a sustainable way, but this possibility should be taken into account in order to contribute to a better development of the regions.

The final information of our study must focus especially on the opportunities offered by sport tourism to invigorate local regions in a global context. In this framework, and as a tool to achieve consensus, we can conclude that the Delphi technique is a very convenient and useful method. Despite the fact that during the first round of questions there was a significant variety of answers, the benchmarks achieving consensus kept the highest scores mainly during the final phases.

Nevertheless, different limitations affect research based on this method. On one hand, we have the matter of the accessibility and availability of the experts. Even if most of the scientific or professional community is in principle and ideally willing to participate in this type of surveys, the final volume of answers obtained is always lower than desired, and sometimes to what would be desirable. In this sense, and particularly in the e-Delphi processes, firewalls in some computers or organizations may also block the questionnaires or direct them into the junk folders.

On the other hand, the Delphi technique is iterative and sequential, and we must always have in mind that can also be time-consuming and laborious (Hsu & Sandford, 2007: 5). In our case, both limitations have been present in different levels during our research.

Following the same authors (*ibid.*), we have to add that the iteration characteristics of the Delphi technique can potentially enable investigators to mold opinions, rating the responses differently after receiving particular feedback. Keeney et al. (2001) points out also that the existence of consensus from the Delphi process does not always mean that the correct answer has been found, but only that, to a particular level, the participants have agreed on an issue or a group of issues.

But although we are aware of all these limitations (as in any research technique, by the way), and probably several of them have possibly affected our research at different times, we think that ultimately, the Delphi method has much to offer in terms of gaining information, discussion and consensus from a wide range of experts on specific subjects. The Delphi method is particularly useful for researchers wanting to gather information from those who are deeply immersed in the topic of interest, and can provide real and practical knowledge.

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