

## Leisure Cycling Entrepreneurialism in Johannesburg, South Africa

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### Abstract

It is estimated that by 2050 as many as five billion bicycles could be in use globally. Reasons for this growth vary, with utility cycling strong in Europe and Asia; while in the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand cycling is a sport and leisure activity, with cycling deemed the 'new golf'. Within this context, there is a rise in community or local bike shops (or LBS) which sell bicycles, related equipment and services. This qualitative study explored LBSs in greater Johannesburg, focusing on who the entrepreneurs are, how they service their clients, and what links the sector has to serious leisure. It was found that the owners demonstrated high levels of serious leisure cycling engagement and passion for the sport. A sense of being part of a bigger cycling community strongly influenced their entrepreneurial practices. This included how they ran their businesses, the employees they hired, as well as how they viewed cycling in general. The research also yielded insights into operational and sectoral realities, trends and challenges. Generally, it was found that the local bike shops in greater Johannesburg are key players in the supply, growth and development of sport and leisure cycling, thereby making a positive contribution to the cycling community. This is important in the light of the COVID-19 challenges experienced by the sport and leisure sector, as a loss of these shops will likely have a negative impact on cycling in Johannesburg.

**Keywords:** cycling, entrepreneurialism, local bike shops, Johannesburg, serious leisure

### Introduction

Cycling in South Africa has enjoyed tremendous growth in the past decade, in line with international leisure cycling trends. For example, the national governing body, Cycling South Africa (CSA), has over 25 500 registered members, while Stephen Reardon, CEO of MoreCycle (one of the biggest cycling retailers in South Africa), estimates the number of amateur sporting or recreational cyclists' at around one million. Consequently, the cycling industry in South Africa is a valuable one, with CSA annual membership fees totalling roughly R6.4 million. South Africa has one of the highest per capita 'bike spend', with bicycles for leisure purposes ranging in cost from R3 000 to over R100 000. Additionally, large cycling events such as the ABSA Cape Epic (regarded as one of the best multi-staged races on the global mountain bike calendar), the 947 Ride Joburg and the Cape Town (Argus) Cycle Tour (the largest individually timed cycle race in the world), draw tens of thousands of local, international, professional and amateur riders. Annual revenue for these three events alone

amounts to well over R100 million. These figures exclude backward linkages that span bicycle retail, sponsorship and media coverage, travel, accommodation, food and drink (Giampiccoli, Lee & Nauright, 2015; Streicher & Saayman, 2010). On this basis, Barry (2014) argues that the sector is worth between R600 million and R1 billion, while Wesgro (2017) maintains that the industry contributes around R8.8 billion annually to the South African economy. Cycling is, thus, a significant contributor to local economic development.

Notwithstanding being a high growth sector, the supply or retail side of the cycling industry remains under researched. This is despite a collusion and price-fixing scandal in 2008, with eleven retailers and six wholesalers found guilty, with two being fined by the authorities (Gedye, 2016). Instead, local cycling research has examined the demand side of recreation and sporting events from the perspectives of motivation, tourism and socio-economic impact (Kotze, 2006; Kotze & Visser, 2008; Turco, Swart, Bob & Moodley, 2003). The present study contributes to the literature by focusing on small cycling retail outlets. As data was collected prior to COVID-19, the study is a baseline against which the impacts of the pandemic and lockdowns can be compared.

### **Cycling: A global perspective**

Globally, there is a drive towards encouraging people to become cyclists, punting cycling: (1) as an alternative to passive commuting, (2) for a healthy, active lifestyle, (3) to reduce transport costs, and (4) to address sustainability and environmental concerns (Szczepanski, 2013). For Continental Europe and Asia this is not new, they have well-established cultures of cycling, with cycling infrastructure and incentives to cycle (Forsyth & Krizek, 2011; Gatersleben & Appleton, 2007; Heinen, Van Wee & Maat, 2010). Copenhagen, for example, is known as the ‘City of Cyclists’, with 52 percent of the population using bicycles as transport. ‘Bicycles-as-transport’ is less important in the Anglosphere [United States of America, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand] (Aldred & Jungnickel, 2012; Spinney, 2016). This may be due to bike-unfriendly cities (Forsyth & Krizek, 2011). Falcous (2017) suggests that cycling in the Anglosphere is about lifestyle and leisure, or ‘bikegeist’, making cycling the ‘new golf’ (Williams, 2005). Thus, the middle classes choose to cycle for health, work-life balance, lifestyle, as well as for social and business networking reasons. Furthermore, the rise of competitive and charity cycling events, social riding clubs, innovative cycling businesses and associated digital technologies has helped cycling replace golf as a leisure activity (Frieswick, 2018; McMahon, 2015; Randall, 2015; Wallop, 2016). Some argue that the ‘Lance Effect’, where Lance Armstrong’s seventh consecutive Tour de France win, which made him an international celebrity, inspired many to take up cycling (Farris & Hoeller, 2009). This boom saw the emergence of large global cycling companies (such as Trek), a period of experimentation with bike materials (such as carbon fibre), diversification of product offerings (mountain bikes, hybrids and road bikes), innovation (better aerodynamics and apparel), as well as cycling tourism.

In terms of retail trends, cycling-as-leisure has four main distribution channels, namely (a) specialist retailers, (b) mass merchants, (c) sporting goods retailers and (d) online and catalogue retailers. Specialist retailers or community/local bike shops (LBS) focus on mid-, high-end and specialised bike sales, bike fitting, advice, maintenance and repairs, group rides and sponsorships of local teams (Farris & Hoeller, 2009). Their staff have high levels of cycling knowledge and are often cycling enthusiasts themselves. LBSs play an important role in the growth and development of leisure cycling by offering services that add value beyond the sale of the bike. Although these establishments dominate the USA market in terms of volume, they are often less profitable due to overtrading. The remainder of the sector comprises bicycle and equipment sales, with little face-to-face interaction or after-sales service. Such

mass merchants deal with lower-end, cheaper products, servicing price-sensitive customers. Sporting goods retailers deal in low- to mid-range products, with limited customer service.

Due to the importance of community or local bike shops (LBSs), this study will now focus on entrepreneurship, as these kinds of retailers are usually established and operated by one or a few entrepreneurs.

### **Local bike shops and entrepreneurship**

While the definition of entrepreneurship is contested, Schumpeter (1965) suggested that entrepreneurs exploit market opportunities through technical or organisational innovation. For the Schumpeterian (or classic) entrepreneurs, there is no emotional attachment to a product or service. Rather, they are concerned with creating wealth, balancing risk, servicing customers and growing the business. Such entrepreneurs focus on profits, not the broader interests of society (Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991). According to Schneider, Teske and Mintrom (1995), however, entrepreneurs discover and meet unfulfilled needs, assume financial, emotional and reputational risk, as well as utilise networks for sales and product sourcing.

There is also a relatively new category: sport entrepreneurship (Pellegrini, Rialti, Marzi & Caputo, 2020). Ratten and Ferreira (2017) single out lifestyle and adventure sports (of which cycling, especially mountain biking, is one) as being particularly entrepreneurially innovative, as they can connect with, and leverage off, cultural trends. Ratten (2010) suggested that sports-related organisations or individuals become entrepreneurial when they act innovatively and proactively to market opportunities. Other examples of sports entrepreneurship include surfing, trail running and scuba diving, although some would argue that this is adventure entrepreneurship (McKay, 2017). Examples of value creation are the social responsibility initiatives such as South Africa's Team Dimension Data for Qhubeka, #BicyclesChangeLives, and 947 Ride Joburg Ride-for-a-Purpose campaigns (Ratten, 2011).

With respect to cycling, the notion of user entrepreneurialism is also useful. User entrepreneurs leverage their personal experience to develop product or service innovations on which an enterprise is then based. For example, some 84 percent of juvenile product firms founded between 1980 and 2007 were started by user entrepreneurs (parents, grandparents or babysitters) (Shah & Tripsas, 2016). Such entrepreneurs seldom have financial gain as the primary motivator and some even choose to limit their growth. Some may even be accidental entrepreneurs (Shah & Tripsas, 2007; Shane, 2000). In the cycling context, Lüthje, Herstatt and Von Hippel (2005) found that mountain biking (MTB) grew out of a 1970s cottage industry of users who adapted road bikes for their off-road needs. Commercial production later followed until MTB became mainstream, led, in part, by Specialized who brought the first mass-produced MTB to market. Specialized is now a global bicycle and components corporation.

Lastly, are the lifestyle entrepreneurs who establish businesses to monetarise an activity they enjoy (Peters, Frehse & Buhalis, 2009). Such entrepreneurs, as with end users and, perhaps, sports entrepreneurs, operate their businesses in order to sustain their activities and quality of life. As a result, Kim, Longest and Lippmann (2014) suggest that leisure-based ventures straddle the work/non-work divide. Leisure-based ventures also tend to develop organically and informally but show better economic and non-economic outcomes – that is, they generate revenue and contribute to society. Peters et al. (2009) suggested that leisure and tourism industries attract this type of entrepreneur, as the individual often has relevant experience, training or expertise, especially if they are serious leisure careerists. McKay (2015) found this to be true for the white-water rafting industry in South Africa, where many entrepreneurs started off as white-water kayakers and adventure guides. Thus, it is to serious leisure that this study will now turn.

## Cycling and serious leisure

Stebbins (1982) conceptualised the serious leisure perspective as a framework for the study of leisure in response to the perceived changes to work in post-industrial society. For Stebbins, in the context of declining jobs and a reduction of work hours, people “will increasingly be searching the world of leisure for ways to express their abilities, fulfil their potential, and identify themselves as unique human beings” (1982, p. 251). Part of the significance of serious leisure is that it “develops skills and knowledge, the accumulation of experience, and the expending of effort” (1982, p. 267) by participants in the way its practice can take on qualities of a career, while also proving enriching to the individual and leisure community. Stebbins (1992, p. 3) went on to define serious leisure as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience.”

Subsequently, Gould, Moore, McGuire and Stebbins (2008) developed the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM) as an instrument to measure and evaluate serious leisure, using six characteristics, as follows: (1) Perseverance of participation despite constraints; (2) Committed effort to practise the activity and acquire skills; (3) Advancement through a career, marked by stages of achievement or involvement; (4) A unique ethos and social world (i.e. a subculture); (5) A social identity linked with the activity, which gives participants a sense of belonging; and (6) Durable benefits for participants, including self-esteem and self-image (see McEwan, McKay & Baker, 2020). As a tool, SLIM can build a picture of a serious leisure motivation and accrued benefits.

In more recent years, Stebbins (2010, p. 7) described the leisure studies field as “happy science”, believing leisure to be a positive experience and an important factor in individual, group and civic life. Stebbins (2010, p. 8) maintained that one of the values of leisure is that it can help people “form careers” and support “a person’s sense of continuous, positive self-development and self-fulfilment”. Another value of leisure is that it helps build interpersonal relationships and encourages community participation (such as volunteering or team sport), all of which are important in terms of building social capital and social cohesion.

The serious leisure perspective has also been used to examine and explain motivation, participation, travel behaviour and careers in non-professional sport (Hungenberg & Gould, 2015). Notably, studies have been undertaken in surfing (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013), white-water kayaking (Bartram, 2001), ultramarathon running (Fairer-Wessels, 2013), triathletes (Kennelly, Moyle & Lamont, 2013) and cycling (Brown, O’Connor & Barkatsas, 2009; LaChausse, 2006). One example is O’Connor and Brown (2007), who studied a self-organised, non-mainstream group of Australian weekend cyclists. These ‘weekend warriors’ were community oriented and socially inclusive, accommodating a range of cycling abilities in a shared participation and semi-competitive environment. The cyclists said they experienced enjoyment, emotional commonality, identity, belonging and shared meaning by being part of the group. Serious leisure, thus, develops a culture based on shared experiences, dress and rituals without formal structures.

Similar patterns are found by Falcous (2017) among ‘coffee riders’ in New Zealand. Furthermore, Herman (2015) found social and group motivations were higher among leisure MTB bikers than among utility bikers. He goes on to suggest that recreation is becoming more integral to lifestyle, self-image and a sense of ‘self’ among the middle class. Herman (2015, p. 38) argues that cycling deserves further exploration, given its “very strong social leisure potential” and its relevance to areas such as educational programmes, city planning and design, psychology, fitness programmes and tourism.

A further step in the development of the SLP framework is the complex relationship between serious leisure and work. Occupational devotion is characterised by a strong attachment to an activity that is self-enhancing, deeply fulfilling, and which comes with a high sense of achievement. Passion often outweighs profit or wages. Stebbins (1992) highlighted similarities between the characteristics of serious leisure and occupational devotion, namely the combination of skill, knowledge and experience involved. Importantly, Stebbins (2010) suggested that the division between work and leisure is increasingly blurry, with many devotee occupations (certain small businesses, skilled trades, consulting and counselling) having roots in serious leisure, while serious leisure adherents tend to make a ‘career’ of their leisure activities. People can transition from a career in leisure (serious leisure cyclist, for example) into a career in occupational devotion (such as a cycling business owner).

## Methodology

This study sought to build a qualitative picture of the supply side of cycling in South Africa by undertaking semi-structured interviews with owners of local bike shops in Greater Johannesburg. Johannesburg is South Africa’s wealthiest and most populous city, home to the 947 Ride Joburg. Due to the lack of a defined population within the sector, a list of 16 enterprises was drawn up, using the Internet footprinting approach (McKay, 2017). All 16 enterprises were contacted telephonically, and nine interviews were eventually conducted. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Pretoria. Firstly, interview questions were grouped under themes: entrepreneur, enterprise, staff, marketing, role of government/legislation, sector development and business linkages, trends and challenges, and customer profile. Secondly, LBS owners self-assessed themselves against the adapted Gould, Moore, Karlin, Gaede, Walker and Dotterweich (2011) Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM), which consisted of 18 (edited to be cycling-specific) statements. Responses were captured using a five-point Likert-type scale: five being the strongest agreement, and one being the least. For example, if the factor was ‘perseverance’, the accompanying statement was ‘I overcame/overcome difficulties in cycling by being persistent’. Numerous challenges were encountered, ranging from an unwillingness to participate to lack of availability and cancellations. As a purposive, non-probability sampling method was used, and the study was limited to Johannesburg, it is not representative of all local bike shops (LBSs) in South Africa.

## Results

### *Serious leisure inventory and measure*

The Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM) consists of five characteristics: perseverance, personal effort, career, identity and ethos, and outcomes (benefits). Based on the scores, all the respondents were self-defined as serious leisure cyclists (see Table 1). The highest score was 90 and the lowest 62, with an average of 81.5 and positively skewed, suggesting a high level of serious leisure adherence across the group. The two outliers were Respondents 4 and 5.

Table 2 presents the individual scores per factor, individual totals, and averages per factor. The sample group scored highly (and was positively skewed) in terms of the five characteristics, as well as on certain factors in the benefits. As a group, they scored the lowest on financial return (32) and group accomplishment (37), both two standard deviations below the mean (40.89), and the highest on identity, self-enrichment, enjoyment and social attraction (44 each), all four of which were two standard deviations above the mean (std. dev. was 2.989) – again, in alignment with seeing themselves as serious leisure cyclists.



Table 1: Respondent scores on the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM)

Respondent	Score (18 x 5 = 90) max possible 90)	Standard Deviation
5	90	+2 SD
1	87	+1 SD
3	86	+1 SD
2	85	+1 SD
7	83	+1 SD
9	82	+1 SD
6	80	-1 SD
8	79	-1 SD
4	62	-2 SD

### ***The supply side of leisure cycling – a profile of LBSs***

The dates of business inception ranged from 1977 to 2014. Three enterprises started between 1993 and 1996, one in 2008, and four between 2012 and 2013. Of the nine, only five agreed to share their annual turnover. There was a large range (R3 million to R300 million), with the majority reporting annual figures of between R20 million and R27 million. The owners of the LBSs were white, male South Africans between the ages of 33 and 61. The enterprises were predominantly sole proprietorship: three had partners, and one comprised a group of owners with shares in the business. All but one was actively involved in the day-to-day running of the bike shop. Seven had used their own money as start-up capital, while Respondent 4 was given the capital by family. Respondent 9 acquired his shares through “sweat equity”. Three respondents had owned other businesses (furniture manufacturing, property development and airplane refurbishment), and two were retired professional cyclists:

*“I was a professional cyclist and getting to the end of my career and needed a source income.”* (Respondent 1).

One respondent was a former sales manager, one a technician and one a student with no previous work experience. Four respondents had other business interests (mobile vending, property development, golf, and online retail). Respondent 3 also had shares in cycling-related businesses. Respondents 7 and 9 were involved as partners in other business interests outside of cycling. Only two said that starting up the LBS was easy. Respondent 4 felt that as his father was a bike parts retailer with existing relationships and accounts with suppliers, it meant that

*“... starting a business was not complicated.”*

Respondent 5 partnered with someone who had specialist knowledge and an existing relationship with a supplier. The remaining respondents listed numerous challenges. Respondent 2 said that suppliers did not want him to

*“open an account. They were protecting their existing clientele”.*

Respondent 7 also mentioned that competitors tried to block him from opening accounts with suppliers. He added that paying for bikes in hard currency, as they are all imported, was another challenge. This was echoed by Respondent 6.

Respondent 1, a former professional cyclist, felt that his lack of business experience and financial knowledge was a major obstacle.

The original business model of Respondent 9 was to supply merchandise to cycling retail outlets, but the high cost of warehousing, stocking products on consignment, and his customers, were all serious problems:

*“... being deceived by people, using our lease to sell their own products, clients disappeared.”*



Table 2: SLIM scores by respondent, characteristic and factor

Characteristic	Factor	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	Factor Total	Factor Avg
Preference	Perseverance	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	40	4,4
	Effort	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	43	4,7
Career	Career Progress	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	40	4,4
	Career Contingencies	5	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	42	4,6
Identity	Identity	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	44	4,8
	Ethos	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	40	4,4
Benefits	Self-enrichment	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	44	4,8
	Self-actualisation	5	5	5	4	5	3	4	5	5	41	4,5
	Self-expression (abilities)	4	5	5	3	5	4	4	3	5	38	4,2
	Self-expression (individual)	5	5	5	2	5	5	4	5	4	40	4,4
	Self-image	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	4	42	4,6
	Self-gratification (satisfaction)	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	43	4,7
	Enjoyment	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	44	4,8
Financial return	Recreation	5	5	5	2	5	5	5	5	5	42	4,6
	Financial return	5	4	5	3	5	3	3	1	3	32	3,5
	Social attraction	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	44	4,8
	Group accomplishment	5	5	3	2	5	4	5	3	5	37	4,1
Group maintenance	Group maintenance	5	5	3	2	5	4	5	5	4	38	4,2
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>82</b>		<b>4,47</b>

After 18 months, the partners decided to change their business plan and open their own retail store. Staff complements varied from highest – 40 employees, to lowest – one had only three. Two had more than 25 permanent employees, with seven having 11 or fewer. The combined total across the nine businesses was 127 employees.

In terms of race and gender, 43 percent of staff comprised black males, and 34 percent were white males. Females of all races were in the minority. Most only employed South Africans, while Respondent 8 recruited Mozambicans, suggesting they were better skilled. Respondent 6 employed Zimbabweans with work permits who, he said, had the “right personality” for the job. Respondent 4 hired a foreign national as a cleaner (through an agency) who turned out to be a skilled bike mechanic. Most avoided seasonal workers, as a lack of skill, experience and commitment to the business negatively impacted on service quality and customer experience:

*“The business depends on relationships built over time ... we try to maintain our employees because short-term employment is detrimental to the business”*

(Respondent 9).

Respondent 6 said that he did not like to use casual staff,

*“... because customer experience is compromised, they don’t follow up and are not committed. Furthermore, they are not trained.”*

Despite this, five made use of part-time staff. In most cases, these numbers were low (between 1 and 3), but in the case of Respondent 6 it was 11 individuals.

Most respondents valued soft skills over technical or business skills (Table 3). Respondent 6 suggested that –

*“... this is a people’s business.”*

while Respondent 4 believed that –

*“... an employee can learn anything with a great attitude.”*

Other competencies such as respect, communication, reliability and attention to detail were referenced. They agreed that managers need skills such as communication, leadership, attitude, honesty, integrity, attention to detail and ability to delegate. For owners, respondents favoured behavioural competencies above technical skills, such as being a people person, honesty, passion, perseverance, accessibility to staff and customers, an entrepreneurial mindset and financial discipline. One respondent said that knowledge of every aspect of the business is important. The industry is, thus, less about selling bikes, and more about servicing cyclists, customer experience and relationship building, hinting that this industry is part of the experience economy. That said, all nine wanted staff with technical and mechanical skills, but said it was a major challenge finding them, partly because of increasing specialisation and complexity of the bikes:

*“... a brake mechanic can charge R6000 for what amounts to a minute of their time”* (Respondent 3).

Other staffing issues included finding staff with the right attitude (Respondent 7), while Respondent 9 explained that staff –

*“... move to competitors depending on who pays better.”*

Respondent 1 agreed that highly skilled cycle salespersons or mechanics could move around the industry to earn higher salaries but felt that passion for the sport also mattered. He noted that LBSs liked to –

*“... get people who ride. Not necessarily experts, but if you don’t ride, you must have passion for the business”*, suggesting that, for all the enterprises, the ideal employee should belong to the cycling community. For this reason, all offered or facilitated some sort of

industry-specific training in (1) product/sales, (2) technical/mechanical (maintenance and repairs), and (3) bike setup (customised setup for clients).

Respondent 1 held an hour-long training session by external consultants every week, as well as incentivised performance:

*“When you get to a certain level of sales you get a special black shirt and a reward”.*

Respondent 6.

LBSs sent staff for training offered by brands/suppliers, two sent staff for training in Australia and Italy, while another two had paid for staff to receive certified mechanic and suspension training, as well as accounting.

Respondent 4 used the Specialized Bicycle Component University (SPCU), an initiative of the Specialized brand, for training and certification on its bicycles and products. In terms of skills required, the owners were asked to clarify the differences between the skills needed between staff, management and owners. This is detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Skill set requirements for staff, management and owners of local bike shops

Staff		Management		Owners	
Skills	Competencies	Skills	Competencies	Skills	Competencies
Technical knowledge	Communication	Sales	Communication	Knowledge of whole business	Passion
Good with hands	Good attitude	Systems knowledge	Good attitude	Industry experience	Perseverance
Active cyclist	Honesty	Day-to-day operations management	Honesty		Efficient
Industry experience	Attention to detail		Attention to detail		Open-minded
	Follow up on customer queries		Networking		Entrepreneurial mindset
	People skills		Work ethic		Accessible to staff and customers
	Reliability		Integrity		Problem solver
	Willingness to mentor colleagues/skills sharing		Ability to delegate		Honesty
	Respect		Leadership		People person
	Commitment/Dedication				Financial discipline

Across the sample, the number of clients varied greatly. One estimated the number as high as 5 000 per week (which would be during a cycling event expo), while another as low as 100 per week. Three estimated between 1 000 and 4 000 clients per week, and five between 100 and 300 per week. The busiest times were summer months (August to April) and periods preceding large cycling events, recording 2 000 customers the day before a race for example (Respondent 1). Winter months were difficult. Only one respondent differed, stating that business peaked every second weekend of the month, all year round.

Respondents felt that most customers rode for exercise and a healthy lifestyle, although local cycling events, media exposure of the sport and a move away from golf also promoted cycling because of its perceived social and networking value. Customers were mostly white middle-aged males, although Respondent 1 stated: *“We are doing a lot to improve the number of women.”*

Respondent 3 stated:

*“This is an expensive sport so a 21-year-old cannot afford a bicycle and over 60 fatigue, old age kicks in.”*

Socio-economic status and culture seemed to also play a role in determining the customer profile:

*“Black South Africans regard cycling as a sport (not a leisure activity); very few of our customers are black.”* (Respondent 4).

The most common buying trend was accessories, followed by bike services, bike sales, apparel and coffee, as customers only upgraded their bikes every three years (Respondent 1). Respondent 9 stated:

*“Add-ons create the value beyond the product and makes it an experience. Without an experience there is no future.”*

Thus, add-ons (coffee, group rides, club affiliation, training and fitness centres, and coaching) are essential to generate store exposure, increase sales, and build and maintain a cycling community:

*“Eighty percent of our business comes from 20 percent of our customers bringing their friends.”* (Respondent 7)

*“This business is community-based so we get the community involved.”* (Respondent 4)

Respondent 1 had an extensive range of add-ons, such as a spinning studio, talks and launches, a nearby bike park, skills training classes, women’s fashion shows, women-only rides, as well as a training app. Respondent 1 had also partnered with a medical aid and insurance provider (Discovery Limited), to offer the Vitality Active Rewards Bike Booster. This allowed for up to 25% cash back on qualifying mountain or road bikes purchased from his store. The respondent also partnered with King Price Insurance to offer free bike cover. In addition, the enterprise offered bike finance and a 30-day money back guarantee. Respondent 3 had negotiated discounts for customers with a nearby coffee shop, training studio and bike track in – another indicator that cycling-as-sport is part of the experience economy.

### ***Inhibitors of growth***

Four respondents felt that Cycling South Africa (CSA) did nothing to help LBSs. One suggested that CSA was a “mess” (Respondent 2) and had not renewed his membership. Another (Respondent 4) referred to it as “dysfunctional”. The other cycling association is Peddle Power, but Respondent 6 suggested that there was a feud between the two, and hence a general lack of organisation in the sector:

*“Each is out for themselves.”* (Respondent 4)

*“Unfortunately, the cycling sector is not organized. It has no structure.”* (Respondent 3)

Respondents felt that CSA should lobby government to reduce import tariffs and prioritise the growth of cycling, such as establishing more cycling events/races to grow participant numbers. Some felt that more could be done to develop the local manufacturing sector, as imported bikes were costly (Respondent 1). Day-to-day challenges included long trading hours to accommodate morning and evening peak hours, which increased operating costs, and caused cash flow issues. There were also challenges in stock management, given the sizeable differences in quality and cost of products, and customer preferences. One respondent suggested that customer loyalty was an issue:

*“They like to shop around for a 10-rand discount.”* (Respondent 6)

Respondent 9 felt that the political situation was negatively impacting business, as the depreciating Rand was a major headache. Respondent 6 suggested that retail is a tough environment:

*“Some businesses are closing down in the area, which will be good for us; we just have to withstand the storm.”*

Respondent 2 added there was little support by, or opportunities for engagement with the Department of Trade and Industry. Respondents wanted government to address import tariffs and road safety, to promote cycling as a lifestyle and alternative mode of transport. Respondent 7 questioned the logic of high tariffs meant to protect a local manufacturing industry that did not exist. The lack of skills, generally, was a concern for Respondent 9, who thought government should be investing in service and skills development.

Respondent 1 argued that as there is no commuter cycling culture, the sector is wholly dependent on events:

*“The cycling industry is event-driven. We have got world class events in South Africa. Since cycling is not used for commuting, like in Holland, events drive the sector, without which the sector would be dead”.*

Concerns about crime in general, and the safety of cyclists, in particular, were expressed by Respondent 4:

*“A guy was shot over the weekend at the Cradle [of Humankind] for his R85 000 bicycle. Several restaurants make money because of cyclists flocking to the area and we make money from the cyclists. If you go the Cradle now, it is quiet. It is a big concern not only for me but the industry as a whole.”*

With these results in mind, a discussion is now undertaken.

## **Discussion**

Most owners of the LBSs see themselves as ‘career cyclists’ in the leisure sense, and strongly resonate with the personal benefits and rewards of serious leisure cycling. That financial return had the lowest average score is unsurprising, as it is documented as the weakest serious leisure reward (Gould et al., 2008). Comments on staffing seem to align with Robles (2012), who argues that the changing nature of work and the impact of technology has resulted in shifts in the skills employers require. That is, technical or hard skills are no longer enough to maintain productivity, engagement and customer satisfaction. Businesses now place importance on soft skills such as interpersonal skills and personal attributes such as personality, likeability, communication, courtesy, integrity, time management, work ethic, teamwork, leadership and customer service (Nealy, 2005). Yet, as Lavender (2019) notes, soft skills are more difficult to acquire or change, hence the emphasis on hiring people with the right attitude. In this business, even as one progresses career wise, to management, the emphasis on soft skills never declines.

The findings of this study suggest that the LBS or cycling retail sector is predominantly servicing a middle-class, suburban sport and leisure market. The narrow customer profile seems largely due to the high cost of cycling equipment and event participation. Cycling in South Africa is, thus, like that of the Anglosphere. It is also seemingly part of the experience economy. As Pine and Gilmore (1998) have argued, the experience economy is when services and goods are sold by engaging with customers in a personal, memorable way. This is reflected in the present study, with some respondents recognising that their business model is selling experiences, such as group rides, cycling clubs, cycling events and cycling workshops, to name but a few. These offerings, which are not necessarily charged to the customer, help retain

customers and sell products. Differentiation, in terms of experiences, was also a response to multiple business threats, such as direct competition from online traders, large sports retailers and low profit margins. Additionally, the LBSs prioritised meaningful engagement and community development, consistent with the dual business and social goals they said they had. A similar sentiment was echoed by Whelan (2017) regarding SoulCycle, an indoor cycling fitness trend in the USA, which focuses on customer engagement, and seeing itself as part of a bigger experiential economy beyond fitness.

The responses in this study regarding lack of government support echo the work of Jennings (2015), who argues that at national, provincial and local levels, government has only a limited focus on cycling, at best, and one of cycling-as-utility despite their not building related cycling infrastructure, developing cycling policy and promoting awareness and education around cycling. There are Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) programmes, but in the context of South Africa's urban sprawl, travel distances, low compliance with traffic regulations, poor road safety, crime, politics and poverty, there is little evidence of any impact of this national "bicycle friendly" narrative in terms of greater adoption of cycling (McKay, 2020).

This is similar to the situation in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America, where Cox (2005) argued that the view of cycling by government is uninformed, and often counter-productive, as the diversity and complexity of the actors that make up the industry are ignored. He noted that government policy and actions do not adequately address the realities of the cycling industry. A case in point is the local South African brand Silverback. Launched in 2004, the company sold price-competitive performance bikes. Silverback was responsible for some key innovations (the first USB charging port on a commuter bike), as well as winning several international awards. In 2010, however, needing to be closer to their major markets (North America, Europe and China), Silverback moved to Germany (Marai, 2018). Failure to retain this company, despite import tariffs, suggests that the country's cycling industry is poorly understood and supported by the state. As the two cycling associations appear to be fragmented, agenda driven and ineffective, they are not assisting the cycling community, and have no formal engagement with any of the three spheres of government. The result is that the voice of the cyclist and the concerns of cycling retail remain unheard.

## Conclusion

It can be said that most LBS owners were serious leisure cyclists who launched a cycling enterprise from their leisure activity. There was a strong lifestyle-community element to the LBS businesses, with many promoting the social and community aspects of cycling through group rides, club affiliation, in-store events, branded apparel, coffee, training sessions, talks, and the like. This seems to stem as much from potential business return as from commitment to the growth and promotion of cycling itself. They also displayed elements of user entrepreneurship, leveraging personal experience and local knowledge to create and grow their enterprises. Furthermore, instances of sports innovation such as links to medical aid initiatives, bike insurance and finance, indicate a type of sports entrepreneur. Notably, they draw on their links to the cycling-as-sport community, cycling networks and cycling social capital, and in this way straddle lifestyle, sports and user entrepreneurship. As many were also part-classic entrepreneurs, there may be links between being a cyclist and being an entrepreneur. This would need further investigation. Additional offerings, investment in the cycling community and the type of employees they hire suggest that serious leisure cycling in South Africa is part of the experience economy. As generalisations from this study to the wider community of cycling cannot be made due to the methodology, it is recommended cycling as leisure is an investigation that should be replicated in South Africa's other major cities, such as Cape Town and Durban. Additionally, as Black African people have notably embraced road running and

adventure tourism of late, investigation into the uptake of cycling by this segment of the South African population is recommended.

Due to the lack of government and institutional support, as well as socio-economic challenges, local bike shops play a significant role in the local leisure cycling industry. Given this, government should engage these enterprises, at both the national and local arenas, to help promote cycling, especially utility cycling. Additionally, due to the importance of events in leisure cycling, event support from all levels of government, as well as the two cycling associations, would be welcomed by cyclists and LBSs alike. The positive spinoffs of the backward linkages associated with cycling events in terms of local economic development alone, are enough to justify this, without even considering the long-term health, social and community benefits of encouraging people to become cyclists. Lastly, these businesses play an important role yet face multiple business threats, so finding ways to support them, such as re-examining import duties, is vital.

### Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to Robert (Bob) A Carrihill (23/02/42 to 07/10/2020). Bob was chair of the Blind Tandem Cycling Association for roughly a decade and won the Blind Tandem Section of the Cape Argus twice (in the mid-90s), his favourite cycling race. He enjoyed racing the Jock of the Bushveld and completed the 94.7 event several times. Notably, he was the first blind cyclist to undertake the Joburg to Durban ride for the blind and the Tour de Durban. He was a renounced bike mechanic and bike builder, although lamented that his lack of sight meant he needed help setting the brakes! His enthusiasm for cycling was never curbed by his lack of sight or hearing, cycling most weekends even in retirement. Later in life he survived multiple cancers, never afraid of pain and always looking to the future

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