

The Nature and Characteristics of Domestic Sports Tourism in Central Africa: The Case of Cameroon

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Abstract

This study is premised on the idea that sporting events have been used as part of strategic tourism development, particularly for the domestic tourism market. The study examines the nature and characteristics of domestic sport tourism in Central Africa using the context of Cameroon. Using data collected from event attendees (n=963) across multiple events within various time frames, and interviews conducted with 16 key stakeholders involved in sport and tourism, the key findings from this enquiry revealed that many of the domestic sport tourists are educated and employed youth, who travel to different provinces from urban cities and are motivated by both the sport and VFR intentions. They tended to link the event attendance with other commitments with friends and relatives as well as trading and business endeavours in the informal business sector. Thus, the study contributes to an enhanced understanding of domestic sports tourism, especially within the Central African region underscoring its significance as a sector with potential to further harness domestic tourism benefits for host destinations.

Keywords: domestic tourism; sport tourism; Cameroon; tourism planning; sustainability

Introduction

The concept of domestic tourism has grown over the years and is used to refer to all the tourism activities of a resident of a country travelling to a main destination within the country of residence (Nengovhela et al., 2017). According to Acha-Anyi (2018), domestic tourism can be looked at as a kind of tourism that is a combination of tourism activities that are undertaken by citizens of a particular country or are permanently resident in such a country. Thus, in the context of this study, domestic sports tourism is argued to play an important role in the development of Cameroon and Africa generally, especially if its development is geared towards specific aims and strategic endeavours linked to destination management in local areas (see Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2020; Tichaawa & Hemmonsbey, 2022; Tichaawa et al., 2018). This is on the backdrop of sport tourism events being oftentimes used as a means of achieving economic development and ensuring increased tourism revenue opportunities that are available at many local destinations, resulting in enhanced domestic tourism (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Higham, 1999; Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017; Lesjak et al., 2017; Mchunu et al., 2021). The central idea behind using such events is linked to the observation by Acha-Anyi (2018) that despite the great tourism potential in many African countries, the actual realization is that the potential has not translated into real advantages in terms of tourist numbers and receipts. Therefore, the strategic use of these events often makes

a positive contribution to the visitor numbers to local areas because they often attract visitors from many different areas, increasing tourism arrivals in the short- and long-term (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Ehsani et al., 2012; Lin & Lu, 2017; Magangqaza et al., 2022; Namethe et al., 2021; Nyikana et al., 2014; Tichaawa & Hemmonsbey, 2022).

Sport tourism events also have the added advantage of bringing about new market segments to a destination, which otherwise would not have come about in the particular destination (Lin & Lu, 2017). According to Giampiccoli and Nauright (2010), as well as Tichaawa et al. (2018), these events play an important role in terms of promoting tourism figures at a host destination. Resultantly, they are used as part of a broader marketing and developmental initiatives, particularly in the developed world context (Nyikana et al., 2014; Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020; Tichaawa & Hemmonsbey, 2022). This is also largely linked to the fact that the events in question are often linked with significant media exposure both in preparation for the event and well after the event, which in turn enhances the opportunities that are provided at the destination for visitation and tourism (Bob et al., 2020; Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018; Hritz & Cecil, 2019; Ishac et al., 2022). Given these benefits, it is clear that sport tourism events play a very important role in terms of serving host destinations as drivers of tourism, and socio-economic development generally.

In the African context, tourism has been identified as a critical enabler through which development can be achieved by many countries (Dieke, 2003; Kimbu, 2012; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2021; Nengovhela et al., 2017; Rogerson, 2019; Tichaawa & Kimbu, 2019). This is why sports tourism, as a type of tourism, has been tasked with enriching the overall contributions that are made by tourism to the economies in the continent (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Hemmonsbey et al., 2021; McEwan et al., 2020; Nyikana et al., 2021; Tichaawa & Bob, 2015). However, for this to be done effectively, there is a need to understand the nature of domestic sports tourism in the continent and the characteristics of domestic sport tourists accordingly. As argued by Slak Valek et al. (2014), the effective management of sport tourism requires that there be a comprehensive understanding of the differences between the different markets that consume sports tourism. They argue that the understanding of the differences in socioeconomic characteristics leads to better development and management of sport tourism for host destinations.

In any case, sports tourism analysis generally tends to be skewed towards the Global North context, with little attention being directed to some economies in the Global South. Even in the analysis that has been conducted in the Global South, there are important aspects that have been neglected, particularly relating to the characteristics of the domestic sport tourists in the African countries that have sought to develop sports tourism. In this study, we argue that domestic sport tourists are different based on the unique domestic context. Therefore, for sports tourism to be developed strategically as a vehicle for growth, context-specific empirical data is needed to inform the direction of the planning and development accordingly.

Moreover, research endeavours on the concept of sport tourism in Central Africa are generally scant. While there has been a phenomenal growth in the analysis of the cause and effects and well as the dynamics of such a niche sector, it is acknowledged that in recent times it has received wide attention from scholars on the African continent (see Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Hemmonsbey et al., 2021; Magangqaza et al., 2022; Mchunu et al., 2021; 2022; Namethe et al., 2021; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2020; Nyikana et al., 2014; Tichaawa & Hemmonsbey, 2022; Tichaawa et al., 2018). The research has mainly focused on prominent destinations that have developed and harnessed the sector as a viable economic activity owing to adopted tourism policies in this regard. In addition, most of the research has tended to focus on the international aspects of sport tourism, especially where the hosting of events are concerned.

Using the case of Cameroon, we unpack the nature of domestic sports tourism as well as the characteristics associated with this niche sector.

The novelty of the research endeavour lies in the analysis of domestic sport tourists at different sporting events with a view to enhance the understanding of what drives sport event attendance, and what kind of impacts such events have on different domestic localities. Next, we provide a review of literature that contextualizes sport tourism. Later, the methods adopted, the findings and discussion as well as the study implications are presented.

Literature review

Sports tourism in context

Sports tourism has become a major component of planning in cities and regions, with this niche sector becoming particularly attractive for transitioning economies as a socio-economic development tool (Achu et al., 2022; Gammon et al., 2017; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018a; Uvinha et al., 2018). The sports tourism sector is one of the fastest-growing typologies of tourism (Lesjak et al., 2015) and as such, has gained great global appeal and prominence (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2020; McKay et al., 2019; Mchunu et al., 2021). By way of definition, sports tourism concerns itself with the participation in active and passive, commercial and non-commercial sporting activities that typically occur beyond one's normal place of stay and work (Tichaawa et al., 2018). Margvelashvili (2021) aptly summarizes it as the combination of sporting experiences wherein the travel to a destination and the interdependence of the experience with the destination all make up sports tourism. Such has been the growth and development of this field in recent years that some scholars have noted how many global governments have now emphasized its development as a way of achieving socioeconomic growth in their respective economies (Bob et al., 2020; Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Gammon & Ramshaw, 2013; Mchunu et al., 2021; Tichaawa et al., 2018). In fact, Lesjak et al. (2017) are of the view that such prominence is a result of the fact that sports tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in tourism globally. Hritz and Ross (2010) observe how such rapid growth in this sector has led to it being acknowledged for the crucial role it plays in economic and socio-environmental changes that it brings to host destinations.

According to Tichaawa et al. (2015), sports tourism is perceived to pose several benefits to host destinations including the fast-tracking of broader socio-economic development and branding and profiling of such destinations. In particular, developing countries have sought to strategically use sports tourism as a growth mechanism that unlocks the opportunities that are presented by the tourism industry (Bob & Swart, 2010; Mchunu et al., 2021). Such opportunities can be direct, indirect and induced, stemming largely from the sport tourists who travel to participate in or attend sporting events (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017). Sport tourism events are seen as an important attraction within sports tourism as they bring sport tourists, who often engage in a range of activities at the destination (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017; Tichaawa et al., 2018). Sporting events are seen as a key economic development tool especially due to their strong links with positive imaging and identities, the potential for inward investment and broader tourism promotion ability (Higham, 1999; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2020). In other work, Palrao (2018) has contended that sporting events serve as key attractions for tourism activity at the destination. This is on the basis that those who visit to participate in sporting events, tend to also engage in other activities before or after the actual sporting event in question. In this regard, the above-cited scholars unanimously identify sporting events as a fast-growing phenomenon in recent times and as such, are used to draw masses of people to different destinations.

According to Holmes and Ali-Knight (2017), the events in question share a very close relationship with the destinations wherein they are hosted owing to their ability to extend the

traditional tourist season. In this way, they argue that these events attract many people in the tourist “off-peak” season, which in turn builds on the existing destination marketing and imaging efforts (Holmes & Ali-Knight, 2017; Nyikana et al., 2014). Besides, such arrivals during the “off-peak” periods go a great length in assisting the concerned destinations with their efforts at combating seasonality, through which the events serve as an additional motivation to visit the destination during a time when arrivals are relatively low (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018b; Palrao, 2018). In summation, sport tourism events can create a favourable image for a destination by attracting tourists that might have otherwise not visited, while simultaneously playing a role in evenly spreading tourism demand for those destinations (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019; Tichaawa et al., 2015). However, in the extant literature, very little has been done to understand the domestic sport tourism markets and their characteristics, particularly as relating to the tourism potential of events that occur regularly at the local, regional and domestic levels.

Domestic sport tourism

Early works by Higham (1999) and later Hinch and Higham (2011) show that the domain of domestic sports tourism, and specifically small-scale sport tourism events and its contribution to host regions has largely been neglected in the analysis of sport tourism. This is despite the growing recognition that such events tend to play a complementary role to the existing infrastructure and facility capacity of local host cities when compared to large-scale international events (Gibson et al., 2012; Higham, 1999; Mchunu et al., 2021; Nyikana, 2019). The close links that such events have with the key features of a destination make them an important area for academic focus. As argued in earlier works by Weed and Bull (2004), sports tourism generally tends to be made up of interaction between activities (i.e. sport), people (i.e. the sport tourists) and a place (i.e. the host destination). Against the above description, it is plausible to understand the importance of the distinctive elements involved, especially the sport tourists because they travel and invest resources like time and money in sports consumption. Lesjak et al. (2017) stress the importance of sport tourism event attendees, indicating that such attendees are key role-players in the industry who bring about much-needed impacts to the destination, particularly outside the peak tourist seasons as argued above. Sports tourism event attendees are brought together by their common interest in sports but tend to come from a varied range of socio-demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, income and lifestyle segments (Morgan, 2007). This unique amalgamation of a group of people requires careful analysis especially at the national and local levels to gain broader comprehension (Morgan, 2007; Nyikana et al., 2014; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018a). Understanding such people and groups ought to provide a strategic position for the analysis of their wide range of leisure-based interests beyond the event space and enable systematic planning which ignites broader tourism pursuits from them, beyond just event attendance (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018a).

In considering the above arguments, this study places great importance on understanding domestic sport tourists more deeply than previously to tailor the industry to respond to the needs of these tourists in the Cameroon context, and other similar destinations in Central Africa. Importantly, sport tourists differ from other types of tourists because they can be individuals or groups, and participate actively or passively in sports while travelling, irrespective of the nature of the sport in terms of competitive or recreational sports (Gammon & Robinson, 1997; Gibson, 2013, Lesjak et al., 2017). Notwithstanding the above, McKay et al. (2019) caution against viewing sport tourists as a homogenous group, but rather advocate for a view of them as different people with different characteristics and preferences that are likely crucial in their individual decision-making processes. A similar notion is raised by Morgan (2007) who feels that sport tourists be looked at from an individual basis instead of a

homogenous or collective perspective. To understand sport tourists, especially at the domestic level, Róbert et al. (2016) suggest that certain dimensions be considered, including the underlying motivations for attendance at sporting events, as well as the behaviour and the needs of the sport tourism event attendees. In any case, for a better understanding of the nature of sport tourists specifically, the three main categories of active-based sport tourists, event-based sport tourists and nostalgia-based sport tourists should be considered (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017; Gibson, 2013; Saayman, 2012). These categories are inclusive of people who travel to take part in a competition, to spectate in sporting competitions and thus become fans and those who travel to see famous sports places and events as well as museums, statues and famous sports personalities respectively. The different dimensions present different behaviours at the host destinations, and thus warrant empirical research, especially in different destination contexts. As argued by Nyikana and Tichaawa (2020), the African continent for example has an additional dimension of sport tourist, who travel to events for the sole purpose of trading and informal business engagement. This dimension is largely neglected in the existing literature, despite being apparent, and playing a key role in the nature of the sporting event on offer, especially on the continent.

Methodology

The domain of sports tourism has shown notable growth in Cameroon, owing to the contributions that it has made to the tourism economy in recent times (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018b). According to Kimbu (2012), tourism generally has continued to grow and contribute significantly to the national economy of Cameroon, although still not playing a role comparable to other dominant industries there. The sector's contribution in terms of tourist spending is predominantly split between leisure and business travel. Interestingly, domestic tourist spending is very dominant (77%) when compared to international spending, suggesting that domestic tourism plays a big role in Cameroon (Tichaawa, 2017; Tichaawa 2021). In this regard, sport as a source of sport tourism activities is poised to play a major role in boosting domestic tourism because sport is very popular among the citizenry of the country (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018b). This is because sporting events, irrespective of the magnitude or level at which it is played, are well attended, often presenting a platform for informal business and trading opportunities for locals (Tichaawa, 2017). In this way, such events are seen as key contributors to employment creation.

Against the context presented above, and in order to meet the objectives of this study concerning understanding the nature of domestic sports tourism in Cameroon, an exploratory sequential mixed-method research design was employed, where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the collection and analysis of data. Firstly, a comprehensive review of literature, coupled with a documentary analysis of the development of tourism generally, the development of sport, and the policy direction for socioeconomic development and growth in Cameroon was conducted. From this review, key themes were noted and modelled into key focus areas for the first phase of data collection. In this respect, in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders in sport and tourism at the domestic levels of government and the private sector. These stakeholders were purposively selected for the study owing to their experience, knowledge and understanding of sport tourism in Cameroon. Initially, seven stakeholders were identified for this purpose. Once the initial interviews were conducted, a snowball sampling approach was used, wherein the interviewee was requested to recommend a contact who is in the same or similar role and could provide the required information for the study. In total, sixteen (n=16) such stakeholders were interviewed for this study after the data collection period was concluded and saturation achieved. Interviews were conducted at convenient locations for the participants, with many

choosing to have the interview at their workplace. The interviews were recorded, with the permission of those participating in them, transcribed word verbatim and analysed thematically using the constant comparative method.

The results from the interviews provided a context for the assessment of sport tourism events, particularly the nature and behavioural aspects of event attendees there. Subsequently, questionnaire surveys were administered to event attendees (n=963) at four prominent sporting events in Cameroon as shown in Table 1 below over a 3-year period (2016-2019). Given that the total sample size of the respondents at the stadium and event spaces could not be known in advance, a spatially-based systematic random sampling technique was used on event days. This technique suggests that there be a representation of the fieldworkers at all the geographic spaces of the event, and then the first respondent is approached randomly. Thereafter, for this study, the systematic interval was identified at every tenth (10th) attendee. This interval was estimated based on general capacity and previous attendance at the event locations involved.

Table 1: Distribution of surveys (n=963)

<i>Name of event</i>	<i>Total number of questionnaires</i>
2016 Africa Women Cup of Nations	310
Mount Cameroon Race of Hope	165
Central African University Games	244
Elite One Premier League matches	244

The questionnaire surveys were self-administered. They were distributed according to the ratios shown above. Where there were challenges experienced with self-administration, the trained fieldworkers were available to assist so that all questionnaires were completed. On completion of the data collection period, all the surveys were quality checked, then coded, and finally captured accordingly. In the above regard, the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, software was used to capture the quantitative data for this paper. The findings therefrom are presented in the following section alongside the key thematic discussions which emerged from the qualitative phase of data collection.

Results and discussion

Profiles of domestic sport tourists in Cameroon

Table 2 show the profiles of domestic sport tourists in Cameroon. The key findings of the study revealed that in terms of gender representation, an almost split distribution was noted with the majority of them (53%) being men, and 47% being women. This finding was not surprising given the considerable growth in the number of women involved in sport tourism events, with suggestions that the sector is no longer male-dominated (see for example Jones, 2008; Tichaawa, 2013; Achu, 2019). Generally, the majority of the attendees were youthful between 18 and 40 years of age. The key informants that were interviewed were predominantly in the age category of between 41 and 50 years of age. The respondents were well educated given that a combined majority had obtained a form of qualification ranging from a minimum of a diploma or higher certificate, right up to a postgraduate degree. This was backed up by the large number of those who were either full-time, part-time employees or self-employed. In terms of province of residence, the findings show that the attendees came from all ten provinces of Cameroon, suggesting that generally they tend to travel around the country for sporting event attendance.

Table 2: Summary of socio-demographic profile of respondents (n=963)

Demographic variable measured	
Gender	Percentage
Male	53.0
Female	47.0
Age	
18-20	28.1
21-30	32.7
31-40	25.4
41-50	8.4
51-60	3.0
61<	2.4
Highest level of education attained	
Undergraduate degree completed	30.6
Secondary schooling / high school completed	30.3
Certificate / Diploma completed	15.2
Postgraduate degree completed	15.1
Primary schooling completed	5.3
No formal education	1.9
Employment status	
Unemployed	8.8
Housewife	4.8
Student	11.2
Part-time employed	13.4
Full-time employed	47.9
Self-employed	10.6
Retired	3.3
Province of residence	
South-West	29.7
North-West	28.3
West	9.9
Littoral	9.1
Centre	8.2
East	7.0
Adamawa	2.5
South	2.4
North	1.6
Extreme North	1.3

Type of involvement in sports tourism in Cameroon

The first aspect explored in terms of the analysis of the nature and characteristics of sport tourism in the domestic context of Cameroon was to gauge the extent of involvement in sport tourism as seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Involvement in sport tourism in Cameroon (n=963)

Type of involvement	
As a spectator	67.9
As a volunteer	20.0
As a participant	18.7
I am not involved	15.7
As a worker	11.5
As an organizer	7.3

A majority of the surveyed respondents (67.9%) were found to be involved as spectators at sporting events, while a notable number (18.7%) were volunteers. This finding is consistent with that of Nyikana and Tichaawa (2018b) as well as Smith and Stewart (2007), who note that sports enthusiasts are largely involved in sports tourism-related activities such as attending or participating in sporting events, watching sports games on TV and listening to the commentary on sports on the radio. On the aspect of volunteering linked to planning, organization and management of sporting events, Nyikana (2013) notes that event volunteers generally tend to

acquire different sets of skills that serve them in the long term. In this regard, the question of the strategic planning for domestic sports tourism, especially human resources becomes an important consideration for improved experiences and continued development of the sport tourism sector in the Cameroon context.

Factors driving sports tourism in Cameroon

On a four-point Likert-type scale, respondents were asked to rate the activities that motivated them to visit event locations and participate in sporting events. The Likert scale consisted of the options ‘very unimportant’, ‘unimportant’, ‘important’ and ‘very important’, as shown in Table 4 below. For ease of presentation and context, the ‘very unimportant’ and ‘unimportant’ were added together, ditto the ‘important’ and ‘very important’ results in the presentation. The study finds that a majority of the respondents (83.3%) considered entertainment to be an important motivating factor when choosing a sporting event to attend. The second highest ranked motivation was the opportunity that an event would provide to also visit friends and relatives (VFR) in a particular destination (82.8%). This was followed by those who rated the event location (80.9%), family getaway (80.4%), as well as business and trading opportunities presented by the event (79.7%), as the most popular factors noted.

When analyzing these motivating factors in the context of Cameroon, some key observations can be made. Firstly, in the existing sports tourism literature generally, (see for example Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018c; Destination British Columbia, 2013; Smith & Stewart, 2007) it is highlighted that sporting events are mostly family-orientated and as such, present opportunities for families to spend time together. In the interviews with the key informant personnel in this study, it is also stressed that event attendees tend to link event attendance with the opportunity to visit family and friends who are around the destinations where the sporting event takes place. As summarized by one interview participant from the tourism domain in Cameroon:

In Cameroon, we have a very active domestic tourism market which is largely driven by VFR. You will see that a lot of people who go to watch sports are actually from a different city, but are visiting their friends and relatives. They spend maybe a weekend and use that time to catch up, but also to do shopping for unique items found only locally....

Based on this response, observations are made that sports tourism is also driven by the VFR component within the Cameroonian context. But an additional observation is also noted for the ability of sporting events to serve as a platform for entrepreneurial activities for locals which is the second critical point to consider in this context. In this regard, sport tourism events are increasingly presenting unique opportunities for the informal business sector to capitalize on event attendance and participation (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018c; Tichaawa, 2021). Typically, the informal business sector in Cameroon includes local entrepreneurs that use local sporting events to sell their goods at different event locations (Tichaawa, 2017). In the context of the present study, most of the respondents (79.7%) noted that they attended sporting events to conduct their business and trading activities, which strongly aligns with the above assertion. The key informants revealed that these sports attendees travelled from different locations that are far from the event location, intending to conduct informal business and trading activities. An official involved in the development of regional sport in Cameroon explained that:

Sport is a big part of the life of Cameroonians, especially football. When teams are travelling to play in a different place, they are followed by many people, who dress up



in their cultural attire so that when they are at that destination they can compete with other cultures. So as they travel, they buy unique cultural items and crafts which they can sell when they reach the destination. When they are at that place, they also go shopping there, so that they can return with unique items that they resell around their area and so on.

Another interviewee explained this by saying:

When an event is hosted, such as the Mount Cameroon Race of Hope, the local people get very active in engaging in informal businesses. Some sell food to attendees, others sell sports and traditional merchandise. Others sell beverages because attendees love their beers. Even the visitors go to our local markets in search of unique items that they can take back to other sporting events to resell.

These views strongly support the notion that sporting events can serve as an ideal opportunity for entrepreneurial activity, especially linked to the informal sector. In fact, the motivation to attend the sporting event seems to have strong links to entrepreneurship, with some interviewees going as far as suggesting that the informal traders purchase tickets to sell their items inside the stadium itself. Above this, the close links that this kind of motivation has with the domestic VFR market is also noted as well as the event location. Regarding the latter, the interviewees suggested that most of the prominent events are held in the urban areas of Cameroon, and therefore become more attractive for people in the outskirts to visit and attend. The urban facilities and easily available transportation and business opportunities are the key drivers towards this motivation in this regard.

Table 4: Common factors driving sport tourism in Cameroon (n=963)

Motivating factor	Very unimportant	Unimportant	Important	Very important
Entertainment available	4.5	12.2	41.2	42.1
The event location	7.6	11.5	41.0	39.9
Tourism opportunities available	4.8	15.5	41.0	38.7
Visiting friends and relatives	6.7	10.5	37.1	45.7
Shopping	11.8	16.7	26.9	44.6
Family getaway and quality time	4.3	15.3	34.0	46.4
Business and trading reasons	4.0	16.3	44.5	35.2

Duration of stay at the event location

The respondents were next asked to indicate how long they stayed at the event location generally. The results revealed that most of the respondents stayed at the destination for the duration of the event (27.9%), closely followed by those who stayed for the weekend (22.3%) or a few hours during the event, after which they left the event location (18.4%). The remaining sample was made up of respondents who stayed overnight at the event locations (14.1%) and those who stayed three nights or more at the destination (5.0%). Such findings confirm the suggestions from the interviews that event attendance tended to be linked with VFR and entrepreneurial activity, which warranted a stay of at least a weekend at the event destination. The two factors of VFR and informal business and trading in particular would likely require the attendees to spend more time in the destination given that they would be spending it with family and friends or using it to buy and sell goods in the event host destination.

Table 5: Duration of stay at the event location (n=963)

Duration of stay	Percentage
The duration of the event	27.9
The weekend	22.3
A few hours, after I left the event	18.4
Overnight	14.1
Three nights or more	5.0

Economic impacts of sports tourism events

In the extant literature on sports tourism, it is noted that many destinations globally, have used sport tourism events as a strategic tool for the advancement of socio-economic growth and development as well as destination branding (Malchrowicz-Mosko, 2017; Mchunu, Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2022; Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020; Tichaawa & Hemmonsbey, 2022; Tinaz & Knott, 2021; Zhou & Kaplanidou, 2018). The results of this strategic focus have been observed through a series of things including, but not limited to increased foreign investments, increase in international trade opportunities and relationships as well as opportunities for destinations to expand their economies (Gibson & Fairley, 2022; Higham & Hinch, 2018; Lin & Lu, 2017). Furthermore, sports tourism literature has widely focused on the economic value and potential benefits of sport tourism events, particularly for local contexts. As such, in attempting to gain a broader understanding of the nature of sport tourism in Cameroon, this study also sought to gauge whether respondents perceived sports tourism to create economic value and opportunities for localities in the country. In this way, it was envisaged that the responses would contribute to the enhanced understanding of the characteristics of sport tourism generally in this context. The findings in this regard are shown in Table 6 below. A majority of the respondents (67.1%) were found to be in agreement that sport tourism events present economic opportunities for Cameroon generally, particularly relating to foreign exchange earnings and regional development. Regarding the ability of sport tourism events to serve as a springboard for the broader development of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), a majority of the respondents (62%) were in agreement. In support of these observations, an official from the Ministry of Tourism indicated that:

When we host events, we anticipate that in time our bigger events will bring in more people from other countries who can then make a contribution to our [foreign exchange] accounts. This will then grow the economy and provide more opportunities for our people, but it needs to be planned more. Right now everything is centralized at the national level of government, so we need more collaborations.

Another official, from a major sponsor of sports in Cameroon, indicated that:

Over the years we have seen that people are drawn to the opportunities the sporting events bring. You know people come up with business ideas to sell things, and sometimes they are so successful in one event that they end up in business full-time or they move around following the events.

The findings above are important when considering that Mabugu and Mohamed (2008) emphasise the importance of sport tourism events in creating entrepreneurial opportunities for locals, particularly unemployed youth. In Cameroon, in recent times such events have opened up opportunities for the informal business sector (Tichaawa, 2017) and these findings confirm this.

On a more negative viewpoint, some scholars have opined that sport tourism events have been noted to increase the cost of living for host destinations, linked to the common



practice of increased prices of local goods and services in the face of tourists visiting the destination (Nyikana et al., 2014; Bama & Tichaawa, 2012). Deccio and Baloglu (2002) suggested that these increases were linked to the increased economic activity during a period of event hosting, which leads to opportunistic price inflation. The majority of respondents (54.5%) in this study felt that sporting events indeed lead to an increase in the cost of living for host destinations. Despite this, there was a notable number of attendees (24%) who opposed this view, suggesting that no such changes in the prices were seen linked to hosting events. Equally, some took a neutral stance on the matter (21.5%), perhaps visitors to the event who did not have enough time at the destination to gauge the general prices of goods and services and thus have such a comparison. The next statement, linked to the previous one related to whether sporting events caused seasonality in income and thus led to an unstable economy. The findings in this regard were relatively split between those who agreed (42%), disagreed (25.8%) and those who were neutral on the matter (32.2%).

Table 6: Economic impacts of sport tourism events (n=963)

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
Sport tourism events bring about foreign exchange earnings and regional development for the community	5.3	7.3	20.3	32.2	34.9
Sport tourism events encourage the development of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs)	4.6	12.5	20.9	33.9	28.1
Sport tourism events increase the cost of living and result in the increased prices of goods and services	5.4	18.6	21.5	33.6	20.9
Sport events cause seasonality in income, resulting in an unstable local economy	6.1	19.7	32.2	24.5	17.5
Many people who visit the area do so because of sport events	13.0	17.3	19.6	29.1	21.0

SD= strongly disagree; D=disagree; N= neither agree/disagree; A= agree; SA= strongly agree

Admittedly, a majority of them were more inclined to agree that these events create an unstable economy due to their irregular hosting which meant that the benefits from them from an employment perspective were seasonal and unpredictable to an extent. However, the majority of the attendees (50.1%) felt that many people who visited the destinations where these events were hosted did so because of the events. In other words, sporting events are seen as a major drawcard for visitors and tourists to the different destinations wherein these events are hosted. To a degree, this sentiment was echoed in the interviews with a manager of an accommodation establishment suggesting that:

We are always looking forward to events being hosted around here because we know that a lot of people from other cities will come and maybe book with us. We have a challenge with many people complaining that we are expensive and so they go to stay with their friends and family, but at least we still get some who want to be in our accommodation. So if there are many more events, we are going to gain.

An official from the local sports sector agreed with this but observed that:

Big football matches and marathons can bring many people to a city or area. But it is difficult to gain all the benefits because decisions are centralized to the higher offices in Yaoundé. So on the ground, we would like to involve different parties [stakeholders] like accommodation, tourism people and others, but it's impossible for us. If they can be part of the planning, then we can all get these benefits.

Ultimately, the findings point to great potential being there for sports tourism to play a bigger role in the socio-economic development of Cameroon. However, for this to be achieved,

and the benefits of the events effectively leveraged for the benefit of all stakeholders, more collaboration is needed. The criticism labelled towards the disintegrated nature of collective planning and the lack of collaboration points to a missed opportunity for the development of sport tourism there. Thus, Cameroonian sports tourism is characterized by great potential, which has not been strategically capitalized on especially for the growth of the domestic tourism market.

Conclusion

This study analysed the nature and characteristics of domestic sports tourism in Central Africa, using Cameroon as a case study. The key findings suggest that domestic sports tourism in this context is characterised by regular attendance at sporting events by young educated youth. These attendees travel from different cities, with a motivation linked to the entertainment provided by the sporting events on offer. They tend to be involved in these events as spectators, volunteers or participants. Interestingly, they combine their attendance at these events with a chance to visit and stay with friends and relatives. Although this aspect can be argued to serve as an obstacle for accommodation establishments, it provides an economic impetus as there is spending in the local economy. In this regard, entrepreneurial activity, especially in the informal business sector is enhanced.

The study finds that many such attendees travel from one area to another with the purpose of buying and selling unique items around the different sporting venues that host events. As such, they become regular attendees at events, to the extent that they buy tickets where applicable and conduct their informal trading inside the stadium and around the stadium precinct. Thus sporting events, as a product of sport tourism play an important role in contributing to local economic development in the host destinations. The study therefore strongly advocates for a more comprehensive and consolidated approach to planning and managing sports tourism generally. Consequently, an argument is made for more collaboration between the private and the public sector in both the sports and tourism domains there. Whilst this study provides a starting point for an enhanced understanding of sport tourism in Cameroon, the key findings are important for the enhanced management of this sector such that it can play a bigger role in line with its potential in that and other similar contexts in Central Africa. Given that the factors of entertainment, VFR and trading/business opportunities were noted to be key drivers of sport tourism, much needs to be done to strategically plan for the growth of this sector so that it may be a key driver of a growing and vibrant domestic tourism market in Cameroon. The novelty of the research endeavour lies in the analysis of domestic sport tourists at different sporting events with a view to enhance the understanding of what drives sport event attendance, and what kind of impacts such events have on different domestic localities. Contrary to what is “known” in the developed world domestic sport tourism context, this research has revealed unique aspects and characteristics of domestic sport tourism in the Central African context, strongly linking it to VFR and informal business, besides the entertainment value often associated with events.

Despite the above, caution needs to be observed based on a number of limitations. Firstly, the data presented here was collected in phases (from 2016-2019) and thus may present challenges in terms of consistency in the perceptions gained. Consequently, the event attendees could have had different views if they were all surveyed at the same time. But the events identified did not take place at the same time. Secondly, a purposive biased approach was used in identifying the stakeholders to be interviewed. Although the reasoning and justification for this were explained in the methodology, the authors state this as a limitation. Finally, only major sporting events were targeted and perhaps the characteristics of the attendees in particular at smaller-scale events may differ from those presented herein.

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