

Strategic Conceptualisation of the South African Sport Tourism Sector's Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the practical and policy-based implications for the South African sport tourism organisations by highlighting strategic approaches to rethinking sport tourism planning and management. A content analysis of published academic and industry papers that focused on disaster management or mitigation within the sport tourism context, within a global and local context were analysed and thematically coded. The results reveal the vulnerability of the sport tourism industry to global threats while highlighting the lack of preparedness of this sector to strategically respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous pandemics and disasters may provide an impetus for rethinking sport event hosting as well as travel and tourism, however not without substantial financial investments and government support. The resilient theory emphasises the synergistic effects of crisis management in sport tourism. This study proposes strategies to guide industry stakeholders towards a research agenda that is based on identified gaps in knowledge within the sport tourism field in order to rethink sport tourism. This paper also contributes to the extant knowledge on crisis management and disaster management by incorporating strategic perspectives of resilient theory. There is significant value to current policies and practices regarding new strategic approaches to crisis management in sport tourism.

Keywords: Sport tourism; crisis management; sport events; COVID-19; South Africa

Introduction

In light of the threat of the COVID-19 coronavirus on the health and safety of all people in South Africa, the City of Cape Town took the decision to revoke all permits for previously approved events (African News Agency, 2020). This decision was taken after President Cyril Ramaphosa's announcement to the nation in March 2020 on several controls including outbound travel restrictions from high-risk countries such as, at the time: Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Germany, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and China. Domestic travel was initially discouraged, before being completely prohibited. Initially, only mass gatherings of more than 100 people were prohibited. Where smaller event gatherings were

unavoidable, event organisers had to put in place stringent measures of prevention and control. The cancellation of events was the responsibility of the event organiser/ owner (Western Cape Government, 2020).

Some events had already decided to cancel or postpone big gatherings prior to this announcement. To name a few, the Cape Town International Jazz Festival (postponed), the Cape Town Carnival (cancelled), the Over 50's Cricket World Cup (cancelled), and the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival (cancelled). An unprecedented number of local sporting events, including the Two Oceans Marathon, were also cancelled during this period. While the majority of the Western Cape's events were faced with drastic decisions to cancel or postpone due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Cape Town Cycle Tour (CTCT) - the world's largest timed cycle race of approximately 35 000 participants from about 70 countries - decided to continue to host the event on March 8th. Up until then, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in South Africa had not yet issued a directive or suggestion to call off any major sporting events in the country. However, the CTCT event still ensured the health and safety of all entrants (Richardson, 2020). Reported precautionary measures implemented by event organisers of the CTCT included the testing and isolating measures by trained medical staff to anybody who presented symptoms before, during or immediately after the event. The event organiser confirmed that nine entries from Italy had withdrawn from the race (SABCNewsOnline, 2020).

After the subsequent commencement of a period of complete lockdown in South Africa from 27 March, all travel and events were prohibited. Table 1 sets out a timeline of these restrictions and events for the local industry in response to the global outbreak. The cancellation or postponement of sport tourism events and activities as a result of the COVID-19 virus has presented unprecedented challenges to the local sport tourism industry. Although other regions of the globe have experienced severe disruptions from previous disease outbreaks or security threats, South Africa has largely been shielded from these since the time of its re-emergence into the global sport and travel sphere post the isolation years of apartheid.

Table 1: Timeline of COVID-19 impacts for the sport tourism sector in South Africa

Start of novel Coronavirus disease (2019-nCoV)	December 2019 in Wuhan
First cases of COVID-19 identified and reported	December 2019 in Wuhan China
Global spread of COVID-19 identified	24 & 29 January 2020 in France (3 cases imported from Wuhan) 28 January 2020 in Germany (3 cases indirect links to Wuhan) 29 January 2020 in Finland (imported case from Wuhan)
First COVID-19 case in South Africa confirmed by the NICD	5 March 2020 in Kwa-Zulu Natal
Cape Town Cycle Tour event	8 March 2020
Initial government restrictions enforced: no events with more than 100 people and limited travel.	17 March 2020
Lockdown Level 5 commenced: no sport events and no leisure or business travel permitted.	27 March
Current statistics of COVID-19 cases reported in South Africa	August 2020: surpassing 500 000 active cases and over 11 000 deaths. South Africa records the 5 th highest number of cases worldwide.

Source: Based on fieldwork

The sport tourism industry is defined by Turco, Riley and Swart (2002: 23) as follows: “all the people, places and activities that influence and are impacted by sport tourists. It is the collections of business, institutions, resources and people servicing sport tourists”. Over the last couple of decades, sport and tourism have become significant economic activities, both in the developed and developing world (Swart & Bob, 2007; Tichaawa, Bob & Swart, 2018) and

sport tourism makes an important contribution to local and national economies (see Deery & Jago, 2006; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018a, 2018b).

Globally, the sport tourism industry has seen significant growth over the past decade as a result of both the exponential growth of international tourism and the continued commercial expansion of sport. Just a few years ago, sport tourism was estimated to be a \$600 billion global business (WTM, 2017) and, until recently, still viewed as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global travel and tourism industry (United Nations World Tourism Organisation, 2019). With the devastating impact of COVID-19 for each of the intersecting areas of professional sport events (see Swart & Maralack, 2020) and global tourism (see for example Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020), it remains to be seen what the future of the sport tourism industry will look like and how it will change in order to adapt to changing global conditions. The pandemic has clearly dealt an economic blow to many nations through the postponement or cancellation of sport tourism activities, especially in emerging nation contexts. The scale of the global disruption to the sector is highlighted by the postponement and potential cancellation or curtailment of sport mega-events such as the UEFA Euro 2020, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games and the 2021 IAAF World Championships, among others.

In order to conceptualise the changes for the sport tourism industry in South Africa, this paper applied the resilience theory concept within the sport tourism framework in order to propose key strategic decisions and actions for South African sport tourism stakeholders to consider in order to re-start the industry. Such may be applicable in the wider pan African context as well.

Literature review

Resilience theory

The concept of resilience has recently been theorised and applied in several settings such as business organisations, communities, and socio-ecological contexts. According to Cheer and Lew (2017), the resilience theory posits that change is fundamental and it is the only constant that we can depend on. To this end, Jones and Comfort (2020) suggest that resilience is simply seen as the ability to withstand or recover from adversity and disruption. From a business end, Sharma, Thomas and Paul (2021) recognise resilience as a crisis management tool or strategy for business stability and adaptability to all types of risks during natural disasters and emergencies. Within a socio-ecological context, Prayag (2020) defines resilience as the ability of a socio-ecological system to absorb disturbances and to recognise itself after a triggering event. This is so that the industry essentially retains the same functions, structures, identity, and feedback. Thus, the concept of resilience provides a way to improve the ability of a system such as tourism to adapt to stress and cope with change while continuing to function with integrity (Reddy, Boyd & Nica, 2020).

Albeit not the first pandemic impacting tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic is believed to be a crisis of higher magnitude compared to past crises due to its global scale and impacts on the tourism industry (Prayag, 2020). For the sport tourism industry, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought a major collapse to the entire system. For this reason, Lew, Cheer, Haywood, Brouder and Salazar (2020) assume that the resilience adaptive cycle, which includes a four-phased approach, can assist organisations and industries to adapt to a new/changed context or otherwise, to some degree, perish. These phases include; ‘re-organisation’ which comprises innovation and creativity, ‘growth’ which exploit the opportunities that arise from phase 1, ‘consolidation’ by establishing fixed institutions and rules from phase 2, and ‘collapse’ which is the failure to achieve and maintain what is set out in the previous phases. It is however not necessary for the system to move through all four phases, for example, the

collapse phase can be avoided if the system maintains a constant culture of innovation to match the new or changed context (Lew et al., 2020).

Sharma et al. (2020) argue that, while adaptive capabilities/ frameworks provide insights into the recovery responses, there is a need for more inclusive development rather than the abstract notion of ‘growth’ and that the changes to recovery and transformation need to reorient the global tourism industry substantially. For this reason, Sharma et al. (2020) propose a resilience-based framework for a new global economy. This framework contends that with the help of the resilient approach from governments, market players, technology innovators, and the workforce employed in the industry, the tourism sector may end up evolving in a much more sustainable way post the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, resilient strategies require effective coordination, various crisis management techniques, good relationships across all stakeholder groups, a comprehensive network, recognition of risks and opportunities, and timely and scalable intervention (Fitriasari, 2020).

Notwithstanding proposed adaptive and resilient frameworks by various researchers, there is still scant theoretical and practical evidence that exist on holistic frameworks that build on tourism resilience in the post-pandemic phase. As tourism is widely recognised as a major contributor towards the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a need to examine sustainability in tandem with resilience theories. Persson- Fischer and Liu (2021) imply that dealing with a pandemic like COVID-19, like dealing with other sustainability challenges such as climate change, will not require the same remedies, however, it requires the same kind of resilience, adaptivity, flexibility, collaboration, and co-creation.

The sport tourism framework

The understanding of sport tourism has developed significantly over the past two decades. Gibson’s (2006) definition is linked closely to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation’s (UNWTO) definition of tourism, where tourism is defined as: “the activities of a person travelling to a place outside his/ her usual environment for less than a specified period of time, with a main purpose other than the exercise of activity remunerated from within the place visited” (cited in Turco et al., 2002: 17). However, Gibson (2006: 2) recognises three distinct areas within sport tourism, defining it as “leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities (active sport tourism), to watch physical activities (event sport tourism), or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities (nostalgia sport tourism)”. Active sport tourism includes all those that travel to certain destinations specifically to participate in, officiate in or assist in any way in the production of a sport event or activity. Event sport tourism refers specifically to those that travel as spectators, be it as fans/ supporters or casual observers. The third aspect, ‘nostalgia’, or, as Turco et al. (2002: 2) refer to it, ‘celebratory’ sport tourism, includes those that travel to reminisce, appreciate or educate themselves about sport or sport events (e.g. visiting sport stadiums or museums).

While earlier definitions tended to conceptualise sport tourism as the sum of the parts of sport and tourism, Weed and Bull (2009) contend that it is far more than this - a synergistic phenomenon that cannot be understood as simply a tourism market niche or a subset of sports management. Similarly, Higham and Hinch (2009: 13) also moved away from criteria-based definitions, to recognise sport tourism as “a composite of people, activity and place, set within the contextual themes of globalisation, mobility and identity”. These three areas of interaction - people, activity and place - form the structure for looking at sport tourism in further detail:

- **People:** Higham and Hinch (2018) highlight the importance of understanding sport tourist markets. Answering questions such as, “Who is a sport tourist?” and “What

motivates distinct groups of sport tourists?” are critical to event and destination planning and development. In the light of the global pandemic and the restrictions on numbers of event spectators and participants, these questions will surely increase in significance. Gammon and Robinson (2004) distinguish sport tourists by the activities they undertake while travelling and by their primary or secondary motivation to engage in sports while travelling. Travel to a destination may not be only primarily for sport. Tourists may be attracted by the destination’s attractions and therefore fit the sporting activities into their plans to visit the destination (Turco et al., 2002). Sport, therefore, becomes a supplemental or secondary attraction that can further satisfy visitors’ needs, extend their length of stay and stimulate economic activity (Turco et al. 2002: 1). In this light, sport tourism may provide a motivational context to entice tourism post the global pandemic.

- **Place:** The sport tourism place or ‘setting’ refers to the particular environment or specific facilities that are required for the activities to take place. According to the framework developed by Higham and Hinch (2018), places form part of the ‘spatial’ dimension that includes locations, regions and landscapes. Kurtzman and Zauhar (1997) describe the types of environments where sport tourism occurs as human-made settings (e.g. stadiums, museums, cruise boats); social settings (e.g. bars, restaurants, fan parks, cities); economic settings (e.g. trade shows, conventions); natural settings (e.g. mountains, lakes, beaches, rivers), and cultural settings (e.g. rodeos in Texas, bullfights in Spain). Weed and Bull (2009: 64) argue that it is the location of the activity in an unusual place that contributes to the uniqueness of the sport tourism experience. They offer two broad perspectives on settings (Weed & Bull, 2009). The first relates to the physical characteristics and spatial patterns of sport tourism places, while the second adds to this the way in which such places are perceived and culturally appraised. The cultural appraisal perspective relates to the perceived quality of the location or setting, and more specifically, the utility of places and the desirability of the environment. Place characteristics within sport tourism are most certainly a core issue due to the global pandemic as perceptions of place security and risk have been influenced and perhaps changed.
- **Activities:** Hosting sport events is seen to be a key to boosting tourism, local investment, and employment, although genuinely sustainable legacies are unfortunately an exception. In many countries, large-scale or sport mega-events have become key factors in local and national development strategies. Knott and Swart (2018) highlight this economic development role of mega-events within the context of the emerging nations.

Emerging nations and sport tourism events:

As Grix, Brannagan and Lee (2019) state, sport mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, which until recently were only hosted by developed countries, have become the perfect soft power project for emerging nations such as Brazil, South Africa and China, as well as Qatar. Additionally, sport has the potential to provide development opportunities in these nations in the form of social, economic, cultural, political, technological or environmental advancement (Tinaz & Knott, 2021).

An outcome of the 20th century has been the decentering of wealth and power from the major developed states — the US, Japan and Europe — to the fast-developing nations in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and South America (Grix, Brannagan & Lee, 2019). Similarly, we have seen a shift in the sport industry, especially in the hosting of sport mega-events, from the

developed to the emerging nations, each of whom faces very different challenges compared to the established nations. Besides the prevalent issues relating to social and economic underdevelopment, many of these nations have experienced political and ideological regime changes or global isolation as a result of their political standing. Furthermore, in an era of significant economic and fiscal uncertainty for emerging nations and other nations alike, the opportunity for gaining public support for extensive governmental investment in city branding strategies is a heightened challenge.

Yet, the common denominator among these nations is a recognition of the opportunities that sport tourism provides for both social and economic development. Both the public and private sectors are seeking to harness sport tourism opportunities in various forms as a means to develop and promote their society and stimulate their economy (Knott & Tinaz, 2021). Recently, the importance of sport tourism has risen unwaveringly in emerging nations. Governments' spending on the development of the sport and tourism industries, specifically in hosting sport events, setting up sport and tourism infrastructure and promoting sport activity has increased (Tinaz & Knott, 2021).

The legacy of sport mega-events has gained ever more importance during recent years for both academics and practitioners (Preuss, 2019). Preuss (2019) argues that a proven positive legacy would increase the power of the IOC by encouraging more cities to take an interest in staging the Olympic Games, while a negative legacy could warn future bid cities to better plan their legacy. Automatic outcomes of hosting are generally considered to relate to the substantial investment in capital projects such as increased tourism, urban regeneration and sporting legacies, and also those outcomes that cause significant social effects (both positive and negative). Grix, Brannagan, Wood and Wynne (2017) found the most commonly researched legacy areas to be economics, urban regeneration, national pride/feel-good factor, increased participation in physical activity and international prestige and 'soft power'. The city branding context relates to the intangible aspects such as prestige and "soft power", but also linked to a measure of tangible economic aspects through tourism and investment. For example, the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa led to a number of positive nation-branding impacts and legacies for the nation and its respective city brands (Knott & Hemmonsbeay, 2015; Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2017)

More recently, studies have taken Chalip's (2004) concept of event leveraging as their starting point and explored the ways in which strategies and tactics are implemented prior to and during an event in order to 'lever' desired outcomes as approaches to bidding become less ad-hoc in nature and more linked to public policies in potential host nations. In terms of leveraged outcomes, Chalip (2004) contends that, in many cases, the event becomes a resource through which wider benefits can be achieved, rather than an intervention itself. Recent papers have even found evidence of positive legacy from failed event bids (Leopkey, Salisbury & Tinaz, 2019).

Koenigstorfer, Bocarro, Byers, Edwards, Jones and Preuss (2019) noted a lack of cross-cultural studies on legacy, urging researchers to distinguish event-specific outcomes from mere generalisations. It should also be noted that the complexities and challenges unique to emerging nation contexts have mediated sport tourism legacies to varying degrees and drawn attention to a more critical assessment of the hosting of sport mega-events by emerging nations (Knott & Tinaz, 2021).

As indicated, the impact of COVID-19 can be analysed through the lens of this sport tourism framework within South Africa. The three sectors - people, places and activities - have all been affected, with the extent of the impact and the resultant future changes not yet fully known. These changes and uncertainties within the sector led to the formation of the following two research questions:

- What are the key strategic decision-making imperatives for sport tourism stakeholders in South Africa to consider as a result of COVID-19 impacted activities?
- How is COVID-19 influencing future strategic decisions for the sport tourism sector in South Africa?

The research study

This paper draws on a content analysis of secondary sources that specifically focused on crisis management in sport tourism; sport tourism responses to natural disasters and pandemics; and the sport tourism response to COVID-19. In total, fourteen documents were selected for review. These comprised ten academic papers and four industry reports. A bottom-up thematic coding approach was used. A list of emergent codes developed through the analysis was clustered into five broader themes that are of most relevance for this paper. The list of codes and themes is set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Codes and themes

Themes/ code clusters:	Emergent codes:
COVID-19 impacts on sport tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Countries hit the hardest ● Country specific responses ● Travel restrictions ● Global response ● African impact ● South African government response ● Tourism business impacts
Crisis management in sport tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research gaps ● Policy and planning ● UNWTO policy
Lessons from previous pandemics & disasters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ebola ● Spanish flu ● Natural disasters ● Olympic Games ● New York marathon
Resilience and future preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Industry threats ● Resilience of the industry ● Preparedness for future disasters ● Predicted changes
Suggested strategic imperatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitoring and evaluation ● Cooperation ● Future research

Results and discussion

This section combines the findings from the content analysis as clustered into broader themes and discussed in a manner that addresses the research questions.

COVID-19 impacts on sport tourism

The introduction of this paper elaborated on much of the economic devastation of the virus for the sport tourism industry. Initially, this was first thought to be most significant in the countries that bore the brunt of the infections during the early months of 2020:

The hardest hit were countries heavily exposed to the crisis with large case numbers causing dramatic newspaper headlines (Italy) as well as countries imposing drastic

measures to restrict movement in the population (Greece, Germany) (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020: 7).

However, as the virus spread, this has proved to be a global impact with very few exceptions and perhaps it is only a matter of time before additional regions experience this too. South Africa has borne the brunt of this impact on the African continent to date. This is particularly devastating for the country as it has a well-established sport tourism industry. While it was mentioned that Africa, in general, has weathered multiple pandemics and other disasters, such as Ebola, for example, it was noted that South Africa has generally not been as affected by these previous outbreaks.

Industry commentators noted that the uncertainty over projected impacts as well as policy responses was concerning. For example, Gössling et al. (2020: 7) mention the UNWTO projections that were significantly revised within a few weeks in March 2020:

A 6 March 2020 press release from UNWTO estimated the pandemic would cause international tourist arrivals to decline 1-3% (compared to 2019) rather than the forecasted 3-4% growth. Three weeks later, on 26 March, a press release updated this assessment to a 20-30% loss in international arrivals.

These shifting estimates highlight the uncertainty in the industry and the challenge for stakeholders to respond or plan to consequences with any certainty. Gössling et al. (2020: 7) further advised that “all estimates of eventual consequences for tourism must be interpreted with extreme caution, and are at best indicative at present”. This is clearly a reflection of the realm of uncertainty facing the industry and the challenges faced in terms of future predictions.

Crisis management in sport tourism

The analysis revealed a surprising dearth of literature relating to crisis management in sport tourism. In fact, there seems to be a limited extent of this topic even within tourism more broadly. One commentary broadly asked the pertinent questions for the South African tourism industry in general:

Is there an up-to-date crisis management plan for tourism? Has it been activated? Has it been communicated to the industry? (Tourism Update, 2020).

One of the key lessons during this period for the sector, in terms of the identification of knowledge gaps, is the need for the development of specific crisis management policies and plans for sport tourism, as called for by Maphanga and Henama (2019), even before the current crisis. Miles and Shipway (2020: 1-2) advocate for “harnessing the potential for closer synergies between sport tourism and the crisis and disaster management fields” in general.

Even prior to COVID-19 there had been calls for the development of “closer synergies between sport tourism and the crisis and disaster management fields as well as the emerging studies on ‘resilience’”. Shipway (2018: 268) suggested, “the development of a future research agenda for managing crises and disasters in sport tourism” with practical implications for decision-makers and sport event and venue managers.

Some stakeholders mentioned the need for balancing social and financial responsibilities. They spoke of a sense of ‘duty of care’ to athletes and spectators. Explaining this, they described how they have put the needs of athletes first in their decision-making on whether to postpone or cancel events. While not mentioned specifically, there appears to be the development of a ‘global social responsibility’ as stakeholders consider the impacts of their

actions on other regions of the globe and indeed consider how the actions in other regions are impacting them.

Lessons from previous pandemics and disasters

The analysis also revealed other major disruptive disasters that have impacted the sport tourism sector to a large degree, especially this century. While more recent documents compared the current pandemic to the Spanish Flu of the early 1900s, most other documents cited tourism disrupting disasters in the period between 2000 and 2015. These included: the September 11 terrorist attacks (2001); the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak (2003); the global economic crisis unfolding in 2008/2009; the Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak (2014-2016); and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak (2015). As Gössling et al. (2020: 3) explain, this could be interpreted as indicating the global tourism sector's resilience, although it is too early to assess the extent of the current pandemic, which is expected to far exceed these disasters:

With only SARS (-0.4%) and the global economic crisis (-4.0%) leading to declines in international arrivals (according to the World Bank, 2020), this would suggest that tourism as a system has been resilient to external shocks. However, there is much evidence that the impact and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will be unprecedented.

From an industry perspective, there are key concerns over whether there are genuine lessons learned from previous pandemics and whether any lessons learned are being applied in the current COVID-19 pandemic. The general sentiment is that there is no clear monitoring and evaluation system in place that guide crisis in the South African tourism sector which affects the preparedness of the industry to deal with unexpected global health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic as well as potential future crises (Tourism Update, 2020).

Resilience and future preparedness

As Fan, Jamison and Summers (2018: 129) stated forebodingly in the year prior to COVID-19: "Few doubt that major epidemics and pandemics will strike again and few would argue that the world is adequately prepared". The current pandemic has therefore merely raised awareness of the vulnerability of the sector to global threats. As a result, there is a recognised "need for greater investment in preparation against epidemics and pandemics" (Fan et al., 2018: 129), which has been called for by academics such as Fan et al. (2018) prior to the current crisis. It appears that the awareness of security threats for the sector has been broadened from mostly terror-related incidents to include other digital and health or physical security threats. Future crises were mentioned, the likes of "other ongoing crises that are not as immediate, but potentially even more devastating than COVID-19, such as climate change" (Gössling et al., 2020: 3). The longer-term social and economic sustainability of the tourism sector was also mentioned within this context of industry threats.

The COVID-19 pandemic raises particular questions of vulnerability to the economic developments to emerging economies such as South Africa, especially where employment is concerned. According to Tourism Update (2020), low-paid jobs in tourism have been disproportionately affected by this crisis and early indicators of the pandemic reveal that the impacts in lower income countries will be substantially felt years after the pandemic. To this end, and emphasising the need for significant recovery and sustainability in the tourism economy and employment in the industry, Hall, Scott and Gössling (2020: 13) proclaim:

As the pandemic wanes, the world will be poorer and more divided, which is not a recipe for a strong rebound in the tourism economy let alone a coordinated, strategic effort to transform it toward sustainability. There will be strong political and industry pressures to “restart” the economy as quickly as possible and generate employment in a period of major global economic recession.

Hall et al. (2020) speculated that COVID-19 may provide the impetus for transformed travel behaviours, but warned, however, that it may be more challenging to transform the tourism system. For example, resilience research in tourism illustrates the consideration for imperatives of global change in combination with destination models that seek to reduce leakage, enhance wellbeing, and better capture and distribute tourism value. While, in contrast, there are strong business and political ‘voices’ that advocate that the economy, including tourism, should re-open as soon as possible so that the industry can return to “normal”. To achieve this end, Hall et al. (2020) suggest that affected businesses should receive substantial financial support from the government without necessarily conforming to sustainability or global change requirements. These support structures and the holistic approach to transformation is further supported by Sharma et al.’s (2021) resilience-based framework for new global economic order. The findings revealed discussion and suggestions relating to the mitigation and prevention of future disasters, and moreover towards an inclusive development and sustainability. The increased awareness of the vulnerability of the sport tourism sector to global threats such as pandemics is now widespread. This is particularly so in the case of South Africa, which has largely been unaffected by previous pandemics and even major terror threats. The widespread belief is that these may be ongoing global threats to the industry. As Gössling et al. (2020: 265) explained, this “makes mitigation and prevention not just socially and economically acceptable, but also an imperative for both national and global governments, and more specifically for sport and tourism policymakers”.

Suggested strategic imperatives

It is clear that even before the current pandemic there was a need to develop “suitable resilience strategies in order to be prepared for uncertain events” (Shipway, 2018: 268). Linked to this need, effective monitoring and evaluation policies and systems are required for the industry. One source specifically mentioned that the tourism sector in South Africa does not have ‘proper’ monitoring and evaluation systems in place.

Specifically for the South African industry, future resilience will require a greater deal of cooperation between different stakeholder, private and public sectors and between the different levels of government, as the following excerpt clearly illustrates:

It is critical to have a range of stakeholders involved at national, provincial, and local governmental levels since they also have a huge stake in what happens in the event of a pandemic outbreak. It is vital to get the buy-in and commitment of all stakeholders and to build a positive working relationship with them and eliminate obstacles as far as possible (Maphanga & Henama, 2019: 7).

Specific reference was made to certain critical South African tourism industry stakeholders that should be included in this cooperation, namely: The Department of Health; tour operators; local consultants; local administration; local businesses; IATA; travel agents; the Department of Home Affairs; ASATA; Airports Company of South Africa; airline companies; Statistics South Africa; CATHSSETA; SATSA; immigration; restaurants; hotels; Field Guides Association; Tourism Business Council; World Travel and Tourism Council; and transport and logistics

companies. Although a full list of more sport-related stakeholders was not mentioned in the same way, two critical stakeholders within the sport-specific context were mentioned, namely international federations and global media commentators. These, and possibly others, should be included for a more comprehensive sport tourism cooperation.

Beyond the industry stakeholder cooperation, there was also a motivation for the need for proactive engagement with local communities, in order to increase the resilience and preparedness of communities. Although this has emerged as an imperative as a result of COVID-19, it is, in fact, similar to what Shipway (2018) advocated for the sport tourism sector, in terms of adopting a more ‘bottom-up’ ethos, with a focus on (i) sport tourism organisations/events; (ii) the societal/community aspects of sport tourism, and (iii) closer scrutiny of the individual sport tourist”.

Linked to the closer cooperation with key stakeholders and understanding the role of sport tourism within a sustainable development context, some sources advocated that sport tourism be informed by the emerging studies in ‘resilience’. For example, Shipway (2018: 268) proposed the following:

It may be useful for future studies on sport tourism to factor greater attention to, and more sophisticated appreciations of, resilience when deciding which sports events or tournaments are perceived as ‘successful’ or ‘effective’ by a wide range of stakeholders including international federations, governments, and global media commentators.

Implications and conclusion

Reviewing the sport tourism framework and the development of sport tourism highlighted the fact that sport tourism is not merely a niche tourism market, but rather a more unique interaction of activity, people and place. This explains why this industry has been particularly severely affected by the global pandemic of 2020, as it has affected each of these elements significantly, with travel, destinations, events and activities curtailed, restricted or prohibited in virus affected regions. Industry stakeholders face great uncertainty in terms of the impact and future predictions of both sport tourist travel behaviour and changes within the sport tourism system within which they operate. However, this paper has also revealed key strategic considerations to provide industry resilience.

The vulnerability of the industry that has been revealed by the pandemic will surely lead to a long-overdue examination of crisis management within this sector. The mitigation and prevention of industry threats is no longer merely socially and economically justifiable, but now also an imperative. It is essential that the South African sport tourism sector develops an up-to-date crisis management plan. A clear monitoring and evaluation system needs to be put in place to guide crisis management across this sector, post the pandemic. As the global sport tourism sector is expected to recover with time, the development of such crisis management plan is, of essence, given that the country’s appetite to host sport tourism events, both locally and internationally, has been well established (see Hemmonsbey et al., 2018; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021).

This paper has clearly revealed the lack of knowledge on crisis management within sport tourism. The future academic agenda within this sector should draw on the crisis management theory, as well as the emergent knowledge area of ‘resilience’ in order to provide the academic and conceptual underpinning of crisis management policy and development within the sector. In order to achieve greater resilience, a greater degree of cooperation between a range of stakeholders at national, provincial, and local governmental and private sector levels is critical. Such cooperation could be government-led, and private sector driven, to align to the country’s sport and tourism plans and sector strategies. Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic

provides the impetus to gain the buy-in and commitment of all the diverse stakeholders within sport tourism and to build positive working relationships between them.

Beyond the industry cooperation, there may be a heightened need for proactive engagement with local communities within which sport tourism activities take place, in order to increase the resilience and preparedness of these communities and the associated industries. Above all, the COVID-19 crisis has surely led to an enhanced sense of ‘global social responsibility’ as stakeholders consider the impacts of their actions on other regions of the globe and indeed consider how the actions in other regions are impacting them. Should these strategic imperatives result in changes to the cooperation between sport tourism stakeholders, and among the related communities and global partners, the sport tourism sector in South Africa may emerge from the crisis period as more resilient, cohesive and sustainable.

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