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Journal article

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THE ROLE OF THE INTERFACE OF SPORT AND TOURISM IN THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This feature editorial discusses the role of the interface of sport and tourism in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Key concepts are set out as context for discussion under two headings. Under Sports Fixtures and Events: a parochial attitude to cancelling major sports events; the impact of recreated and relived sports events on wellbeing; the response of sports audiences to live sport behind closed doors. Under Activity, Movement and Travel: the appetite and provision for outdoor activity during lockdown, and the role of a sense of movement; the factors that might lead to observed increases in sustainable modes of travel being sustained post-lockdown. Lessons and questions for future research, policy and provision are discussed, and the potential is identified for activities at the interface of sport and tourism to make significant contributions to outcomes and policy goals for wellbeing, physical health, mental health, and in supporting green space and sustainable travel as a response to the climate crisis. A challenge is set for managers, administrators and researchers working at the interface of sport and tourism to look outwards beyond their own development concerns, and recognise and accept both a responsibility and an opportunity to make these contributions. The feature editorial concludes with an invitation for researchers to take up the challenge of submitting research to the *Journal of Sport & Tourism* that either focuses on the contribution to the COVID-19 response, or that explores contributions that can be made to wider social, economic and health outcomes and policy goals.

INTRODUCTION

On 30th January 2020, following 213 global deaths and 9,800 infections, the World Health Organisation categorised COVID-19 as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), and five weeks later, on 11th March, as a pandemic, at which point 118,000 cases and 4,291 deaths in 114 countries had been reported (Ghebreyesus, 2020). The first cluster of COVID-19 cases were recorded in Wuhan, China on 21st December 2019, and the first death on 11th January 2020. Since then, initial outbreaks in Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, led the WHO Director General to declare on 13th March 2020 that Europe had become the epicentre of the virus. A further global spread across North and South America meant that countries in every continent around the world, faced with a virus for which there was no vaccine and no treatment, had implemented lockdown measures to deal with a global pandemic that had resulted in over 500,000 recorded deaths worldwide by 1st July 2020 (Worldometer, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the impact of, and response to, COVID-19 has dominated discussion in every walk of life, and in every field of academic activity. For scholars of physical activity, health and wellbeing, of sport and tourism, and of events, two things are notable and noticeable from the consequences of, and reaction to, the restrictions that have been implemented on people's lives to combat the spread of the virus. Firstly, people's desire to be outside and to have 'mobility' beyond their everyday movements which have been, of course, far more curtailed than usual. Secondly, the recognition by policymakers that both opportunities for physical activity and for engagement with sport, particularly opportunities to watch sport, are a key part of supporting and ensuring people's wellbeing.

Taken together, these two observations suggest that the interface of sport and tourism may be playing an important role in supporting the response to COVID-19, but also that there may be important lessons and questions about the interface of sport and tourism that can inform both future provision and policy responses to other society-wide issues and concerns, locally, nationally and globally. Consequently, this feature editorial presents a preliminary analysis of the role of the interface of sport and tourism in responding to the current pandemic, and discusses the implications of this role for future research, policy and provision. However, by way of context it first sets out some key relevant concepts for this analysis relating to the interface of sport and tourism.

KEY CONCEPTS IN UNDERSTANDING THE INTERFACE OF SPORT AND TOURISM

There have been multiple debates and discussions by and between many authors over time of definitions of sports tourism, including that it comprises active, passive and nostalgic elements (Gibson, 1998), that it may be the prime purpose or a secondary or incidental purpose of a trip (Gammon & Robinson, 2003), that it should be considered as a trip behaviour rather than a trip purpose (Weed & Bull, 2009), and that it might be experienced vicariously (Weed, 2005). Mirroring longstanding debates about definitions of tourism, discussions of sports tourism have generally concluded that, rather than minima of time or distance, sports tourism is characterised by a sense of movement or visit engendered by the different places through which, or to which such movement takes place (Weed & Bull, 2009). Finally, seeking

to move beyond definition to conceptualisation, Weed and Bull (2004) suggested that sports tourism is best understood as arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place.

For the purposes of this paper and this analysis, the details of the above debates are less important than the concepts they identify. In particular a sense of movement and place, activity and its interaction with place, vicarious experiences and the need (or not) for proximity, the attraction of nostalgia, and the contribution each and all of the foregoing might make to wellbeing. As context for the analysis that follows, each of these concepts are briefly outlined below.

Sense of Movement and Place: Tourism, and consequently sports tourism, has often been defined as comprising a minimum distance travelled and/or a minimum duration of stay (Cooper et al., 1998). However, such definitions have often been developed for statistical purposes relating to the generation of economic impact data (Ryan, 1991). This has little relevance in helping to understand the importance that individuals and societies place on such movement, including why it is valued. In this respect, a sense of movement to or through places that are either physically or perceptually distinct from the usual, mundane and routine, regardless of the distance travelled or time spent, appears to be the key element in understanding the importance and value placed on such movement (Weed & Bull, 2009).

Activities and Places: Increasing interest in event sport tourism over the last decade or more has seen comparatively less emphasis placed on active sports tourism and active travel (Gibson et al., 2018). Concomitantly, fields such as green exercise and adventure tourism have burgeoned, both of which have key intersections with sports tourism, and for both of which the interaction of activity and places is key. Research on green exercise emphasises the impact green environments can have on the health and wellbeing impact of physical activity (Barton et al., 2016), and on adherence to it (Frazer, Munoz & MacRury, 2019), whilst adventure tourism research has emphasised natural environments, and the challenges they offer, as an attraction for travel and activity (Giddy & Webb, 2018). Both areas suggest that the gradual de-emphasis over time of active sports tourism research has been a missed opportunity.

People and Proximity: While some form of movement might appear to be the *raison detre* of tourism, some sports tourism studies have suggested that such movement might be experienced vicariously, via an imagined journey to a different time or place. Such imagined journeys in time might be stimulated by heritage artefacts or museums, such as the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York (Ramshaw, Gammon & Tobar, 2019), whilst imagined journeys to places might be stimulated by sports events, festivals and tournaments, such as the Soccer World Cup (Weed, 2010). The vicarious experience can also be enhanced by people, with previous ethnographic research on mediated event viewing suggesting that the desire for proximity might be related as much to the proximity to other people sharing in the event experience as it is to any physical co-presence to the event itself (Weed, 2008).

Nostalgia: Intersecting with the idea of an imagined journey is the concept of nostalgia, which almost by definition seems to suggest seeking a connection with something in the past that is now gone (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2020). However, some authors have suggested that nostalgia can be socially constructed, with the yearning often being for something that 'never

was', or that has been re-constructed through re-telling (Gammon, 2002). Equally, nostalgia might be linked with the future, and be less about the loss of something that is gone, and more about anxiety or, more positively, the hope that something might return (Boym, 2008). Take, for example, Vera Lynn's second world war song, "We'll Meet Again", or Baddiel and Skinner's lament in the fan anthem, "Football's Coming Home", that "I know that was then, but it could be again!". Both are supported by literature from social psychology that suggests that hope can be a strong and uplifting emotion (Lazarus, 1999).

Wellbeing: All of the above, one way or another, might be linked to wellbeing, a concept which has evolved considerably from a perception as being something frivolous or hedonistic that makes you feel good, to being a core concept that supports mental good health and that is at the heart of primary care and public health policy (Walker & John, 2012). Evidence suggests that positive experiences and wellbeing are linked to proximity to people (be it real or imagined) (Kok & Fredrickson, 2013), valued activities and places (Adams, Leibbrandt & Moon, 2011; Atkinson, Fuller & Painter, 2016), and a sense of nostalgia and hope (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2020; Slezackova, 2017)

Weed and Bull (2004) argued more than 15 years ago that sports tourism defies technical definition, and that it is best understood as an experience derived from the interaction of activity, people and place. In all of the concepts set out above, and in considering the role of the interface of sport and tourism in supporting the response to COVID-19, this interaction seems meaningful and important and, significantly, appears to be key to the intersection with the wellbeing outcomes that both people and policy-makers are seeking during the pandemic.

THE INTERFACE OF SPORT AND TOURISM AND THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

This section draws on the perspectives outlined above to explore five areas, under two headings, in which the interface of sport and tourism has played a role in the COVID-19 response. Firstly, under the heading of Sports Fixtures and Events, three areas are discussed: a rather insular and parochial attitude to cancelling major sports events as the COVID crisis accelerated; the impact of recreated and relived sports events on wellbeing during lockdown; the response of sports audiences to a 'new normal' of live sport behind closed doors as lockdown loosened. Secondly, under the heading of Activity, Movement and Travel, two areas are discussed: the appetite and provision for activity in the outdoors during lockdown, and the role of a sense of movement; the factors that might lead to observed increases in sustainable modes of travel and transport being sustained post-lockdown. In each area, lessons and questions for the interface of sport and tourism, and how the impact and contribution of this interface is evidenced and understood, are set out, prior to a final section which discusses the implications of these lessons for future research, policy and provision.

Sports Fixtures and Events

The Cancellation and Postponement of Major Sports Events

As the impact and spread of COVID-19 became clearer during February and March 2020, sports event hosts and administrators began to consider whether their events should be

postponed or cancelled. Perhaps the highest profile of these was discussion relating to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, which was due to commence on 24th July 2020.

Initially, the International Olympic Committee and other administrators, such as Lord Sebastian Coe, the President of World Athletics, suggested that there was no need to consider cancellation of the Games until the impact of COVID-19 was clearer (McCurry, 2020). However, this position was maintained for quite some time, even in the face of growing evidence of the devastating global impact of the virus. Even as late as 19th March 2020, seven weeks after the World Health Organisation had declared COVID-19 to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), and more than a week after it was declared a global pandemic following more than 100,000 cases and more than 4,000 deaths across more than 100 countries, Coe was still insisting that it was too early to decide whether to cancel the Games (BBC Sport, 2020).

Perhaps even stranger than this decision, or lack of it, was the criteria by which it was apparently being made. Reasons cited by Coe for not cancelling included the need to protect elite athletes' earnings and the difficulty of rescheduling the event within the international sporting calendar, whilst also commenting that, despite increasing lockdown restrictions in a number of countries, athletes needed to be allowed to continue to train so that their preparations for the Games were not disrupted (BBC Sport, 2020). There was little or nothing on the significant international movement of people that such an event would generate, nor any apparent concern for the health of athletes, their families and their social circles.

Major sports events hosts are very quick to articulate and promote the role this form of sports tourism plays in wider society when they are making claims for positive economic, social and public health impacts, and in deploying such claims as justification for public funding and commercial sponsorship (Smith, 2014). However, the Tokyo 2020 example suggests that the key administrators involved did not accept that they had a responsibility to consider the wider societal impact of the event on global health, even in the face of a global death toll of multiple thousands in over 100 countries. Rather, the factors informing their considerations were parochial and concerned with the inconvenience to sport, even to the extent of ignoring the potential health consequences for their own athletes.

The decision to postpone the Tokyo Games was eventually made on 24th March 2020. However, if major sports events wish to be seen to play a positive role in the economy and society, and to retain credibility in their claims to do so, they must also accept that their decisions must be informed by societal concerns. That this was not the immediate response in the face of the world's most significant public health threat in over a century, is both a major indictment, and a significant lesson for the future.

Recreating and Reliving Sport During Lockdown

The various levels of lockdown experienced by countries around the globe meant that domestic leagues and international sporting fixtures that would usually attract both a travelling live audience and large mediated television audiences stopped abruptly. This left television networks with gaps to fill in their schedules, and sports fanatics with gaps to fill in

their lives. The response in many countries around the world was to turn to the past and nostalgia.

In the UK, the BBC transformed its weekly football highlights programme, *Match of the Day*, into *Match of THEIR Day*, showing highlights of what were promoted as classic matches, whilst other parts of the schedule were filled with Talking Heads nostalgia programmes in which the hosts and analysts turned their attention to their Top Tens – their Top Ten World Cup Moments, their Top Ten Tournaments, and so on. Interestingly, much of the celebration of nostalgia extended significantly beyond the games and matches to the wider associated events and their festival elements, hence the link to sports tourism, which creates much of this festival element (Chalip, 2006). In England, Euro 96 (the 1996 European nations football tournament, hosted in England, and in which England reached the semi-finals) featured heavily, with the imagined nostalgic journey being not just to the matches, but to the tournament as a festival and celebration, with all its cultural associations.

Previous work on sport spectating and proximity has suggested that the spectator experience is as much about a feeling of proximity to a shared communal experience as it is about a physical proximity to an event (Weed, 2008). This work focused on alternative sites in which to watch live sport, such as pubs, bars and 'Fan Fest' live sites featuring big screens, thus suggesting that proximity to a shared communal experience could occur across places (Weed, 2006). However, is it possible that the proximity to a shared communal experience could also take place across time?

The role of nostalgia during lockdown suggests that, for a short time at least, the shared communal experience and connection that occurs across places (i.e., to others experiencing sport fixtures and events that are happening live in the present) might also be shared across time, creating an imagined journey and connection to one's own experiences, and those of others, that occurred in the past, and also sharing the experience of that journey and connection with others in the present. Furthermore, the manifestation of nostalgia during lockdown suggested that proximity to shared communal experiences across time may be heightened and enhanced when the imagined proximity is not just to a match or fixture, but to a wider event and its festival elements. The idea of a *festival effect* has previously been invoked to create connections between individuals and events in the present (Weed, et al, 2012), but does the COVID-19 lockdown suggest a festival effect might also play a role in enhancing a nostalgic connection to the past?

The feelings of proximity and shared communal experience created by lockdown nostalgia may have played an important role in supporting wellbeing during this period of social isolation (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2020). A key theme of lockdown nostalgia has been not just a longing for the past, but a hope and expectation that the experiences of the past will return in the future. Boym (2008) and others (Zhou, et al, 2008) have termed this 'restorative nostalgia', and it is linked to the role of hope as a positive and uplifting emotion (Lazarus, 1999; Slezackova, 2017). A key question, therefore, is whether the role of nostalgia in supporting wellbeing is dependent on its restorative elements, that something could be again, and whether any wellbeing effect is therefore time-limited, and dependent not only on the memory of previous sports tourism festivals and events, but the hope and expectation that such sports tourism will again be possible in the future?

A new normal for Elite Sport – Live, but not as we know it!

Linked to the possibly time-limited role of restorative nostalgia for sports fixtures, festivals and events in supporting wellbeing, the UK government acknowledged the role that a recommencement of elite sporting fixtures could play in boosting wellbeing as lockdown loosened, supporting and setting out measures to allow sporting events to take place behind closed-doors for broadcast (HM Government, 2020).

In the UK premieriership football re-commenced without crowds on 17th June 2020, just over three months after it was suspended. A previous loosening of lockdown had set out 'COVID secure' environments in which elite sport training could take place in preparation for re-commencement of fixtures, and fans were able to watch the first match between Aston Villa and Sheffield United at 6:30pm on the Sky Sports Channel. It was live, but not as we know it.

Producers of television comedy have long realised that a live audience is vital to the atmosphere created for those watching comedy shows at home, as well as to getting the best performances and reactions from the actors (Lawson, Downing & Cetola, 1998). This has also led to debate about whether 'canned laughter', using sound effects to create the aural illusion of a live audience, has the same impact (Brewer, 2018). As the premieriership season re-commenced, clubs and broadcasters soon realised that the same appeared to be true for football, and the sound effect of crowds began to be pumped into empty stadiums (Lee, 2020). The use of artificial crowd noise stimulated much debate, and perhaps the responses to that debate depend on whether individuals are seeking to watch a game, or share an experience.

Drawing again on ideas of proximity, if the desire is for proximity to a shared communal experience, then the sense that there are others sharing the experience is obviously vital. Previous work has shown that a sense of proximity to a shared communal experience can be created in venues other than that in which the event is taking place, but importantly this experience still involved physical co-presence in pubs, bars or Live Sites with others with whom the experience was shared (Weed, 2006). With live football being played in empty stadia, and lockdown measures still prohibiting any gathering of more than a few socially distanced people, the experience of watching football at home has the potential to be strangely isolating. This is likely to be immaterial if one is seeking only to watch a game, but if one is seeking to share an experience, it is likely to be disappointing, particularly if the anticipation of the re-start of live sport was fuelled and supported by restorative nostalgia in the period during which live sport was suspended. If this is the case, a key question is whether the shared communal experience of live sport is dependent on a sense that a festival and celebration is taking place. Is a feeling of proximity dependent on a sense that people have travelled to gather to celebrate the event as a sports tourism occasion, and that an individual watching at home can make an imagined journey to that celebration to share in the communal experience?

Activity, Movement and Travel

The Role of Exercise, Activity and the Outdoors During Lockdown

In most countries around the world, no matter how severe the lock down, some provision or allowance was made to allow some form of physical activity or exercise. In the earliest stage of lockdown, the UK, like many other countries, limited such exercise: in the UK's case, to one hour a day, near one's home (i.e., not involving travel by car, bus or train), and with one's own household, with the exercise itself being largely limited to walking, jogging or cycling.

The response was quite startling. A survey commissioned by Nuffield Health showed that over three-quarters of people in the UK had taken up a new form of exercise, with home activities such as yoga, weight training and home treadmill necessarily featuring alongside the allowed outdoor activities of walking, jogging, running and cycling (Nuffield Health, 2020). Unsurprisingly, walking for exercise was the most popular activity. In a related weekly tracking survey for Sport England (Savanta ComRes, 2020), in the first six weeks of lockdown, almost two-thirds of people said exercise was important for their mental health and wellbeing.

In the UK, one of the keenest aspects of public debate in the early weeks of lockdown focused on the rules for exercising outdoors, and on access to green space. While those fortunate enough to have such space within walking or cycling distance of their home began to discover and appreciate areas that had long been on their doorstep, there was a debate about the social and health inequalities created by not allowing those without such access to travel to green spaces for exercise (Duncan, McIntyre & Cutler, 2020). Clarifications followed (Grierson, 2020) which allowed people to take short journeys to access areas for exercise, and as lockdown loosened in the UK, the first restrictions that were lifted were on the time and travel that could be spent for the purposes of accessing spaces for exercise (HM Government).

What this demand and these debates illustrate is the importance not only of exercise, but also of the place in which it takes place, with the wellbeing impact of exercise in natural green spaces being acknowledged as significantly greater than in urban areas, something that the literature on green exercise supports (Barton et al., 2016). But the wellbeing impact also appears to be linked to a sense of movement, no matter how small, to places that are perceptually distinct from 'home'. And, of course, during lockdown, 'home' had a much more restrictive definition than would usually be the case and, as such, it seemed that people valued more than ever the opportunity to utilise places that were perceptually distinct from it.

This suggests that the wellbeing impact of sports tourism extends further than might previously have been conceptualised, and that there may be an evidence gap in relation to what might be termed *everyday sports tourism*. While the requirements for a sense of movement away from the usual, mundane and routine might intuitively suggest that the idea of *everyday sports tourism* is a contradiction in terms, the experience of lockdown appears to show that an everyday opportunity to step out of and away from the usual, mundane and routine has been valued by the public and recognised by policy makers as supporting wellbeing. Furthermore, the recognition and demand for access to green spaces and places that increase this sense of movement suggests that it may be necessary to re-assess what is considered to be perceptually distinct from the usual, mundane and routine when we seek to explore the impact of sports tourism. Specifically, can a sense of movement be provided as

much by a short walk or cycle to a different place or environment, regardless of its distance from home, as much as it might be provided by international air travel? A further question and research need is to understand the importance of that sense of movement to enhancing wellbeing impacts. Research on green exercise shows that natural environments enhance wellbeing (Barton et al., 2016), but is the sense of movement and perceptual distinction from 'home' also important, and if so, how is that generated?

The Increase in Sustainable Travel and Transport Modes

Lockdown restrictions have led to a reduction in all forms of motorised travel, with air travel obviously experiencing the largest reduction. However, UK data showed that car use was down by two-thirds in the first month of lockdown, and although this crept back up as lockdown loosened and people began to return to work, car use at the end of June was still only 75% of that which it had been in February, prior to lockdown (Department of Transport, 2020b). The same data also showed that increases in cycling as a form of transport have averaged out at between a 50% to 100% increase, with some weeks (largely driven by good weather) seeing an increase of over 200%. These data have stimulated considerable debate about whether the experience of lockdown will lead to a sustained increase in more sustainable forms of travel.

While charities such as Sustrans have tended to focus on longer journeys by cycle, particularly on the UK's National Cycling Network (Sustrans 2018), the UK National Travel Survey showed that in 2018-19, over 40% of urban journeys were under 2 miles (Department of Transport, 2019) and thus there is considerable potential for these to be made on foot or by cycle. Similarly, a meta-analysis of data on leisure cycling showed that the greatest volume of cycle day trips were under 20 miles (Weed et al, 2014a). It is therefore clear that the greatest potential for change lies not in the long cycle tour, but in replacing the car with the cycle for both cycle commuting and cycle sports tourism closer to and around home.

However, the number one barrier to cycling across all data and surveys is perceived safety. Monitoring of the National Cycle Network in 2008 showed that the traffic-free parts of the route comprised 30% of the network, but accounted for 85% of its use (Sustrans, 2009). Furthermore, a 2011 systematic review of the factors influencing cycling participation showed that while experienced cyclists will utilise routes shared with traffic in order to ride on a better quality of surface, for less experienced cyclists, women and family groups, routes shared with traffic are a barrier to, and traffic-free routes are a facilitator of, cycle route use (SPEAR, 2011). It appears to be no co-incidence that the increases in cycle use during lockdown occurred alongside a two-thirds reduction in car use. A key question is whether cycle use will continue when the cars return.

It is clear that people, particularly families, feel unsafe cycling amidst motorised traffic. In this respect, marked cycle lanes on roads used by cars are not enough. Separate lanes, onto which motorised vehicles are physically prevented from encroaching, are required to promote cycling, even for short distances, and especially if these routes are in urban areas, which is where most short car journeys, and thus where the potential for the largest gains, take place. Similarly, for a sustainable travel impact to be secured from leisure cycling, quick traffic-free access from home to off-road cycle routes in green spaces are key. Otherwise,

leisure cyclists will continue to load their bikes onto their cars and drive to those areas which they perceive to be safer and more attractive for their cycling sports tourism. Weed et al's (2014b) analysis of the sustainable travel credentials of cycling sports tourism showed that 46% of local residents (living within 25 miles) travel to cycle trails and routes by car, and this increases to 62% if all cycle trail users (including those staying in the local area) are included. This suggests that infrastructural improvements providing traffic-free routes and access could have a considerable sustainable travel impact on both commuting and cycling sports tourism, as well as on physical activity levels through active travel.

The UK government's response to increased levels of cycling during lockdown was to issue additional statutory guidance to the 2004 Traffic Management Act (Department of Transport, 2020a), including measures to 're-allocate road space' to support increased cycle use. These measures include 'pop-up' cycle facilities with 'light physical separation' such as flexible plastic wands, and included a recommendation that, because "lanes indicated by road markings only are very unlikely to be sufficient to deliver the level of change needed, especially in the long term... facilities should be segregated as far as possible, with physical measures separating cyclists and other traffic" (Department of Transport, 2020a, para 15). A key research question for the interface of sport, tourism and active travel will be the extent to which such measures have been implemented (in the UK and beyond), and the extent to which they have a meaningful and significant impact on levels of both cycle commuting and cycling sports tourism in the coming months and years.

LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, POLICY AND PROVISION

It is clear from the above discussion that in a number of areas across sports fixtures and events, and activity, movement and travel, activities at the interface of sport and tourism have played a role in the response to COVID-19. However, the discussion also highlights a number of lessons and questions for managers, administrators and researchers at the interface of sport and tourism relating to how this interface might contribute to wider societal issues and concerns in the future.

In 2009, reviewing progress in sports tourism research, Weed noted that the field of sports tourism would need to take care to look outwards, to respond to external challenges and issues. Not to do so, Weed (2009, p. 627) argued, would be to fall into the "trap of becoming 'self-referential' and, eventually, irrelevant in wider debates on wider social science issues such as global warming and economic development". Now, in the eye of the storm of the world's greatest public health threat for more than a century, the challenge is to look beyond the development of sports tourism, and outwards towards the role the interface of sport and tourism might play in delivering wider social, economic and health outcomes and policy goals.

Of course, to be taken seriously in doing so, those responsible for the organisation of major sports tourism activities that generate significant global flows of money and people must be seen to consider the social and economic context for the decisions they make. The lesson from the debate around the postponement of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games in the wake of the advancing COVID-19 pandemic is that such decisions must be, and must be seen to be, informed by their impact on society, not by the inconvenience they cause to sports administrators.

There are some clear research questions from the role of nostalgia in the lockdown period that have considerable potential to inform future health and wellbeing policy. Given the clear link between social interaction, connectedness and wellbeing (Adams, Leibbrandt & Moon, 2011; Kok & Fredrickson, 2013), the link piece that nostalgia appeared to provide between memories of the past and hopes for the future appears to be significant. Nostalgia seemed to provide a sustained sense of community and connection to those with whom people had shared previous sports tourism experiences, and with whom they hoped they would do so again, which appeared to support good mental health and wellbeing. Understanding the extent to which nostalgia can provide a sense of proximity and social connection, and a hope for restoration in the face of adversity, as well as the ways in which this connection and hope might be stimulated as a wellbeing therapy, are important and significant questions for researchers, policy-makers and practitioners working at and beyond the interface of sport and tourism.

The continuous provision that policy-makers made throughout lockdown for people to exercise has been a consistent feature of the response to COVID-19 across the globe. However, the importance of a sense of movement away from the usual, mundane and routine to spaces that, regardless of distance travelled, provided an environment that was perceptually distinct from 'home', as well as the clear value placed on this by policy-makers and the public, suggests some key questions for future research and policy. Current research on green exercise shows that natural environments enhance both wellbeing and adherence to activities (Barton et al., 2016). But a key question for future provision and policy is whether *everyday sports tourism* can create a sense of movement and perceptual distinction from the usual, mundane and routine that can further enhance wellbeing and physical health outcomes. And if so, how can this be generated and delivered, as well as provided for in a way that does not exacerbate social and health inequalities.

One of the most immediate impacts of lockdown was the almost overnight cessation of around two-thirds of car use, and the concomitant rise in cycle use, much of which may be linked to the provision for exercise and access to green spaces set out above. However, the conditions that created this increased cycle use suggest questions for future provision, promotion and policy for sustainable travel. Not least that the significant reductions of cars on the roads allowed people to overcome the largest barrier to cycle use, that of perceived safety, resulting in increases in cycle use during some weeks (particularly linked to good weather) of over 200%, and on some weekends of over 300%. This clearly suggests that the main driver of increased cycle use will be supply side changes to infrastructure. Such changes will need to both support potential commuting cyclists to feel safe making short journeys in urban areas, and support cycling sports tourists to feel safe accessing off-road routes by cycle from home, rather than driving to such routes in their cars. The extent to which policy makers retain an appetite for supply side infrastructural investments as lockdown eases, the extent to which such investment does increase perceptions of safety, and the extent to which such perceptions lead to increased cycle use, for both commuting cyclists and cycling sports tourists, will be key questions in supporting, promoting and growing sustainable travel.

The response to COVID-19 suggests that activities at the interface of sport and tourism can make a significant contribution to outcomes and policy goals for wellbeing, physical health,

mental health, and in supporting green space and sustainable travel as a response to the climate crisis. The challenge for managers, administrators and researchers working at the interface of sport and tourism is to look outwards beyond their own development concerns, and recognise and accept that they have both a responsibility and an opportunity to make these contributions.

AN INVITATION TO CONTRIBUTE

I want to end this feature editorial with an invitation to you, as the community of researchers working in and around the interface of sport and tourism, to take up the challenge of submitting research to the ***Journal of Sport & Tourism*** that either focuses on the contribution that the interface of sport and tourism has made to the COVID-19 response, or that explores the contribution that the interface of sport and tourism can make to wider social, economic and health outcomes and policy goals.

As you will be aware, many journals have issued Special Issue Calls focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on their discipline. Our approach is different in two ways. Firstly, we do not feel that we can adequately capture the intersection of sport, tourism and COVID-19 in a time limited special issue, particularly as the response to the impacts of COVID-19 will continue long after the virus itself has receded. Consequently, we will be curating an ongoing *research theme* relating to COVID-19 across issues and volumes.

Secondly, we are asking not what COVID-19 has done to the interface of sport and tourism, but what the interface of sport and tourism can do to support society, the economy and our health and wellbeing in the response to COVID-19. This means taking up the challenge to look outwards beyond our usual concern with the development of sports tourism, to consider the contribution, impact and role of our research for wider societal issues and concerns.

Some of these questions may require a re-conceptualisation of sports tourism, away from the large set piece occasions or the extraordinary journeys and activities with which it is most often associated, and towards a concern with the role that the interface of sport and tourism can play in people's everyday lives. I hope as a community we will be able to take up this challenge, and I look forward to receiving and reading your manuscripts in this area. Of course, the ***Journal of Sport & Tourism*** will continue to welcome and review manuscripts in all areas that fall within its scope, but manuscripts addressing the types of questions outlined in this feature editorial and invitation will be given particular attention in terms of delivering a swift and timely process of peer review and feedback. Please do feel free to contact me directly (mike.weed@canterbury.ac.uk) with any comments or suggestions you may have.

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