

# Sports Tourism and the Development of Sports Events

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Tourism and travelling is expected to grow by five percent each year up to 2020; the forecast for sports tourism is ten percent per year. Cities and regions across the globe are presently entered into honourable combat for these tourists, their money, and the inherent growth potential that follow in their wake. The winners will be those cities/regions that can fathom the fundamental motive power of sports tourism, and most successfully can utilize the potential of sports as tourist attraction. And they can find much to aid them in the academic research about sports tourism, where Professor Mike Weed of Canterbury Christ Church University takes a central position.

In his article for [idrottsforum.org](http://idrottsforum.org), Professor Weed starts by thoroughly analyzing the concept of sports tourism and the various definitions put forward in the rather voluminous body of literature already published. The definitions are generally too dependant on the common definitions of sports and tourism respectively; Mike Weed himself takes his point of departure in the synergistic nature of this particular form of tourism; sports tourism is seen as 'arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place', and thus related to both sports and tourism, but more than the sum of them. From this conceptual orientation and theoretical stance, the field opens up to in-depth scrutiny, and Weed develops models that increase our knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of sports tourism. With empirical data from his own as well as other research, he presents stimulating answers to the basic points in question, regarding the motivation and expectations of the sports tourist, the initiation, planning and carrying out of the trip, and, specifically when the object is a single sports event, what this means in terms of the decision to attend, the planning of the trip once it's been decided, and the actual realization of the trip.

**T**here has been a proliferation of definitions of sports tourism, but few attempts at conceptualising the area. Typical of many such definitions is that offered by Standeven and DeKnop (1999, p.12) that 'sport tourism' comprises:

All forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organised way for non-commercial or business/commercial reasons, that necessitate travel away from home and work locality.

Such a definition, while allowing an inclusive approach to the study of sports tourism, does little more than combine widely-accepted definitions of sport (cf Council of Europe, 1992) and tourism (cf British Tourist Authority, 1981). As such, it is really no definition at all as it doesn't add anything to an understanding of the area that couldn't be established from definitions of sport and of tourism as it simply identifies tourism activity involving sport. In fact, such a definition would seem to cast doubt on whether sports tourism is a serious subject for study, or whether it is merely a convenient descriptive term with little explanatory value. Other authors (eg Gammon & Robinson, 1997/2003; Robinson & Gammon, 2004; Sofield, 2003) have attempted to separate out 'sports tourists' (for whom sport is the primary purpose of the trip) and 'tourism sportists' (sic) (for whom tourism is the primary purpose), and to further classify these categories into 'hard' and 'soft' participants. However, the flaw in such work is that it is dependent on defining tourism activity in terms of sport, or sport activity in terms of tourism, and as such inevitably establishes a subordinate role for either tourism or sport in an understanding of the area. This is something that Pigeassou, Bui-Xuan and Gleyse (1998/2003) explicitly argue for, claiming that there is a need to establish an 'epistemological rupture' (p.30) that 'divides the phenomena and prevents any confusion between sport, tourism and sports tourism', and that this is only possible through such subordination, without which 'sports tourism would not exist and the activities described or observed would be confused with tourism phenomena' (p. 30). However, as has been argued elsewhere (Weed & Bull, 2004), sports tourism is a synergistic phenomenon that is more than the simple combination of sport and tourism. As such, it requires an understanding of both sport and tourism (cf Standeven & DeKnop's definition above), but it needs to be conceptualised in a way that is not dependent on definitions of sport and of tourism, and which allows its synergistic elements to be understood. Inevitably, sports tourism will be 'confused' with both sport and tourism, particularly by participants who are familiar with the concepts of sport and of tourism, but less likely to be familiar with the idea of sports tourism. This is not a problem, definitional boundaries are always fuzzy, and there is no clear need to establish such boundaries between sport, tourism and sports tourism. There is, however, a need to establish a clear conceptual understanding of the sports tourism phenomenon. One way in which this can be done is to examine the features of both sport and tourism and establish an understanding of sports tourism derived from those features.

Sport can be seen as involving some form of activity (eg kayaking, cycling, etc), be it formal or informal, competitive or recreational, or actively or vicariously/passively participated in. Furthermore, sport also involves other people, as competitors and/or co-participants. For vicarious/passive participants, the people element is likely to be both other vicarious/passive participants (ie other spectators) and the active participants (ie competitors). Similarly, active competitors and co-participants may experience other people as active and/or vicarious/passive participants. Even activities that are sometimes participated in alone (eg mountaineering, running) are likely to involve other people because participants may reference their participation in terms of the subculture of the activity and thus experience a feeling of 'communitas' (Turner, 1974). Similarly, tourism involves other people, either as co-travellers and/or as hosts. Even solitary tourism entails passing through areas that have been constructed by other people or other communities, and it is rare for a tourist to complete a trip without encountering other travellers. Tourism also involves visiting

places outside of the tourist's usual environment. There is, of course, a travel element, but this is either an instrumental factor in arriving at an 'unusual' place, or the travel takes place in or through 'unusual' places. Considering the interaction of these features of sport and tourism, it is possible to arrive at Weed and Bull's (2004, p.37) conceptualisation of sports tourism as 'arising from the unique interaction of activity, people and place'. Notice here that the focus is on the 'interaction' of activity, people and place, thus emphasising the synergistic nature of the phenomenon and moving it away from a dependence on either sport or tourism as the primary defining factor. Thinking about sports tourism in this way establishes the phenomenon as *related to but more than the sum of* sport and tourism, and thus establishes sports tourism as something that cannot be understood as simply a tourism market niche or a subset of sports management.

This conceptualisation has implications for terminology. Deriving from definitions of sports tourism that are dependent on definitions of sport and tourism, the term 'sport tourism' (rather than 'sports tourism') has achieved common currency. This is usually on the basis that 'sport' refers to the social institution of sport, while 'sports' refers to a collection of activities that have come to be defined as such. However, given the discussions above and the conceptualisation of sports tourism as derived from the unique interaction of activity, people and place, a reliance on the social institution of sport to delimit the area of sports tourism is somewhat contradictory. Furthermore, the concept of sport can in many cases be a misnomer in that it implies coherence where none exists and detracts from the heterogeneous nature of sporting activities. As the conceptualisation outlined here assumes that one of the unique aspects of sports tourism is that the interaction of people and places with the activities in question expands rather than limits heterogeneity, it is argued that the term 'sports tourism' should be used, along with the focus on diverse and heterogeneous activities that this implies.

## **Sports Tourism Behaviours and Sports Events**

The conceptual discussion above leads in to a discussion about areas for research and understanding in sports tourism. My own book (co-authored with Chris Bull), following an initial discussion of impacts, considers three sets of stakeholders in sports tourism: participants, policy-makers and providers. That these stakeholders are considered in this order is no co-incidence as an understanding of sports tourism participation and behaviours is fundamental to developing policy and making provision. In fact, as the impacts of sports tourism are derived from sports tourism behaviours, a knowledge of participation is also fundamental to understanding impacts.

Consequently, the remainder of this paper will focus on participation, and will consider the Sports Tourism Participation Model that we (Weed & Bull) proposed in 2004. However, before outlining the Model, it is perhaps useful to identify a number of key questions to consider about sports event tourists:

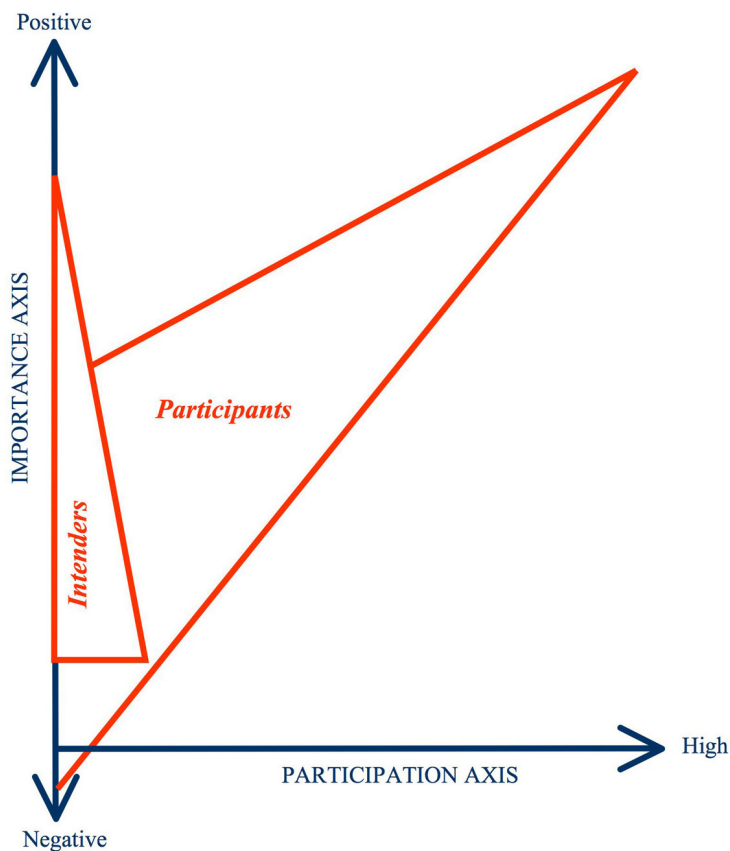
- Why do people travel to sports events?
- What do people want from event sports tourism?

- Are event sports tourism visits “one-off” occurrences or part of a broader profile of event sports tourism behaviours?
- How do event sports tourism behaviours relate to the rest of the trip?
- What role do sports events play in...
  - Trip decision making?
  - (post-decision) trip planning?
  - (spontaneous) trip behaviours?

The following section attempts to address some of these questions through the presentation of the Sports Tourism Participation Model.

## The Sports Tourism Participation Model

The Sports Tourism Participation Model (Weed & Bull, 2004) plots sports tourism participation against the importance placed on sports tourism activities and trips (see Fig. 1). Levels of participation increase along the horizontal axis, whilst the vertical scale indicates the amount of importance attached to the sports tourism trip by individuals. The model illustrates that towards the left of the scale the level of importance attached to a trip may vary from a relatively high level, to little importance, or even negative importance. At the right of the scale, however, both importance and participation are high. This creates a ‘triangle’



**Fig. 1** The sports tourism participation model (from Weed & Bull, 2004)

of participation, the size of which corresponds to the number of sports tourists at each particular level. This, however, refers to numbers of participants rather than levels of activity, as those towards the right of the scale will generate a much higher level of activity per participant than those on the left of the scale.

Studies of sports participation at Butlins Holiday Worlds in the UK (McCoy, 1991; Reeves, 2000) describe reluctant participation in sport on holiday that accounts for the existence of participants who attach a negative importance to sports tourism. The following are two representative examples of comments made by tourists in focus groups in these studies:

I do more than I probably realise, to be honest I prefer to relax. But I'm always having to play with the kids or I'm in the pool with them, but none of that is my own time and not really organised. It just happens when you have to look after the young ones.

Having the sports going on adds to the atmosphere of the place, but its not really my idea of what to do on holiday, although my wife has got me playing badminton a couple of times.

The participation these tourists are describing often takes place as a result of a sense of duty to others, particularly family members such as children or partners. Participation takes place although there may be an antipathy towards it. At the other end of the importance axis at the left of the scale is participation that individuals feel is important to their sense of self or identity even though actual levels of participation may be low. Such participation is important as it affects the identity that participants wish to portray to their peers on return from the sports tourism trip. The importance of 'returning' as a significant part of the tourism experience is described by MacCannell (1996; 4) who explains that 'returning home is an essential part of being a tourist – one goes only to return'. MacCannell believes that tourists are people who leave home in the expectation that they will have some kind of experience of 'otherness' that will set them apart from their peers on their return. Here the experience of otherness is the participation in sport whilst on holiday, with the importance being attached to the perceived kudos that the telling and re-telling of the experience, often based on only sporadic or incidental participation, gives the participant on returning home. An example of this level of importance may be of someone who takes a beach holiday abroad and spends most of the time soaking up the sun on the beach. However, this person may be goaded by his or her family into participating in a 30 minute water-skiing session. This may be the sum total of this individual's sports participation on this holiday, but the impression that may be conveyed to his or her peers on return, through exaggerated re-telling of the experience, would be of a holiday full of watersports activities – an impression that may accord the individual a certain level of esteem among his or her peers. A perceived identity is constructed that means that the sports tourism element of his or her trip has a relatively high importance despite the very low level of actual participation. Of course, in this example, the level of importance is a result of extrinsic factors – the identity which is portrayed to others. For other participants on the left and towards the middle of the scale, sports holiday participation may be important for more intrinsic factors. Holiday sports participation may be an opportunity to take part in lapsed activities for which the

time or opportunity for participation does not exist at home (Weed, 2001b). Here significant importance may be attached to such participation because holiday sports participation, no matter how low, may be the only link that such individuals have with past sports participation and, consequently, with a continued conception of themselves as a 'sports person'. This is something that may be of major importance to someone who has previously been a very active sports participant, but for whom other responsibilities now restrict participation. As an example of this, the following comment is from a participant in a pilot study of recreational sports participation at Club La Santa, a sports resort in Lanzarote:

Coming here, it was an absolute top priority for me to do as many sports as I can because my current lifestyle, my job, my family, do not allow sufficient time for exercise. I like to think of myself as a sporty person, but I just haven't got the time any more. I get annoyed with myself sometimes.

Other participants made similar comments, and this serves to illustrate the levels of importance that can be attached to relatively sporadic levels of sports tourism participation. In both this example, and that described above, the contribution which sports tourism can make to individuals' perceived and self identities, means that sports tourism can be important to individuals for whom actual levels of participation are low.

As levels of participation, and broad levels of importance, increase with a move from left to right in the model, the quality of the sports tourism experience becomes more important as sport becomes a significant factor in tourism destination choices. Weed and Bull (2004) discuss the extent to which the nature of the place can contribute considerably to the quality of such experiences. This may be through the standard of facilities available at the destination, but also as a result of the general environment, the place ambience, the scenic attractiveness, and the presence of other like-minded people. Furthermore, Weed and Bull (2004) also draw on the work of Urry (1990) in noting the specific motivation of some regular sports tourists to 'collect places'. This may be the development of a 'collection' of as wide a range of places as possible, a factor among many of the 'active event sports tourists' studied by Bull and Weed (1999) in Malta, many of whom had competed at non-elite level in running events around the world, often combining such participation with a subsequent family holiday. Alternatively, such 'place collection' may relate to particularly significant or 'mythical' sports places. An example of this might be visits by surfers to beaches in Hawaii that are regarded as surfing 'Meccas'.

The significance of the unique interaction of activity, people and place would appear to increase with movement towards the right of the participation triangle. However, for some at the far right of the scale, the place experience may be less important than technical requirements related to the quality of facilities. Such participants are the elite athletes described by Jackson and Reeves (1998) and Reeves (2000). For these participants, factors related to place environment – with the exception of climate which is, of course, important for 'warm-weather training' – are relatively insignificant. For example, many of these athletes were unable to take part in activities that might have enhanced their experience of the place, such as eating out or recreational participation in other sports, because they were on special diets and were afraid of injury. The latter issue was highlighted by virtually all the athletes in the Reeves (2000) study, as exemplified by these comments:

We go swimming. Quite often we use it as a session. We play a bit of basketball, but I tend not to play too many other sports because your muscles are not used to it and there is a greater chance of sustaining an injury. (Mark Richardson, 23, GB & England Senior International, 400m)

I tend not to play other sports as I'm usually too tired after my athletics training. There is also the risk of injury. I do a bit of swimming, but really when I am away I believe that I'm specifically there to train. I try not to do too many active things so that I can conserve my energy and put it into my training. I cannot risk getting injured. (Angela Davies, 28, GB and England Senior International, 1500m)

A couple of years ago when I was in Lanzarote, I went in early December so you are not too close to competition time. So that time I got involved in surfing, cycling and played tennis. When I went in March time just before competition, I would not do anything for fear of injury. I did swim recreationally, but nothing dangerous. (Sonya Bowyer, 23, GB & England Intermediate International, 100m)

These differences in behaviours, along with their elite sports ability, set such participants apart from other sports tourists. However, with the exception of the elite athlete, high levels of sports ability and performance are not a pre-requisite for even the most committed of sports tourists. Surfers are a good example of such committed sports tourists who are not necessarily concerned with elite performance, and for whom the experiential aspects of the activity are clearly of great importance. This is highlighted by Butts (2001) who notes how many of the surfers in his study described the 'serenity of the ocean' and the importance of the condition of the ocean and the environment to the surfing experience.

Also at the far right of the model are spectators in a number of sports for whom both participation and importance are high, and for whom sports spectating is a defining part of their self-identity. An example from this end of the scale might be the 'Barmy Army' group of England cricket fans who, since their emergence in the mid-1990s, have demonstrated a very high level of commitment to following a less than successful England cricket team around the globe (Weed, 2002). The 'spirit' of the Barmy Army is described by one of its long-standing members recalling its origins:

The Barmy Army was in effect created by the Australian media's description of England's cricket fans during the Ashes series in 1994/95. 'Barmy' because we were spending lots of money supporting a side that couldn't win a game of cricket and 'Army' because there were hundreds grouped together at each match singing and partying. As results got worse the intensity of our support increased and the Barmy Army rapidly became the focal point for both the media and the general public. The Army verbally conquered the Aussies with the use of songs, chants, irony and wit. Since our first foray into Australia we have travelled on all of England's subsequent adventures and the same popularity and media attention has been enjoyed by the supporters (South Africa, New Zealand, Sharjah and the Caribbean). During this time we have

accumulated a mailing list of around 5000 names who we regularly update on travel tips for upcoming tours, reunions and merchandise.

Football fans are also a good example of the committed sports spectator, and much of the work on football hooliganism (see Carnibella et al, 1996; Dunning et al, 1988 and Weed, 2001a) certainly suggests that many are Driven participants for whom their identity as a hooligan is of central importance. That is not to suggest that football supporting is not important to non-violent football fans – in fact, the level of commitment shown by some fans has been compared to religion (Bale, 2003) – but is merely an indication of the area in which the majority of research on sports fans has been concentrated.

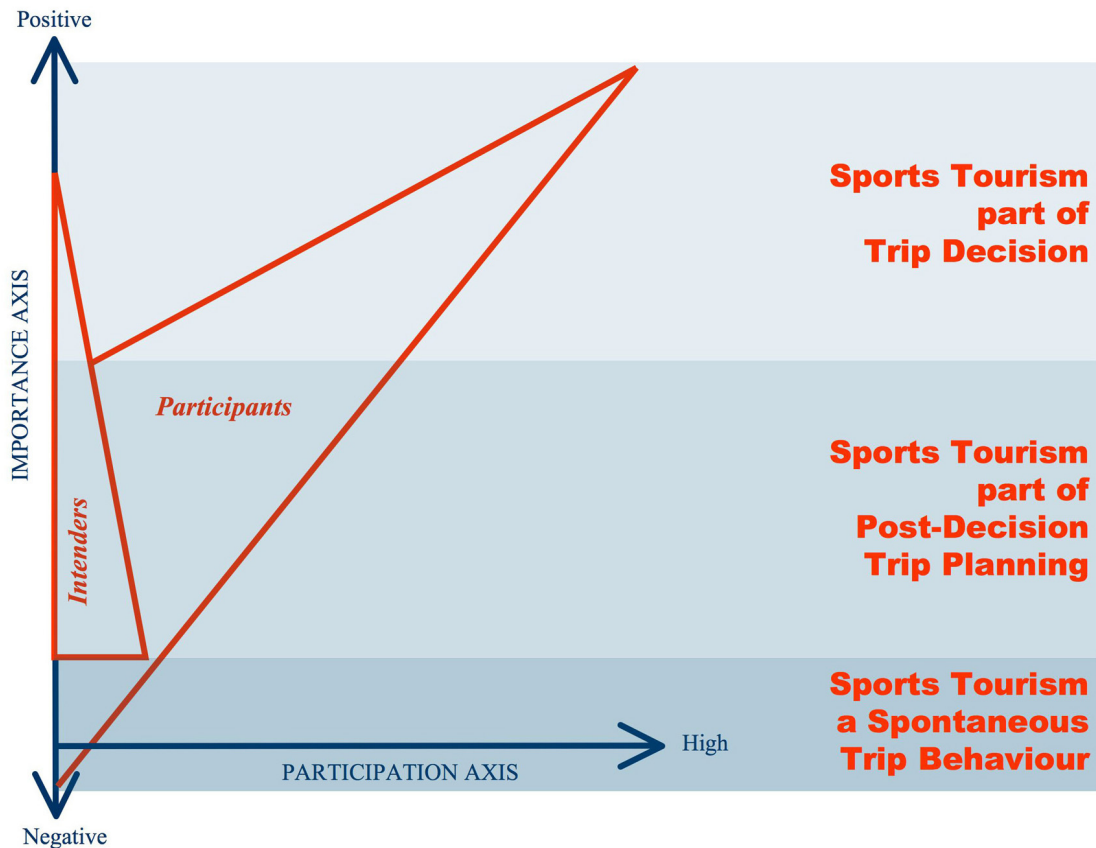
The example of football fans is a useful one to continue with in examining sports spectators at the left of the triangle where participation is low. Here there will be a vast number of people for whom identity as a football fan is of great importance, but for whom participation in live football spectating as a sports tourism experience is minimal. Similarly, there will be those who have spectated at football, but for whom it is not an important part of their identity. In fact, as with participants in active sports tourism, it is likely that, for some, such participation has a negative importance as it has taken place out of a sense of duty to others such as partners or children. Studies of spectators at two athletics events in Britain in 1996 – the Europa Cup (Train, 1996) and the Athletics World Cup (Reeves, 2000) – found that around 20% of spectators had attended because a family member or friend had wanted to attend.

A discussion of sports spectators provides a useful avenue through which to introduce another concept into the model – that of the ‘Intender’. Intenders were described in relation to arts audiences by Hill et al (1995; 43) as ‘those who think the arts are a “good thing” and like the idea of attending, but never seem to get around to it’. Such a concept would also seem to be useful in relation to sports tourism, and perhaps sports spectators provide the most useful illustration. The growth in televised coverage of sport has created a vast number of sports spectators who are highly committed, and for whom watching sport is important, but who rarely travel to a live event (Weed, 2006). Many such spectators often express a desire to go to a live event, but like Hill et al’s (1995) arts intenders, ‘never seem to get around to it’. Of course, some intenders will attend the odd match, and so the boundary with incidental participation is fluid. However, this group is largely made up of those for whom watching sport is important, but for whom attending a live event never becomes more than a whimsical intention.

The Intenders categorisation is, of course, equally significant in relation to active sports tourism. In the same research in which he identified holiday sports participation that takes place as a duty to others, Reeves (2000) also describes those who go on holiday with the intention of taking up some of the sports opportunities available, but never actually get round to it. The promotion of the range of sports opportunities available in hotel and resort brochures can create the intention to participate in sport on holiday, but in many cases such intention is not converted into actual participation (Keynote, 2001; Weed & Bull, 2003). Even where such incidental sports opportunities may play a part in resort or hotel choice, and the intention may be described to peers pre-trip (in the same way as low levels of participation may be exaggerated post-trip as discussed earlier) as a way of boosting perceived identity, there is no guarantee that such intention will be converted into actual participation.

## The Sports Tourism Model and the Trip Decision Making Process

In updating the Sports Tourism Participation Model from that proposed in 2004, it is useful to consider the role of sports tourism in the trip decision making process. Here, sports tourism may be a deciding or contributing factor in the decision to take a trip and the choice of destination, it may be a factor in trip planning that takes place after the trip decision and destination choice has been made, and/or it may simply be a spontaneous trip behaviour. These levels can be illustrated in the Sports Tourism Participation Model as the diagram below shows:



**Fig. 2** *A revised sports tourism participation model*

The diagram shows that, as might be intuitively expected, sports tourism is a factor in trip decision at the top of the model where importance is high, it is a factor in post-decision trip-planning in the middle of the model where importance is moderate, and is a spontaneous trip behaviour at the bottom of the model where importance is low. Sports tourism intentions (as indicated by the Intenders classification) can also influence trip decisions and planning, even though this may not be carried through to actual sports tourism behaviours.

## Events Sports Tourism and the Trip Decision Making Process

In considering the role of the trip decision making process within the model in relation to event sports tourism, a range of categories of event sports tourists exist for whom the role

that the event plays in the trip decision making process can be identified. As such, for the following categories of event sports tourist, event sports tourism will have been part of the trip decision:

- Event Participants and Officials
- Friends and family of participants
- Spectators who are “emotionally invested” in supporting a particular individual or team (ie, long-term committed fans)
- “One-off” spectators to major events
- Spectators taking in the event as part of a wider trip
- “Must-see” spectators who see the event as a vital part of a visit to a particular area (eg Baseball in New York)
- Obligation spectators who are attending because members of their family wish to attend
- Intending spectators who travel but don’t attend
- Intending spectators who don’t make the trip

In addition to the above, in the following cases, event sports tourism will have featured in post-decision trip planning:

- “One-off” spectators to major events
- Spectators taking part in a wider trip
- “Must-see” spectators
- Obligation spectators
- Intending spectators who travel but don’t attend
- Less-emotionally invested spectators
- Curiosity spectators (who are interested to see what the event is like)

As the above list shows, there is some overlap with the previous list, for example, some “must-see” spectators including a consideration of event sports tourism in their trip decision, whilst others will not consider it until the post-decision trip planning stage. A similar overlap occurs when those for whom event sports tourism is a spontaneous behaviour are considered:

- Obligation spectators
- Less-emotionally invested spectators
- Curiosity spectators
- Novelty spectators (who feel it is something different to do)
- Experience-oriented spectators (who like to “collect” different experiences)
- Opportunity spectators (who spontaneously took up the opportunity to attend)
- “Loose-end” spectators (who have “nothing better to do”)
- Pre-trip information-poor spectators (who would have planned to attend the event but didn’t know about it)

## Conclusion: Developing Strategy

The issues relating to sports tourism and event sports tourism behaviours discussed in this paper can be fundamental to the development of sports tourism and event sports tourism provision strategies. As such, and in conclusion, it is suggested that the following are key questions relating to behaviours that providers and policy-makers should consider in formulating provision strategies:

- *When is the decision to attend the event made?*
- *What aspects of Activity, People and Place attract visitors to the event?*
- *What is the relationship between the event and other aspects of the trip?*
- *Will the event attract loyal visitors?*

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