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## Article

# Sport tourism as a local economic development enhancer for emerging destinations

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## Sport Tourism as a Local Economic Development Enhancer for Emerging Destinations

Siyabulela Nyikana<sup>1</sup>, Tembi M. Tichaawa<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper explores sport tourism and its contribution to local economic development in an emerging destination context. Sport tourism events have been earmarked as having the ability to spotlight previously neglected and underdeveloped destinations. Resultantly, countries in Africa have recognised the potential of sport tourism to stimulate LED. Using a mixed-method research design, the study collected 670 surveys with sport event attendees at four distinct events in Cameroon. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with officials in the domain of tourism and sport. Data reveal that, by and large, sport tourism contributes significantly to LED and plays an important role in the promotion of the region. The study provides critical lessons for the local government and relevant authorities in tourism and sport regarding policy formulation and planning around sport tourism events. Particularly, the need for local authorities to leverage sport tourism events further for the broadening of community benefits exists.

**Keywords:** sport tourism; local economic development; sustainability; emerging economy; Cameroon

**JEL Classification:** L83

### 1. Introduction

Sport tourism has experienced significant growth as an industry, an area of research focus, and as an economic and social growth strategy for many countries, globally. (Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2018; Hinch & Higham, 2011; Knott & Hemmonsbeey, 2015; Marumo et al., 2015; Nyikana, 2016; Saayman, 2012; Steinbrink et al., 2011; Tichaawa et al., 2018) According to Tichaawa et al. (2018), sport tourism events, have played a great role in this growth of sport tourism. According to Steinbrink et al. (2011), sport tourism, and events generally, have appealed to countries in the Global South, and especially to emerging nations in recent times. Marumo et al. (2015) observe how, given the historical over-reliance of emerging economies on traditional industries, like mining and agriculture, the dynamic expansion of globalisation has forced the economies to move towards diversified economies that emphasise the development of such service sectors as sport tourism. Bob and Swart (2010) advocate for the drive towards diversified economies, by promoting sport tourism as a way of achieving event-driven economies, especially in the Global South. The aggressive approach towards hosting sport tourism events, and towards the exploring of sport tourism as a growth and development strategy among emerging nations is based on the premise that they serve as avenues through which economics and other wider tourism benefits can be accrued, in both the short and the long term. Simultaneously, they also provide much-needed upgrades to the sporting and transport infrastructure, which are much required by the local communities in such countries. (Briedenhann, 2011; Tichaawa

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et al., 2018) Other commentators<sup>1</sup> note that both the developed and the emerging economies tend to focus on sport tourism as a means of promoting development, of enhancing social cohesion among citizens, of promoting health and wellness, and of boosting their profiles as desirable tourist destinations.

Sport tourism is continuously being utilised for the restructuring of both rural and urban local communities, which are in great need of regeneration in the emerging economies. (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Egresi & Kara, 2014; Grix, 2012; Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2018; Homafar et al., 2011; Tichaawa & Bob, 2015) According to Njoroge et al. (2017), besides the much-publicised economic implications that are associated with sport tourism and events hosting, other lasting benefits also exist that can be leveraged for the long-term sustainable development of the communities of the local economies. For example, sport tourism often leads to the fast-tracking of general infrastructure development, and to the creation of leisure and sporting facilities, which in turn, can attract investments in the lodging and catering industries for the local regions. (Bob & Swart, 2010; Njoroge et al., 2017; Weed & Bull, 2009)

Such investment inevitably leads to destination attractiveness, and to the establishment of small to medium business growth, whose value for the local economic development (LED) of emerging tourism destinations like Cameroon, the case study area for the current study, cannot be overemphasized. (Tichaawa, 2017) Bouhaouala (2015) also notes that, in many economies, sport tourism is seen as an important driver of growth, which is especially linked to such socio-economic development opportunities as employment and business opportunity creation for the locals. However, the effectiveness of sport tourism as a socio-economic development tool for emerging nations hinges largely on adequate capability that is mostly linked to facilities, as well as to the availability of knowledgeable and qualified administrators. (Marumo et al., 2015) Against such a backdrop the present study argues that, while much research has been conducted on the sport tourism implications for the developed economies, emerging nations have been somewhat neglected, especially in Africa. (Tichaawa & Bob, 2015) Most of the studies mentioned above have, to a certain degree, analysed sport tourism, but those concerned have been consisted of impact-based studies that seek to assess the impacts that sport tourism can have on specific destinations. The current study's uniqueness lies in the fact that it explores the nexus between sport tourism and LED in an emerging context, especially on the basis of the existing wide acknowledgement of sport tourism events being used strategically to enhance LED. The argument is that, despite the acknowledgement that sport tourism can play an important role in LED, specific research on the above, especially within the African context, is scant.

## **2. Sport Tourism and Local Economic Development**

The concept of LED has grown in significance for economies, as well as having become an important theme for researchers in recent times. (Andergassen & Candela, 2013; Binns & Nel, 2002; Kimbu, 2011; 2012; Pike et al., 2007; Rogerson, 2011; 2013; Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018) The studies mentioned have explored LED for varying reasons, but common among them has been the identification of LED as a critical part of economic development for many countries globally, and for sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Other commentators (Kimbu, 2012; Rogerson, 2007; 2011; 2013a; 2013b; Tichaawa & Bob, 2015; Tichaawa et al., 2018; Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018) have considered the link that exists between LED and tourism generally. However, what has been arguably

<sup>1</sup> See (Bob & Swart, 2010; Getz, 2013; Gibson, 2006; Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2018; Hudson & Hudson, 2010; Radicchi, 2013; Saayman, 2012; Tichaawa et al., 2018).

neglected is the specific link between sport tourism events and their LED contributions. The current study is, therefore, positioned to explore the existing link in the Cameroon context.

In the extant literature that has focused on tourism, the sector's growth, coupled with the increase in recreational activities, are said to have significant implications for the local economies, particularly in terms of the socio-economic development of marginal regions and rural destinations. (Kimbu, 2011; Rogerson, 2013a) Rogerson (2013b) contends that various tourism activities can be used to contribute significantly to the preservation of regional identity, for example, and for the stimulation of local service activities which, in turn, contributes to employment creation. LED has, thus, become an increasingly important theme for destinations globally, and, in particular, the importance of local-level planning for socio-economic development has been much improved. (Rogerson, 2011) LED activity represents a socio-economic approach that stresses employment creation, poverty alleviation, the enhancement of the quality of life of community members, and environmental sustainability. (Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018) Similarly, and although not yet largely explored in the Pan-African context, sport tourism has, equally, been noted as an effective tool for employment creation, and as a tool for improving the quality of life and well-being of community members. (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018; Nyikana, 2016; Saayman, 2012; Tichaawa et al., 2018) According to Rogerson (2011), an LED strategy focuses on adopting an integrated developmental approach as opposed to a more general, 'one size fits all' solution. As such, its main aim is to mobilise the local economic potential through innovation regarding infrastructure, SMME development, and human resource skilling, attracting foreign direct investments (FDIs), fostering destination competitiveness, and strengthening the local institutions. LED is seen as a social technique of development, wherein economic aspects, as well as employment creation, the reduction of poverty, the enhancement of the quality of life of the locals, and environmental sustainability are considered holistically for the benefit of the local economy. (Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018) The decentralised approach to development, in terms of which development is focused on the local level, is a strategic vehicle for driving national economic development. (Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018)

Much of the LED promotional activity centres around expanding the role of localities in the developing context. (Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018) The authors contend that the increased interest around tourism as an important and equally strategic vehicle for LED is largely due to the increased importance of tourism in the national economies. In the African context, LED is seen as a process whereby collaborations between local governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based groups, and the private sector are encouraged and established. The above is done to manage resources, to create employment opportunities for the locals, and to stimulate the economy of a local destination. (Rogerson, 2011) Over the past decade, the amount of importance attached to LED as a way of developing the African continent has been markedly rising. (Rogerson, 2011) In the present article, the authors argue that sport tourism can be used to further enhance LED, especially if its impacts are carefully planned, and collectively leveraged, for all the stakeholders concerned, but particularly for the host communities.

Besides the fact that tourism promotion is seen as an important strategy by means of which economic upliftment, community development and poverty reduction can be achieved in the emerging economies, socio-economic and environmental resources can be used to promote tourism as a local economic development vehicle for such destinations. (Binns & Nel, 2002) In the Pan-African context, much of the existing research on tourism and LED is directed towards tourism's role in pro-poor development, and towards its impacts on poverty alleviation at the local level. (Rogerson, 2013b; Kimbu, 2011) The author argues that another aspect that is evident in the above-mentioned context is

the catalytic role that tourism plays in establishing partnerships between the local stakeholders. The role is also key in the sport tourism domain, wherein stakeholders should be collaborating and involved in the planning and management of sport tourism events, in particular. (Tichaawa et al., 2018) Such stakeholders include the local authorities, the community and the private sector. (Kimbu, 2011; Rogerson, 2011; Tichaawa & Bob, 2015; Van der Merwe & Rogerson, 2018) Kimbu (2012) argues, though, that, in the process, it becomes crucial to improve on the understanding of the specific roles of the local actors concerned, but particularly the public sector, in promoting tourism-led LED. The above occurs on the basis that tourism-led LED requires certain preconditions to be met, in terms of localities having certain assets for tourism development. (Rogerson, 2013a) According to Rogerson (2013b), tourism is therefore viewed as an attractive industry, which exhibits sustainable potential for employment creation, assured income streams, and urban regeneration, as well as potentially assisting in the renewal of failing economies. The above makes tourism desirable for many destinations, especially as a key driver for LED.

Tourism's development, and the development of other associated sectors, are seen as important contributors to LED, and, if properly planned and managed, the tourism economy could play a crucial role in the developing world in future. (Rogerson, 2002) According to Binns and Nel (2002), the main features of LED are that it seeks to encourage economic growth, and to diversify the local economic base into sectors that typically differ from the traditional sectors. Therefore, such vibrant tourism offerings as festival and events hosting, heritage sites, convention centres, and capitalising on locally available natural resources, are all hallmarks of LED. Binns and Nel (2002) see such initiatives as part of a broader LED programme that is intended by the local authorities to make destinations more exciting and attractive for tourism and recreation. Moreover, LED also focuses on the quality of life, social cohesion and well-being balanced with economic competitiveness and growth at the local level. (Pike et al., 2007) Therefore, for tourism to be effective as a vehicle for LED, its development should be intrinsically linked to other issues of local social development and environmental conservation, so as to exhibit commitment towards pro-poor tourism outcomes. (Rogerson, 2013b) To achieve the above, a comprehensive and holistic approach should be adopted, wherein the linkages between tourism and other economic activities, like agriculture, and in the present case, sport, are formed, with the synergies therefrom being encouraged and promoted. (Rogerson, 2013b)

Rogerson (2011) suggests that, in sub-Saharan Africa, LED will only prove to be effective if the national business environment is improved, and the regulatory processes that impede local business development reviewed. In addition, the coordination across different government departments requires improvement, and the competitiveness of cities strengthening. Kimbu (2011; 2012) posits that, while tourism generally has been identified as being important to LED in Central African countries, like Cameroon, the area has not yet been given sufficient attention and, as such, its impacts as a vehicle for LED still have to be realised. Kimbu (2012) suggests that, for LED to be enhanced in Cameroon's local areas, there should be meaningful consultation, inclusion, and the participation of all interested and affected parties (IAPs) in all the stages of planning, right through to the implementation and management of tourism activities in such areas. According to Presenza and Iocca (2012), the success of tourism, and of sport tourism events in particular, largely depends on the fruitfulness of planned interactions between the event owners and other relevant stakeholders. The researchers in question argue that events are only likely to be important drivers for LED, and to foster significant socio-economic contributions, when the need for such interactions is stressed.

The activities in which stakeholders should be involved could include natural attractions and sport tourism products, which, collectively, require collaboration between the local government, the private

sector, the non-governmental organisations, and the non-profit sectors, as well as the local community. (Kimbu, 2012) The author argues that the local communities should be empowered to improve their investment climate, and, therefore, to enhance LED through improved destination and business competitiveness and employment opportunities. The emphasis is on collaboration between all who are involved in the tourism development process, as such is the only way to achieve success.

In sub-Saharan Africa, however, LED strategies are often devised solely by the local governments concerned, with very little, or no, consultation of other stakeholders, thereby resulting in disappointing results for socio-economic development. (Kimbu, 2012; Tichaawa & Bob, 2015) In Cameroon, for example, sport tourism is identified as having great potential, with prime sites for its development having been identified, but with very limited physical infrastructure being put in place to entice investors and tourists to capitalise on the niche. (Kimbu, 2012) The above is supported by Rogerson (2013b), who argues that, in sub-Saharan Africa, the absence of complementary investments, support services and infrastructure committed to the building of tourism serves as an important challenge for tourism-led LED. Resultantly, the specific contributions that sport tourism can have on LED enhancement are not realised. As was previously indicated, Van der Merwe and Rogerson (2018) suggest that tourism-led LED practitioners consider niche forms of tourism that many localities use as a way of building competitiveness in relation to tourism development. Such niches include adventure activities, agritourism, birdwatching, wine or youth festivals, and sports events, amongst others.

Sport tourism is seen as an ever-increasing industry, which has significant influences on the economic and social restructuring of the urban and rural, areas especially in the emerging destination context. (Ehsani et al., 2012) Sport tourism, when analysed holistically, has important synergies with the local arts and crafts, which, in terms of their part in LED, are crucial to cultural heritage preservation and to the general development of the local economies. (Radicchi, 2013) The author contends that some sport tourism events take place in beautiful and exotic locations and, by their mere nature and character, make the participants feel like heroes, since they occur under extreme conditions, and therefore test them to their limits. The above can be contextualised in relation to the Mount Cameroon Race of Hope, which is one of the events in question in terms of the current study. (The Race is an endurance challenge that brings thousands of visitors to Cameroon.) Such events are seen as being highly sustainable, based on their functionality for the promotion and eco-compatible development of local contexts, which, otherwise, might be isolated, or perform poorly, in terms of their tourism industry-related performance. (Radicchi, 2013)

In such developed contexts as Europe, sport and tourism are often linked to traditional products like cycling or walking routes through cultural territories. (Radicchi, 2013) The above leads to a unique tourist experience, which can serve as a catalyst for LED in both the short and the long term. Sport tourism events, when successfully managed, can play a significant role in LED, in terms of socio-economic contributions. (Presenza & Iocca, 2012; Radicchi, 2013) According to Radicchi (2013), sport tourism events have been noted as being important resources for development, especially in the local context. The above is because the events offer a platform for local economic growth through job creation, infrastructural development, enhanced access to information, and a general boost in destination attractiveness, among others. (Radicchi, 2013) Furthermore, such events provide a much-needed boost to local businesses, which are predominantly small or medium-sized, especially in the local developing context. Such business boosts, in turn, have positive implications for the LED component of the local government. However, for the above to be realised, the stakeholders, especially in the local context, need to be aware of the potential impacts of such events, and to be able

to cooperate for the greater good of the community and all involved. (Aas et al., 2005; Presenza & Iocca, 2012; Radicchi, 2013)

### **3. Cameroon and Sport Tourism**

The current study was conducted in Cameroon (see Figure 1 below). Cameroon is a West African country that is located north of the Gulf of Guinea, adjoining the Atlantic Ocean. The country shares its borders with Nigeria to the west; with Congo Brazzaville, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea to the west; with the Central African Republic (CAR) to the east; and with Chad to the north-east, while it fringes on Lake Chad to the north. (Nations Online, 2016) The country is subdivided into ten semi-autonomous regions. (Cameroon Ministry of Tourism and Leisure, 2016) According to the Cameroon Association for Responsible Tourism (CAMAST) (2016), tourism in Cameroon is growing at a rapid rate, albeit that the industry is still seen as being minor in relation to some other industries, like agriculture. Since the 1970s, the Cameroonian government has cultivated the industry, establishing the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure to oversee the encouragement of investment in airlines, hotels and travel agencies throughout the country. Cameroon offers a unique tourism experience, through its diverse offering in terms of its climate, culture and geography. (CAMAST, 2016) According to Hele (2002), Cameroon is often described as a destination offering a unique tourism experience, especially on the basis of the country having an abundance of cultural and natural attractions. Kimbu (2011) notes that Cameroon is nicknamed “Africa in miniature”, due to its exceptional topography, its varied flora and fauna offerings, and its diversity. The government of Cameroon has, thus, identified tourism development as a key driver for enhancing LED, especially in areas that lag behind in terms of mineral and agricultural resource production. (Kimbu, 2012; Tichaawa, 2017) However, for any tourism development to be effective, such challenges as the country’s general poor international image as a tourist destination, the poor quality of accommodation available, and the disappointing ground transport network, among other challenges, should be overcome. (Tichaawa, 2017)

Sport in Cameroon has, for a long time, served as a way of uniting the citizens of the country, especially during periods of relative turmoil. (Top End Sports, 2016) The country has a diverse range of sporting codes, including those pertaining to canoe racing, boxing, basketball, cycling, and running marathons. However, football remains the most popular sport in the country, drawing large numbers of spectators and participants alike, even at the grassroots level. (Top End Sports, 2016) The men’s national football team has participated in seven Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup tournaments so far, and it has also won five African Cup of Nations titles, as well as a gold medal, in the Summer Olympic Games in the year 2000. Besides the success achieved in such ventures, the country has recently displayed an eagerness to host a number of local, national and international sporting events, including the successful hosting of the 2016 Women Africa Cup of Nations, and the imminent hosting of the 2019 AFCON.



Figure 1. Map of Cameroon, indicating the study areas concerned

Source: Modified from Tichaawa (2017)

#### 4. Methodology

The present study employed a mixed-method research approach, wherein both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used. The data for the study were collected in two phases. The first phase consisted of the quantitative data collection, in terms of which closed-ended questionnaires were administered to event attendees at four prominent sport tourism events across Cameroon. Such events included the 2016 Women Africa Cup of Nations, the Mount Cameroon Race of Hope, the Central African University Games, and a premier league football game. Due to the uncertain nature of events, the number of attendees could not be determined prior to the events. However, by using the estimates from previous years, a sample size of 500 was drawn. The distribution of the questionnaires is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Distribution of questionnaires

Name of event	Total number of questionnaires
2016 Women Africa Cup of Nations	220
Mount Cameroon Race of Hope	150
Central African University Games	150
Premier League Match	150

In total, 670 questionnaires were deemed usable after the data collection period. The questionnaires were collected by a team of trained fieldworkers over the period of a year (2016). A spatially-based systematic sampling approach was employed to collect the data. As was mentioned earlier, a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the attendee perceptions of sport tourism on LED. The main variables measured included the socio-demographic profiles involved; the motives concerned in

attending the events; other activities in which engaged besides event attendance; and the perceptions of LED contributions of sport tourism.

The second phase consisted of the qualitative interviews conducted with key informants consisting of various stakeholders (4 officials) in the sport and tourism domains of Cameroon. A purposive sampling technique was used in the qualitative data collection process. The key informants were chosen on the basis of their in-depth understanding of sport tourism and LED issues. In the above regard, officials from the Ministry of Sport and Physical Education; the Ministry of Tourism and Leisure; a tour guide; and an official from the LED office were interviewed. The interviews were, on average, 45 minutes long. They featured discussions on the perceptions of sport tourism contributions to the local economies involved. In addition, the interviews were used to gauge, and to discuss, the level of purposeful planning required for socio-economic gains to be made from sport tourism events.

Data analysis involves reducing data to a manageable size, so as to draw summaries and patterns, enabling the effective interpreting of the findings of a research project. (Cresswell & Clark, 2011) In the above regard, the quantitative data for the study were analysed through the use of the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25, software. The qualitative interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically in line with the objectives of the study. The findings therefrom are presented in the following section.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### *Respondents' Profiles*

The data reveal that the majority of the respondents (81.2%) were domestic tourists/visitors to the events (Cameroon citizens), whereas only 18.8% were foreign visitors, as can be seen in Table 2 below (indicating the basic demographic profile of the attendees). The main countries that were represented by outsiders to Cameroon (N=126) included neighbouring Nigeria (23.0%), Mali (17.5%), South Africa (8.7%), Zimbabwe (8.7%), and Kenya (8.7%). In respect of those from within Cameroon (N=544), there was a wide distribution of the domestic source markets to the events. The majority of domestic tourists originated from the Southwest (21.8%) and the Northwest (20.3%) provinces, respectively. In terms of gender representation, there was a closely split representation between men (53%) and women (47%). Interestingly, a notable percentage of the respondents (29.0%) indicated that others had travelled with them to the event destination, but were, by preference, engaging in other activities apart from the event space. The above finding was supported by the related finding that was made in the interviews with the key informants, who indicated that sport tourism events tend to have aspects of non-event activity. For example, a prominent tour guide in Cameroon indicated:

*“Sport can promote touristic sites, because, when tourists come, they go around. They pay tour guides to take them around, and this goes to form part of the economy.”*

**Table 2. Basic profile of attendees to Cameroon's sporting events**

Characteristics	Key findings
Nationality	81% Cameroonians; 19% non-Cameroonians
Gender	53% men, 47% women
Employment status	Full-time (49.9%); part-time (13.4%); student (11.2%); self-employed (10.6%)
Education	Postgraduate (15.1%); undergraduate (30.6%); diploma/certificate (15.2%); secondary schooling (30.3%); primary schooling (5.2%); no formal education (1.9%)

*Factors Motivating Attendees to Attend Sport Tourism Events in Cameroon*

Maintaining high satisfaction levels among the attendees, and establishing a culture of repeat visits is key to designing better products and services that should meet the participants' demands and motivations. (Egresi & Kara, 2014) In the above regard, coming to understand clearly what motivates the attendees to visit the event destination becomes important. Egresi and Kara (2014, p. 95), for example, suggest that festivals and events are attended by a diversity of people, whose attendance is motivated by various factors. Table 3 reveals the motivating factors involved in attendees visiting sporting events in Cameroon, besides actually participating in them. The motivating factors are predominantly linked to the entertainment on offer, as well as to self-actualisation and the event location. The latter factor is of interest due to, in Cameroon, many sporting events occurring in urban centres. As such, many attendees travel from their rural setting to an urban space to participate in sport tourism. Other notable reasons or motives include tourism, relaxation, socialising, the quality of the actual sport event, as well as the visiting of friends and relatives (VFR). The motivating factors found are in line with those of Getz (2008), who indicates that visitors attend events for such general reasons as entertainment, socialising, learning, doing something new, and escape from the tedium of everyday life, as well as for more specific reasons, such as the event itself and the event location.

**Table 3. Motivating factors for visiting destination, besides event attendance**

Ranking	Activity	Total (N=670, in %) Multiple responses allowed
1	Entertainment opportunities	83.3
2	Self-actualisation	81.5
3	The event location	80.9
4	Tourism-related reasons	79.7
5	Relaxation	79.5
6	Meeting with interesting people and socialising	77.6
7	The quality of the sport event concerned	75.1
8	Visiting of friends and family	72.8
9	Weather	70.4
10	Shopping	69.5

*Sport Tourism Impacts on LED*

To identify the specific impacts of sport tourism on LED, as perceived by the attendees, 35 Likert scale items were factor analysed to test for construct validity. The factor analysis yielded five factors: economic impacts; local economic development impacts; socio-environmental impacts; government and community trust/partnerships impacts; and regional development impacts. For the purpose of the current paper, the emphasis was placed on three factors, namely economic impacts, local economic development, and regional development. A Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test for relationships between the three constructs. When testing for the relationship between a pair of variables, three measures are investigated. Firstly, whether the direction of the relationship is either positive or negative is considered. Secondly, the strength of the relationship is regarded, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of less than 0.3 indicating a weak relationship, and one of between 0.3 and 0.5 showing a medium-strength relationship, while anything above 0.5 indicates a strong relationship. Thirdly, the p-value is calculated, with a p-value of less than 0.5 noting a statistically significant relationship.

The first correlation test was conducted between the economic impacts and the LED impacts. The main constructs that were measured included the ability of sport events to attract tourists to the local areas; the employment opportunities that such events create for local community members; the

attraction of investment in the local area; the resulting increased spending in the local area; and the ability of sport tourism events to encourage the development of SMMEs. The findings indicate that there was a strong positive correlation between the economic impacts and the LED impacts,  $r=0.595$ . Moreover, the relationship between the two factors was noted to be statistically significant, as the P-value was  $p<0.000$ . The above means that the respondents who rated the economic impacts positively also rated the LED impacts in a positive manner, and vice versa.

In relation to the economic and regional development impacts, the main themes that were investigated included the ability of sport tourism events to boost the profile of the region hosting; the events' encouraging of infrastructural investment in support of the local communities; their ability to bring foreign exchange earnings to the local area; as well as the fact that the events could be used to communicate with the visitors in the local area. The correlation test between economic impacts and regional development yielded a medium-strength positive correlation,  $r=0.411$ . The P-value was  $p<0.000$ , indicating a statistically significant relationship between the two factors. Therefore, those who were positive about the economic impacts were also positive about regional development opportunities, albeit at a moderate level. In contrast, the positive correlation between the LED impacts and the regional development impacts,  $r=0.562$ , was strong, with a P-value of  $p<0.000$ , indicating the existence of a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The above implies that the attendees' agreement with the positive local economic development impacts was largely associated with agreeing with the positive regional development impacts involved.

The above-mentioned findings were supported by the key informant interviews, which generally indicated that sport tourism events could bring numerous benefits to the local economy, including increased local spending, improvements and upgrades to the local infrastructure, and employment creation, among others. For example, one key informant (a tour guide) said the following:

*"I think sport tourism can create employment, because people will be linking sport and tourism as well. More money will come into the country, because many, many supporters will be coming, whether coming to compete or to watch others. Once they go to touristic sites, more money will enter into the economy."*

Another key informant from the sporting domain emphasised:

*"When there is an official event, like we saw a few days ago at Yaounde and Limbe [i.e. the 2016 Women Africa Cup of Nations], it brings people from the four corners of the continent. And this is actually linked to the good income from hotels and local shops. [It is] even linked to the airline companies who are benefitting from that, I'm sure. You see, there are many aspects, even the local transportation. They rent cars to travel along [i.e. around] the country."*

As mentioned in the literature above, sport tourism can only be effectively used in LED when planned interactions between stakeholders are stressed. However, the study found that this is a major limitation within the context of Cameroon. The key informants were rather sceptical about the planning around sport tourism there as shown in the following responses from a tour guide and an official from the Ministry of Sport and Physical Education respectively. They were asked whether there was an existing relationship between the ministries, and if there was not, why it wasn't there:

*"Wow, I really don't think that there is a relationship, or a direct relationship between the ministry of sports and the ministry of tourism because each time we see sports, the sporters [i.e. athletes] coming into the country for tournaments or football competitions, but after that you really don't hear*

*about them going for tourism, going for sightseeing whereas we have great touristic sites in Cameroon”*

*“I don’t think there is that relationship in terms of promoting the sports and tourism. All of them they act as individual, as different ministries so for now, I don’t, I’m not sure they have that link, that relationship.....I think so far, it’s because maybe they are not aware, that maybe if they link sports and the tourism industry, the two will grow...”*

Based on the above results, it is evident that sport tourism could be used as a tool to enhance LED in Cameroon. However, the above relies on the sound planning and management of the niche area of the economy, because, for sport tourism to serve LED effectively in a context like Cameroon, there should be sufficient involvement of the stakeholders (Kimbu, 2012) and currently this is not the case. The above should assist in ensuring that the desired socio-economic development goals are achieved. (Presenza & Iocca, 2012; Tichaawa & Bob, 2015)

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The main purpose of the current study was to explore the possibility of sport tourism as an LED tool for use in Cameroon. Previous studies have highlighted the role of sport tourism in the developed economies. (Egresi & Kara, 2014; Hinch & Higham, 2011; Steinbrink et al., 2011, among others) However, in the emerging world context, a dearth of research exists on the subject. The findings of the present study reveal similar characteristics to those revealed by many other studies that have been conducted on sport tourism, generally. For example, the event attendees are generally young men, even though a notable increase in the number of female participants in sport tourism has occurred in recent times. (Tichaawa et al., 2018) The respondents were relatively well educated, and, as such, it was not surprising to find that the majority of them were either in full-time or part-time employment, or were self-employed. They came from many different areas of Cameroon, and from beyond the borders, especially from the nearby regions, which has strong implications for the regional tourism opportunities to be leveraged through sport tourism. However, most importantly, the findings reveal that sport tourism could be used to kick-start domestic tourism in the country, as many of the respondents showed a willingness to travel across the country to attend, or to participate in, sport tourism events. The onus is on the relevant authorities to capitalise on such eagerness by ensuring that sport tourism event participation is leveraged with other socio-economic objectives of the local economies wherein the events are hosted.

While the above-mentioned findings are somewhat consistent with those discovered in other studies in different contexts, there were two main distinctive aspects of the attendees at sport tourism events in Cameroon. Firstly, many of the respondents indicated having travelled from a rural context to attend an event at an urban centre. Such travel was mainly due to most of the events usually being hosted in the developed/urban spaces, where the required infrastructure is available. Moreover, the attendees and the key informants indicated that the hosting of such events also assisted in improving the infrastructural developments concerned, while also creating opportunities for transport upgrades. The above supports the relevant literature (Bob & Swart, 2010; Njoroge et al., 2017; Weed & Bull, 2009), which indicates that sport tourism often leads to the fast-tracking of infrastructure development, and to the creation of recreational facilities that can also bring about more investment in the local regions involved. Secondly, the event attendees indicated that they packaged their event attendance with other activities, like business/trading, VFR, socialising, and other general tourism activities. Once more, the

above reveals that there are opportunities for significant contributions to be made to the development of the local areas wherein the events are held. The above reinforces the idea that sport tourism can be used to enhance LED in the emerging contexts. Tichaawa (2017) argues that investments in the lodging industries for business tourism in Cameroon, for example, could be extended to incorporate small to medium business growth, whose value to the LED of emerging destinations is important. The findings support the notion, as it was found that the respondents felt that sport tourism could assist, and encourage, the local communities to develop SMMEs, thereby creating employment opportunities.

The present study provides lessons for the local government and for other related authorities in both the tourism and sport domains of Cameroon in relation to the re-evaluating of policy and planning initiatives. Such initiatives address the contribution of tourism and sport to the local contexts, and are especially linked to events hosting. The evidence from the study is that significant benefits accrue to the local economy through events hosting, but that such benefits should be effectively planned, including all stakeholders with a view to leveraging the benefits as far into the local economy, and, in particular, the local community, as possible.

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