

Stakeholder reflections on the relaunching of the post-COVID-19 sport event tourism industry in South Africa

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Abstract | The current paper examines stakeholder reflections on the post COVID-19 sport event tourism subsector in South Africa. The paper is premised on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sport events tourism sub-sector, characterised by large-scale cancellations of sport events and restrictions on movement of people. Grounded by the sport tourism framework and the stakeholder theory, the main objective of the paper was to present stakeholder insights on the relaunching of the post COVID-19 sport event tourism subsector using South Africa as a case study. Fourteen in depth interviews were conducted with key informants involved in the sport event tourism subsector. The empirical findings show that the subsector experienced significant negative impacts but that stakeholders are engaged in several innovative activities including cross-sector collaboration, efforts to reignite demand and contemporary marketing initiatives making use of new technologies in efforts to counter the negative effects of the pandemic and to ensure future sport event tourism resilience and sustainability. The study makes a significant contribution to existing literature by articulating emerging trends in the sport tourism as the sector post-Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, it provides insights which ensure the future resilience of the subsector and its use as a tool for economic, societal and urban development.

Keywords | Sport event tourism, COVID 19, sport tourism, COVID 19 recovery, South Africa

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1. Introduction

In South Africa, sport event tourism is a unique tourism niche product that for long has been used as a means to stimulate economic growth and overall development, and in the development of a national identity (Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Chang, Choong & Ng, 2020). The hosting of sport events as tourist attractions has been strongly encouraged by the South African government (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2018) to promote tourism related activities, create employment, generate income, regenerate urban areas and create new service sector and business opportunities (Duglio & Beltramo, 2017; Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019). According to Weed (2020), sport event tourism has the ability to make significant contributions to outcomes and policy goals around economic development, well-being, physical health, mental health and environmental development. Hemmonsbey and Tichaawa (2020) add that for participants and local communities, sport event tourism creates opportunities for self-actualisation while for event officials, there are clear benefits in terms of economic contribution and the promotion of destination image. Despite this, the sport event tourism subsector is particularly vulnerable to crises and has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic which saw a global shutdown of the hosting of sport events and the movement and gathering of people (Swart & Maralack, 2020; Poon & Peris, 2020; Nhamo, Dube & Chikodzi, 2020; Gossling, Scott & Hall, 2020), both in the developed and developing world contexts.

In South Africa for example, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the declaration of a National State of Disaster in 2020, resulting in a lockdown of all public activities and the cancellation of all sporting events (ENSAfrica, 2020). As a result of this, Gossling, Scott and Hall (2020) argue that sport event tourism was one of the hardest hit subsectors of the tourism industry, particularly due to the knock-on effects on other parts of the supply chain, cha-

acterised by the cancellation of all forms of sport events. Such cancellations mean that the usual known socio-economic benefits associated with the hosting of sport events could not be materialised by host destinations. As the world tourism industry recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a marked increase in visitor numbers which is indicative of the sector's ability to overcome crises and assist with economic rejuvenation (United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2020; South African Tourism, 2020). While much research has been conducted on the recovery of the tourism sector after times of crises and negative events such as war, terrorist attacks and health crises (Wut, Xu & Wong, 2021; Novelli, Burgess, Jones & Ritchie, 2018; Tew, Lu, Tolomiczeko & Gellatly, 2008; Bremser, Alonso-Almeida & Llach, 2018; Kubickova & Kirimhan, 2008; Alonso-Almeida & Bremser, 2013; Aliperti, Sandholz, Hagenlocher, Rizzo, Fre & Garschagen, 2019), there is a significant lack of literature that relates to the recovery of the sport event tourism sub sector. In this paper, we argue that the cause and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic linked to sport event tourism presents an intellectual opportunity to research on the sector's recovery and resilience. Besides earlier work suggest that the resilience of sport tourism events is much under-researched in the current literature along with the impact of crises and disasters on this sector (see Muller, 2005; Shipway & Fyall, 2012). According to Shipway (2018), this field is research remains in the early descriptive stage and requires much additional consideration. Moreover, according to Rogerson and Baum (2020), a global rethinking of the tourism industry is required after the damaging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prayag (2020) adds that the relaunching of the post-COVID-19 sport event tourism subsector can perhaps be viewed as an opportunity for the subsector to reinvent itself and for stakeholders to rethink the ways in which sport event tourism is managed, to ensure its future sustainability. The present article un-

packs stakeholder reflections and responses to the relaunching of the post COVID-19 sport event tourism industry in South Africa. The paper identifies key sport tourism stakeholder in South Africa, and by way of in-depth interviews, generate insights are crucial to the recovery of the subsector. The rest of the article is organised in the following manner. First, we provide a theoretical literature framework upon which the study is developed. This is followed by an overview of the methodological framework that was adopted. Key findings, discussion and conclusion makes up the rest of the paper.

2. Theoretical and literature framework

2.1. The sport tourism framework

The relationship between sport and tourism gained recognition largely as a result of the popularity of sport events (Kurtzman & Zauhaur, 1995; Gibson, 2002), highlighting the symbiotic relationship between sport and tourism as tourism aids sport and sport stimulates tourism activities, overlapping and creating increased awareness of areas of the potential benefits from these areas of common interest (Swart & Bob, 2007; Hemmonsby & Tichaawa, 2019; Hritz & Ross, 2020; Kennelly & Toohey, 2014). According to Swart and Bob (2007), the linkages between sport and tourism revolve around (i) the type of benefits accruing to the sport participants and the attendees, (ii) the community development and economic opportunities provided thereby, and (iii) the potential negative aspects of the relationship between sport and tourism. The concept of sport tourism is defined as 'travel away from one's primary residence to participate in a sport activity for recreation or competition, travel to observe sport at the grassroots or elite level, and travel to visit a sport attraction such as sports halls of fame or water parks (Gibson &

Yiannakis, 2002). Gammon and Robinson (2003) posit that when defining sport tourism, what must be considered is whether sport or travel is the primary motivation for participation. In sport tourism, sport is the primary motivation to travel and includes activities such as passive or active participation at a competitive sporting event or active recreational participation in sport. According to Gibson (2006), sport tourism consists of three distinct areas that are leisure based travel, which takes an individual temporarily outside of their home environment to participate in physical activities or to visit attractions associated with sport; nostalgia sport tourism, which involves travel to reminisce, appreciate or educate oneself about a sport or sport event; and event sport tourism, where individuals travel as spectators, fans or supporters of a sport event. Early definitions of sport tourism considered this industry as a sum of the parts of sport and tourism (Hemmonsby, Tichaawa & Knott, 2021) but it has since been debated that it is far deeper than this and that it cannot be viewed as simply a niche market within tourism or an aspect of sport management (Weed & Bull, 2009). Higham and Hinch (2018) stress that one of the most important aspects of the sport tourism framework is the sport tourist and understanding this market is essential for destination planning and development and for the successful hosting of sport events as tourist attractions. Sport tourism events are sporting activities that attract visitors and spectators, the number of which depends on the nature of the sport event (Ziakas & Costa, 2011). Within the framework of sport tourism many destinations have developed a portfolio of sport events which are held throughout the year to attract visitors and capitalise on the positive impacts on sport tourism. This portfolio approach is goal driven and value based, aimed at satisfying the needs of all stakeholders involved (Ziakas & Costa, 2011; Ziakas, 2020). Ziakas (2020) adds that a well-developed portfolio of sport events can be used by destinations as a multipurpose developmental tool to ge-

nerate economic, social and other benefits.

2.2. Resilience theory

The term resilience can be defined as 'the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks' (Walker, Gunderson, Kinzig, Folke, Carpenter & Schultz, 2006, p.16). The concept of resilience is based on the understanding of different responses to external changes, also known as shocks, that push a system towards change and innovation (Williams & Vorley, 2014). In this context, resilience then refers to the capacity of a system to survive these rapid changes and external shocks and to become sustainable and grow in the face of these changes (Fiksel, 2006; Hamel & Valikangas, 2003; Williams & Vorley, 2014). According to Stevenson, Airy and Miller (2009), resilience considers turbulence, self-organization, co-evolution and disequilibrium. It accepts that the world's processes are dynamic and complex systems that can adapt when something stressful occurs. Existing literature suggests three different approaches to resilience: resilience in terms of the ability of a system to return to a previous state of normality, resilience as the capacity to recover from a crisis, and resilience as a means to bring about change and a different state of being (Scott & Laws, 2006). The framework of resilience suggests identification of the elements that are crucial to achieve a particular desired state and shifts the focus to reinforcing these. If this is accurately done, in the case of a stress event, these elements can form the foundations of a rebuilt and renewed system (Gallopin, 2006). In order for a system to be successfully rebuilt and renewed, and to ensure future sustainability, Dahles and Susilowati (2015) propose three strategies – survival, adaptation and innovation, which all need to take place side by side.

The basic principles of resilience theory are that systems do not evolve in a linear fashion, but rather according to a cycle or a loop. The phases of the cycle or loop are often repeated, but the characteristics at each stage will not be the same. The theory also states that the speed of recovery from a destabilizing or critical event will depend on the adaptive capacity of the system, which is directly related to capital accumulated during previous phases (Calgaro & Cochrane, 2009). Resilience theory posits that systems fluctuate within domains (Holling, 1973), valleys (Gunderson, 2000) and basins of attraction (Walker, et. al, 2004). The point at which the system is the strongest is the bottom of the basin. On either side of the basin is a margin in which systems can fluctuate without losing their inherent function. Within these margins, the degree of instability can be changed without the essential workings of the system becoming impaired. The margins are also considered the adaptive capacity of the system, with the resilience of the system depending on how long it takes the system to return to its original condition (Cochrain, 2015). This is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts system states with stability domains or basins of attraction.

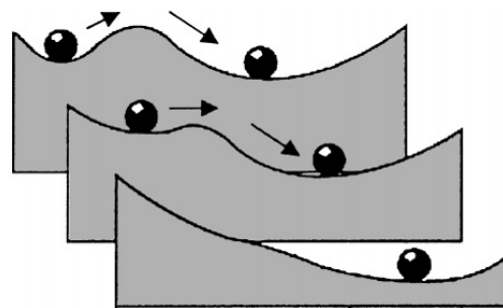


Figure 1 | System states within stability domains or basins of attraction
Source: Gunderson, 2000

If a stress event occurs, the system will override the margins of its basin and change into a different state, where negative outcomes might oc-

cur. Understanding how these shifts occur, can assist role players in mitigating negative impacts (Gunderson, 2000). Within the resilience theory, mention is made of the adaptative capacity of a system, which is represented by the margins on either side of the basin. According to Adger & Vincent (2005), adaptive capacity is a determinant of the vulnerability of a system. If a system has a low adaptive capacity, it is considered vulnerable. Despite this, having a high adaptive capacity does not mean that a system is immune to disruption or disturbance as this also depends on the nature of the incident (Adger & Vincent, 2005). One of the biggest challenges when considering the adaptive capacity of a system is that it may be latent, and only realised when the system is exposed to a disturbance (Lemos et al., 2007; Adger et al., 2005). The adaptive capacity of a system can be strengthened and enhanced by investing in information and knowledge; encouraging collaboration; increasing levels of resources and education; and ensuring effective institutional arrangements (Yohe & Tol, 2002; Smit et al., 2000). Mithani (2020) posits that the adaptability of a system is affected by a number of 'modes' that directly contribute to this, which are avoidance, absorption, elasticity, learning, and rejuvenation.

In tourism and event studies, many researchers have used the resilience theory to analyse the recovery of the sectors (Faulkner, 2001; Folke, Carpenter, Elmqvist, Gunderson, Holling & Walker, 2002; Larsen, Miller & Thomalla, 2008; Lepp, 2008; McKercher, 1999; Russel & Faulkner, 1999), particularly as the sectors are highly vulnerable to destabilizing forces (Butler & Suntikul, 2012). Following the catastrophic impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on sport event tourism and the broader tourism industry both in South Africa and globally, the resilience theory provides a lens through which to analyse the potential recovery of sport event tourism to ensure survival, adaptation, innovation and future sustainability.

2.3. Stakeholder theory

The stakeholder theory was first introduced by Freeman during the 1980s, at which time a stakeholder was defined as 'any individual or group who can affect a firm's performance or who is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives' (Timur & Getz, 2009). At this time, stakeholder theory was 'intended to explain and guide the structure and operation of a corporation while viewing the corporation as an organisational entity through which numerous and diverse participants accomplish multiple, although not always congruent, purposes (Donaldson & Preston, 1995:70). Since then, the theory has evolved to incorporate various groups and individuals who could potentially affect an organisation as well as the behaviour of management in response to these groups and individuals (Lewis, 2006; Presenza & Iocca, 2012). Within the domain of tourism, stakeholder theory has often been applied in relation to strategic planning and in the development of sustainability initiatives in the management of tourism destinations (Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; Simpson, 2001). Garrod et al. add that the stakeholder theory has been incorporated into various tourism planning and policy development activities and in various collaborative efforts particularly in the field of destination marketing (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013). Within the context of sport event tourism, stakeholder theory is a clear necessity, not only due to the large number of stakeholders involved in the subsector, but also as it is ever changing and requires a future ready approach to adaptability to changing environmental, social and economic conditions (Currie, Seaton & Wesley, 2009). Within this context, a sport event tourism stakeholder can be defined as 'anyone who is impacted on positively or negatively by a development such as a sport tourism project' (Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005). The importance of stakeholders in sport tourism is presented by Mossberg and Getz (2006) who emphasize that without effective sta-

keholder engagement and communication, sport tourism and particularly sport tourism events, cannot be successfully hosted. Agha, Fairley & Gibson (2012) add to this, stating that successful sport events are those that demonstrate effective synergy between all stakeholders so that they can assist each other in achieving their objectives. In keeping with this, Ruhanen (2004) states that without meaningful and concerted engagement with all sport tourism stakeholders including the community, industry and relevant authorities, achieving sustainable development in sport tourism will not be achieved and this requires a participatory model for the agreement on planning direction and goals. Various authors (Hinch & Higham, 2001; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Currie et al., 2009) support this by stating that without stakeholder support, sustainable development in sport tourism would be extremely challenging. The key to success in this regard, is to develop a framework in which the goals and objectives are developed collectively, incorporating the views of all stakeholders and serving the interests of all.

Stakeholder analysis is an important aspect of stakeholder theory and a tool that is used for the identification and analysis of stakeholders in order to determine their knowledge, position, interests, conflicts, levels of power, alliances, as well as their influences (Parnell, 2007). In terms of sport event management, Burton, O'Reilly and Seguin (2012) highlight that the identification of primary stakeholders helps to understand their interests in a particular event. The identification of these stakeholders helps to detect any conflict between stakeholders, the way in which different stakeholders need to be involved, and common or opposing interests (Miron & Predia, 2009).

Gursoy and Kendall (2006) state that in the planning of sport events, the support of all stakeholders is critical and that this is essential for the successful hosting of events and the long-term sustainability of a tourism destination. Kruger (2011) supports this by adding that if effectively

applied, stakeholder management and involvement can support the cohesion between event organisations and destination managers and reach the objectives of the event project. The degree of interest and involvement as well as the support offered to the event project often differs amongst varying stakeholders. As a result of this and to manage the above, stakeholder involvement and participation at every stage of the event project is essential. At a strategic level, Candrea and Bourriad (2009) state that it is essential to conduct a stakeholder analysis in order to identify the interests of all stakeholders involved, potential problems that could disrupt the hosting of the event, key people who need to be communicated with, groups that need to be participate in the various stages of the project, negative stakeholders, stakeholder management strategies and ways to reduce potential negative impacts. According to Weed (2007) this is an ongoing process as the interests of stakeholders evolve and change over time. Although various authors (Allen & Kilvington, 2001; O'Brien, 2005; Ayuso, Rodriguez, Garcia-Castro & Arino, 2012) have written that the full participation of stakeholders during the design and implementation phases of an event will not guarantee the success of the project, Golder and Gawler (2005) have found that where this is done, it can assist one to identify the interests of all stakeholders who might affect or be affected by a project, potential stakeholder risks and strategies for risk reduction. This also gives stakeholders the opportunity to raise their voices and concerns, creating learning opportunities and building capacity amongst stakeholders (Golder & Gawler, 2005). The current study employed the stakeholder theory in order to identify various key stakeholders engaged in sport event tourism in South Africa and to facilitate collaboration between stakeholders to assist with the relaunching and recovery of the subsector.

3. Methods

A qualitative approach was selected for the research as it sought to determine reflections of stakeholders on the recovery and relaunching of sport event tourism in South Africa following the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate as it addresses questions concerned with developing an understanding of meaning and experiences (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002), and is particularly useful when not much is known about a research phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented impacts on sport event tourism both in South Africa and globally has meant that there is little literature available on this topic, necessitating the need for a qualitative approach that would allow the researcher to gather in depth information and insights. Data for the study was collected through interviews with stakeholders in the South African sport event tourism subsector including representatives from various spheres of government, sport event organisers and stadium managers. In selecting stakeholders to be interviewed, both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used. For the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of a range of stakeholder perspectives, fourteen in depth interviews were conducted with respondents from a range of backgrounds including local, national, and provincial government representatives; sport event organisers; tourism authorities; sport event sponsors and sport event venue owners. A summary of these stakeholders is provided in Table 1 below. Interviews were guided by a semi structured interview schedule which was developed from a review of relevant literature on sport event tourism, tourism resilience and crisis management in tourism. The key variables included in the interview schedule were the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on sport event tourism in South Africa, changes to the subsector as a result of the pandemic, me-

asures that have been taken to ensure sport event tourism recovery and long-term challenges facing the subsector. Stakeholder interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, using mainly open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide broad responses and for the researcher to probe further into areas of interest. The length of each interview was approximately 1 hour long. Data collection took place between February and July 2022 and permission was obtained for the recording of all interviews. Once recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and loaded onto the Atlas.ti Version 9 software programme where data was analysed thematically.

Table 1 | Stakeholders interviewed

Stakeholders	<i>n</i>
National/provincial/local government	2
Sport federations and organisations	4
Sport event organisers	7
Destination and sport marketing organisations	1
Total	14

4. Results

4.1. Impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on sport event tourism in South Africa

With the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, the South African government implemented a range of stringent rules and restrictions around the gathering and movement of people that completely stopped the hosting of all sport events and curbed the recovery of the sport event tourism subsector. In light of this, the study sought to determine what the overall impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic were on sport event tourism in South Africa by gathering insights from key informants involved in the subsector. Many respondents agreed that the negative impacts on sport event tourism were unprecedented with one stating:

The negative impacts of the pandemic were so severe because it was such a sudden impact. This was a risk that we could not control, and which had a remarkably wide impact. The pandemic and its impacts were also not necessarily understood at the time, and we did not know how far reaching the consequences would be. It was sudden. It was extreme and it was wide.

The negative financial impacts of the pandemic on sport event tourism organisations were reiterated by the majority of stakeholders interviewed with one adding:

We took a major financial knock and so what we didn't earn we had to cut from other areas of the budget. We stopped all marketing and completely removed the marketing budget. We furloughed staff and operated with skeleton staff. A significant portion of the venue maintenance budget was cut, and we needed to do this strategically so that when we could host live events again we had a stadium that was ready for use.

For most respondents, emphasis was placed on the wide-reaching negative impacts of the pandemic not only on their own organisations but across the entire sport event tourism value chain, as it was mentioned that:

All sport events were cancelled, even those with a huge international following where tourists stay for over 14 days and visit the entire country. The fact that we could not host events impacted the entire tourism industry in a significant way. Peripheral businesses were also impacted such as the informal traders who sell food on events

days. The tourism and economic impact is being felt right through the value chain.

Along with concerns about the closure of many businesses along the value chain, key informants interviewed also noted that this resulted in the large-scale loss of skilled and experienced staff who were essential to the success of the subsector with a respondent noting:

We were not able to host events because of the restrictions on gatherings, and that resulted in the value chain being negatively impacted. Sport events were not viable financially or operationally and that caused a lot of businesses within the events sector to close down or furlough staff. As a result, many of these businesses were left not viable at all. The employees of these businesses needed to find alternative incomes and we therefore lost many employees with a wealth of knowledge.

We have lost the people that know how to execute major sport events on an international scale. Our event professionals have been poached by other countries and by international markets that have recovered before us. We are now trying to determine how we can try to lure them back to South Africa where their skills are desperately needed.

As was mentioned in the quotes above, the National State of Emergency declared in South Africa in 2020 put an abrupt stop to the hosting of sport events in the country. As the State of Emergency and its related restrictions were slowly lifted, sport events were once again hosted, but still no fans or

supporters were allowed into stadia due to the potential risk of spreading the COVID 19 virus. This had an effect on the sport event tourism subsector as fans and event attendees continued to watch sport events from their homes and became increasingly reluctant to return to stadia due to financial and health concerns. This has had negative implications as according to a respondent:

One of the major impacts is that it is going to be difficult to get people back to the stadium, unless it is for an event that is extremely attractive. People are no longer used to coming to live sport events in stadia and many have become more comfortable watching from home. In their homes they are comfortable, and the beer is always cold.

Fans do not want to watch a whole game in a stadium, but rather highlights on their tv while they do other things. They want to be at home, and they don't want to park, queue and walk to a venue.

The insights provided by key informants on the impacts of the pandemic on the sport event tourism sub sector indicated that these were far reaching, impacting not only business operations and sustainability, but also sport event tourist behaviour, requiring the subsector to adapt to a new post COVID 19 landscape.

4.2. The post COVID 19 recovery of the sport event tourism sub sector

In addition to describing the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on the sport event tourism subsector, respondents were also asked to share their perspectives on its relaunching and recovery.

At the time of conducting the study, sport events were once again permitted by the South African government to be hosted and stadia were permitted to operate at full capacity.

It was widely acknowledged by stakeholders that new and innovative techniques are required to reignite demand and attract attendees back to live sport events. As mentioned above, stakeholders agreed that many sport fans had now become accustomed to watching sports from their own homes and felt reluctant to return to stadia. The changes in sport event tourist behaviour were agreed upon by key informants and extend to more than just a reluctance to return to stadia to watch live events. Post pandemic sport event tourists are demanding more than just the opportunity to watch a live sport event, but fully engaging sport event experiences that offer the highest quality experiences in all aspects of event registration and ticketing, content, speakers, entertainment, food, networking opportunities and opportunities for social engagement. This view was shared by a respondent involved in destination marketing who stated that:

The user journey is now extremely important. As sport event organisers and stakeholders, we need to understand what an event attendee would experience from the point of registration and this needs to be supported by a wealth of information and communication.

This shift in focus to the user experience and the need to develop innovative and exciting marketing techniques to attract attendees back to stadia was echoed by another respondent who lamented that:

Our biggest challenge now in relaunching is finding new ideas on how to get people back to the stadium. We are going over the top with music, festivities, and peripheral events in and around the stadium on match days to

try to attract people. At the moment this is not working 100%. We are putting in much effort and money and we are not yet seeing a positive outcome which is quite sad.

The spectators now have a major influence, and we need to somehow entice them to come back to the stadium. We have to change the models of how we present live sport events so that people want to attend.

We now have to put products on the table that are entertaining and enticing and talk to different markets and age categories. If we can tick these boxes, then people will come again. After the pandemic people are different and we need to think about how to entertain them now that they have different objectives and interests.

The response presented above indicates that due to the COVID 19 pandemic the sport event tourism product in South Africa has had to change and adapt to meet the changed needs and requirements of sport tourists. These changes to the product are essential to the success of the subsector and its recovery.

Along with getting attendees back to attending sport events, another challenge mentioned by stakeholders was attracting sponsors to once again sponsor sport events. Sponsors are essential to the financial success of the sport event tourism subsector and one respondent expressed concern that:

Sponsors are reluctant to get back into sponsoring events where there is a possibility that with another virus outbreak, they might be cancelled, and they may not be able to recover these funds.

Other challenges mentioned by key informants in the relaunching of sport event tourism included a lack of experienced and skilled staff, the loss of sport event infrastructure due to the financial implications of the pandemic and the long-term closure of facilities, rising inflation and petrol costs and the limited electricity supply in South Africa.

Although it is evident that domestic travel has increased dramatically since the relaxing of COVID 19 related regulations, there is still a need to attract international sport tourists in order for the subsector to fully recover. Respondents agreed that for this to take place it is essential that these visitors feel confident in visiting South Africa with a respondent from the South African government mentioning:

We have to instil destination confidence in international travellers. If there is still a chance of there being a virus, we have to be truthful and honest with sport tourists and tell them that we can take care of them if they fall ill. This might not always be the popular answer, but we are required to act in terms of our responsible tourism policy. This is a big challenge when we are desperate for business, but we have to be truthful and honest and give the right message so that we can rebuild destination confidence which in the end will pay off very well.

Despite the negative impacts and the challenges presented by COVID 19, stakeholders also reflected on valuable lessons learned during the pandemic, resulting in new practices that need to continue to ensure success and sustainability. One of these practices mentioned by multiple respondents was an increase in cross sector collaboration with a respondent stating:

We learned to reach out to each other.
We have learned a lot about collabo-

ration because we all of a sudden, we were in the same boat. In the past we may have thought that we were in competition, but we have now realised that it's not a competition and that we can actually help each other grow and become better through this.

Most respondents interviewed agreed with the view above that the pandemic forced organisations to collaborate and that this had positive results. Respondents were also of the opinion that continued collaboration is essential for the full recovery and relaunch of sport event tourism, particularly between the private and public sectors with one respondent saying that the relaunch:

Should be a collaborative effort. Government should be able to put things in place via legislation and regulations to make sure things are done. What we need in the end for a successful relaunch is industry, government and universities coming together and putting our minds together on what would be the best for sport event tourism. We have to work together to make this work.

For the duration of the COVID 19 in lockdown many sport events were hosted online as these allowed for virtual attendance, could access a far-reaching audience and provided some income for event organisers and owners. Although hybrid events have continued to be hosted alongside in person events, a respondent from the Western Cape Provincial Government cautioned against this in the recovery of sport event tourism as:

Everybody veered off to the hosting of virtual and hybrid events as a panacea, but was this actually a solution?

Yes, your event can take place and people can participate in different areas across the world but what about the broader industry? Virtual and hybrid events don't result in people travelling and don't bring visitors to our hotels and our towns.

Along with drawing increased attention to the hosting of hybrid events, the pandemic also highlighted the importance of technology in sport, events and tourism and this heightened use of technology is expected to continue long after the effects of the pandemic have passed, with one respondent noting:

People are registering for events online and they want to pay online. People do not want to handle money or sign any physical forms relating to events. In response to this all aspects of sport events need to be automated. We have to send sport event tickets online instead of having people collect them at the stadium and that makes attendance a bit easier for fans. The digital adoption in event planning and hosting is exciting as this has opened up many new opportunities for sport events.

The findings above illustrate that all aspects of the sport event tourism subsector in South Africa have been impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic. Despite this, stakeholders have engaged in numerous practices to adapt to the changing landscape of the subsector and through the pandemic have learned new and innovative techniques to plan for and host sport events in the future in order to boost tourism.

5. Implications and Conclusion

The current study presented stakeholder reflections on the relaunching of the South African post COVID 19 sport event tourism subsector. The study found that the COVID 19 pandemic has had far reaching negative impacts on sport event tourism in South Africa which have resulted in significant changes to the subsector going forward. These negative impacts have included financial losses, the closure of businesses involved directly in sport event tourism and along the value chain, the loss of skilled and experienced staff to other industries which are less vulnerable to crises, and the reluctance of previous sport event attendees to return to attending live events. Of concern is not only these wide-ranging negative impacts but also the knock-on effect on the broader hospitality industry in South Africa (Swart & Maralack, 2020). While sport events are now once again being hosted in South Africa, the consensus from stakeholders was that sport tourist behaviour has changed as they are now demanding an engaging and high-quality experience at every point of the sport event. According to Dandotiya and Aggarwal (2022), this provides opportunities for determining tourist behaviours and developing strategies for satisfying them. Changes in sport attendee behaviour have meant that stakeholders have had to make changes and adaptations to the sport event tourism product. This is supported by Mapstead (2022) who found that sport event attendees are now in search of an event experience where they are engaged at every moment of the event from purchasing tickets to being present at the event venue, maintaining feelings of excitement once the event is over. According to the resilience theory, these adaptations are essential for the recovery of the sport event tourism subsector and understanding changes in the product and the sport event tourism system will ensure the future resilience and sustainability of the subsector. Following the extended COVID 19 lockdown

in South Africa, sport tourists are also attending fewer live events as they have grown accustomed to enjoying matches and tournaments on television and online from the comfort of their homes. Although the hosting of virtual and hybrid events may appear to offer a solution to this, these events are cautioned against as they do not support the tourism value chain and provide limited economic and social benefits. These events also lack a sense of reality and immersion, meaning that attendees do not receive a true lived experience, engaging in social experiences and interactions (Zhang & Zhou, 2022; Marasco, Buonincontri, van Niekerk, Orlowski & Okumus, 2018; Rahimzhan, Ozturen & Ilkan, 2020). In response to this, sport event organisers and role players have to implement new and innovative practices to attract sport event attendees to events around issues of ensuring attendee health and safety, meeting attendee needs and demands to ensure visitor satisfaction and repeat attendance and the use of technology for ease and safety. This is supported by Rodrigues, Stevic and Breda (2022) who posit that through the use of innovative technology, new experiential offerings can be created, incorporating the integration of new actors from both the public and private sectors, generating benefits and spillovers that support economic recovery. From the perspective of sport event tourism stakeholders, for the subsector to fully recover from the COVID 19 pandemic and successfully be relaunched, there is a need for continued collaboration between the private and public sectors with clear lines of communication and ongoing support. Within this collaboration, it is recommended that government provide the regulations and guidelines necessary for the recovery of sport event tourism and to ensure the future sustainability of the subsector. If successful, this process can also align with the South African 'sport-for-development' discourse, directed towards the empowerment of the wider population, access for individuals with disabilities, and increasing sport participation and the wellbeing of the population

(Tichaawa, Bob & Swart, 2018). For the full recovery of sport event tourism, collaboration is an essential strategy for the design and implementation of recovery plans for a sustainable subsector and to identify new opportunities and solutions to challenges currently being faced (Mollah, Cuskelly & Hill, 2021; Batory & Svensson, 2019; O'Boyle, Shilbury & Ferkins, 2019).

This study provides valuable theoretical contributions to existing literature on sport event tourism, as well as practical considerations for the relaunching of the subsector in South Africa and other emerging economies. From a theoretical perspective, the study provides new insights into sport event tourism through the lens of resilience, indicating that the sub sector is dynamic and complex and can adapt to crises, returning to a desired state that can form the foundations of a renewed and rebuilt system. The resilience theory states that the ability of a system to adapt to future crises can be strengthened and enhanced by investing in information and knowledge, collaborating with stakeholders and increasing education levels, which the current study has sought to do. Theoretically, the study also considers sport event tourism based on the grounding of the stakeholder theory, facilitating dialogue between a wide range of sport event tourism stakeholders to promote stakeholder collaboration and elicit insights essential to the future sustainability of the subsector. The findings of the study raise several opportunities for future research on changing sport tourist behaviour, sport event attendee perspectives on the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on sport event tourism and the willingness of sport event attendees to attend future live sport events.

In conclusion, the COVID 19 pandemic has significantly impacted the sport event tourism subsector in South Africa. As sport events are once again being hosted, the changes to their hosting and in sport event attendee behaviour cannot be ignored. A deep and in depth understanding of the changes, provided by sport event tourism stakeholders,

allows for them to be addressed and planned for, ensuring the resilience, sustainability and success of sport events in the future.

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