

Commitment, expertise and mutual recognition: Oscillating sports tourism experiences of performing and watching at the World

Gymnaestrada

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This paper is dedicated to exploring the shifting experiences between being actively involved in and viewing sports tourism and the extent to which the perception of both roles relates to their experience of a participant community. While historically both activities were considered as heterogeneous categories in sports tourism, understood and analysed separately, recent research increasingly acknowledges the separation between both activities is often not as clear-cut as it seems. This paper explores the oscillation of the two roles in the context of the 2011 and 2015 World Gymnaestrada in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Helsinki, Finland. Framed by the conceptual notion of community and drawing on an ethnographic research approach, the findings suggest over and above taking part in a gymnastics display oneself, watching and talking about other groups' performances is central to the event experience. During the event week, the participants adopt two constantly shifting roles of being a performer and being a spectator, with asking for and giving feedback based on one's own expertise being the mediating device between the two. There appears to be an internalised consensus that being involved in a display, which is taken seriously, provides the ability to assess and judge others. The constant interplay between performing and watching, between asking for feedback and showing appreciation, constitutes a significant device of mutual recognition through which the participants' community is confirmed and validated.

Keywords: active sports tourism; Gymnaestrada; gymnastics; leisure community; passive sports tourism; spectators

Introduction

This research is placed among the emerging and growing body of studies that meet the call for a more theoretically underpinned in-depth understanding of participation and involvement in active sports tourism that occurs in the context of events (Coghlan,

2012; Gillett & Kelly, 2006; Green & Chalip, 1998; Lamont & McKay, 2012; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Shipway & Jones, 2007; 2008). In particular, it contributes to the debates and addresses The Big Questions for research into active sport tourism, by combining two particular themes that were deemed insightful in sports tourism research, (1) shifting experiences between being actively involved and viewing sports tourism (Higham & Hinch, 2009; Lamont & McKay, 2012; Ryan & Lockyer, 2002), and (2) the development, expression and experience of a sense of belonging in and through sports tourism (Green & Chalip, 1998; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Rickly-Boyd, 2012).

The theme of an oscillation of active and passive sports tourism needs to be considered against the backdrop of recent debates about the extent to which being actively involved in, and watching sports tourism, can indeed be separated as clear-cut as it has often been for analytical purposes in the past. Yet at least and in particular, on a grass-root or amateur level, participants can and do adopt both roles (Lamont & McKay, 2012). In this context, this paper is dedicated to exploring shifting experiences between being actively involved in and viewing sports tourism. It investigates the oscillation of the two roles as well as the effects these processes have on the participants' community, as it interacts outside of everyday life in the context of sports event tourism. The official, worldwide event of Gymnastics for All, the World Gymnaestrada, provides the research setting. Taking place in 1953 for the first time, the event promotes and celebrates the diversity of gymnastics in a purely non-competitive environment. Participation is open to everybody, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, class background, nationality and skill level (Schwartz, 2006). Taking place every four years and bringing together around 20,000 participants from 55 countries, the event has a considerable sports tourism significance and potential. Its one-week programme consists exclusively of group displays presented by a minimum of ten up to several

hundred gymnasts. Each group usually presents their show twice or three times during the event week. Further aspects of the programme include national evenings, allowing each nation's federation to display their gymnastics activities in combination with folklore elements, an educational forum and a gala organised by the International Gymnastics Federation. The World Gymnaestrada aims at building bridges and fostering understanding between people. Collective displays of all forms of gymnastics are a means to connect the different facets of gymnastics as well as the gymnasts themselves.

The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, it identifies the extent to which and how the participants perceive and experience both their roles as performer and spectator. Second, the paper aims to explore the extent to which the perception of both roles relates to their experience of a participant community. The paper argues the World Gymnaestrada is a two-sided experience involving a constant interplay between performing and watching that serves as a strong constituent of affirming and validating the participants' community.

The active-passive divide, community and the World Gymnaestrada

While sports tourism as such is a more recent field of academic interest (Gibson, 2008; Weed, 2008; Weed & Bull, 2009), the divide between active and passive activities has been a central theme in the development of research into the field, characterising in particular the early stages of investigations into the phenomenon. In her critical analysis of the literature prior to 1998, Gibson (1998) already recognised the crucial differentiation between active participation and passive spectatorship. To organise the existing body of knowledge, she proposed three broad categories: actively participating in sports tourism ('active sport tourism'), travelling to watch sports tourism ('event

sport tourism') and venerating attractions such as sports stadia ('nostalgia sports tourism'), with the first two categories explicitly addressing the active-passive divide. Also in the early phases of typology developments, being involved in and watching sports tourism activities were considered as heterogeneous categories, understood and analysed separately. Besides a holiday / non-holiday segmentation and a differentiation between holiday sport activities and sport activity holiday, Standeven and De Knop (1999) used the distinction between active and passive participation for the development of their differentiated sports tourist typology. In their passive sport category, Standeven and De Knop (1999) further subdivided between a 'casual observer' and 'connoisseur', with the latter being a person who has a considerable knowledge of the sports s/he is watching. This distinction implies different levels of commitment not only among those actively involved but also among those who are passively engaged in sports tourism. This has also been raised by Weed and Bull (2009) who suggested another category relates to 'vicarious' sports tourists. This classification acknowledges there are actors who, while not actively participating, engage and interact with active participants much more than merely watching them as passive sports tourists do.

The differentiation between active involvement and passive spectatorship is one of the crucial characteristics of the world of sports in general (Guttmann, 1986). It appears as a natural consequence that researchers in the field of sports tourism have taken it up and drawn on it to make sense of and understand sports away from home. Yet, recently, researchers have started to question whether this distinction is as clear-cut as it seems. Weed and Bull's (2009) suggestion of vicarious sports tourists challenges the boundary between the two activities. Their classification suggests a type of sports tourism that sits in between active and passive sports tourists. Going beyond that, a theme seems to emerge in sports tourism research that acknowledges participant and

spectator roles can shift and merge and that sports tourists can adopt both roles in one and the same context, especially and in particular on an amateur level (Lamont & McKay, 2012). This topic has been touched upon by Green and Chalip (1998) and Ryan and Lockyer (2002), raised by Higham and Hinch (2009), used as a methodological approach by Tassiopoulos and Haydam (2008), and addressed in greater detail by Lamont and McKay (2012). On a methodological level, in their study on golf tourists in South Africa, Tassiopoulos and Haydam (2008) surveyed golfers on their active golfing behaviour while watching a golf event. Passive behaviour was used to collect data on active activities, which implies a relationship and synergy between the two kinds of activities. Going further, Lamont and McKay (2012) explicitly acknowledged and addressed the phenomenon of a conflation between, and oscillation of, both roles in sports tourism. They conceptualised the Tour de France as a context, in which the active-passive dichotomy erodes. They studied tour spectators who also cycled parts of the Tour de France routes themselves, and hence ‘switched from cyclists to spectators’ (Lamont & McKay 2012, p. 322). Drawing on the perspective of postmodernism, in their study, the boundary between taking part and watching seemed to be dissolved. Going beyond the context and relating sports tourism to wider issues in social life, Lamont and McKay (2012, p. 327-328) argued ‘that the static dichotomies and taxonomies that dominate sports tourism research are inadequate for capturing the fluid identities and relations characteristic of postmodern tourism.’ They suggested that both activities, being involved and watching, play a significant and constantly changing role in shaping the participants’ experience. These findings seem to challenge the literature in the realm of sports that suggested there is a weak relationship between participating in an activity and an earlier or subsequent choice to view (Burnett, Menon & Smart, 1993; Irlinger, 1994). Yet different from Lamont and McKay (2012), this work

(Burnett, Menon & Smart, 1993; Irlinger, 1994) has not looked at immediate experiences on site, but into how viewing sport activities on television might spread participation. More research is needed in other sports tourism settings to fully understand this phenomenon of merging and oscillating experiences of being actively involved and viewing. In this context, this research also investigates the immediate in situ experience of both roles.

Over and above the increasing acknowledgement of shifting kinaesthetic and viewing perspectives, a second central and significant theme in sports tourism research relates to the concept, aspect and idea of community. The extent to which sports tourism provides its participants with deep social bonds and a sense of belonging has been explored both in terms of those actively participating in (Gillett & Kelly, 2006; Green & Chalip, 1998; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007) as well as those watching (Fairley & Gammon, 2005, Fairley, 2009; Weed, 2006; 2007) sports tourism. What these studies have in common is they acknowledge, address and shed light on the significant role sports tourism plays in providing its participants with a community experience and deep sense of belonging. Chalip (2006) and Shipway and Jones (2008) argued further research is needed to fully understand the extent to which and how community is expressed and experienced when sports tourists interact with other like-minded people.

Community is a crucial theme in social studies. It already featured prominently in the work of early sociologists such as Durkheim, Tönnies and Weber. Its use as a theoretical concept is simultaneously attractive and powerful, as well as ambiguous and contested (Amit, 2002; Blackshaw, 2008; Cohen, 1985). Its extensive utilisation to make sense of social phenomena derives from its capability to conceptualise, represent and explain the very basic human need of social belonging, solidarity and togetherness (Jenkins, 2008). Yet, the rise of individualism in modern and postmodern times has

challenged the analytical value of the concept. Bauman (2002; 2009) suggested the conceptual notion of community is incompatible with modern times. He argued it depicts a pleasant style of life that individuals strive for, which, however, is no longer available. Against the backdrop of these considerations, there seems to be a growing consensus in favour of a rich and meaningful reinterpretation of the concept in order to make sense of what community means, represents and stands for today (Amit, 2002; Bauman, 2000; Blackshaw, 2008; Jenkins, 2008). These considerations are crucial not only when people interact in their home environment, but also, and in particular, when they do so outside their everyday life in a sports tourism setting.

The foundation of a community was initially linked to a specific geographical locale, a shared interest or a sense of emotional attachment (Blackshaw 2008). All these three forms were usually based on, and shaped by, 'real' social relations. In line with Blackshaw (2008), Amit (2002) suggested that, from the 1980s onwards, the notion of community shifted away from necessarily accounting for face-to-face togetherness. Instead, with the work of Cohen (1985) and Anderson (1991), the concept became imagined and immaterial. The concept turned from necessarily accounting for face-to-face relations into something symbolic, a shift, which has been labelled as 'interpretative turn' (Amit, 2002, p. 4) in the development of the conceptual notion of community. Cohen (2002) proposed the concept refers to some sort of communality, something that individuals appear to share. They may just be connected to each other in a narrow way or for a restricted purpose. For Cohen (2002, p. 167-168), it is not necessary that 'the condition of community extends beyond the specific item which people are presumed to share.' What matters for him is the meaning an individual attaches to the communality, the joint interest or collective purpose. It is this restricted sense which, for Cohen (2002), is consistent with, and able to account for, the

conditions of ~~and~~ human interaction in ~~contemporary~~ social life. And it is in this restricted sense of a meaningful shared interest and collective purpose that community is understood in the context of this research. The notion's ambiguity does not entail 'that we should ban it from use – only that it is futile to try to theorize community other than in its *particular* uses' (Cohen 2002, p. 169, original emphasis).

This study seeks to contribute to investigations of these two themes that were deemed insightful to advance sports tourism research, the sense of belonging experienced in and through sports tourism, on one hand, and the oscillation between the kinaesthetic and the viewing perspective, on the other. The World Gymnaestrada, this study's research context provides a promising, insightful setting for a joint investigation of these two themes. First, it entails a long tradition and history in providing its participants with a sense of belonging, community and a shared identity. Its predecessors and historical roots, the regional and national gymnastics festivals that emerged in various countries in nineteenth century Europe were important milestones in the development of national identities and communities (Düding, 1984; Lindroth, 2006; Nolte, 2002). Second, the event's doctrine does also explicitly address the oscillation of roles, and hence the second theme. Being both a performer and a spectator has a long tradition in this event, as right from the beginning of the event, it was part of the idea that the participants should see, meet and learn from each other (Kihlmark & Widlund, 2010). In this sense, the event allows for exploring a sports tourism community based on, and grounded in, a shared interest in the context of shifting participant-spectator roles. The research aim of this study is, hence, two fold, with both issues being closely intertwined. First, it seeks to explore the extent to which, and how, both the role of being a performer and a spectator are perceived, expressed and experienced. Second, it

aims to identify the extent to which this interplay of roles relates and contributes to the sense of community among the participants.

Methodology and methods

This research is part of a larger project that seeks to identify and make sense of the meaning participants attach to their involvement in the World Gymnaestrada. Informed by subtle realism as a philosophical position (Hammersley, 1992) and based on an ethnographic, research approach, data were mainly collected in the context of the 2011 World Gymnaestrada in Lausanne, Switzerland. These data were then checked, validated and confirmed four years later during the 2015 World Gymnaestrada in Helsinki, Finland. In broader and more generic terms, this project's research purpose is to *understand* a sports tourism experience, looking at it from the inside in order to make sense of the meaning social actors attach to their actions and interactions with others (Blaikie, 2007). It is underpinned by the ideas of Max Weber (1864-1920), who argued social enquiry is concerned with *Verstehen*, empathetic understanding (Weber, 1947). According to Weber (1947), *Verstehen* requires a holistic approach comprising both immediate observation (*Aktuelles Verstehen*) and locating action in its broader context involving non-observable facts (*Erklärendes Verstehen*). Based on these considerations, the key research methods used in this project were participant observation and semi-structured interviews along with informal conversations, with the data collected through the different methods informing and complementing each other.

In the context of the 2011 World Gymnaestrada, data were collected during a three-phase research process (pre-event, event, post-event) over one year including the rehearsals for the German Large Group Performance, in which the first researcher took

part herself. The rehearsals were used to approach and recruit 18 women of the German delegation, aged between 25 and 60, as interview partners. The research has, hence, listened to the voices, narratives and perspectives of more mature women, a usually less considered demographic group in sports tourism research. Table 1 provides some background information on these women in the alphabetical order of their assigned pseudonym. The main characteristics identified in the outline include the age, occupation, marital status, family size, the length of involvement in gymnastics, and how often they have taken part in the World Gymnaestrada so far. The latter point is crucial as it demonstrates the variety of earlier Gymnaestrada experiences among the research partners.

Table 1. Research partner profile and involvement in gymnastics and the World Gymnaestrada.

Research partner profile and involvement in gymnastics and the World Gymnaestrada
<p>Antonia</p> <p>She is 64 years old, retired, married and has two children. She has been in her gymnastics club since she was seven years old. She actively participates in general gymnastics and is the coach of two groups. Lausanne is the 8th World Gymnaestrada for her.</p>
<p>Bärbel</p> <p>She is 43 years old, has a commercial occupation, is married and has two children. She has been a member of her gymnastics club since her mid-20s. Lausanne is her 5th World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Birgit</p> <p>She is 55 years old, is a teacher, married. She has been involved in gymnastics since her childhood, is both actively involved, as coach and official for group gymnastics. Before Lausanne, she had attended one other World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Charlotte</p>

<p>She is 47 years, a child care worker, married and has two children. She has been a member of her gymnastics club since her early 20s. Lausanne is her 7th World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Christina</p> <p>Aged 66, she is retired, married and has two children. She joined her gymnastics club in her early 20s. Lausanne is the 8th World Gymnaestrada she attended.</p>
<p>Erna</p> <p>She is 59 years old, a homemaker, married, two children. She has been actively involved in her gymnastics club since her childhood. Lausanne is her 4th World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Eva</p> <p>She is 62 years old, has a commercial profession, is married and has one child. She has been in her gymnastics group for 18 years. Before Lausanne, she had attended three World Gymnaestradas.</p>
<p>Evelyn</p> <p>She is 52 years old, has a commercial profession, is married and has two children. She joined her gymnastics club in her early 20s and had attended three World Gymnaestradas before Lausanne.</p>
<p>Gerda</p> <p>She is 65 years old, retired, married. She has been an active member of her gymnastics club for 25 years. In Lausanne, she participates in a World Gymnaestrada for the 7th time.</p>
<p>Heidi</p> <p>She is 60 years old, a physical education teacher, married and has two children. She has been involved in her gymnastics club since her childhood, both actively and as a coach working with young children. Lausanne is the 2nd World Gymnaestrada for her.</p>
<p>Irene</p> <p>She is 64 years old, retired, married and has two children. She has been an active member of a gymnastics club since childhood. When she moved, she joined her new club in 1981. Lausanne is her 8th World Gymnaestrada.</p>

<p>Maria</p> <p>She is 60 years old, self-employed, married and has two children. She has been in her gymnastics club for 19 years, with Lausanne being her 5th World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Miriam</p> <p>She is 47 years old, has a commercial profession, is married and has three children. She joined her gymnastics club in 1991, yet was involved in gymnastics from childhood. Before Lausanne, she had taken part in four World Gymnaestradas.</p>
<p>Nadine</p> <p>She is 37 years old, is a physiotherapist, single. She has been actively involved in artistic gymnastics and team gym since her childhood and now is a team gym official. In Lausanne, she took part in a World Gymnaestrada for the 1st time.</p>
<p>Sabine</p> <p>She is 52 years old, an accountant, married. She has been involved in her gymnastics club since a child. Lausanne is her 3rd World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Theresa</p> <p>She is 41 years old, a teacher, single. She has been involved in gymnastics since she was a child, acrobatics in particular. She is both actively engaged and works as a coach. Lausanne is her 3rd World Gymnaestrada.</p>
<p>Ulrike</p> <p>She is 25 years old, a student, single. She has been actively engaged in artistic gymnastics since she was three years old. In Lausanne, she took part in a World Gymnaestrada for the 3rd time.</p>
<p>Uta-Maria</p> <p>She is 56 years old, a teacher, married, has four children. She has been involved in her gymnastics club since her 30s. Lausanne was the 3rd World Gymnaestrada in which she participated.</p>

In depth-interviews and informal conversations before the actual event took place in July 2011 informed the data collection in Lausanne, during which participating, observing, listening and informal conversations were the main methods used. The display rehearsals on site along with the two performances as well as the waiting times before and between the performances offered valuable occasions to listen to the participants' conversations and stories or to observe their emotions and behaviour. These insights were complemented by field observations during both event and tourism-related activities in Lausanne, such as performances in the city centre and the exhibition area, guided city tours and social gatherings. In-depth interviews were again conducted after the event to check, elaborate and make sense of data collected in Lausanne. With the consent of all research partners, all interviews were typed and then transcribed verbatim. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours. Pseudonyms are used in the results presentation to protect their anonymity. Data collection and analysis were an on-going process, following a circular rather than linear model as it is typical in qualitative research (Flick 2006; Maxwell 1996). All data were reviewed and analysed in an on-going process of identifying codes and themes. Themes and patterns were systematically identified, developed, compared and coded, and were then re-examined against the data. The codes were further developed to identify conceptual and theoretical themes to account for the findings. Once new data were obtained, these were immediately reviewed, passing through continuous analytical stages. The codes were then further developed to identify the conceptual and theoretical themes to account for the findings. The process of analysis was based upon Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 159), who suggested that in ethnographic research:

We must be prepared to go beyond the data to develop ideas that will illuminate them, and this will allow us to link our ideas with those of others; and we must then bring those ideas back to test their fit with further data, and so on.

The 2011 World Gymnaestrada in Lausanne provided the core research setting of this project. It is there where this study's key themes emerged and where the research partners' quotes are drawn from. Four years later during the 2015 event in Helsinki, Finland, the data, themes, interpretations and quotes could not only be checked and verified, but also confirmed and validated. Again participant observation was used by the first researcher, who took part in a group performance herself. Informal conversations were conducted with 13 out of the 18 women of the 2011 research group. A further level of data enrichment and verification derives from the second researcher attending the 2015 event as well and from the discussions between the two researchers as a result thereof. Both researchers adopted different roles that insightfully complemented each other. The first researcher's background as a former rhythmic gymnast and her involvement in event performances made her adopt the insider or emic view. For her, the process of accessing, interpreting and making sense of the participants' perceptions of the event happened in the context of her own background and experiences, requiring a constant process of self-reflection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Sands, 2002; Spencer, 2001). The second researcher attended the event in the role of an outsider, critically questioning and complementing the data collection and interpretations from an external, etic point of view. During several rounds of discussion, both formal and informal, the second researcher reflected on his experiences and shared his impressions, which were overall meeting the first researchers' interpretations of the 2011 event. So it needs to be again acknowledged, that rather than developing knowledge in dialogue (see for example Brown & Huang, 2015), the main data collection for this paper occurred in 2011. The external perspective of the second

researcher assisted the first investigator in her process of ongoing self-reflection. Conducting the research in a culture with which she was familiar, the first researcher often saw herself faced with the tension that Mansfield (2007, p. 117) relates to Norbert Elias's concept of 'Involvement-Detachment', where it is 'presented as a way of explaining, understanding and working with ever-changing balances of passion and reason in scholarship'. The first researcher has been involved in the world of gymnastics for more than 30 years, yet she had never been to a World Gymnaestrada before going to Lausanne. Consequently, she was 'simultaneously concerned to make the strange familiar, so as to *understand* it, and to make the familiar strange, so as to avoid *misunderstanding* it' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 231, original emphasis). Sharing thoughts with the second researcher assisted in this process of analysing the data against the biography of the first investigator.

Despite this fruitful combination of internal and external eyes in the process of data collection and interpretations, the knowledge produced in this project is highly contextualised and may not represent the voices of all participants. Yet, with this research encompassing two events as well as selected periods before and after, the multi-methods approach and strategies to achieve trustworthiness, such as extended engagement in the field, selective member checking processes, and keeping a detailed record and audit trail of data analysis, ensure that valid and rich insights were created. The findings as well as their analysis and interpretation, similarities and differences of the different perspectives and a comparison with existing studies will be presented in the following. For analytical purposes, the participants' perceptions of their roles of being a performer and a spectator are dealt with separately first, before the process of shifting and merging roles will be explored. Drawing on Wolcott (1994), who suggested, in ethnographic writing, the three elements description, analysis and

interpretation, should be interwoven in the text, the following presentation of the findings is not separated from their interpretation and discussion. Instead, a thematic approach has been adopted, with each section addressing one of the themes that emerged from the data.

The World Gymnaestrada participant as a performer

Being involved in a performance plays a crucial role in the schedule of activities of the World Gymnaestrada participants. Taking part in a collective performance is even central to the event experience. When asked about the role the display played for her, Sabine's prompt and spontaneous answer was *'That's why I am here'*. She continued:

Taking part in a display is part of the Gymnaestrada experience, only then you are a real participant. If I am only watching, I am a guest or visitor and don't belong to the active participants.

Antonia agrees, as she shares Sabine's view saying: *'When you perform, you are part of the whole event, that's the core of the experience.'* The group display puts participants in the thick of things. Heidi explains why this is the case:

It's so fascinating to perform as part of a group ... You are there, on the ground in the middle of the stadium, a little human being among many others, in front of several thousand spectators. The music starts, you do your stuff, it gives you chills. It's a fantastic experience to perform in front of so many spectators, you as part of a group.

It is the experience of physical interaction in unison which fascinates the gymnasts. In addition to that, the group performance is a setting where boundaries are transcended and differences become blurred. Underpinned by the official objectives of the World Gymnaestrada and the Gymnastics for All philosophy, the collective displays of gymnastics are a means to demonstrate the diversity of gymnastics, to unite its different facets as well as the gymnasts themselves. One example of enabling everybody

to participate was the German large group performance. Its 2011 programme was introduced by a modern dance choreography performed by 100 female dancers, followed by an energetic piece of dance aerobics presented by both male and female gymnasts. A group of 100 older people then took to the stage, performing a display with hand apparatus, succeeded by a group of younger gymnasts whose performance was dominated by high-level parkour, free-running and tricking elements. The programme was rounded off by a big finale with all 500 participants. The purpose of the show was to present the diversity of gymnastics practiced within the German Gymnastics Federation. Participation was open to anybody.

The gymnasts appeared to appreciate this mix of skill levels and gymnastics forms, and that age and gender were not relevant. When the 500 performers were waiting for their display's turn in the back stage area of the stadium, a female participant, perhaps aged 60, suddenly grasped the megaphone the choreographer used for her final comments before the show, and said, visibly touched by her own emotions and directed to the coaches and officials, *'We would like to thank you for this cross-generational choreography, and thanks also for your patience, so that we had the chance to become a harmonious whole.'* Everybody started applauding and answered the gymnast's comments with a spontaneous Mexican wave. These findings support the work of Mechbach and Lundquist Waneberg (2011) who, in their investigation of the 2007 World Gymaestrada in Dornbirn, came to a similar conclusion. They also identified the merging of age, gender, skill levels and gymnastics forms to be not only a philosophical idea, but one that was consciously perceived and appreciated by the participants.

The deep sense of belonging that the participants experience and express in and through the performance did not arise automatically or naturally. A sense of duty and

dedication on the participants' side turned out to be crucial for the development of the spirit of affiliation. Commitment and subordination emerged to be the driving forces behind the strong feeling of connection. *'It only makes sense when it's perfect.'* Eva's comment on the required quality of a display illustrates that, even if the World Gymnaestrada, by itself, is non-competitive, participants are very ambitious to do well in their show, even on a non-elite level. Antonia comments: *'It's our ambition to perform free of errors'* and explains:

The large group performance means representing your home country. That's not just about being there, but that's a real big event, the whole world comes together, and to experience something special like that, you have to be well prepared.

Incited by the awareness of performing for one's home country, striving for success and perfection in the display is considered to be important, in spite of, or precisely because of, the non-competitive environment of the event. Mechbach and Lundquist Waneberg (2011) come to a similar conclusion. At the 2007 World Gymnaestrada, they identify an element of contest was perceived by some participants, in that the event 'has a serious motto and is a kind of competition where you simply compete in a different way' (2011, p. 111).

Doing well in the large group performance matters for the researched participants; it is tantamount to representing the home country. There is a common goal behind the gymnastics display and 'it is the collective's achievement that is most central' (Mechbach and Lundquist Waneberg, 2011, p. 112). This contradicts Weed and Bull (2009, p. 72), who argued involvement in sports tourism for task reasons, 'i.e. enjoyment of working with other members of the team in common pursuit of the task completion', may not be immediately relevant in sports tourism. At the World Gymnaestrada, it is. Working together for the common goal is part of the experience.

This supports Ziakas and Costa (2010, p. 20), who suggest sports tourism can provide a context of ‘cooperative physical endeavour that everyone can participate in while working towards common goals.’

At the World Gymnaestrada, everybody is expected to give one’s best and to take the performance seriously, despite, or because of, the non-elite level. Antonia comments:

There will, of course, be mistakes. Knowing it and making mistakes is okay, but not knowing it and making mistakes is another thing.

Commitment seems to be more important than skill level. If one knows the routine, mistakes are forgiven; if one does not know it, there is no excuse. It is not about being a highly skilled gymnast, but about taking the display and the rehearsals seriously.

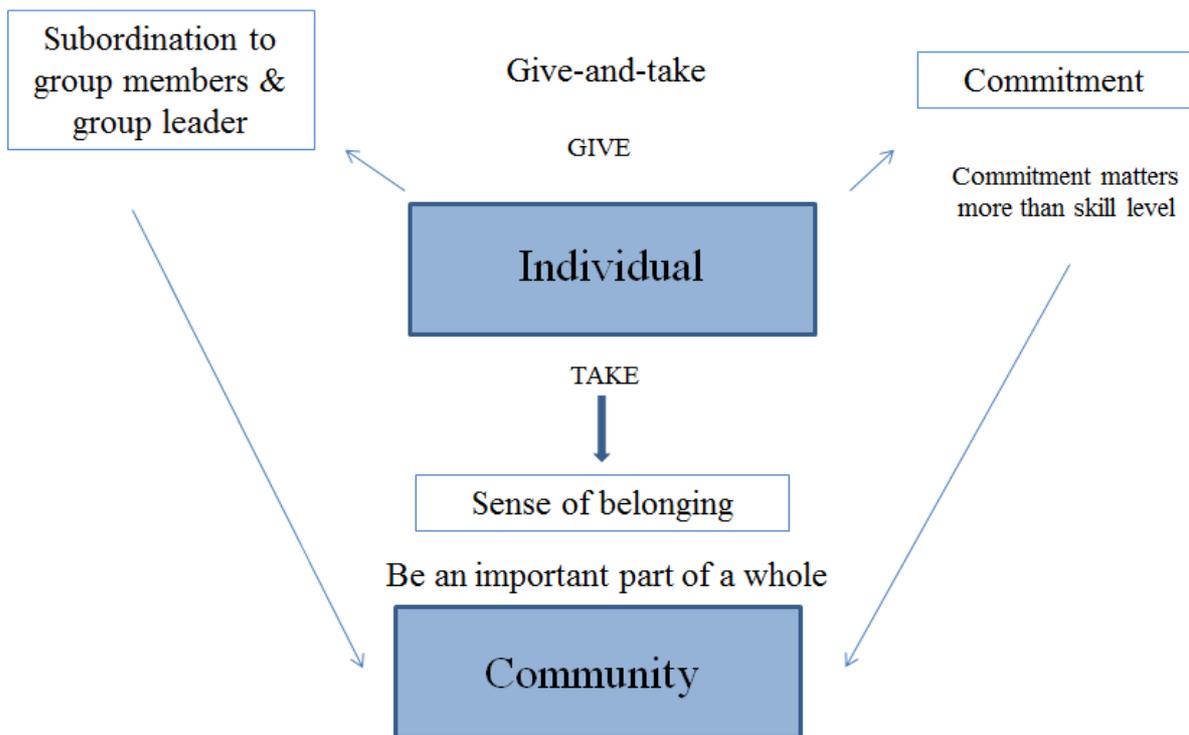
Being engaged and committed to do well can be interpreted as the price that must be paid to be part of the Gymnaestrada community. ‘*This is no vacation here*’, is another statement that teases out the significance of taking it seriously. Commitment, dedication and subordination to the common goal are the unifying devices that provide access to, and allow being part of, the community. Commitment is what constitutes the Gymnaestrada community. It reflects the required behavioural device that needs to be displayed to experience the value of membership of the group. This complements Rickly-Boyd's (2012) finding that exclusivity of membership in a sports tourism community is expressed through dedication and commitment – all this in their role of actively being engaged in the related sports tourism activity.

The issue of commitment in a leisure context has been explored more in detail by Stebbins (1982). His Serious Leisure concept provides a more differentiated insight into the strong dedication Gymnaestrada participants show towards their activity. Among the six qualities that distinguish serious from casual leisure, Stebbins (1982) identified as particularly relevant the need to persevere and to undertake considerable

efforts based on knowledge, skill and training. In the case of sports tourism, it has been argued, over and above the activity, these features are reinforced through the very act of travelling (Green & Jones, 2005; Higham & Hinch, 2009). At the World Gymnaestrada, the participants already had to persevere during the practice stage. They had to undertake effort to take part in the rehearsals. They had to overcome failure and needed to deal with mistakes. In addition, the act of travelling threw up additional constraints such as cost and time that had to be sustained and negotiated.

It is not only the need to persevere and to undertake effort, but also gaining durable benefits such as self-esteem, social interaction or feelings of belonging as well as being part of a group or ‘unique ethos’ which characterise Serious Leisure enthusiasts (Stebbins, 1982). In an attempt to account for the continued commitment and involvement in an activity, Green and Jones (2005, p. 173) proffer the ‘profit hypothesis’ as one possible explanation. Seen from this perspective, dedication occurs as long as ‘the benefits of participation outweigh the costs of taking part’. At the World Gymnaestrada, a similar process seems to be applicable. It can be argued there is a relationship between commitment and subordination, on one hand, and the sense of belonging that participants experience and express, on the other. There seems to be a mechanism that takes the form of give-and-take. Being dedicated to the group, the common goal and the activity constitutes the Gymnaestrada community. Commitment is what the participants need to ‘give’, the strong feeling of belonging is what they are able to ‘take’. It is the participants’ commitment to a common goal which shapes their sense of affiliation. Figures 1 illustrates these considerations in a visual way.

Figure 1. Commitment as a constituent of community at the World Gymnaestrada.



The World Gymnaestrada participant as a spectator

It is not only performing that plays a significant role in shaping the experience of the World Gymnaestrada community; so does watching other groups' displays. Apart from the activities related to their own performance, it is viewing gymnastics that occupies an important place in the participants' event schedule. Typical comments were:

Watching other groups' displays is fantastic.

I can't get enough of seeing other displays.

Well, looking at others groups' performances is an obsession.

What are you doing today? - Well, watching of course, what else should I be doing?

While the participants agree they enjoy viewing displays, there are different methods of selecting which groups to watch. With up to 40 performances taking place

every hour, spread across the exhibition centre, the so-called city stages in the centre of Lausanne and Helsinki and the stadia in both cities as main sites, the gymnasts had to choose where to go and what to see. While some people had detailed plans regarding the displays they intended to view, Heidi adopted a more relaxed approach towards making a choice this time, compared to the earlier events she attended. She explains:

Watching other groups, that was always a bit of a, um, hassle, do I watch that display or the other one? Well, this time I took things as they came and didn't decide what I absolutely wanted to see, I didn't jump from one hall to the next, but kept my seat, stayed in one hall and simply watched what came next. Last time, that was so stressful, also because there are always time displacements, well, yes, and then you really come under stress, when you are running from one hall to the next to watch something.

Not only the selection mechanism varies, there are also contrasting preferences in terms of which groups to see. People like watching performances from other nations that seem 'exotic' or from groups they have seen or heard about before. The gymnasts may also select a display when they are familiar with one or more performers in the team. What is worth noting, is, the first couple of days, groups explicitly advertised their displays. In the lunch hall or outside in the exhibition centre's patio, groups carried large signposts indicating the day, time and site of their displays: '*Come to see our display, Monday 14.00, hall 3 and Tuesday 15.00 hall 4.*' Also, distributing flyers was a common device in order to attract people as spectators. The group advertisements assisted people to make their choice. In addition, passing on recommendations from person to person turned out to be helpful to make one's way through the filter process.

Watching displays entailed several levels of meaning. Ulrike comments, '*Some displays are just amazing, as they have great ideas or it's so great to see masses of gymnasts perform together.*' This is in line with Heidi, who explains, '*It's great to watch the other nations' displays, to see how creative they are, the diversity of*

gymnastics forms.' Besides enjoying the richness and diversity of gymnastics, another aspect comes to the fore in these statements. Becoming inspired by the creativity of other groups' choreographies and developing and trying new ideas is what matters to the gymnasts. Ulrike explains what this means:

It's amazing to see what you can do with gymnastics groups. Well, we were all so motivated and tried some of the acrobatic elements we saw in the school accommodation.

Viewing and trying out what others did is a crucial part of the event experience. Theresa told me her group mates tried some acrobatics elements they had seen during the day in the meadow of a little park in the middle of Lausanne. Watching and learning from each other is one of the core event objectives, according to the International Gymnastics Federation. The research partners' statements illustrate this is not only an idea that exists on paper, but one that is consciously perceived, appreciated and valued. Also, when I asked Ulrike in our post-event interview to tell me about her Gymnastrada highlights, her spontaneous answer was:

Some of the performances which were simply amazing, as some of them had, I mean, such great ideas, ..., and again and again, this crowd of people that does something together, well, that's impressive.

This statement stresses it is not only the creativity presented in the displays which attracts the spectators, but also, and in particular, the collective form it takes. This is confirmed by a woman who, when asked what she liked most so far, answered, '*Watching the Swiss national evening*'. When queried '*Why?*', she continued, '*Because they did not present a spectacular elite performance, but a gymnastics crowd on a good level.*' Adopting the perspective of a performer, Theresa explains why this is the case:

Well, I think you can create impressive things for the spectators with rather easy means, I mean, without the need to reach your performance limits.

The possibility of creating impressive images on a non-elite skill level is what attracts the participants. They appreciate it is the collective, not an individual performer, who facilitates these effects. The group displays fascinate the gymnasts, not only in their role as performer, but also as spectators.

Shifting roles of performing and watching: The World Gymnaestrada as a two-sided community experience

The community of Gymnaestrada participants is expressed and experienced not only by performing as a collective, but also by watching other groups' shows. Even Theresa, who comments she would not travel a long distance to the event to be a spectator 'only', states she feels highly attracted to watching other groups. Subject to the condition that she herself performs, being a spectator matters to her. The performers themselves are eager to watch others; likewise they also wish to be watched. Viewing other groups' displays means changing one's perspective. The collective goal of doing well in one's own performance has a meaning which is encapsulated in a relationship between performing and watching. Antonia explains:

You want to perform free of errors, you want to deliver a message to the spectators. Well, when you know your stuff and enjoy doing it, you can do an impressive display and reach the spectators.

The gymnasts are aware they are watched by spectators who would like to see a harmonious picture. In the very moment of delivering her show, however, Ulrike faded out the thought of being watched. While laughing, she says, '*The display was stress ... I had to focus on what I had to do, I didn't have time to think about the spectators.*' For Antonia, in turn, thoughts about those viewing came up during her performance:

I enjoyed the display, as we did so well, as you could also have a look at the spectators and I thought, wow, great, and also what I enjoyed was, when afterwards, you could say, we were good, and, great, no errors, we were great.

Even if the point of time and form of reflection was different, both Ulrike and Antonia knew, by way of their performance, they would deliver a message to spectators which they wanted to perceive and feel themselves when they changed their role from performer to spectator. The World Gymnaestrada can be interpreted as a two-sided experience that entails constantly shifting roles of performing and watching. This notion seems to challenge the binary division of sports tourists of either being actively or passively involved when travelling in terms of sport. The World Gymnaestrada provides a context where the traditional boundary between acting and spectating appears to dissolve. This study, therefore, reinforces the theme of merging participant-spectator roles identified more in detail by Lamont and McKay (2012). The strength with which performing and watching are shifting and constitute overlapping activities at the World Gymnaestrada goes beyond Weed and Bull's (2009) mediating category of being a 'vicarious' sports tourist. Nor does Kruger and Saayman's (2012) distinction between fans who are committed to the general sports context of an event versus those who are devoted to an individual participant appear to be applicable. As in Lamont and McKay's (2012) case of the Tour de France, the World Gymnaestrada is a context where the active-passive dichotomy is dissolved and where both being involved and watching others play a crucial role in shaping the participants' experience.

Being viewed is something that is explicitly sought. Typical questions and comments which were fairly often heard were '*When is your display?*', '*Did you see our display?*' or more strongly '*Did you like our display?*' or even '*Sorry, I could not make it.*' The latter also features prominently in the following dialogue: '*What kind of performance are you doing?*', '*Large group for Germany.*', '*Me, too, large group*

Switzerland. Sorry, I couldn't watch yours, it was our turn right after you finished. It is worth noting that people apologise, when they were not able to watch the display of their counterparts. There appears to be an internalised agreement within the Gymnaestrada community that viewing each other's display is a taken-for-granted activity. Nevertheless, performers showed explicitly they were pleased when somebody who had considered going to see the display did so, with common statements being, *'It's so great you watched our performance'* or *'Thanks for coming.'*

Communicating with the spectators through the collective display is clearly something that matters to the participants. And whether the message has been received is an object of critical self-reflection. The performers aim to touch the spectators through their display, and they want to discover whether this has been achieved, as Bärbel's statement reveals:

I would really like to get a honest feedback ... Did the audience like the kind of performance we did? I would like to know that. I mean, during the display I think I did well, at least I have the impression we did well, but was it well received? I am missing that, the feedback.

Maria adds, *'I would have liked to see the whole thing, if somebody had filmed it, I would like to see it.'* Apart from asking for and receiving verbal or visual feedback, the performers experience and enjoy the spectators' response immediately and straightforward, as soon as the last tone of their display's piece of music has faded out. On many occasions, a broad smile and a sparkle in a gymnast's eyes could be observed, when, while s/he remained in the final position of the choreography, the spectators were showing their appreciation through thunderous applauses and standing ovations.

As illustrated, at the World Gymnaestrada, performing is inextricably linked to watching. Asking for and providing feedback can be interpreted as the mediating device

between the two. What seems to play a particular role in this context is that the response is provided by an expert audience that is able to assess and judge what is happening.

When the participants change sides to watch other displays, they do so as experts, using their performers' eyes. This also came to the fore for example when, on the occasion of the 2011 World Gymnaestrada, nearly 80 gymnasts successfully managed to inscribe their names in the Guinness Book of World Records, performing 790 double somersaults in fewer than 20 minutes. While excitedly watching it, Sabine turned to me saying:

That's clever they do it here during the Gymnaestrada, where the audience understands what this is all about.

Being a gymnast herself, Sabine empathises with the Swiss world record holders. She is able to think her way into what they were doing, even if she comes from a completely different discipline within the wide field of gymnastics. At the World Gymnaestrada, artistic and rhythmic gymnasts, acrobats as well as people involved in aerobics, dance or trampoline gymnastics come together. For Theresa, an acrobat, it makes a difference from whom she receives feedback.

Theresa appreciates feedback from people involved in gymnastics in general, but not necessarily in her specific discipline, acrobatics. At first glance, she seems to set a boundary within the Gymnaestrada community, one between her area of expertise and others. Yet the participants' overall interest in gymnastics, taken as a whole, makes this borderline invisible. Watching displays at the event enables the participants to identify and use synergies between their different disciplines. What unites them is a general understanding of the foundation of gymnastics which qualifies them to perceive things that people who are not involved in this kind of sport would not be in a position to notice or comprehend. While watching in the stadium in Lausanne, I heard a dialogue

between two spectators who discussed the display that was taking place in front of them:

I'm curious to see how they will drag away the parallel bars for the second part of their show.

Me too. Interesting we talk about that, somebody who is not a gymnast would never ever see that.

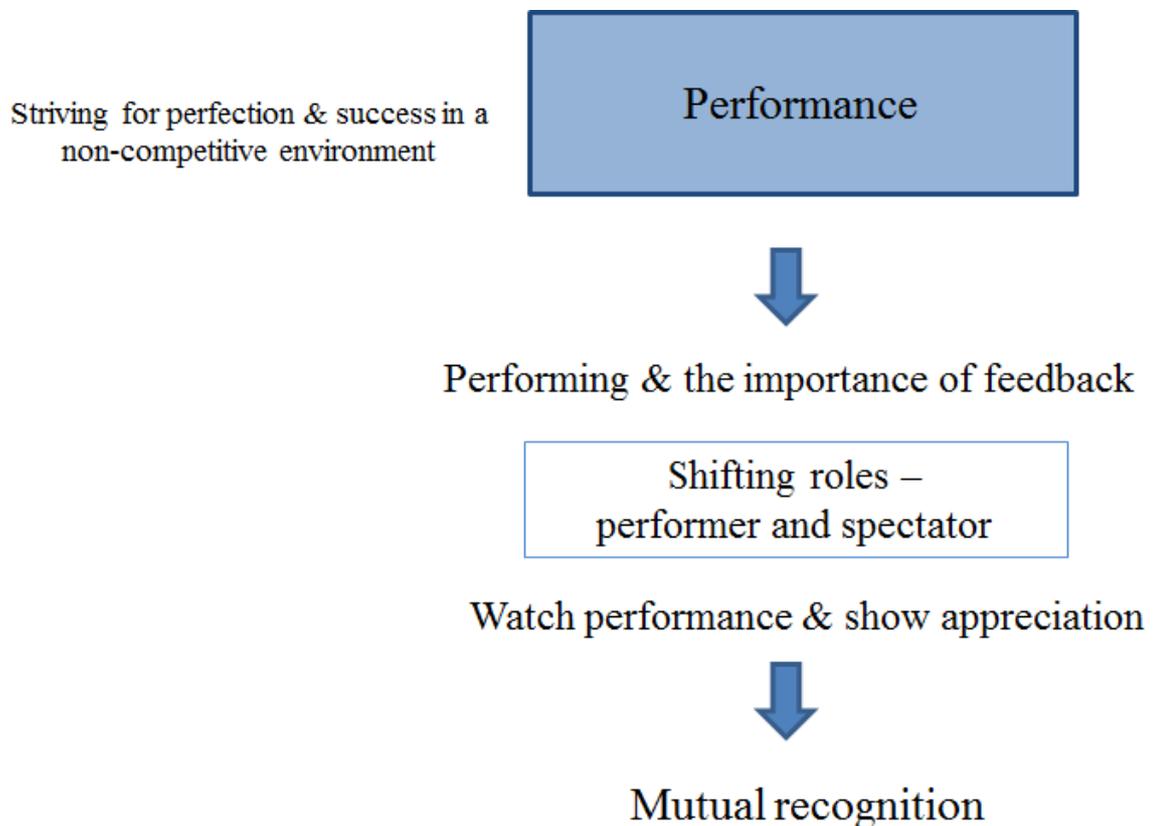
Well, you are right.

The general understanding of gymnastics, as well as the awareness thereof, shapes the participants' perspective through which they view other groups' performances. Bourdieu's (1984; 1989) notion of the habitus helps account for these findings. According to him (1989, p. 19), 'Habitus is both a system of schemes of production of practices and a system of perception and appreciation of practices'. His theoretical construct explains what happens at the World Gymnaestrada, where not only creating and performing something, but also assessing it, shapes the event experience, with both being inextricably linked.

Closely connected to the issue of commitment, revealed earlier in this paper as one of the basic constituents of the Gymnaestrada community, these findings provide an insightful, additional layer of understanding the actions and occurrences on site. Bourdieu (1984; 1989) argued the more committed persons have schemes of perception which enable them to see things the less skilled ones cannot see. All the same, the displays are created through the participants' habitus, 'however they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the code, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their social meaning' (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 19). Access to the group depends on competencies needed to appreciate and understand it. Full members are those connoisseurs who have the knowledge and competencies to judge the quality. The ability to assess serves as a marker of distinction and belonging (Bourdieu, 1984;

1989). This is exactly what happens at the Gymnaestrada. The individual is affiliated to the community in a two-fold way, through performing in specific gymnastics activity, and through the ability and competence to assess and appreciate other gymnasts' displays. Asking for and giving each other feedback based on one's expertise is an indicator of mutual recognition and affirms the community's membership. Figure 2 provides a visual overview of these considerations.

Figure 2. The World Gymnaestrada as a dual experience.



These considerations relate back to how community is understood in this paper. In line with Cohen (1985, 2002), it is conceptualised as a meaningful shared interest and collective purpose. What constitutes the participants' sense of belonging is something symbolic, namely the deep meaning they derive from their joint expertise.

Conclusion

This research explored the role oscillation of performing and watching in the context of the World Gymnaestrada. The study went beyond simply exploring the merging roles of being actively engaged and watching others. It investigated a context where these two are inextricably linked. On one hand, taking part in a collective gymnastics display and interacting with their fellow gymnasts through gymnastics movements in a synchronised way is central to the experience. On the other hand, watching and talking about other groups' performances is significant in the context of the event experience. During the week, the participants adopt two constantly shifting roles of being a performer and being a spectator. The paper argued the World Gymnaestrada is a two-sided experience involving a constant interplay between performing and watching that serves as a strong constituent of affirming and validating the participants' community. It is a community outside of everyday life, understood as a meaningful collective interest and joint purpose. In line with Cohen (1985, 2002), what matters is not the shared expertise as such, but what people think about it, what it means to them.

Asking for and giving feedback based on one's expertise is the intermediating device between the two roles of performing and viewing. There appears to be an internalised consensus that being involved in a display, which is taken seriously, provides the ability to assess and judge others. The constant interplay between performing and watching, between asking for feedback and showing appreciation, constitutes a significant device of mutual recognition through which the community is confirmed and validated.

These findings may further the understanding on the double-sided nature that life in a community may entail, not only in the context of sports tourism, but also

related to wider issues in social life. To *receive* a sense of self and belonging, the individual needs to *give* something in return. Access to, and membership of, the community is affirmed and validated by way of showing commitment and dedication to the common goal. This give-and-take mechanism is embedded in an environment of mutual recognition which is based on each member's gymnastics expertise. The give-and-take mechanism, hence, establishes a relationship between commitment, expertise and mutual recognition which constitutes the foundation on which the Gymnaestrada community is kept together, affirmed and validated.

This study has a variety of limitations that relate, in particular, to the kind of knowledge that has been generated. The knowledge produced in this research is highly contextualised and may not represent the meanings developed by all World Gymnaestrada participants. To further verify the data, similar research could be carried out at the World Gymnaestrada with different age groups, male gymnasts or participants from other nationalities. In addition, studies could be conducted in other sports tourism contexts formed of aesthetic sports such as street dance or cheerleading events. Also researching any other sports event, both on a grassroots and elite level, in both individual and team sports, could add further insight on the oscillation of roles. What does it, for example, mean to athletes involved in tennis, swimming or soccer, to follow and watch their fellow actors in the sports tourism context of an event? Going a step beyond, further research could explore how these findings might be used by marketers to strengthen and leverage the relationship between participation and fanship, supporting their attempts to develop participation from spectating and vice versa. Addressing ~~this phenomenon~~ the oscillation of roles more in detail could insightfully contribute further to the knowledge on sports tourism as well as the nature of leisure based communities.

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