

SPORTS TOURISM: PLAYING THE NEW GAME

Terry Stevens

Viewpoint

<https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.27.3.10>

Much has been written about the impact of the pandemic on sports tourism together with a raft of predictions and forecasts about the nature, rate, and form of the recovery, regrowth, and re-imagining of tourism over the next ten years or so (Burini 2020; Dieke et al. 2021). In this situation, as never before, we are all dwellers on the threshold – the title of a song written and recorded by the Northern Ireland musician, Van Morrison. In the forward to *Lit Up Inside: The Selected Lyrics of Van Morrison* (2014), Ian Rankin writes, “Morrison is talking for all of us, poised throughout our lives between what we have already experienced and what may lie ahead.”

The future trajectory of the recovery, re-growth and reimagining of sports tourism is full of uncertainty. Numerous speakers at the Congress reported how COVID-19 had challenged us all to step away from the traditional destination development and tourism business models that have held good in the past but whose fragilities have been cruelly highlighted by the pandemic (Travel Foundation 2018).

In an extremely thoughtful article, posted by Maja Pak (Director, Slovenian Tourist Board) on LinkedIn on 30th July 2021, sets out the key trends that must be considered in the wake of the pandemic and from climate change. Pak calls for a new definition of the metrics for success, the centrality of sustainability and conscious travel driving new customer expectations and the engagement of local communities.

Throughout the past eighteen months, according to The Future Laboratory, “We’ve spent our time fretting about the New Normal, when we should be talking about the New Extra-ordinary! The pandemic has precipitated scientific advancement, championed innovation and ushered in a new age of collaboration, challenge and accelerated change”. The search for the extra-ordinary in sports tourism development will be essential over the next ten years as destinations, sports organisations and sporting venues find ways harness smart technologies, nurture innovation, stimulating new forms of collaboration that place co-dependency at the heart a tourism eco-system.

Easier said than done. The highly respected tourism visionary, Claus Sendlinger¹ has, for ten years, consistently argued for these changes concluding that the tourism industry needs innovative and creative ideas to survive but that the industry is not sufficiently innovative or creative to deliver what will be needed. Sports tourism needs hybrid thinkers delivering hybrid solutions (Sendlinger 2018).

Today, as Dylan would say, “The times they are a-changin’”². New ways of working are happening. Examples abound where we are re-imagining the power structures and relationships in sports tourism: leadership for re-growth is moving away from the public

¹ The Founder of Design Hotels, www.designhotels.com

² Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are A-Changin’* 1964. Warner Music. Renewed 1991 Spyder Music.

sector, increasingly responsibility is being taken by new pirates, sports clubs, and local communities. There is disruption of the traditional models. There will be new ways of measuring success in sports tourism.

It is comm(on)unity based on common values, common vision, common trust, common sense in practice. It is about the much-needed balanced approach of equilibrium in managing a destination, and about respons(ustain)ability – shared actions for a sustainable future.

We are already witnessing DMOs around the world using a different glossary of terms. They want to be admired, desired, loved, respected, and trusted. They want to work more collaboratively. They are making well-defined promises and pledges to their communities, their businesses, and their guests – and, of course, they must be safe, secure, and hygienic.

Recent research by Stevens & Associates has identified important paradigm shifts that are currently evident in the post-COVID environment that will directly, and significantly, impact on how sports tourism evolves over the next few years (Table 1.)

Table 1: Eight Paradigm Shifts Affecting Sports Tourism and the Role of DMOs

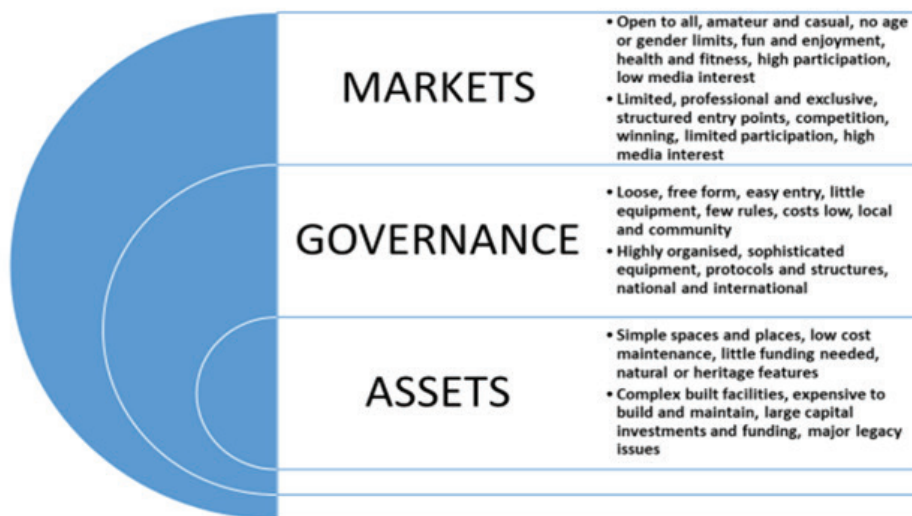
Paradigm Shift	Short Explanation
1. Hybridity & Transformation	The appearance of novel, unique solutions, in product development, experience creation and tourist engagement that are blurring definitions and making it increasingly difficult to categorise and accredit these initiatives – and does it matter anymore to the customer if a product receives a 5* or a 2* assessment by a tourist board? Initiatives that boldly go where few have been before to make a positive transformational impact in their destinations.
2. Blurring	The increasing occurrence of products that do not fit the traditional definitions of what constitutes a visitor attraction, hotels, events venue and so on.
3. Outliers	As part of the era of the hybrid, we are seeing the rapid emergence of projects that would have been regarded as being ‘left-of-field’ or quirky but now these niche outliers are fast becoming mainstream – ‘who would have thought it’ ideas are now becoming the expected.
4. Co-creation	Multi-faceted, multi-layered, co-created, and collaborative unique experiences capable of commanding high value and capturing guest attention and involving the guest in their design will become a demand driver for destinations.
5. Co-dependency	A cornerstone of co-created experiences is the need for destination stakeholders to work together and recognise a co-dependency tourism eco-system rather than a business-centric, ego-system.

6. Elasticity	The need for DMOs to be more agile, flexible, and fluid in their operations welcoming new ideas, different ways of working, and nurturing innovation.
7. Talent	Exploring the idea that an individual’s talent may well be more important to a tourism business or a DMO than a traditional skill or qualification – the fact that your night porter in a hotel is the best fiddle player in the village might be more important than his qualities as a night porter?
8. Value	The culmination of these shifts is resulting in our need to re-calibrate all aspects of perceived and real value of tourism in our destinations and, ultimately, deliver Maja Pak’s call for new metrics of success.

Source: Stevens (2021)

Challenging times indeed. Pace not haste is of the essence if we are to get it right. Now is the time not only to re-grow tourism but to re-set all the buttons, so we emerge with a sustainable, resilient, more inclusive, and a much wiser sports tourism industry. All involved in sports tourism collectively must embrace the need for transformation and innovation. New business models will be the order of the day (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Business Models in Sports Tourism



Another significant trend that has been identified over the past five years, is the emergence of what has been termed ‘the new pirates’ (Stevens 2020a; Stevens 2020b). These are genuinely original and self-made individuals who are developing innovative, surprising, and inspiring ideas for product and experience development. They appear to be more radical in their mindset with a willingness to think differently, to challenge and be challenged, and to stop asking for permission to do what they intuitively know what is right and good for sports tourism development.

In 2019, the UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology, and the Arts (NESTA)³ published a blog entitled *Does Our Economy Require More Pirates?* The blog begins with the statement that “the pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy were some of the most radical political and economic actors of the 17th and 18th Centuries” suggesting that “it is definitely time to explore how we can be more pirate.” NESTA suggests that it is no wonder that social engineers, like Sam Coniff Allende (2018), urges tourism entrepreneurs to “be more pirate” – the title of his 2018 best-selling book.

Coniff Allende reflects on the nexus that led to the emergence of the Golden Age of Piracy noting: (i) the engrained self-interested establishment and (ii) a broken economic system resulting in certain uncertainty Pirates didn't just break the rules, they rewrote them. They didn't just reject society, they reinvented it. Their innovation, social leadership, and rule-breaking ways were a powerful way to enact change and challenge the status quo. For Coniff Allende, to be more pirate today needs “professional rule breaking”. Professional rule breakers are the modern equivalent of those historical buccaneers. They don't operate alone: the recruit a crew of others with similar beliefs, shared values, and who hold each other to the account on the success of their mutiny.

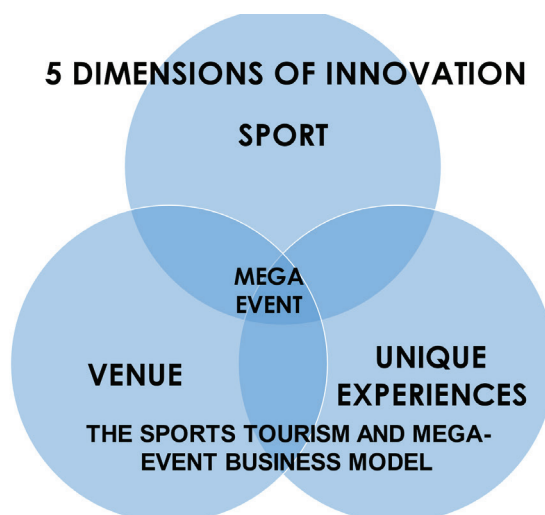
In summary, Coniff Allende identifies four steps ‘to be more pirate’. All four are relevant to the post-COVID era of sustainable sports tourism development. They are:

1. Break a rule: crucially, this should be a rule that shouldn't exist in the first place: one that's been executed with minimal thought and still somehow exists. See what happens... probably not much.
2. Start a mutiny: there will be a need to put something in place of the rule you've just broken – and recruit other people to follow you and start your own mutiny.
3. Be agile: pirates weren't successful because they relied on systems that slowed them down. They made their decisions quickly based on values and principles, making them dynamic and responsive.
4. Redistribute your own power: pirates devolved power to the rest of the ship and make sure your decisions can be challenged by the juniors on your team, who might have creative ideas of their own.

At the core of re-imagining the future of sports tourism there is a core requirement for innovation in the five dimensions of sports tourism (Figure 2).

³ www.nesta.org.uk

Figure 2: Innovations in Sports Tourism



So, in this era of re-imagining and re-growing of sports tourism there is scope for all of us involved to be more pirate in our approach and revel in the chance to work in different, more inclusively, and in innovative and hybrid ways.

NOTE

This paper is based on the presentation made by the author during session two of the UNWTO⁴ 1st World Sports Tourism Congress held in Lloret de Mar, Catalunya, Spain (25-26th November 2021).

REFERENCES

- Burini, F. (Ed.) (2020), *Tourism Facing a Pandemic: From Crisis for Recovery*, Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Bergamo
- Coniff Allende, S. (2018), *Be More Pirate: Or How to Take On the World and Win*, Cape Town, Penguin Random House.
- Dieke, P.U.C., King, B. and Sharpley, R. (Ed.) (2021), *Tourism in Development: Reflective Essays*. CABI Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781789242812.0000>
- Hughes, E. (Ed.) (2014), *Van Morrison: Lit Up Inside: Selected Lyrics*, Faber & Faber, London
- NESTA (2019), *Does Our Economy Require More Pirates?, for*, viewed 1 December 2021, <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/does-our-economy-need-more-pirates/>
- Pak, M. (2021), *The Future of Travel in light of two recent devastations – 7 shifts to watch out for*, viewed 1 December 2021, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/future-travel-light-two-recent-devastations-7-shifts-watch-maja-pak-1e/>
- Sendlinger, C. (2018), Personal Correspondence.
- Stevens, T. (2020a), *The Coker Canvas Cluster of Sail and Rope Making; Bucked in the year, not in the piece*, CRS Monograph No. 7. May, The Coker Rope and Sail Trust, West Coker, Somerset.
- Stevens, T. (2020b), *Wish You Were Here: The stories behind 50 of the world's great destinations*, GRAFFEG, Cardiff.

⁴ United Nations World Tourism Organisation, www.unwto.org

Stevens, T. (2021), Presentation: *Playing the New Game*, Session 2 World Sports Tourism Congress, Loret de Mar, Spain. UNWTO / Catalan Tourism.
Travel Foundation (2018), *The Invisible Burden of Tourism*, Bristol, England.

Terry Stevens, PhD, Prof., Founder & MD
Stevens & Associates
The Studio, 10 Bwrw Road
Loughor / Casllwchwr
Swansea / Abertawe, Wales / Cymru, UK
Phone: 0044 7850885262
E-mail: terry@stevensassoc.co.uk

Please cite this article as:

Stevens, T. (2021), Sports Tourism: Playing The New Game, *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 717-722,
<https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.27.3.10>



Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial – Share Alike 4.0 International