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An investigation into the role of place attachment within extreme sport tourism

Purpose of the paper: Sport tourism can be conceptualised as a unique interaction of activity, people and place (Weed and Bull, 2004; Harrison-Hill and Chalip, 2005). Nevertheless, there is no clear indication of the role of place (destination) within sport tourism consumption, with other scholars suggesting that sport tourism is a unique experience where place may not be significant (Klaus and Maklan, 2011). As identified by Tsai (2012) place attachment has a significant impact on destination loyalty and therefore viewed as an important tourism marketing strength. As a result of this, place attachment within tourism, has received increased academic attention (*c.f.* Gross and Brown, 2006; Gu and Ryan, 2008; Yuksel, Yuksel and Bilim, 2010; Tsai, 2012). However, within a sport tourism context where the role of place is unclear, the factors that influence attachment within sport tourism are ambiguous. Indeed, extreme sport is one segment of sport tourism that is achieving rapid growth in consumption (Intel, 2012), although at this point in time the extant literature remains undeveloped. Given the dichotomy of views of the role of place within sport tourism, this paper seeks to identify the factors which influence attachment within an extreme sport tourism context, using the Isle of Man TT motorcycle race as the focus of the study.

Theoretical background: Within tourism, place attachment can be understood in the context of the emotional and psychological bonds formed between an individual and a particular place (Tsai, 2012). Attachment has also been explored within the sport fan literature (Trail, Anderson and Fink, 2000; Robinson and Trail, 2005; Filo, Funk and O'Brien, 2009), with researchers arguing that individuals can be attached to any aspects of the sport object (Robinson and Trail, 2005) e.g. motorcycling racing. Given the unique interaction identified by Weed and Bull (2004), it is unclear within sport tourism, whether individuals will develop an attachment to the place or an attachment to the activity. Klaus and Maklan (2011) developed a conceptual framework of extreme sport tourism experience which comprised five socio-psychological dimensions. This is a form of sport that is defined as outdoor leisure activities where the most likely outcome of a mismanaged mistake or accident is death and involves individuals exploring their limits (Punchan, 2005; Brymer, 2005). One such pursuit is the notorious Isle of Man TT motorcycle race held annually incorporating the 37 ³/₄ mile mountain course.

Design/Methodological approach: Based on a survey methodology, a survey instrument will be constructed using contributions from Klaus and Maklan's (2011) framework of extreme sport tourism along with Tsai's (2012) work on causal antecedents of tourism place attachment. Data will be collected at the 2014 Isle of Man TT event.

Findings: Findings will enable a greater understanding of how individuals form attachment within extreme sport tourism and the 'objects' that constitute the attachment, be they sport, event or place related.

Implications: On a practical level this will allow marketing academics and practitioners an insight into the factors that influence attachment and destination loyalty within an extreme sport context. In addition an understanding of how to develop attachment within extreme sport tourism will be presented.

Originality / value / contribution: This study expands the almost non-existent research on extreme sport tourism, whilst also contributing to the existing body of knowledge on the role of place within tourism attachment in an extreme sport context. Despite previous contributions on sport tourism behaviour, no theoretical model has been developed to understand the concept of attachment within a sport tourism context. This research will directly contribute towards a better understanding of the connection between sport tourism experience, place and attachment.

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