

# Insights in Sports social science

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# Insights in sports social science

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# Editorial: Insights in sports social science

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## KEYWORDS

sport business insights, social science, innovation, future, sport management and marketing

## Editorial on the Research Topic Insights in sports social science

We are now entering the third decade of the 21st Century, and, especially in the last years, the achievements made by natural and social scientists have been exceptional, leading to major advancements in the fast-growing field of Sports and Active Living. This collection of articles is part of a series of Research Topics across the field of Sports and Active Living. This multi-disciplinary, editorial initiative is focused on new insights, novel developments, current challenges, latest discoveries, recent advances, and future perspectives in the field of sports social science. The goal of this special edition Research Topic was to shed light on the progress made in the past decade in the sport social science field, and on its future challenges to provide a thorough overview of the field. This article collection that has contributions from Canada, throughout Europe, UK, USA and South Africa will inspire, inform and provide direction and guidance to researchers in the field. This collection considers the findings from 11 research teams that from a variety of perspectives have identified current challenges in several sub-disciplines, and who have applied different methodologies to address those challenges. The different viewpoints are reflected in the types of articles that were included in the Research Topic, including articles containing original research, perspectives, a brief research report, a conceptual analysis, and a systematic review. What follows is a brief outline of the various projects.

Testa conducted a study into extremism in the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) football terraces, focusing on risk factors that govern the “entry” of BiH youth into extreme hardcore football fans groups and prolong their involvement in them. The study provided recommendations for BiH policymakers, security agencies, and football federations and clubs to understand and effectively respond to this threat for public security in BiH.

Partly in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic, Weese et al. proposed transformative changes in what sport management academicians teach, how they teach, and where they teach, to facilitate working in flexible environments and across areas. Sport management professors are offered suggestions to help them seize the opportunities arising from the changing sports landscape and emerging entrepreneurial ventures.

In a paper focusing on participants in the Danish version of the reality TV-show *Alone in the Wilderness* (AIW), Andkjaer and Ishoi explored their motives, values, and experiences of being part of the show. The study used a hermeneutic approach, and the analysis was based on a 6-phased thematic analysis. The findings suggest that the motives and values of the participants reflect ideas that may be related to the solo experience and the Nordic tradition of *friluftsliv* (simple life in the outdoors). The study presents new empirically based knowledge on the motives, values, and experiences of people participating in AIW and how these can be understood as part of outdoor education and recreation and as a cultural phenomenon in late modern society.

In the USA, the National Football League (NFL) and its teams face challenges with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In their perspective piece, DeMartini and Butler investigated NFL teams' utilization of organisation employees dedicated to DEI, utilizing a content analysis of publicly available data. Their findings conclude that NFL teams lag behind other American businesses in their adoption of Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) roles. Only 31.25% of NFL teams had a dedicated DEI staff person. Three additional teams host diversity councils utilizing employees with other job responsibilities. The study suggests that to address these challenges and move forward, NFL teams should create CDO roles with appropriate reporting relationships, well-crafted position responsibilities, generous resources, and qualified and experienced employees.

Seibeth et al. explored stories of national identity development from the perspective of youth football players with Turkish background in German youth elite football. The study used 10 expert interviews and biographical mappings to identify specific types, strands, and trajectories of national identity development. The findings illustrate three types of narratives on national identity development: "going with the nomination(s)," "reconsidering national belonging," and "adding up chances." The study concludes that national identity development in youth elite sport is a complex process.

In a paper that asked the question of how arena-anchored urban development projects fit into a local city's tourism economy, Barry et al. positioned professional sports teams as the anchor tenants of sport facilities to generate development in the city. The study draws data from two cities, Columbus, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan, using interviews with leaders and content analysis. Their results indicate that growing the visitor economy through arena anchored urban development relies on planned placemaking *via* the strategic approach of bundling diverse amenities together. These findings provide valuable feedback to those cities considering arena development projects, and how the arenas may be combined with other civic amenities to undergird the local visitor economy.

In their conceptual analysis, Zheng and Mason argued that the emergence and proliferation of new media technologies have drastically changed the media landscape. This has created a much more complicated cross-media environment that unites popularity and personalization, structure and agency. This

changing environment creates industry transformations, and adapting to these transformations will lead to the accelerated and ongoing evolution of the professional sport industry and its success in the digital media age.

Emerging economies are increasingly hosting large-scale and mega sport events as they are viewed as key factors in local and national development strategies. Knott and Tinaz argued that a variety of legacies have predominated the literature over the past two decades. However, it is proposed that there is a difference in the types of legacies anticipated or realised within emerging economies. Therefore, this systematic review aimed to determine the types of legacies anticipated or realised by emerging economies as a result of hosting sport events, and to determine if these differ from those of more economically developed nations. The study confirms legacy as a growing body of knowledge in emerging nations, aligned with increasing event hosting. A conceptualisation of key legacy areas for emerging nations is proposed, including social development; politics, soft-power and sport-for-peace; the economics of tourism, image and branding; infrastructure and urban development; and sport development.

The environmental impacts of shadow stadia, which are the facilities left behind after new stadium development, are not fully understood. Limited research exists on how the immediate neighbourhood anchored by pre-existing venues cope in the shadows of these new development plans and the loss of a sport venue and its events. In their perspective article, Barry et al. discuss current advances in the academic literature on the circular economy. They present a comprehensive categorisation of shadow stadia globally and future opportunities on integrating circularity into best practices. By doing so, this perspective article highlights several areas of future investigation that should be considered and planned for when major league sports teams and city leaders move their team and build new facilities.

Sport marketing research has much to gain from engaging with critical social science assumptions, worldviews, and perspectives to examine complex issues in sport. Evans et al. argued that, historically, sport marketing research has adapted traditional research approaches from the parent marketing discipline to sport. This paper offers two research propositions, each accompanied by four actional recommendations, to advance the field of sport marketing in meaningful and impactful ways. The paper employs a particular focus on the marketing campaigns that activate and promote corporate partnerships in sport to frame the two propositions, which discuss consumer culture theory and the circuit of culture as two important frameworks that begin building bridges between critical social science and sport marketing research.

In the final article of the Research Topic, Pereira et al. discussed the importance of nautical tourism as a potential product to promote and develop tourist destinations in Europe. The study focuses on analysing the strategic alliances established by nautical stations in Portugal for the development of nautical tourism products, including their strategic goals and sustainable environmental practices. A content analysis of 17 Portuguese

nautical stations' application forms collected between September and December 2021 showed that strategic alliances between nautical stations had multiple strategic objectives, including structuring the tourism offer, increasing governance, and promoting and marketing nautical tourism. The study concluded that future scientific research is needed to operationalize the objectives underlying the formation of strategic alliances and the environmental practices developed by nautical stations.

## Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

## Conflict of interest

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# The Future Is Now: Preparing Sport Management Graduates in Times of Disruption and Change

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COVID-19 disrupted the world, and the impacts have been experienced in many areas, including sport and higher education. Sport management academicians need to reflect on the past two years' experience, determine what worked and what did not work, and avoid the temptation of automatically returning to past practices. The authors of this manuscript applied the disruption literature and propose transformative changes in what sport management academicians teach (e.g., greater emphasis on innovation, entrepreneurship, automation, critical thinking skills to facilitate working in flexible environments and across areas), how colleagues teach (e.g., heightened integration of technology, blended learning models) and where colleagues teach (on-campus and distal delivery modes, asynchronous and synchronous delivery to students on campus and across regions/countries). Examples of start-up companies and entrepreneurial ventures are offered to help illustrate the changing sports landscape and the emerging opportunities for current and future students, graduates, and professors. Sport management professors are offered some suggestions to assist them in seizing this opportunity.

**Keywords:** disruption, higher education, sport management, preparation, COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

The late Harvard professor Clayton Christensen introduced the concept of “disruptive innovation” to the business literature by describing how nimble and future-oriented organizations did things differently, and in doing so, effectively differentiated themselves from their competitors. These organizations accurately forecasted trends, precisely determined emerging consumer wants and needs, and effectively delivered new or adapted programs and services that heightened their competitive advantage and increased their market share (Christensen and Eyring, 2011; Christensen et al., 2011). Less agile organizations led by leaders who refused to embrace strategic change were negatively impacted and put out of business in some cases. History has provided countless examples of companies and industries that have followed this course. Estrin (2015) chronicled one of the most poignant examples of a company not paying attention to the changing times in the example of Kodak.



This company was once the industry leader in the field of photography. According to Estrin (2015), Steve Sasson, a young engineer, pitched the futuristic idea of the digital camera to the firm in 1975. Leaders summarily dismissed the idea and quickly pointed to Kodak's leadership position in the film and image reproduction areas. Unfortunately, they missed the bigger picture, and when Fuji and Nikon developed their digital camera 10 years later, Kodak paid the price. Five years after this launch, Kodak was out of business (Estrin, 2015).

Other examples of industries being disrupted can be observed in how Nike trumpeted Reebok in the athletic apparel and footwear fields or how Netflix transformed the video rental business with electronic delivery that quickly put Blockbuster out of business. Think of the impact that both Uber and Airbnb have had on the ride-sharing and hotel industries. Organizations must anticipate changes in their industry and adapt their strategies and practices. Failure to do so puts them at risk of being left behind. COVID-19 has accelerated the need for industries and their practices to adapt (Huber and Sneader, 2021).

Industry leaders must also embrace technological advancements. Despite their recent entries into the marketplace, organizations that have embraced innovation and technology have redefined their industries and are thriving (e.g., Amazon, Shopify, Google, Uber, Airbnb, Skip the Dishes). Huber and Sneader (2021) suggested that some of the practices forced on providers and consumers during COVID-19 will remain long after the pandemic subsides. They offered examples like telehealth, e-commerce, and heightened use of automation as examples of the changes necessitated by the pandemic, but likely to become standard practice.

Furthermore, the start-up/venture capitalist culture has risen in the 21st century and has disrupted many markets (Christensen, 2003). A start-up company is defined as a newly founded organization or entrepreneurial venture in the beginning phases of development (Cannone and Ughetto, 2014). These organizations are nimble, meet a need, and are adaptable (Robehmed, 2013). According to Lee (2016), they have a different organizational culture than traditional organizations. They require less "bricks and mortar" infrastructure and rely more on spaces that facilitate idea generation, heightened synergy, and technology interfaces for remote collaborations (Lee, 2016). These characteristics appeal to many recent graduates seeking an appropriate blend of challenge and freedom in their work experiences (Gabrielson, 2019). Given the disruptive forces impacting sport, they may prove to be a growth area for sport management graduates.

## DISRUPTIVE IMPACTS ON SPORT

Significant changes are taking place in how society engages in sport as participants and spectators. Attendance at some professional sporting events has been in decline in many markets over the past decade (Stebbins, 2017; Damgaard, 2018; Suneson, 2019), and it typically comprised of older fans (Bryne, 2020). COVID-19 significantly altered attendance patterns, and as some

suggest, permanently (Ratten, 2020; Wilson, 2021). Many sports leagues were shut down, and others were required to operate with limited numbers of spectators. Out of necessity, fans were forced to consume sport through television and social media vehicles (Goldman and Hedlund, 2020; Hull and Romney, 2020). Mastromartino et al. (2020) suggested that broadcasting and social media advancements have enriched and transformed the fan experience. Will fans return to their previous ways of physically attending games once the pandemic subsides? Some (Mastromartino et al., 2020; Ratten, 2020; Wilson, 2021) suggest that many will not.

Given the consumption pattern shifts and the economic consequences of COVID-19, it is reasonable to assume that the traditional size of the sports organizations that previously employed our graduates will be smaller, and those working in these organizations might be required to do more with less. Some graduates may need to assume new or expanded roles. Current and future graduates will need to be critical thinkers, flexible, adaptable, and confident working across disciplinary areas. Some may wish to strike out on their own and use their entrepreneurial backgrounds to create their own employment (Escamilla-Fajardo et al., 2020). Some may find employment in alternative settings like start-up companies. These realities point to the undeniable fact that sport management students will need a new kind of education—one that prepares them to be highly adaptable, innovative, and progressive. They will need to be entrepreneurial. They will need to understand automation (Johnson, 2020) and the impacts that technological advancements have on our field, and their employment prospects.

## THE SPORT AND TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION

Technology and sport have become increasingly dependent on each other during the COVID-19 period. The authors of this manuscript and others (e.g., Readwrite, 2018; Pizzo et al., 2018; Proman, 2019; Reitman et al., 2019; Finch et al., 2020) predict that technology will exponentially increase in the coming years create boundless opportunities for progressive leaders in sport management. This scenario may be especially true for those who embrace start-up industries in sport (e.g., esport), which will use technology to keep fixed costs low and penetrate emerging markets (Finch et al., 2020).

The start-up company concept originated in the Silicon Valley in the 1980s (Larsen and Rogers, 1984). According to Fontinelle (2020), start-up companies emerged to develop and deliver unique products or services that could more effectively meet the needs of the marketplace. These companies typically started small before expanding into larger enterprises. Some of today's leading companies (e.g., Amazon, Shopify, Microsoft, McDonald's, Apple) began as start-up companies.

However, according to Au (2017), the sports marketplace is one of the more difficult sectors for new brands to integrate. In

Canada, there are only a few incubators and sports laboratories to support start-up companies. Some, like Ryerson University's *Future of Sport Lab*, is a joint effort between the university and Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment (MLSE) and is an incubation hub that supports research and innovation that often leads to partnerships with private or public funding groups (Start-up Here Toronto, 2019). The University of Guelph proudly supports the International Institute for Sport Business and Leadership (n.d), a start-up that brings academic and industry leaders together to identify and pursue action research projects. These kinds of programs represent the new thinking that is required in sport management. The emergence of other start-up companies in sport highlights the explosive growth of this area.

Virtual Reality (VR) and, in particular, esports represent a rapidly growing segment in the sports industry (Jonasson and Thiborg, 2010; Funk et al., 2018; Collis, 2020), and by extension, an area that sport management scholars should integrate into their teaching and research programs. While initially designed for children and youth, interest and participation have also spawned into older populations. According to Clement (2021), there were 2B world-wide video gamers in 2015, and the number is expected to grow to 3B by 2023. The Canadian Sport Daily (2020) supported this growth prediction by reporting that there were 2.7B worldwide video gamers by the end of 2020. Alton (2019) noted similar growth in viewership of competitive gaming events. She noted that esports had a world-wide fan base in excess of 454M, up from 380M in 2018 (Willingham, 2018) and was experiencing a growth rate of a 14% per year. In comparison, and prior to the onset of pre-COVID-19, the NCAA Men's "March Madness" Basketball Tournament had viewership that maximized at 28M (Wilson, 2021). Imagine the advertising and branding opportunities esports provides corporations looking to reach a young and emerging market. Some speculate that esports games will soon be included in major international events, such as the Asian Games in 2022 and the Paris Olympics in 2024 (Kocadag, 2019). The future for sport is bright (Mulcahy, 2019). Advancements in, and access to technology will fuel future growth. The same could be said for another growth area in sport, namely, legalized gambling. Online sports gambling is proving to be a highly profitable and permanent fixture impacting sports spectatorship. Are sport management scholars also discussing these developments in their classrooms, and are they preparing graduates to compete in these types of emerging areas? Sport and sport management have been disrupted, and as noted below, so have the institutions traditionally preparing sport management graduates and leaders of the future.

## DISRUPTIVE IMPACTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Kak (2018) and Levin (2021) have called for significant change in higher education for some time. They argued that the 20th-century models need to be updated in terms of what is taught and how it is delivered. Automation,

artificial intelligence, hologram technology, and advances in telecommunications offer unlimited opportunities for changing how academic programs can be constructed and delivered.

Govindarajan et al. (2021) suggested that COVID-19 has accelerated the change process. As a result of COVID-19, lecture theaters and campuses were abandoned, and professors were forced to integrate technology and implement remote teaching strategies for their students. Naturally, there were bumps along the way given this sudden shift. Professors and students both claimed to have missed the relationship-building aspects that in-person delivery offers to support and inspire learning. However, while many students and professors struggled with this adaptation and longed for pre-pandemic practices, some students and professors thrived in this new environment. Many would like some of these new practices to continue. Some students have reported that they liked the pace and flexibility of taking their classes remotely and in an asynchronous format. Many stayed at home and saved money previously spent on transportation, accommodations, and parking. Professors found that the heightened use of technology could enrich their courses. Small group discussions could be effectively facilitated through virtual chat rooms. Professors could integrate internationally-renowned experts into their courses who didn't need to travel to deliver guest lectures. In some sectors of our campuses, productivity increased. The pandemic proved that there were other ways of delivering higher education, and once again, necessity proved to be the "mother of invention."

As a result, Levin (2021) and Govindarajan et al. (2021) encouraged professors and program leaders to reflect deeply on the needs of students, the content of courses, and be open to adopting some of the practices that had to be implemented during the pandemic. Perhaps programs, courses, or parts of each could be more effectively delivered in virtual or a hybrid of virtual and face-to-face formats. They made a case for progressively integrating more digital technologies (e.g., remote delivery, holograms) to enrich learning. Some students may prefer the benefits of remote delivery (or perhaps some combination of time on campus and time in remote delivery modes). If this delivery option exists, new cohorts of students might be drawn to the sector. Recognizing the benefits and cost savings of some remote learning, in whole or part, might prompt some institutions to reduce their infrastructure footprint. Some campuses could adopt a blended model where students in the first and final years have an on-campus experience, while those in the middle years consume their programs from a remote setting. Some of the more reputable institutions may take this opportunity to significantly expand their high-demand programs previously restricted by space realities.

Think of the cost savings for some students if they did not have to be on campus for their entire university experience. Think of program expansion opportunities if courses, programs, or parts of programs could be delivered through distance education. Consider the cost savings if universities could more discriminately rationalize program offering and efficiently share

courses or parts of programs with other institutions. Incremental revenue could be generated from selling or renting some freed-up land or buildings. The high costs of constructing and operating facilities could be reduced. Program officials could offer more courses in asynchronous formats so students could consume their courses at a pace and time that is advantageous to them. Academic leaders and governing boards more effectively future-proof higher education by adopting some of these practices. Fiscal realities and societal pressure might demand such action.

It is a challenging time, and neither sport nor sport management educational programs are immune from the disruptive forces and seismic changes outlined above. Graduates are now entering employment opportunities that are less structured, more fluid, and less permanent (Vedder et al., 2013). The situation has been exponentially accelerated by the economic and labor market disruptions of COVID-19 (Gentilini et al., 2020). Bold questions must be addressed. Are colleagues delivering what sport management students need? Are they preparing graduates to be thought leaders who are entrepreneurial, independent, and confident to navigate careers in times of rapid societal change? Are graduates critical thinkers who can adapt and work across a number of areas given the anticipated smaller workforces? Is the content of sport management programs cutting-edge and progressive? Are the tuition and related educational cost structures for students realistic and affordable given the market forces, value propositions, and economic times (i.e., current and predicted)? Sport management colleagues must adapt to thrive given the changes taking place in sport, sport management, and higher education (Christensen and Eyring, 2011; Christensen et al., 2011).

## CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has been a devastating virus that has disrupted society in innumerable ways. It will also have far-reaching implications on institutions of higher learning and in the ways that society participates or consumes sport. Organizations that prevail will be nimble, progressive, and innovative. Implementing some or all of the suggestions outlined below could improve and modernize our academic programs. Colleagues can lead change by:

1. Developing and delivering a curriculum that covers the traditional areas like leadership, finance, economics, analytics, as well as the emerging areas in the field like innovation, entrepreneurship, automation, artificial intelligence, and start-up companies.
2. Expanding experiential learning opportunities for students beyond the traditional sport settings and include opportunities in emerging organizations like start-up companies. Students need to understand the rules of engagement in emerging technologies and the realities of working in agile, risk-taking ventures.

3. Implementing higher levels of technology into the curriculum to bring world experts into the digital classrooms. Industry leaders (from across the globe) can be beamed into digital classrooms with minimal expense via Zoom or hologram technologies. Technological advancements allow for virtual meeting rooms where smaller groups of students can have deeper discussions and reflection sessions.
4. Using technology to share courses and professors between campuses and expanding digital platforms to reach more students in synchronous and asynchronous formats. Many universities are facing fiscal challenges. Courses between campuses could be shared to enrich the experience and preparation of students at little or no cost to the host institutions. Sport management could be leaders in this synergistic approach.
5. Ensuring that guest speakers, case studies, and classroom examples are drawn for diverse fields (e.g., start-up companies, venture capitalists, e-sports, gaming, fantasy sports, sports gambling) in addition to those from traditional sports settings.
6. Expanding experiential learning opportunities for students by investing in case competitions that include examples from start-up companies and other emerging areas in the field. These rich learning opportunities allow students the opportunity to apply course content and, if also drawn from emerging industries, can help keep the program current. To increase application and underscore relevance, have practitioners pose the challenge question and involve them in evaluating the proposed solutions.

The impact of COVID-19 has accelerated the need for change in sport, sport management and in the institutions that house sport management educational programs. Sport management colleagues are encouraged to reflect on the suggestions outlined above and ensure that the programs delivered to students align with the current and emerging developments in the industry and in higher education.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

JW took the lead in the preparation of this article. ME-K, GB, and ZW are former students and sport management leaders who have experience in the industry, recognize the disruption that has taken place in recent years, and have experience working with recent graduates of our sport management programs, and provided helpful insights and examples that have been integrated into this article. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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# Waves of Extremism: An Applied Ethnographic Analysis of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Terraces

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This article offers an overview of a four-month research project, conducted in 2019/2020, which studied extremism in the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) football terraces. This work was funded by the International Organisation for Migration - United Nations and by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The research focused on risk factors and how these may govern the “entry” of BiH youth into extreme hard-core football fans groups (Ultras<sup>1</sup>) and prolong their involvement in them. The study highlighted the nature of these groups and their activity providing detailed recommendations for BiH policymakers, security agencies, and football federations and clubs who wish to understand and effectively respond to this emergent threat for public security in BiH.

**Keywords:** extremism, far-right, Bosnia, Balkans, football, violence, Ultras, policing

## INTRODUCTION: THE BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA SOCIAL SPACE

As a result of the 1995 Dayton Agreement, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is today a country divided both geographically and politically along religious and ethnic lines, existing as a tripartite state. Within the population of 3.254 million, 48% identify as Bosniak (Bosnian Muslims), 37% as Bosnian Serbs, the majority of whom are Orthodox, and 14% as Bosnian Croats, most of whom are Catholic (World Population Review, 2020)<sup>2</sup>. A crucial factor in the politics, society, and international engagement of BiH is the impact of the ethnic and religious conflicts of the 1990s. The legacy of these conflicts continues to control the narratives that meld religion, heritage, culture, and ethnicity in the evolution of Bosnian identities, driving difference and division. For example, far-right “Chetnik” groups (named after Serbo-Croat units within the former Yugoslav Army) depend primarily on the Ravna Gora movement, centred mainly in Prijedor’s north-western town<sup>3</sup>. The Neo-Ustaše groups<sup>4</sup> (the former Croatian fascist movement) are especially active in areas along the BiH Croatian border where ethnic tensions flare-up between the predominantly Croatian population and the Bosniak Muslims. Bosnian Muslims also have nationalist or extremist groups. Nascent factions have appeared, including the Bosnian Movement of National Pride (BPNP). The movement promotes Bosniak identity and supports a secular Bosniak ethno-nationalist state;

<sup>1</sup>This article uses the term Ultras and not hooligan because the groups define themselves as such as they model their repertoire of actions according to Ultras groups in Europe. The term Ultras – or *ultra* – originates from the ultra-royalist French (Testa and Armstrong, 2010a,b).

<sup>2</sup>2022 Data, retrieved February 2022 from the World Population Review : <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina-population>

<sup>3</sup>C.f. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/10/bosnia-charges-serb-chetniks-with-inciting-ethnic-hatred/>

<sup>4</sup>C.f. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/05/far-right-balkan-groups-flourish-on-the-net-05-03-2017/>

it actively shows enmity towards groups such as Roma, Communists, Jewish people, the LGBT community, and the so-called “non-whites” considered alien to their ideology and cultural heritage<sup>5</sup>.

Against this background, hostilities are frequently expressed across BiH football terraces, with clashes among groups of Ultras. For example, widespread fights involving over 500 fans took place in 2009 in the Bosnian Croat-dominated town of Široki Brijeg between locals and the Ultras from FK Zeljeznica<sup>6</sup> resulting in one death, over fifty injured, and widespread vandalism<sup>7</sup>. In 2015, the Široki Brijeg youth football team bus was ambushed in Sarajevo, once again involving Ultras connected to FK Zeljeznica<sup>8</sup>. In other towns with diverse populations such as Mostar, sectarian divides also permeate football clubs’ rivalries; for instance, FK Velež Mostar (associated with Bosniaks) and HŠK Zrinjski Mostar (linked to Bosnian Croats). Because of such violent episodes, the Bosnian Football Union has regularly ordered football matches to be played behind closed doors. Over the past decade, there have been repeated rumours that the national football league – currently consisting of Bosniak, Bosnian Serb, and Bosnian Croat teams – could be dissolved. On occasions, Bosnian Serb officials have suggested withdrawing Bosnian Serb football teams from the league altogether; the NK Široki Brijeg football club management has several times threatened to join Croatia’s national football league instead<sup>9</sup>. Such violence highlights the fragility of tolerance between the country’s three ethnic groups and how easily intolerance can escalate into violence, often stoked by far-right and nationalist groups.

Most studies on the link between extremism and violent ideologically Ultras groups rely on “external” observations of the groups’ behaviours and mostly on secondary collected data from the Internet *via* social media<sup>10</sup>. This approach is understandable as security risks are involved in interacting with these groups, and these groups are challenging to approach<sup>11</sup>. This situation is even more difficult considering the peculiarity of the BiH social space, as mentioned earlier, plagued by historical conflicts among different ethnic groups and political rivalries among the same ethnic groups. Few studies have focused on this topic; among the most notable, Milojević et al. (2013) mainly link the occurrences of violence among Ultras to the consequences of the BiH war; however, it is dated. The excellent research of Italian

sociologist Sterchele (2013) provides an ethnographic account of BiH football practitioners, including BiH football supporters, but not focusing specifically on the groups analysed by this article.

This article aims to fill this gap in the literature; the article originates from a research project aimed to understand the potential linkage between Ultras in BiH and violent extremism. This article will focus only on findings aiming to understand the BiH Ultras groups’ main traits, exploring if they can be considered extreme football fans or, more simply, criminal gangs interested in football. This article will also explain who joins these groups, the groups’ structure, their appeal to the BiH youth, and how the groups use social media to manifest their collective identity and, if any, ideologies.

## METHODS

This study employed an “applied ethnographic” approach<sup>12</sup>. Applied ethnography has two main elements; the first one is explanatory, therefore, relevant for policymakers, practitioners, and institutions, and anyone seeking to address complex social issues. The second element is the application to real-world problems; it provides a specific, in-depth understanding of how individuals’ social world unfolds daily (Brim and Spain, 1974; Pelto, 2013; Cf. Fetterman, 2020).

To gather data, the research team used triangulation. As the term suggests, this approach employs more than one method to collect information (Hobbs and May, 1994; Denzin, 1996; Silverman, 2013; Jerolmack and Khan, 2017). Our research approach involved accessing relevant groups *via* a network of crucial “gatekeepers” (i.e., individuals linked directly to who are active in the studied communities/groups). Based on this negotiated access, the research team gathered data *via* fieldwork from various sources, including direct interviews, observations, and the internet. Moreover, researchers gathered data on the culture, values, and ideology of the participants and groups, and their interactions with each other.

The research team focused on the most active Ultras groups to violence, alleged criminal activity, and the groups’ proselytism in and outside the BiH football stadium; the chosen groups needed to represent the three main BiH ethnic groups. *Via* a combination of gatekeepers’ introduction and snowballing sampling, we selected the following groups: The HŠK Zrinjski Mostar (Hrvatski športski klub Zrinjski Mostar), the Škripari - NK Široki Brijeg, the Ultras - HŠK Zrinjski Mostar, the Lešinari - FK Borac Banja Luka, and the Robijaši - NK Čelik Zenica.

In relation to the stakeholders, the research team interviewed the following institutional stakeholders:

- The Ministry of Security of BiH;

<sup>12</sup>There are differences between academic ethnography and applied ethnography. While the theoretical roots are the same, the main difference is in how the research is shaped. In academic ethnography, the chosen topic/problem dictates the design, budget, and, most importantly, the timeframe; specifically, fieldwork requires six to two years or more. A contract funds the applied ethnographic work, and it is a fully developed response to the funders’ expressed interest in the problem (Brim and Spain, 1974; Pelto, 2013; Cf. Fetterman, 2020). The timeframe of the fieldwork depends on the funders’ needs, and the findings are used to tackle the problem.

<sup>5</sup>C.f. <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/02/bosnian-far-right-movement-weds-bosniak-nationalism-neo-nazism/>

<sup>6</sup>The main group is known as the “Maniacs” or Manijaci, they are linked to Bosniaks and are based in Sarajevo.

<sup>7</sup>Retrieved November 2020 from <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/05/far-right-balkan-groups-flourish-on-the-net-05-03-2017/> and <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%202020%20Balkan%20foreign%20fighters.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>Retrieved September 2020 from <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/108850/pdf>; <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/03/16/hooligan-attack-raises-ethnic-tensions-in-bosnia/>

<sup>9</sup>Retrieved November 2020 from <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/03/16/hooligan-attack-raises-ethnic-tensions-in-bosnia/>

<sup>10</sup>This also holds true for mainstream extremism, especially jihadist and far-right groups.

<sup>11</sup>Fielding (1981) in his seminal study on the British National Front, details the challenges for a researcher in studying extremist groups objectively; while Testa (2010a, 2010b), Testa, 2018, 2020) points out the risk inherent in interacting with them.



- The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Sarajevo Canton;
- The Sarajevo Canton police;
- The Republic of Srpska Ministry of the Interior;
- The Police Administration Banja Luka;
- The Football Association of BiH (Nogometni/Fudbalski Savez Bosne i Hercegovine);
- The Football Association of Republika Srpska (Fudbalski savez Republike Srpske);
- The Football Club Široki Brijeg (Nogometni klub Široki Brijeg);
- The Football Club Željezničar (Fudbalski klub Željezničar Sarajevo);
- The FK Velež Mostar (Fudbalski klub Velež Mostar).

The team then proceeded with semi-structured interviews. Informed consent was given prior to the interviews; the interviews were recorded with a digital recording device, then translated and transcribed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is part of the United Nations System administration staff. The observations were carried out in the locations of the cities linked to the groups; those locations were often signposted by graffiti that were also photographed and translated. Observations were also made during matches and events such as the BiH gay pride, where we knew groups would have intervened to protest. To complement this work, the research team gathered and translated media articles, policy documents, and BiH laws dealing with hate crimes and violence at BiH football matches; the research team also collected policies and directives of BiH football clubs and football associations. The institutional stakeholders were instrumental in the collection of these documents. Finally, the online data gathering about groups, networks, and narratives was carried out by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD); it complemented the offline research by determining the level of online activity of the Ultras groups studied, and if these groups had links to ethno-nationalist violent extremism (c.f. Testa, 2020). The investigation assessed the scale and extent of their online activity, the social media these groups used, how they used them, and for what purposes and the types of content and narratives promoted by the groups.

## Analysis

The research team used grounded theory to make sense of the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). The analysis started by reading and coding<sup>13</sup> the interviews transcripts, online data, policies, and laws. The team also coded pictures of groups in action and mural graffiti. The codes were at this stage provisional to allow flexibility to new interpretations in line with the development of the analytical process. The process also involved comparing, modifying, and merging codes. Once the research team ended this initial step; the analysis became more intensive, aiming to develop more significant classifications including theoretical concepts; this process was integrated by memo writing. This process lasted until saturation was reached

<sup>13</sup> All data were coded and analysed using MAXQDA software, which facilitates and supports qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research projects (Woolf and Silver, 2018).

(Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The project adhered to the ethics code of the American Society of Criminology. The online research team also followed The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD's) in-house Ethics Principles for online research. All data obtained for the project was stored securely following the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

## FRAMING THE BiH ULTRAS

Explaining the Ultras in BiH is a complex task. The BiH authorities are struggling to counter the Ultras' illegal activity and control their violence inside and outside the football terraces. The danger posed by these groups is exemplified by a violent incident that occurred in September 2019. Radio Sarajevo came under attack from a group of Ultras associated with the Football Club Sarajevo<sup>14</sup>, terrorising several journalists. Indeed, since early 2019, BiH journalists and the "Free Media Help Line" recorded five death threats and six actual physical assaults on reporters and media teams. The journalists denounced the inability of the BiH authorities to prevent such episodes and to punish them<sup>15</sup>.

The group structure is centralised but includes more than a leader; members also have some authority. So, power is in multiple hands, and there is a high level of functional diversity. In one group, there were ten leaders. The Ultras had a "nucleus" of individuals ranging from 50 to 70, while the group members' number was from 100 to 500 maximum. The age of the members ranged from 17 to a few over 40's years old. The demographic seems to represent the local community's ("the people") social stratification. The Ultras Zrinjski - FC Zrinjski Mostar provided more details about the demographic of a typical BiH Ultras group:

Research Team: *Who are the members in the group, students or workers?*

Ultras: *There are high-school kids, university students, those who got employed straight after school, or unemployed people - you know how the situation is here [high unemployment rates].*

The leaders were those who were older and were perceived as charismatic figures. This is important to make sense of the radicalisation process of newcomers, as they promote changes in beliefs and behaviours and facilitate the internalisation of the Ultras mentality. The Ultras Lešinari - FC Borac Banja Luka described the nature of the members' commitment to the group:

Research team: *How much time do you invest in the group?*

Ultras: *Usually on weekends, when the football club is in action. We gather maybe every second weekend. However, everyone also leads its own life...*

Research team: *Do you go to every match?*

<sup>14</sup>In terms of criminal activities, the Maniacs (Manijaci supporters of the Football Club Željezničar) and Horde Zla (supporters of the FC Sarajevo) are deemed by all police forces interviewed as the most dangerous; they are classified as criminal organisations. It is important to stress that both Ultras groups were the only ones who refused at the last moment to meet the research team because of our questions focusing on criminal activities.

<sup>15</sup>Retrieved September 2020 from <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/09/30/bosnia-journalists-protest-after-thugs-storm-news-outlet>

Ultras: *Every local match, away matches when I have time.*

To be part of the Ultras “nucleus” (senior members’ circle), it is indispensable to show commitment and elitism to adhere to the group’s values, ideology, and tradition; only, in this case, a member is co-opted. The nucleus deals with all the activities of the Ultras group from memberships, mural graffiti, banners, chanting, smuggling pyrotechnics, and organising crimes such as selling drugs.

## RISK FACTORS

A range of risk factors explains the existence and appeal of the Ultras groups to the youth of BiH. Our analysis indicates that the first broad risk factor is socio-environmental; therefore, it needs to consider many issues. Ethnicity and ethnic tensions do appear to play a part, but we suggest this is not a prime issue in understanding the Ultras groups in BiH. The Ultras groups exploit ethnicity to justify their existence; the groups serve as a catalyst of belonging in a politically fragmented country. Ethnic roots are also used by the Ultras as a narrative to single out and most often legitimise provocation to rival factions and, ultimately, violence. Our research indicates that the economic and political situation of BiH and unemployment rate and concomitant underutilisation of youth were vital risk factors singled out by all stakeholders, including the Ultras groups. Disenfranchised youth join the Ultras because they allow them to gain power, tackle boredom, discharge everyday frustrations, and because of their productive criminal activities. Our research also suggests that adding to the problems of the political and economic situation are causal factors that relate to the lack of an effective federal legal structure and the fact that the responses of the BiH police and football authorities seem to fall well below international standards; the latter point was confirmed ironically by several Ultras groups.

Data also indicate the BiH football stadiums as a key risk factor, particularly the poor stadium facilities, lack of stadium regulation, and inefficient security. As in other East European countries, low attendances at football matches work as an amplifier of Ultras’ actions and presence (Dzhekova et al., 2015 in Testa, 2020, p.28). Ultras are thus perceived by youngsters and other fans as powerful: the true owners of the football stadium. Their chants, banners, symbols, and physical intimidation are used to recruit (fans join them because they are intimidated or fascinated by them) or exclude those who oppose their presence and power. This imbalance of power between Ultras and the “others” within the stadiums must be addressed. The control of the football terraces is so strong that the Ultras determine who has access to them. The Catholic Ultras Škripari - NK Široki Brijeg vetted Muslims who exhibit symbols of their religious identity; according to the group, no women with the niqab could access it.

The Škripari - NK Široki Brijeg explained:

*I have a problem with it [niqab] but for another reason. My issue with it is that is not part of the Bosnian Muslim tradition, it is imposed by a foreign culture - the Arabs. A vast majority of Muslims*

*here are moderate, European kind of Muslims. I know for a fact that it bothers Bosniaks even more than Serbs or Croats. I did a lot of research into this because I am interested in it, and I saw that this was not something that was ever part of BiH. This was imposed on them [BiH Muslims].*

In addition, the lack of football clubs’ security and regulations inside the stadium means the Ultras groups can exercise a very high level of control in the football stadiums.

The second broad risk factor is political and can be identified in the Ultras’ narrative of a perceived corrupt political class that fails the BiH youth and society. Around this narrative, the groups organise and recruit. In this case, the Ultras characterise themselves as the sole “resistance” to the federal and local status quo. The BiH Ultras can be identified as resistance groups from the data gathered. All Ultras groups accomplished three main functions; they were a vehicle of anti-systems sentiments, they function as a means of identity shaping, social solidarity maintenance, offering members and potential recruits with frames to make sense of their lives, frustrations, and grievances; providing recruits and members the illusion of self-efficacy to their grievances. (Cf. Adams and Roscigno, 2005; p.71; Diani, 1992). One of the leaders of the Škripari - FC Široki Brijeg explained their resistance against the system and their struggle with the local authorities:

*We are visible and spreading our messages, but we do it from our stands because we cannot change anything [outside]. So, if we have a banner that somebody does not like, our police give us troubles about it. We do not get punished in Sarajevo or anywhere else. This does not happen anywhere else [in BiH].*

All the Ultras groups interviewed manifested their oppositions to local political parties who - according to them - have hijacked any societal arena, including policing; sometimes, the groups acted as political/pressure force to contrast local politics as the earlier quotation of the Škripari - FC Široki Brijeg details.

Far-right ideology was part of two groups’ collective identity<sup>16</sup> but it did not appear to be as sophisticated and strong as other European Ultras, for instance, as the Ultras in Italy, Spain, Greece, and some Eastern European groups such as the Polish and Bulgarians. Significant risk factors are also the sense of belonging/community and identity. For example, being from Grbavica in Sarajevo enshrines an identity upon the everyday teenager of being a Manijac<sup>17</sup>. Local networks (family, friend groups, classmates) also amplify the chances to join an Ultras group. Our data also stress risk factors such as the feeling of victimhood against journalists, the federal state, local politicians, the police, the love for the city and the football club, and the excitement of violence and glory.

## The Ultras Mentality

Throughout the study, all the Ultras interviewed referred to their ways of life as the “Ultras mentality”. The concept of Ultras mentality can be understood using Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of

<sup>16</sup>Škripari - NK Široki Brijeg and Ultras - HŠK Zrinjski Mostar.

<sup>17</sup>Ultras supporting the Football Club Željezničar (Sarajevo).

Habitus: “a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class” (Bourdieu, 1977; p.86). The Ultras mentality serves to understand the members’ group life perceptions and challenges and ultimately their practises, including violence. These internalised structures and schemes of perception shape the subject’s (and groups) shared worldview and their awareness of the social space in which the groups are located (Bourdieu, 1977, p.86, 1998; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2007). The Ultras mentality is acquired as Bourdieu’s Habitus by the practise of being a “true” Ultras, by a permutation of influences such as vicinity or distance from other actors (group members; rivals and the police) and ‘mimeticism’ (Lizardo, 2009). *Via* mimeticism, intangible principles -such as values- and dispositions are transmitted, and these are employed when similar situations and practises reoccur. Lizardo (2009) clarifies how mimeticism works; it intentionally starts focusing on visually accessible role models – in the case of the Ultras, the Ultras leaders- then, this process of motor-schematic mirroring comes to gain a habitual and implicit cast. This mentality shaping process occurs within the group in the football terraces but also during the meetings outside the stadium. As Bourdieu’s Habitus, the Ultras mentality has a collective dimension since the members’ categories of judgment and action that arise from the group are shared by all those subject to the same social conditions and constraints. Ultras who inhabit the same social space develop a comparable mentality and a comprehension-led mechanism influenced by this mental philtre (Simons and Burt, 2011) sharing hopes, choices, and frustrations.

Based on this study data, the BiH Ultras mentality is shaped around four essential elements, namely groups’ values, anti-system attitude, past and tradition, and ethnic nationalism. The fundamental values of the “true” BiH Ultras are loyalty, honour, strength, group’s unity, and the celebration of “Balkan” masculinity, essentially represented by backwardness, parochialism, traditionalism (Dumančić and Krolo, 2016), and in the Ultras case, aggressiveness and ultimately violence.

Contact sports are part of this mentality as the Ultras Robijaši - FC Čelik Zenica pointed out:

Research team: *Do you like to fight?*

Ultras: *Yes, yes.*

Research team: *Do you train?*

Ultras: *I play rugby. ... it is the part of being Ultras [to be tough].*

*I go to the university during the week, and the weekend is for the football games. And you know what happens during the games...*

*You must be prepared [to fight] .... That is also the reason why we go to the football games [to fight].*

The previous quote encapsulates the essence of being a BiH Ultras, reflecting a man showing strength *via* rugby. An Ultras Škripari, who was interviewed, was proud of being a kickboxing expert; his combat skills were used by the group to challenge their opponents; he confirmed being always in the front row if fights against the police and rival groups arose.

The daily frustrations against the federal and local politics are externalised by the groups *via* their anti-system attitude.

Their resistance (and disgust) to the perceived corrupt federal state and political class are a common element that unites the groups interviewed. This rage borderline hopeless stance is also present when the BiH football establishment situation is analysed. The Football Association of BiH was considered decadent and costly, spending money on “fancy” buildings in Sarajevo but not investing funds in stadiums’ facilities and in promoting BiH youth talent in football.

The police were also often the target of all the Ultras groups’ anti-system narratives:

Ultras Škripari - FC Široki Brijeg: *They [Croatian Democratic Union of BiH- HDZ- and the police] are all linked, while we are completely unrelated to HDZ. It is the proof that once we start digging into something that should not be looked into (from the political point of view) or rise up against the police, or some club’s decisions, immediately we get some fines. So, in these situations the city, the football club and the police all get together to work against us. For example, we make some stupid, small thing at the stadium, and immediately tomorrow 20 group members will be taken to the police station and questioned. So that is why it is impossible to make any change.*

As the quotation underlines, the police in Mostar and the city of Široki Brijeg were seen as being used as a political tool; as a means to punish those who oppose the local political party (the HDZ) deemed as corrupt.

## Past and Tradition

As mentioned earlier, an evaluation of the BiH Ultras phenomenon concentrating solely on ethnic nationalism does not capture in its entirety extremism in the BiH football terraces. The Ultras Robijaši - NK Čelik Zenica explained: “We cannot speak about ethnicity, because we have members who are Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats and that is why we are specific.... There is no place for nationalism in our group”. According to the Ultras Robijaši - NK Čelik Zenica, the Ultras from Banja Luka or Mostar are seen the same way as those groups from Sarajevo. Aggro can originate from past rivalries. As in many European Ultras groups, friendships and animosities develop similarly; for example, friendships with other groups tend to be based on respect. All groups, who have the same mentality, benefit from this shared system of values. The premise of the Bedouin Syndrome ostensibly controls the establishment of rivalries and allies: friends of an ally become friends, enemies of an ally become enemies (Bruno, in De Biasi and Marchi, 1998).

Historic rivalries between football clubs are linked to the Ultras mentality and its propensity towards forming a “sacral space”<sup>18</sup>. The football terraces – as the districts and neighbourhoods where the Ultras belong – are deemed sacred; they are a physical and symbolic location, which is autonomous from the stadium and the city. Their violation (sacrilege) by opponents promotes violence and call for “sacrifices”. Rather revealing, in 2016, was the “call to arms” of the Manijaci group of the Sarajevo team FK Željezničar to their rivals the Horde

<sup>18</sup>C.f. <http://rj-vko.kz/en/speczproektyi/sakralnaya-geografiya.html>



Zla (Evil Horde) to attack and destroy the Fukare<sup>19</sup> when their football team would have played in Sarajevo. All three Ultras groups were mainly Bosniaks, so ethnicity was not the reason for this episode. Although this episode shows the link between violence and football in BiH, it is essential to point out that football fans' violence cannot be compared in severity and significance to other European countries such as Poland, Russia, Italy, and the UK.

### Ethnic Nationalism

As mentioned earlier, ethnic nationalism is not enough alone to justify the BiH Ultras' existence. As the Ultras Lešinari - FC Borac Banja Luka argued:

Research team: *Is Serb-nationalism important in your group?*  
 Ultras A: *I do not give a f\*\*\* about that. My best man is Croat, my wife is Muslim, my grandmother is Muslim.*  
 Research team: *But what about the younger generation?*  
 Ultras A: *They are the same. We love our city and the club.*  
 Ultras B: *We are the same. There are not only Serbs on the stands.*  
*It is about the love for the [football] club.*

Ethnicity is used arbitrarily and contradictorily by the groups. In some groups, ethnic nationalism was associated with far-right and far-left ideologies. Ethnicity is symbolically exploited as a tool to distinguish themselves from others (De Vos et al., 2006) justifying at times the groups' existence. An Ultras Zrinjski-HŠK Zrinjski Mostar member underlined the use of what they identified as "Bosniak nationalism", which was part of the Ultras Manijaci and Horde Zla Sarajevo narratives:

*For example, groups from Sarajevo are right-oriented but they are not fascist, more like Bosniak nationalists. But Velež supporters are officially communists; so, they have a conflict of interest. They cannot put a red star on their flag but also want to be Bosniak. Their "leader"- Tito did not want Bosniaks, Serbs or Croats but he wanted Yugoslavs, and that is their internal conflict. Before the war, they were perceived as a Yugoslav club.*

While ethnic nationalism does not entirely justify the groups' existence, the groups' criminal activities do so. To make sense of the BiH existence, focusing on localised power dynamics and the Ultras groups' criminogenic needs is crucial.

### Criminal Activities

Our analysis suggests that the Ultras phenomenon in BiH is not so much an issue related to politics or religion (cf. ethnic nationalism and far-right or jihadist ideologies) but more about the groups' criminogenic nature, status, and needs within the political, social, and economic geography of their local setting - their cities. The data indicates that in BiH, Ultras groups exist to make money from criminal activities<sup>20</sup>, mainly *via* drug dealing, racketeering, extortions, intimidations, and "services" offered to local politicians during the electoral period. Our data also

highlight that in specific locales, authorities' corruption levels allow the local Ultras groups to gain and exercise their power and control. Crime and corruption were so intrinsically linked to the Ultras in BiH that one Ultras group regretted that it was relatively small in number because this was hindering their criminal opportunities and profits. A key driver for groups' recruitment is their capacity to operate as a semi-organised crime group within and sometimes beyond their locality. Our findings also suggest that those within Ultras groups' organised criminality may be legitimised through the connexions between the Ultras leaders and the football clubs. Our data suggest that most of the Ultras groups receive financial payment from the football clubs to avoid creating problems for their clubs<sup>21</sup>.

While the political and ideological dimensions appear not as significant when compared to their counterparts in Europe and the Balkans<sup>22</sup>, we also found that homophobia hate crimes are instead the element that links all the BiH Ultras groups regardless of religion and ethnicity, and they are an integral part of the Ultras "DNA". A representative of the Football Association of BiH elaborated on an episode involving homophobia which would have been rigorously dealt with if it had taken place in other football stadiums in Europe:

*Homophobia is present occasionally; during the recent match of FC Željezničar, Manijaci used a banner which said "Ima Zabraniti" (which would mean "there is something to forbid") as a reaction to the announcement that the first gay pride ever will be held in September 2019 in Sarajevo. The official motto of the pride is "Ima izaći" which means "getting out of the closet" and also getting out to support the pride; additionally, during the same match, the flag of Brunei was displayed as homosexuality there is illegal [punished with the death penalty].*

Antisemitism shares the same dynamic occurring for homophobic hate crimes; it unites, *via* prejudice and hate all Ultras groups regardless of religion, ethnicity, and historic rivalries.

### The Internet

Football and social media are closely linked in BiH. For instance, the Bosnian international footballer Edin Dzeko was the most followed page in the country on both Facebook and Twitter, with over 2 million and 1.5 million followers<sup>23</sup>. During this study, the public activity of several Ultras groups was monitored. For the purpose of this analysis public activity is understood to be content produced by particular accounts or Ultras groups on social media which is readily available to researchers searching across a platform, or through that platform's application programming interface (API), and which does not require special permission to access (e.g., through a request to a closed group or chat channel). Hence, the research team focused on engagement data with public Facebook pages

<sup>21</sup>This was confirmed by the BiH authorities.

<sup>22</sup>The Ministry of Security of BiH, Sarajevo Canton police, Republic of Srpska Ministry of the Interior and Police Administration Banja Luka confirmed our data that racism was not an issue.

<sup>23</sup>Data gathered by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue for this research (2020).

<sup>19</sup>They are called the "Wretches" and they are the Ultras of the football team Sloboda from the city of Tuzla.

<sup>20</sup>This was confirmed by the BiH authorities.

associated with Ultras groups in BiH from January 2013 to November 2019. This investigation revealed over 4.7 million user interactions with posts in these groups; 1.5 million (non-unique) users liking these pages and an 11% growth over the 12-month period.

Overall, there was a strong online presence of pages, channels, and accounts associated with BiH Ultras groups. From our data, there were approximately 31,500 core users which follow the Ultras groups and related pages from BiH on Facebook. The findings show that the pages were primarily used for (1) sharing football-related news; (2) mobilising Ultras through glorifying their clubs, stoking rivalries with other groups, and the provision of practical guidance around match days; (3) voicing displeasure with their own club's management or ownership; (4) fundraising and selling merchandise; and (5) spreading political messages. The Ultras' Facebook pages were key in sharing messages and guidance for the group members. Most importantly, the platforms were used to recruit and mobilise individuals to attend home and away games. Each separate Ultras group displayed its rhetoric when mobilising members by using parts of chants glorifying the club and emotional calls to inspire as many individuals to come as possible. The mobilisation calls were not intended for established Ultras members but for a greater audience, primarily individuals from the neighbourhood or city where the club is based and its surroundings. For instance, looking at the mobilisation called by the Ultras Fukare from Tuzla calls upon all attendance to "one of the most important games this season" away at Ugljevik, the FK Zvijezda 09 stadium. The call was for all "fans, sympathisers, old and young" to come in large numbers to support the team, so they do not relive the relegation suffered by the club in 2012 after 42 years in the top tier Bosnian football".

Ethnic nationalist narratives and political ideologies were present in their posts. Events from the Yugoslav wars are consistently present in the Ultras' rhetoric; the groups commemorate various massacres and atrocities that happened during the war. Inevitably, each group commemorates certain events based on their ethnic identity. For example, the Alcohol Boys from Prijedor, a Bosnian Serb Ultras group, commemorate Operation Storm (Oluja), which saw the dislocation of ethnic Serbs from the Srpska Krajina region in Croatia in 1995. Similarly, the Škripari - FC Široki Brijeg - and their rival Ultras Zrinjski- FC Zrinjski Mostar, ethnic Croat Ultras groups, commemorate the fall of Vukovar when the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) took over the city in a Pyrrhic victory from the Croatian forces that left thousands of civilians dead, injured and displaced. This event is seen as the liberation of Vukovar by some Serb groups.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This article originates from a research project aimed to increase the key BiH stakeholders' understanding of the relations between extreme football fans groups (Ultras) and violent extremism. The research project contributed towards IOM-UN and USAID's

effort to reduce the threat of ideologically motivated violence in BiH. This article argues that the BiH Ultras are an issue that must be thoughtfully and systematically addressed because of their associations with criminal activity and how their behaviours in football stadiums enable their power and influence to enact crime (including hate crimes). This article highlights the importance of an efficient response in terms of policing, club security arrangements, and new legislation<sup>23</sup>.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Written informed consent for participation was not required for this study in accordance with the national legislation and the institutional requirements.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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<sup>23</sup>This topic will be the subject of a forthcoming monograph commissioned by Routledge.

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# Perspective: National Football League Teams Need Chief Diversity Officers

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The National Football League (NFL) and its teams, some of the world's most profitable sporting properties, face challenges with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). With a history of discriminatory work environments, including a recent high-profile lawsuit, the NFL and its teams have a poor reputation on these issues. This perspective piece investigated NFL teams' utilization of organization employees dedicated to DEI. Utilizing a content analysis of publicly available data, this piece investigated DEI employees at NFL team organizations. The study analyzed the position's characteristics including the name of the role, the department in which it was housed, and the reporting structure. The study also examined the demographics and professional background of the employees in the roles. The findings conclude that NFL teams lag behind other American businesses in their adoption of Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) roles. As of 2022, only 31.25% of NFL teams had a dedicated DEI staff person. Three additional teams host diversity councils utilizing employees with other job responsibilities. The employees filling the CDO roles were majority women and majority Black. Though not the only answer to a complex problem, in order to address these challenges and move forward, the NFL teams should create Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) roles. These positions should have appropriate reporting relationships, well-crafted position responsibilities, generous resources, and qualified and experienced employees.

**Keywords:** diversity and inclusion, National Football League (NFL), Chief Diversity Officers, sport management, professional sport, diversity equity and inclusion (DEI)

## INTRODUCTION

### National Football League

The National Football League (NFL) is the most powerful organization in American sport (Crepeau, 2020) and is also "one of the most significant engines of contemporary culture" (Oates et al., 2014) (p. 3). The NFL, one of the most popular and profitable sporting leagues, dominates American sports' viewership ratings (Oates et al., 2014; McGannon and Butryn, 2020). The popularity of American football, along with the massive influx of media dollars, has driven the value of individual NFL franchises to billions of dollars (Crepeau, 2020).

The NFL and its teams have struggled with issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the past including the use of racist mascots (Bruyneel, 2016), race norming (Hobson, 2021), and perpetuating discriminatory work environments (Eichhorn, 2020; Shephard, 2021). The NFL generates billions of dollars, to the benefit of its team owners, whose lack of diversity is striking, given the racial



makeup of the players in the league (McGannon and Butryn, 2020). There was not a non-white NFL team owner until 2012, and there are currently only two owners of color with major ownership interests and significant involvement in the operations of an NFL team (Lapchick, 2020). Team CEO/President positions have been predominantly held by white men (Lapchick, 2020).

Commentators have criticized the NFL's attempts to address DEI and social justice issues. Researchers analyzed the NFL and its teams' responses to athlete activism. Montez de Oca characterized the league's reaction to Black players' activism as contradictory attempts to appease fans and its mostly Black on-field workers (Montez de Oca, 2021). Rugg argued that the league tried to control the voice of rebellious Black players by subsuming their social justice efforts into a weak, market-friendly version of "justice" based in calls for unity (Rugg, 2019). Niven found that NFL teams punished athletes who protested during games, paying them less and treating them worse than their peers (Niven, 2020).

Most of the literature focuses on NFL coaches and players rather than administrative executives. Scanga identified the lack of diversity among decision makers, the absence of diversity in the final candidate choices, and the anti-tampering policy as factors facilitating and perpetuating a cycle of racial employment discrimination in the National Football League (Scanga, 2004). Conlin and Emerson discovered strong evidence that non-white players face hiring discrimination in the NFL, though they are treated more equitably in retention and promotion decisions (Conlin and Emerson, 2006). Madden found Black coaching candidates were held to a higher standard during the hiring process (Madden, 2004). Some investigators have found that the institution of the Rooney rule may have mitigated that discrimination (Fanning Madden and Ruther, 2010; DuBois, 2016). The Rooney rule requires NFL teams to interview at least one minority candidate for any head coaching vacancy (DuBois, 2016). However, Pitts et al. recently determined after accounting for numerous characteristics of coordinators, Black coordinators were significantly less likely than non-Black coordinators to become head coaches over the 2018–2020 seasons (Pitts et al., 2022).

Very recently, the public eye again focused on the NFL's treatment of DEI issues. Brian Flores, former Miami Dolphins head coach, filed a lawsuit in February 2022 alleging that "the NFL remains rife with racism, particularly when it comes to the hiring and retention of Black Head Coaches, Coordinators and General Managers" (para 3) (Smith, 2022). The high-profile lawsuit claims that Flores was subjected to "sham" interviews for head coach positions (Smith, 2022).

Also, a now-former head coach's disparaging emails came to light—containing racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic content (Razack and McKenzie, 2021). These emails were uncovered by an independent investigation into the Washington Football Team's well-documented misogynistic and toxic culture (Shephard, 2021). Commentators noted the retrograde opinions expressed in the emails, and their wide acceptance among those with whom he shared them, illuminated the extent to which the NFL's efforts to broaden its audience are a sham (Shephard, 2021). Shephard opined these emails as

evidence of "deep cultural rot at the center of the NFL and just how far the league still has to go to fix it" (Shephard, 2021) (para 4) and that the NFL "has no sincere interest in the changes its marketing campaign pretends to take seriously" (Shephard, 2021) (para 7). The NFL's "systemic and systematic protection of white men in power has bred hypocrisy, race norming, gender exclusion and violence and performative acts of solidarity with the league's majority racialized player pool" (Razack and McKenzie, 2021) (para 5).

Following a summer of mass political mobilization triggered by the police murder of George Floyd, racial justice activism compelled the NFL to respond to public pressure (Montez de Oca, 2021). In 2020, as an attempt to improve DEI efforts, the NFL made enhancements to the existing Rooney Rule and extended its application from solely coaching and football operations jobs to a wide range of executive positions (Lapchick, 2020). Teams must now include people of color and/or female applicants in the interview processes for senior level front office positions such as club president and senior executives in communications, finance, human resources, legal, football operations, sales, marketing, sponsorship, information technology, and security positions. Additionally, teams that develop women or people of color to be candidates for primary football executive, general manager positions or a head coach position will earn draft pick rewards (Lapchick, 2020). In March 2022, the league announced two enhancements to the Rooney Rule (Jones, 2022). Interviewing a woman for coaching and front office vacancies would count toward fulfilling the Rooney Rule requirement and only interviews conducted in person will count (Jones, 2022).

In 2020, the NFL League Office also hired Jonathan Beane as Senior Vice President and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, highlighting the increased emphasis on continuing the League's progress when it comes to improving diversity and inclusion in its workplace and in all aspects of its business (Lapchick, 2020). The League earned an A+ rating from the 2020 Race and Gender report card for its diversity and inclusion initiatives (Lapchick, 2020).

However, even with the increased efforts at the league level, individual teams continue to struggle with DEI. Richard Lapchick, Director of The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, noted the continued disparity in racial and gender hiring practices between the NFL's league office and their 32 teams. He identified a serious underrepresentation of women and people of color at the team level in positions with significant decision-making power (Lapchick, 2020). At the team level, only 15.9% of the vice presidents are people of color and only 25.1% are filled by a woman (Lapchick, 2021b). At the beginning of 2021, only 17.3% of C-suite positions at NFL teams were filled by people of color and 28.6% by women (Lapchick, 2021b). By March 2022, all 32 teams are required to fully implement a DEI plan (Lapchick, 2020). One component of those plans should be dedicated DEI staff positions.

## Chief Diversity Officer Roles

Diversity leads to greater financial performance and drives productivity, innovation, and decision making (U.S. Government

Publishing Office, 2019). The strategic diversity leadership movement has moved from a narrow focus on access and equity issues to a broader frame that addresses the rich experience of an increasingly diverse, global world. This shift requires organizations to make DEI central to their operation rather than leaving it on the margins (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). One way to accomplish that is creating staff roles dedicated to DEI.

Government entities, for-profit and non-profit corporations, and educational institutions have all created the positions, often called Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs). Local governments have been addressing equity issues by adding CDOs or staff with similar titles or focus (Kimbrough, 2017). In recent years, CDOs have assumed an increasingly vital role in higher education. Between 2000 and 2010, at least 60 of the nation's leading College and Universities reframed their senior diversity administrative role (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013).

There has been significant progress in the creation of these roles in American business. In 2012, only 198 out of 957 (20.7%) Standard and Poor's (S&P) 500 firms had adopted CDO positions (Shi et al., 2018). In that same year, Forbes reported about 60% of Fortune 500 companies had CDOs or executive roles designated for diversity (Kwoh, 2012). As of 2021, about 53% of S&P 500 firms have a CDO position or equivalent, up from 47% in 2018 (Green et al., 2021). Institutional pressures, crucial stakeholders that control important resources, or internal powerful actors may motivate firms to adopt CDO positions (Shi et al., 2018).

Recently, US corporations have been setting hiring records for CDOs and large companies have poached peers for management talent in the DEI space (Green, 2021). After the mass protests in 2020, new hires of CDOs in the S&P 500 index tripled the rate of the previous 16 months, increasing to approximately a dozen each month (Green, 2021). At least 60 other publicly traded firms appointed their very first diversity leader in that time frame (Green, 2021). Eighty-five of the 100 largest American corporations have a CDO, 16 of which added or elevated the role in 2020 or 2021 (Green et al., 2021). The increase in CDOs in large American corporations demonstrates firms' commitment to workforce diversity and attests to their willingness to invest resources to accomplish it (Shi et al., 2018).

However, even with the uptick in hires and recognition of the role's importance, turnover in the role has been high. The average tenure is 3.2 years, compared with 5.5 years for a CEO (Green, 2021). Additionally, since the adoption of the role is relatively new, though it is becoming more common, there is not a long track record of success (Gabriel, 2019).

Definitions of the CDO role vary. These positions lead diversity, inclusion, and equity efforts on several fronts, internally and externally (Kimbrough, 2017). CDOs generally have hybrid job descriptions that include recruitment, human resources, marketing, ethics and legal compliance (Kwoh, 2012). CDO's primary duty is to conceptualize, define, assess, nurture and cultivate diversity (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2007; Shi et al., 2018). The CDO also brings a new perspective to the top management team and can coordinate diversity initiatives and foster relationships with important stakeholders (Shi et al., 2018).

In a higher education context, Williams and Wade-Golden's foundational work defined a CDO as "boundary-spanning senior administrative role that prioritizes diversity-themed organizational change as a shared priority at the highest levels of leadership and governance" (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013) (Chapter 1, para. 8). Williams and Wade-Golden recommended that as the institution's highest ranking diversity administration they report to the president (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). The CDO's goal is to create an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all, which requires them to serve "an integrative role that coordinates, leads, enhances, and...supervises formal diversity capabilities of the institution" (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013) (Chapter 1, para. 8).

CDO roles place high demands on the employees who hold them. To be effective leaders, CDOs must remain highly involved with their communities and in critical conversations, engaged on the subject matter, not defensive, and be able to hear critiques (Wood, 2021). CDOs must have a broad span of knowledge that can be leveraged in different domains, including a detailed and sensitive understanding of diversity topics across identity groups, ranging from race and ethnicity to sexuality, national origins, disability, and veteran status, among others. CDOs must also retain working knowledge of key affirmative action and federal and state policies (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). The success of the CDO depends on personal characteristics of this employee including leadership traits, ability to build networks, and understanding organizational change (Leon, 2014).

In 2012, CDOs holding these roles in Fortune 500 companies were 65% female and 37% African-American (Kwoh, 2012). Their professional backgrounds ranged from human resources and marketing to finance and operations (Kwoh, 2012; Shi et al., 2018). Approximately 25% reported directly to the CEO, while the rest answered to human resources or another department (Kwoh, 2012).

Organizational design also impacts the success of the CDO. Rank, support staff, reporting structure, and resources can support or jeopardize their work (Leon, 2014). Historically, workplace diversity has been the domain of human resource departments and managers responsible for DEI issues were considered to have few career options and negative connotations (Anand and Winters, 2008; Shi et al., 2018). In the past, CDOs were one person, with little to no staff, resources, or direct authority (Hancock, 2018).

To set up a CDO for success, firms must make more substantial resources commitments than for the adoption of other types of diversity programs (Shi et al., 2018). Adding a CDO position to the firm's senior management team represents a significant structural change (Shi et al., 2018). Shi et al. (2018) found most CDOs either belong to the top management team, reporting to the CEO, or report to a top management team member. Creating a new senior position requires investment of people, money, and setting up priorities, goals, channels of communication, and organizational routines that align with the rest of the organization (Shi et al., 2018).

## METHODS

This study utilized content analysis of publicly available secondary data. Content analysis defines the process of summarizing and reporting written data (Cohen et al., 2018). Content analysis has become a popular method for qualitative and quantitative analyses in management and international business research (Gaur and Kumar, 2018). Prior studies within the sport management field have also utilized this method (Pederson and Pitts, 2001; Peetz and Reams, 2011; Miller et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2021).

The investigator used Google and the LinkedIn website and entered search terms “[team franchise name]” and diversity, “[team franchise name]” and equity, “[team franchise name]”

and inclusion. Investigator also used the Find function for each search term on each NFL team’s website’s front office staff page. See **Table 1** for numbers of search results.

After identification of the existence of a DEI role on the NFL team staff and the name of the person holding that position, the investigator then confirmed the role by using the person’s name as a search term on LinkedIn and google. Utilizing the LinkedIn profile and any biographical information found through Google, the investigator coded the available information. The measures used for coding were position (job title, department, reporting structure), education (highest degree earned, degree discipline) and prior professional background and qualifications.

The investigator also coded the photos for demographic characteristics. Visual images can be analyzed similarly to

**TABLE 1** | Number of search results.

	Google [team franchise name] and			LinkedIn [team franchise name] and			NFL team website front office staff directory word search
	Diversity	Equity	Inclusion	Diversity	Equity	Inclusion	Diversity, equity or inclusion
Arizona Cardinals	1,080,000	830,000	479,000	12	11	5	0
Atlanta Falcons	557,000	863,000	460,000	34	27	24	0
Baltimore Ravens	693,000	424,000	634,000	21	14	14	0
Buffalo Bills	633,000	466,000	1,120,000	18	24	16	0
Carolina Panthers	542,000	276,000	439,000	33	24	16	0
Chicago Bears	1,710,000	570,000	717,000	31	34	21	1
Cincinnati Bengals	1,270,000	286,000	1,050,000	16	15	11	0
Cleveland Browns	644,000	383,000	563,000	26	24	18	0
Dallas Cowboys	991,000	608,000	1,060,000	32	35	24	0
Denver Broncos	754,000	511,000	661,000	27	22	15	2
Detroit Lions	401,000	393,000	483,000	29	18	20	1
Green Bay Packers	552,000	545,000	848,000	25	17	17	0
Houston Texans	513,000	335,000	869,000	18	19	13	0
Indianapolis Colts	489,000	277,000	416,000	22	13	22	1
Jacksonville Jaguars	918,000	256,000	747,000	23	21	16	1
Kansas City Chiefs	534,000	473,000	833,000	29	17	17	0
Las Vegas Raiders	383,000	323,000	366,000	9	4	6	0
Los Angeles Chargers	199,000	492,000	729,000	11	6	7	1
Los Angeles Rams	630,000	350,000	475,000	17	87	12	0
Miami Dolphins	669,000	446,000	592,000	39	39	31	0
Minnesota Vikings	1,180,000	1,020,000	518,000	24	19	15	1
New England Patriots	1,130,000	744,000	947,000	11	39	9	0
New Orleans Saints	976,000	316,000	593,000	13	26	7	0
New York Giants	1,410,000	591,000	1,380,000	6	11	2	0
New York Jets	1,240,000	1,020,000	703,000	21	64	23	0
Philadelphia Eagles	741,000	1,010,000	681,000	96	42	46	1
Pittsburgh Steelers	694,000	1,020,000	1,460,000	10	21	7	0
San Francisco 49ers	727,000	11,090,000	640,000	30	48	22	1
Seattle Seahawks	605,000	447,000	597,000	38	41	20	1
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	437,000	375,000	542,000	28	15	13	0
Tennessee Titans	410,000	665,000	360,000	13	7	9	0
Washington Football Team	356,000	362,000	325,000	22	12	11	
Washington Commanders	151,000	66,700	139,000	8	6	7	0

analyzing texts, for example, through “reading” the meanings (Cohen et al., 2018). Since these characteristics were not self-reported, the investigator was required to perceive them.

The study utilized the ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e or not Hispanic/Latino/a/x/e) and race (White, Black, American Indian, Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) categories as based on the US Office of Management and Budget's Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity (Department of Health Human Services Office of Minority Health, 2018). The investigator observed socially assigned race, the racial/ethnic categorization of individuals by others (White et al., 2020). Appearance-based observed race is an external classification based solely on readily observable characteristics (Roth, 2016). This includes not only a person's phenotype but also visible status markers, clothing, hairstyle, and the context of the observation (Roth, 2016). These classifications largely reflect how perceptions by the dominant or mainstream social groups (White et al., 2020). In social research, it is typically measured by the interviewer's classification of the individual (Roth, 2016).

The investigator determined gender using phenotype and dress. “Determining gender” is the umbrella term for social practices of placing others in gender categories (Westbrook and Schilt, 2013). People present information about their gender and others then interpret this information, placing them in gender categories (Westbrook and Schilt, 2013). The process of gender determination often relies on visual and behavioral cues (Westbrook and Schilt, 2013) that relate to society's expectations of masculine vs. feminine behavior and presentation (Caffrey, 2021).

## FINDINGS

Out of the 32 NFL franchises, 10 (31.25%) had identifiable DEI dedicated staff roles like a CDO. See **Table 2**. The Jacksonville Jaguars, Chicago Bears, Detroit Lions and Seattle SeaHawks had more than one executive DEI dedicated position. There was evidence three additional teams, the Los Angeles Rams, the New York Jets, and the Miami Dolphins, have created DEI councils utilizing employees who maintained other primary roles.

The most common position title was Director/Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, with half of teams using this language. Other position titles included Chief People Officer, Vice President of Social of Responsibility and Impact, Director of Latino/a Diversity and Cultural Affairs, and Director of Inclusion and Employee Investment. For positions that were not C-suite level, the most common department in which these positions were housed was Human Resources (also called People and Culture). Other departments represented included Marketing, Strategy, and Communications.

Seven of the employees holding these DEI positions were Black (70%), 20% white and 10% Latina. Eight of the employees were female (80%), 20% male. Five of the ten the employees in these positions held degrees more advanced than Bachelor's degrees. Twenty (20%) percent of the group attained Ed.D degrees and there were examples of an MBA, an MSHRM,

and an MS in Sports Administration. Four of the 10 (40%) of the employees held DEI specific training credentials, the most common of which is the University of South Florida's Corporate Training and Professional Certification Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace.

The employees in these roles illustrate two dominant pathways to CDO positions. Four of the 10 had previous professional backgrounds in corporate, for-profit businesses including WalMart, Sephora, and Alaska Airlines. The other prominent path was gaining experience in higher education and intercollegiate athletics administration. Most were external hires, with only two of the 10 having spent significant time with the NFL team before assuming the CDO role.

## DISCUSSION

### Results

The finding that only 31.25% of NFL franchises have a CDO demonstrates that NFL teams are significantly behind other American businesses. Even in 2012, well before the protests following George Floyd's murder that prompted so much corporate action, about 60% of Fortune 500 companies had CDOs or equivalent (Kwong, 2012). Almost a decade later, the NFL's teams have still not caught up to that level. Including diversity councils, the number increases to 40.6%. The executive diversity committee may be less ideal for generating diversity strategy because of its potential lack of expertise and the non-representative nature of the group (Williams, 2013).

That many of the CDO positions were housed in human resources is consistent with previous findings. Historically, human resource departments have supervised workforce diversity (Shi et al., 2018). Similarly, 75% of CDOs at Fortune 500 companies in 2012 answered to human resources or another department (Kwong, 2012).

Half of the NFL teams' CDOs did not report directly to the owner, president, or CEO. Having a direct line to the CEO can give a CDO more power and visibility (Kwong, 2012). Most CDOs either report to the CEO or report to a top management team member (Shi et al., 2018). This indicates that NFL teams may not be establishing an organizational structure that will best support the CDOs work. A reporting structure that connects the CDO to the president sends a powerful message to the entire organization and allows CDOs to raise issues within the highest levels of leadership (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013).

The demographics of the employees who hold these positions did show some progress. In 2012, 65% of Fortune 500 CDOs were female, and 37% were Black (Kwong, 2012). Most organizations choose CDOs from underrepresented minority groups (Ng et al., 2021). The NFL team's CDOs are 80% female and significantly more racially diverse than the Fortune 500 CDOs, with 70% Black employees. The employees in these positions are significantly more diverse than other executive roles within NFL teams. Only 17.3% of C-suite positions at NFL teams are filled by people of color and 28.6% by women (Lapchick, 2021b). Team senior administration, which includes director and senior manager roles, are 20.1% people of color and 25.3% female (Lapchick, 2021b). Employees in CDO roles do align with the NFL team's

**TABLE 2 |** NFL teams with CDO.

Team name	Title of position	Reports to	Highest degree	Discipline	Race	Gender	Background
Arizona Cardinals	Chief People Officer	owner	MBA	Human Resources Leadership	Black	Male	Corporate
Chicago Bears*	SVP diversity, equity and inclusion	President/CEO	Bachelors	Business	Black	Female	Intra-organization events and entertainment; intercollegiate athletics administration
Denver Broncos	VP of diversity, equity and inclusion	SVP of strategy	EdD, masters	Athletic administration	Black	Female	Coaching, intercollegiate athletics administration
Detroit Lions*	SVP chief people officer and diversity officer	President/CEO	BFA	Musical theater	White	Female	Corporate; technology
Indianapolis Colts	Director of diversity, equity and inclusion	VP of finance	MS, EdD	Kinesiology; higher education and student affairs	Black	Male	Higher education
Jacksonville Jaguars*	SVP and Chief Community Impact Officer	President/CEO	MS	Business administration	Black	Female	Higher education
Los Angeles Chargers	Director of Latino/a diversity and cultural affairs	SVP, communications and external affairs	Bachelors	Liberal studies	Latina	Female	State government
Minnesota Vikings	Director of inclusion and employee investment	EVP and chief people and culture officer	Bachelors	French	White	Female	Intra-organization since 2006
San Francisco 49ers	Director of diversity, equity and inclusion	VP Human Resources	MSHRM	Human resource management	Black	Female	Corporate
Seattle Seahawks*	VP of diversity, equity and inclusion	President/CEO	Bachelors	Communications	Black	Female	Corporate

\*Indicates evidence of more than one DEI executive.



production labor racial demographics, as 70.7% of NFL players are Black (Lapchick, 2021b).

The educational and professional background of the NFL team's CDOs indicate that they do take the employee's qualifications seriously. Fifty (50%) percent of the employees had advanced degrees and four of the 10 had DEI specific certifications or credentials. This is different than in the past when some organizations placed employees into the diversity role who had no previous experience, or whose careers were in decline, or someone who happened to be a visible minority with a passion for diversity (Dexter, 2010).

The NFL team's reticence in hiring CDOs may be explained by the NFL's culture and insularity. It is a league run, owned, and coached by a handful of executives which enables systemic oppression (Razack and McKenzie, 2021). Shi et al. (2018) found a strong effect of female top management team representation on firms' likelihood of adopting CDOs. At the beginning of the 2021 season there were only four women in a CEO/President position of an NFL team (Lapchick, 2021b). The number of women in CEO/President positions has increased from zero in 2017 to one in 2018 and 2019 to two in 2020 and four in 2021 (Lapchick, 2021b). At the team level, only 25.1% of Vice President positions are filled by a woman (Lapchick, 2021b). Therefore, the lack of gender diversity in top management teams may lead to a lack of will to develop and support CDOs.

## Recommendations

Organizations may adopt a CDO position if doing so would allow them to increase legitimacy, improve efficiency, change the corporate culture, and increase control over external resources and external actors, in response to diversity-specific pressures (Nath and Mahajan, 2008; Menz, 2012; Shi et al., 2018). The NFL is experiencing diversity-specific pressures and calls to prove that their expressed commitment to diversity and social justice is more than just lip service. Also, Shi et al. (2018) found accumulative industry adoptions impacted firms' decision to adopt CDOs. The NFL teams may feel pressure from other major American professional sports teams, like NBA teams, that are perceived as doing better in terms of diverse hiring and social justice initiatives (Lapchick, 2020, 2021a; Beard, 2021; Butler et al., 2022). Therefore, NFL teams that do not have staff dedicated to DEI should create CDO positions.

CDOs advance an organization's diversity agenda but cannot be solely responsible for transforming an organization's culture (Gabriel, 2019). If firms adopt CDOs simply for impression management, it can waste resources (Shi et al., 2018). Creating a new leadership position sends a strong signal, but it takes more than one executive to make an impact in the face of institutional pushback (Green, 2021). Therefore, these roles deserve support from the owner and CEO/President, appropriate reporting relationships, well-crafted position responsibilities, generous resources, and talented employees.

NFL teams with current CDO positions should audit that role's reporting structure. All NFL team's CDOs should report to the President/CEO, even though the trend of developing new roles at the senior level is fairly recent (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). Allowing the CDO to report directly to the President/CEO

gives credibility, indicates the value the organization places on the role, and places final accountability with the President/CEO. Businesses characterized as DEI high performers were twice as likely as low performers to report that the CEO/President is primarily responsible for DEI issues (HR Research Institute, 2021). Reporting to the President/CEO, allows the CDO to strengthen alliances and networks across different levels of the organization's hierarchy (Leon, 2014). Raising the profile of the CDO reflects an organization's willingness to expose and close long-standing equity gaps (Zalaznick, 2020).

To truly shift the organization's structure and strengthen its commitment to DEI, the CDO needs to supervise other DEI staff across divisions. The development of a vertically integrated CDO division offers a powerful way of creating a more responsive organizational infrastructure by creating economic, organizational, and strategic effects (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). Diversity management has evolved out from under the traditional human resources and talent acquisition roles, to assume more dotted-line responsibilities including corporate strategy, corporate social responsibility, organizational design and effectiveness, corporate marketing and even sales (LLopis, 2011). Change rarely happens when a diversity leader is separated from other departments (Green, 2021).

Since many of the NFL teams have already created diversity councils, teams could ensure that each division is represented on these councils, designate that person as the "Diversity lead" and allocate some percentage of their workload to DEI work. Then, each of these leads report to the CDO as well as their division head. Relying on diversity committees without a CDO can be ineffective, since they are commonly not supported by senior leadership or a true institutional commitment to producing results (Williams, 2013).

The CDOs job description should be carefully drafted. The position's designers should delineate an area of work they define as "strategic diversity leadership work" (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). Changing culture and making progress on DEI issues is not easy nor fast (Hancock, 2018). Achieving these goals requires expanding expectations for CDOs outside of tactical areas like compliance, training, problem solving, recruiting, and event planning (Hancock, 2018). CDOs must learn to play a more integral strategic role in the design of new business models, including operating more holistically in a general management and operational capacity (LLopis, 2011). Effective CDOs work to ensure that a DEI lens is rooted throughout all functional areas (internal) and the supply chain (external) (LLopis, 2011).

Once installed, diversity chiefs often face challenges such as lack of budget and direct reports (Green, 2021). NFL teams should ensure CDOs receive the support they need. Organizations must be prepared to give CDOs the resources necessary to succeed (Geisler, 2021). CDOs should be part of strategic planning and all employees should know that the CDO is a power player and not just the organization's conscience (Geisler, 2021). Fully empowering the CDO allows them to leverage diversity as an integral part of the organization's overall strategy (Shi et al., 2018).

Finding the right hire for a CDO position is difficult, because it requires a wide range of competencies

(Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). NFL teams should vet candidates carefully and focus the search on those who can lead and guide change. If not, the teams risk hiring employees who are underprepared for the demands of such a complex, high-profile, and politically charged position (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). When an area of responsibility becomes critically important, organizations specialists who are content experts (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013). The NFL should continue the practice of external hires who have a professional background in corporate DEI.

“The development of the CDO role marks a step toward creating specialized capacity to engage in strategic diversity leadership work” (Williams and Wade-Golden, 2013) (Chapter 1, para. 70). Adopting CDO positions leads stakeholders to perceive organizations are strongly committed to workforce diversity and can be considered role models (Shi et al., 2018). It is time for NFL teams to catch up with American businesses and truly prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion. Though not the only answer to a complex problem, NFL teams should add or modify existing CDO roles to ensure an organization-wide commitment.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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AD and BB contributed to conception and design of the study. AD conducted the content analysis and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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# New Media, Digitalization, and the Evolution of the Professional Sport Industry

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The professional sport industry achieved tremendous success in the traditional broadcast media age, established a multi-sided market and an effective business model for revenue growth. However, the emergence and proliferation of the new media technologies have drastically changed the media landscape, creating a much more complicated cross-media environment that unites popularity and personalization, structure and agency. Such a changing environment creates transformations within the professional sport industry, and adapting to these transformations will lead to the evolution of the professional sport industry and its success in the digital media age.

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## INTRODUCTION

The professional sport industry has thrived with the formation of a symbiotic relationship with traditional mass media (Gratton and Solberg, 2007) and a derived multi-sided market model, characterized by a synergistic effect of value creation from both the demand and supply side. However, the advent and proliferation of new media technologies have profoundly changed the media landscape and its compatibility with the professional sport industry and disrupted the value creating effectiveness of the mass-media-centric sport multi-sided market. This conceptual paper examines how digitalization and new media transformed the multi-sided market of professional sport industry. To do so, we develop an alternative cross-media ecosystem model of sport based on recent communication studies and uncover four major implications that the sport industry might face due to the transformation of its external environment into a cross-media ecosystem characterized by the synergistic effect of traditional mass media and myriad emerging digital technologies.

This paper contributes to the literature on digitalization occurring within a sport management context. Despite the rapid advancement of digital technology in broader society and its prevalent applications in the sport context, sport management research regarding digital transformation of the sport industry is still in its infancy. Currently the main issue facing digital transformation in sport management research relates to the lack of a theoretical framework to unify studies pertaining to traditional mass media and new media, as well as the new ecosystem emerged from changing relationships between sport business and their divergent types of media partners. In this paper, by developing a theoretical framework of a cross-media ecosystem, we offer a useful tool to systematically analyze the impact of digital transformation on the sport industry and unveil new value creating mechanisms that can lead to continuous prosperity of professional sport industry in the new media age.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. With a focus on the North American context, we first review the relationships between the professional sport industry and the traditional mass media, to explain the value creating mechanism of the sport multi-sided market. We then examine the disruptive changes that had happened in the sport-media symbiotic relationship due to the rapid growth of new media technologies, and developed an alternative cross media ecosystem model to analyze the evolutionary implications of digital transformation for professional sport industry. We conclude by identifying future avenues for digital transformation in sport research.

## PROFESSIONAL SPORT AND TRADITIONAL MASS MEDIA: A VALUE CREATING MULTI-SIDED MARKET

The professional sport industry formed early ties to the mass media when newspapers and other print media started to report game-related information to readers (Walker, 2015). Since the 1950s, with the advent of television, the professional sport industry has seen enormous revenue growth outside of traditional gate revenues (Wenner, 1989). The synergies between the media and the professional sport industry created a lucrative business model for both industries, boosting their potential to reach and establish new audiences. In this section, we introduce the multi-sided media-sport business model and analyze how the alliance between sport and media has benefitted both.

### Mass Media and the Formation of a Multi-Sided Market

With its emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, professional sport initially depended on gate receipts as the primary source of income (Fort, 2018). However, with the development of new mass media technologies (particularly television), media rights income has become the single most important revenue for the professional sport industry (Gratton and Solberg, 2007; Zheng and Mason, 2018). Multi-sided markets refer to “markets in which one or several platforms enable interactions between end-users and try to get the multiple sides ‘on board’ by appropriately charging each side” (Rochet and Tirole, 2006, p. 645). Multi-sided market owners face a classic “chicken and egg problem,” which forces them to take on the strategy of subsidizing one side of a market in order to draw revenues from the other side to the market, ultimately resulting in the market’s financial viability (Wright, 2004). For example, as a typical two-sided platform, eBay charges online vendors listing fees and/or commissions on one side of the market, while granting free access for consumers on the other. As more consumers enter the platform, vendors become more interested in paying to reach customers through the platform; in turn, the more vendors (and purchase options) consumers can access, the greater the number of consumers will use eBay for online shopping. This mechanism is defined as the network effect or, to be more specific, the *cross-side network effect*, which occurs where the more users exist on one side of the market, the more utility users on the other side of the market obtain from joining the

network (Eisenmann et al., 2011). Meanwhile, *same-side network effects* enable users to reap more benefits by simply accessing a larger network of users (Economides and Tåg, 2012), such as with the telephone or internet.

Professional sport has developed into a special type of multi-sided market (see **Figure 1**) consisting of the league as the central platform and the fans, the media, corporate sponsors and host communities on different sides (Mason, 1999; Zheng and Mason, 2018). Leagues generate revenues from: fans primarily through gate revenues; the media *via* broadcast rights; corporate sponsors with sponsorship fees; and host communities *via* subsidies provided for facilities (Mason, 1999). However, professional sport is a special type of multi-sided market in two ways. First, instead of a conundrum between the “chicken” and the “egg,” sport fans—more specifically, gate-paying spectators—were the side that generated the initial momentum for professional sport to develop into a multi-sided market. As sport’s fan base grew, the media, corporate sponsors, and host communities were drawn to the platform and provided different sides of it (see **Figure 1**).

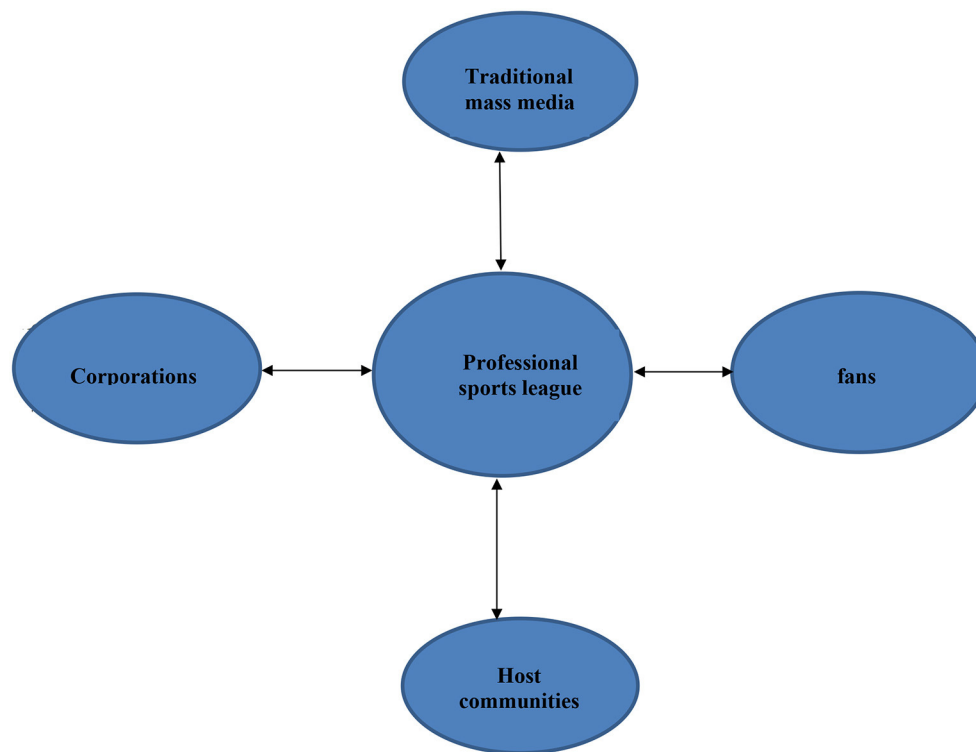
Second, across the network of the professional sport multi-sided market, the media magnify the network effects with and across the different sides. For instance, more media coverage will attract more corporate sponsors and intensify the competition between host communities competing for the right to host sport teams.<sup>1</sup> With the magnifying effects of the mass media, the professional sport industry was able to fully exploit the network effects generated from the different sides of the market, and turned these network effects into a “double whammy” (Shapiro and Varian, 1998, p. 182)—the combination of both demand-side economies (economies of networks) and supply-side economies (economies of scale).

### Information Product and the “Double Whammy”

Mason (1999) argued that the core product of professional sport industry is the uncertainty of the game outcome, or the game itself. However, with the formation of a symbiotic relationship between the professional sport industry and the mass media, this core product has become mediated, where a significant portion of the product is consumed as content available through the media. Once produced, the mediated sport product can be replicated, edited, repackaged, and distributed according to consumer tastes for very little incremental cost.

On the demand side, same-side network effects among fans can be significant, where the more fans watching the game, the more valuable the game because the same game experience can be shared with more people (Zheng and Mason, 2018). Moreover, unlike other products that have diminishing marginal utility, the professional sport product has an increasing marginal utility due to the fact that the more a fan follows a certain sport, the more knowledge she/he will possess regarding that particular sport, and the more she/he will be able to enjoy the experience (Dietl et al., 2012). These strong same-side network effects generated among

<sup>1</sup>The movement of sports franchises from one city to another in order to obtain a more lucrative subsidy is a practice limited to North American markets, where leagues restrict the number of available franchises.



**FIGURE 1** | Basic model of professional sport multi-sided market with traditional mass media (adapted from Benner and Tushman, 2003).

fans are magnified by the mass media, and cross different sides of the professional sport multi-sided market, creating strong cross-side network effects as well among the media, corporate sponsors and host communities (Zheng and Mason, 2018). Combined, the same-side network effects and the cross-side network effects engender a *positive feedback loop* (Shapiro and Varian, 1998), expand the professional sport multi-sided market even more, and in the end, concentrate the market to a winner-take-all (Cook and Frank, 2010) structure. This process is what has allowed for some powerful media providers and sports leagues to emerge that have dominated the industry.

### The Domination of Sport-Media Conglomerates

With network effects engendered by the mass media on the demand side, and the mediated sport products produced by the mass media on the supply side, a combination of supply side economies of scale and demand side economies of network created a professional sport market dominated by a select few (Zheng and Mason, 2018). This can be attributed to the centralized, one-to-many nature of the traditional mass media (Napoli, 2010), which came to be dominated by a few television networks. Through a top-down broadcasting mode that distributed homogeneous content, a few media providers “enjoy[ed] exclusive formal and informal access to elite sources and act as gatekeepers by filtering information that they consider newsworthy and disseminating it to the general public” (Etter

et al., 2019, p. 31). The value of sport content was rooted in *broadcast scarcity* (Hutchins and Rowe, 2009), where viewers had few options to choose from and sport was a form of media content that could attract significant demand.

### EMERGING DIGITAL MEDIA: A CROSS MEDIA ECOSYSTEM MODEL

In contrast to a few traditional mass media outlets producing and disseminating homogeneous content through a top-down, one-to-many process, with a stark structural distinction between the gatekeeping role played by the mass media and a passive information receiver role played by the audiences (Etter et al., 2019), new media—more precisely, social media—fundamentally changed the media domain. In this section, we identify and analyze those changes that have had an impact on the way information is disseminated and how society functions as a whole. First, however, we need to distinguish between new media and traditional mass media, and differentiate types of new media.

#### Typology of New Media

Not all of the types of new media that emerged were completely different from, or more advanced than, the traditional mass media. For instance, Web 1.0 new media refers to the nascent generation of Internet websites that has a similar information distribution mode as the traditional mass media, which is characterized by a one-to-many broadcasting distribution



structure (Drury, 2008). Web 1.0 new media “might be likely to adopt many of the characteristics of traditional mass media rather than evolve as the entirely unique and revolutionary medium” (Napoli, 2010, p. 56). In this instance content production and platform formation have usually been singlehandedly controlled and distributed by one organization, with little user interactivity (Filo et al., 2015).

In contrast, Web 2.0 new media, or social media, can be defined as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which facilitates interactivity and co-creation that allow for the development and sharing of user generated content among and between organizations and individuals” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and Snap are examples of Web 2.0 new media, or social media. Social media is characterized by heterogeneous, user-generated-content (UGC), horizontal information co-creation and distribution, and selective exposure and audience fragmentation (Etter et al., 2019). Social media users “engage in participatory and collaborative content generation by sharing, linking, collaborating, and producing online content using text, photo, audio, and video” (Abeza et al., 2015, p. 602). It is New Media 2.0, or social media, that has the greatest potential impact on the traditional multi-sided market structure of professional sport.

Recent years have witnessed the emergence and development of web 3.0, which remains in its nascent stages; hence the denotation and connotation of what is web 3.0 is still heatedly debated among practitioners and scholars. However, two widely recognized and acknowledged characteristics of web 3.0 include: first, web 3.0 is constructed based on blockchain technology and the broad use of cryptocurrency, which enable decentralized interactions among internet users, rebuking centralized control of services and information from internet giants such as Facebook or Google in Web 2.0 (Kshetri, 2022); second, web 3.0 is characterized by an immersive, networked “metaverse” which can be generally described as a parallel virtual world built alongside the real world (Metaverse, 2022). With the advanced technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), or even holograms, people “live” in the “metaverse” vicariously through their avatars, and can engage in all kinds of activities such as virtual shopping, gaming, tourism, as well as sports entertainment and training (Gursoy et al., 2022; Metaverse, 2022). For instance, “the Manchester City club has become the first soccer club to announce that the Etihad Stadium will be virtually recreated in the Metaverse,” which “will allow fans of the soccer team to watch matches live without having to physically enter the stadium” (Metaverse, 2022, para. 20).

## Supply Side Change

This is because new media, especially social media, alters the way information is produced and distributed. Traditional mass media operates in a top-down mode to broadcast information from a few content providers to an audience of many (Petko et al., 2015) with limited opportunities for audiences to respond; hence it is easy to control content production and distribution channels, as well as the attributes of the content itself. Social

media bring alternative ways to this vertical broadcasting model of the traditional mass media by enabling the emergence of a “bottom-up” model characterized by organized co-production, information creation, and dissemination (Etter and Nielsen, 2015). “Social media now enable vast audiences to serve as both senders and receivers” of information and to “collectively engage in the coproduction” of this information (Etter et al., 2019, p. 36). With social media, content is no longer produced by a few media providers, but co-created by actors from different backgrounds and viewpoints (Prahallad and Ramaswamy, 2004). Collectively, millions (billions) of users of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media comment on and alter the narratives and discourse of the information produced by the mass media, post their own related content, and expose or reveal events that may be neglected by the mass media, therefore subverting mass media’s role as the gatekeeper of information and social rhetoric (Shoemaker and Vos, 2009). In the social media context, any individual that produces and diffuses information has the potential to gain widespread attention (Webster, 2016).

The emergence of social media has blurred old distinctions between information producers and senders, and information receivers (Etter et al., 2019), and enables the establishment of a horizontal “hyperlinked society” (Maeyer et al., 2013) where content is created in chunks of interconnected networks of the online world (Ellison and Boyd, 2013) and distributed in a nonlinear mode (Manovich, 2002). Every user of this networked online world has the potential to “contribute to the creation and rapid diffusion of content,” as they “freely and easily share information across and between different platforms” (Etter et al., 2019 p. 36). Even traditional mass media “increasingly rely on social media users as sources, using information circulated through social media channels for their reporting, which is then picked up by social media users again” (Etter et al., 2019, p. 36).

With the traditional mass media, homogeneous information was produced and diffused by a few media gatekeepers; in the social media age, content stems from different sources created by individuals or organizations with diverse motives (Etter et al., 2019). Users of social media produce content based on their own personal identities and experiences instead of abiding by the commercial news criteria of the traditional mass media, and this “experiential credibility” (Hussain et al., 2017) can be deemed more authentic and trustworthy than information promoted by giant media conglomerates reflecting “corporate interests” (Johnson and Kaye, 2004, p. 625). Social media users also have disparate motives to engage in information creation and dissemination. Individuals and organizations “use social media to build or reinforce a distinctive image—frequently built in opposition to corporate practices—by supporting or stigmatizing actions that are congruent or incongruent with the social values they advocate” (Etter et al., 2019, p. 38).

Additionally, the traditional mass media produce more objective information due to their necessity to conform to established industry norms and ethical codes (Deephhouse, 2000), while social media content is often created to express strong emotional sentiments, such as “anger and frustration, surprise and excitement, shock and disgust, or joy” (Etter et al., 2019, pp. 39–40). Without the filtering process imposed by the traditional



mass media, emotion-laden content prevails more readily in the online world, attracts rapid and wider public attention, and enables “emotional contagion” (Hatfield et al., 1993) to more like-minded individuals. With social media, “emotionally charged information shared by an original sender with their links rapidly branches out in multiple directions and indirectly reaches and possibly mobilizes a vast audience” (Etter et al., 2019, p. 40).

## Demand Side Change

In the new media age, homogenous information is gradually replaced by highly heterogeneous and idiosyncratic content created by diverse groups of actors. These actors selectively expose themselves to similar information “that confirms prior beliefs and to ignore disconfirming information” (Etter et al., 2019, p. 41) due to their autonomy in choosing information. Some recently developed new media technologies such as feeding algorithms reinforce this positive feedback loop by optimizing the chances of the audience being exposed to content with similar traits over and over again; meanwhile, even traditional mass media “offer their audiences increasingly narrow, partial, and preselected information” in order to “compete for the attention of niche audiences” (Etter et al., 2019, p. 41). The combination of effects of both individual’s preferences for consistent information that can resonate with their existing beliefs and values and new media’s tendency to cater to these preferences has led to a continuous fragmentation of the audiences and the formation of *reputation silos* (Pariser, 2012; Turow, 2012) and *echo chambers* (Sunstein, 2018). These echo chambers are “online spaces, such as fan forums or online activist communities, that host exchanges among like-minded individuals who are sheltered from opposing views” (Etter et al., 2019, p. 41).

Because of the existence of echo chambers and reputation silos engendered by the advent and proliferation of the new media technology, some communication scholars worry that society is becoming increasingly polarized and fragmented, where people screen out any dissonant information that runs the possibility of contravening their prior beliefs and values (Stroud, 2011; Levendusky, 2013). This will lead to the “growth of a massively parallel culture composed of millions of microcultures and tribal eddies” (Anderson, 2008, p. 183). However, Webster (2016, 2017) argued that people still tend to be drawn to the most popular informational content offered by whatever media platform is available, and built a model of exposure and a cross media ecosystem which integrates traditional mass media and new media.

## A Dynamic Model of Exposure and a Cross Media Ecosystem

Media users now face a cross-media environment where traditional mass media and new media (social media) play their respective roles to meet the collective and individual needs of different users. In the dynamic model of exposure that represents such a cross-media market (see **Figure 2**), Webster (2017) suggested that through “user information regimes” (Webster, 2011) such as online recommendation systems, new media users *pull* certain types of information content toward them according to factors exogenous to the media context, such as their

predisposed tastes, needs, attitudes, or moods; while *via* market information regimes (Anand and Peterson, 2000) like the Nielsen ratings services, and traditional mass media *push* particular kinds of contents toward the same media users whose preferences are determined by factors endogenous to the media context. In the new media age, users have unprecedented agency to pull similar patterns of content to them over and over again; however, new media users are embedded in a nonlinear, recursive media environment where media exposure is not only determined by personal preferences, but also influenced by structural factors such as big TV networks, famous journalists, advertisers, and online algorithms.

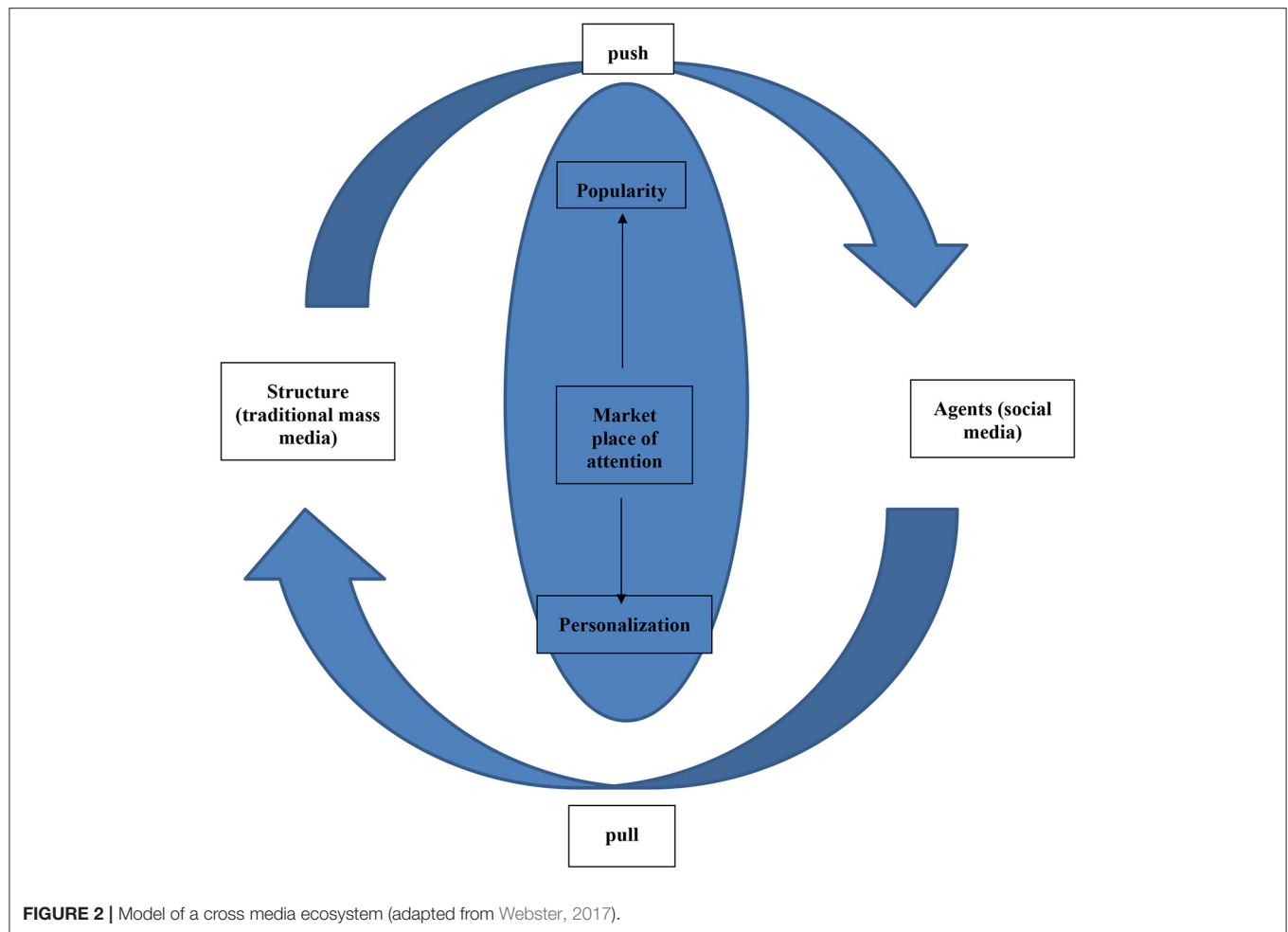
By and large, the new media age might be more precisely described with a cross media model (see **Figure 2**) where unification of the traditional mass media turns into a dichotomy of personality and structure, which both attempt to draw massive attention toward their information product, hence the establishment of “the marketplace of attention” (Webster, 2016).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL SPORT INDUSTRY IN A CROSS-MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

In this section, we analyze the transformational implications of a cross-media ecosystem for professional sport industry. First, fans’ consumption behavior has been altered by new media technology, which enables them to consume the holistic professional sport experience as opposed to discrete, time-restricted games; second, beyond consuming the content produced and distributed by the professional sport leagues and teams, new media users possess the tools to create their own forms of mediated content based on their own idiosyncratic demands, as well as express themselves more freely and immediately. Third, radical technological innovation of digitalization erodes the old business model of professional sports, highlights the strategic paradox between exploitation and exploration, and calls for the simultaneous exploitation of the broadcasting business model of a multi-sided market and exploration of a new media business model to deliver value to the customers, and to create new revenue flows for the sport industry. Finally, new media—especially social media—transformed how sport leagues or teams are viewed and discussed, creating unexpected turmoil where disruptive events have occurred. Next, we will break down these transformations in greater detail.

## Attention Economy and Changes to Viewing Behavior

The attention economy perspective suggests that as new media technology has enabled abundant information to be produced on a daily basis, the term *information economy* is replaced by *attention economy*, where information is abundant and the scarce resource is the attention required to consume said information (Simon, 1991; Davenport and Beck, 2001; Lanham, 2007). With this logic, the attention economy and the information economy can be conceived as ends of a continuum (see **Figure 3**). As shown in **Figure 3**, the left side of the “information economy/attention

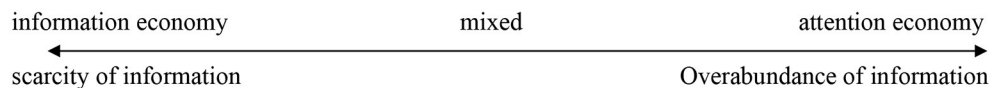


economy continuum” represents a hypothetical information economy where information production is virtually nonexistent, and the collective human attentive capacity to consume that information is far greater than the information that is produced. As more information is produced—due to technological advancement, for example—it will eventually overwhelm the collective human attentive capacity to consume it at a certain point. Thus, society shifts to an attention economy. Real-life scenarios fall in between the two hypothetical cases, representing a mixed information and attention economy, and the dominance of either changes with the evolutionary course taken by technology. For instance, traditional mass media and sport exist in an information economy. With the overabundance of information being produced with the assistance of the new media technologies, traditional mass media started to integrate the attention economy by establishing and incorporating myriad new media platforms, which was combined with new sport-related content produced by other actors.

New media 2.0, or social media, exists in a predominantly attention economy, which has a profound impact on consumer behavior and demands the emergence of innovative business models to bring ongoing value to the sport fans who are new

media users as well. Evidence has shown that entering the new media age, media users’ attention span has narrowed (Davenport and Beck, 2001; Fidler, 2018) due to the attention deficiency when facing information overload. This has brought fluctuations in viewer numbers even for major professional sport leagues such as the National Football League (NFL). For instance, a 9.7% drop was reported in overall NFL ratings for the 2017-18 season, an even steeper decline from the 8% drop from the 2015-16 season (R/GA, 2018). Richard Ting, Global Chief Design Officer, R/GA, pointed out that “Nowadays, consumers have such fragmented attention spans. They have such limited time to devote to a 2-h-long basketball game or 3-h-long baseball game. Sports are competing with so many different things, like video games and YouTube videos.” (R/GA, 2018, para. 5).

In the new media age, sport fans are more likely to watch the game from multiple media platforms (Zheng and Mason, 2018); they are more likely to watch highlights than the entire game (R/GA, 2018); and they are more likely to watch sports games from non-linear media such as online streaming than linear ones such as television (Singer, 2017). For example, “more than 1.3 million homes in the US dropped traditional cable or satellite TV service in the second quarter of 2020” and switched sport



**FIGURE 3 |** Information economy/attention economy continuum.

viewership to over-the-top (OTT) delivery platforms such as DAZN, Amazon Prime Video, or OTT delivery service provided by traditional sports broadcasters such as Fox Sports or ESPN (How Sports, 2020, para. 1; Newman, 2020). Compared with paid cable and satellite TV services, these OTT platforms not only cost less for the consumers, but can also transcend the boundaries of broadcast media and allow sport viewers to “watch more sport on more devices in more places than ever before and to personalize viewing practices and experiences across a variety of screens and communities of interest” (Hutchins and Rowe, 2019, p. 977). In addition, fans also use social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter to comment on the game or communicate with their friends during game time, while logging onto YouTube to watch game recaps and highlights beyond the game time. Kavanagh (2019) pointed out that in May 2019, “28% of live social video viewers—those who have used the live feature on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter—have commented about a sports event on Facebook and 17% have done so on Twitter” (Para. 21). In addition, “Globally, 22% of internet users say that following sports events is one of their primary reasons for using social networks, climbing to 39% among live social video viewers” (Kavanagh, 2019, para. 14).

New media technology-savvy fans also prefer to watch shorter content such as highlights or game recaps over entire games. Tom Richardson, founder and president of Convergence Sports & Media, described this *highlight economy*: “The league is putting out real-time highlights in-game, if you really want to pay attention as a fan, you can do that in a highlights environment, without watching the actual product” (R/GA, 2018, para. 8). Evidence also showed that the slipping viewership numbers for major sport leagues such as NFL or MLB might be attributed to the fact that fans are watching in fewer and shorter increments due to their dispersed attention toward so many different information sources (Singer, 2017). For example, the 9 percent ratings drop of the NFL in the 2016–17 regular season among millennials “was caused by an 8 percent drop in the number of games watched and a 6 percent decline in the minutes watched per game (down to 1 h 12 mins per game)” (Singer, 2017, para. 4). Confronting the rise of the new media technologies and the changing viewing behaviors of a younger generation of sport fans, professional sport leagues and traditional sport media strived to adapt to a more new-media-centric business model. For instance, “Major League Soccer replaced local cable rights with digital only local rights on platforms such as YouTube TV and ESPN+,” while “ESPN launched a streaming service that will replace live sport as the foundation of the cable industry” (Agha and Dixon, 2021, p. 24).

Webster (2016) suggested that a linear way of delivering content is characterized by a predetermined broadcast schedule

by which audiences must abide. “Even with hundreds of channels delivered by cable and satellite, users may have to accommodate themselves to the schedule of linear delivery” (Webster, 2016, p. 64); whereas a nonlinear delivery system “let users fetch what they want at almost any time” (Webster, 2016, p. 64). Watching professional sport games on television is a typical linear way of consuming mediated sport product. With or without broadcasting, professional sport games only take place at a certain time, and because the game itself is time sensitive and perishable, watching a game after it ends considerably reduces its utility to consumers. Therefore, research shows that new media users, even millennials, still enjoy watching live sport games; and “more believe they have increased the amount of live sports they watch on TV than those who think they have decreased” (Singer, 2017, para. 10). However, we want to argue here that new media users are more likely to utilize nonlinear media platforms to build themselves the whole sport experience; hence to a certain extent, the importance of the game itself and its uncertain outcome declines as an experiential product can still be devised and delivered without watching the entire game.

## Value Co-creation and Power Balance Tipping

In marketing research, a service dominant logic (SDL) suggests that consumers create and determine their own value-in-use with the value propositions (incarnated as the products) offered by the producers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). In the media domain, the core product—the content—can be altered, edited, and/or created by media users harnessing the enabling power of new media technology. Billions of new media users globally converge and diverge on every possible aspect of life, with traditional mass media outputs, constituting the entire media ecosystem. As discussed earlier, the broadcasting media age is platform driven—a few mass media platforms were able to draw most of the public attention, whereas the new media age is content driven—valuable content will flow across divergent media platforms, “it exists across platforms providing widely shared encounters that focus public attention on the most salient news and entertainment” (Webster, 2016, p. 163).

As a form of content, professional sport still attracts massive public attention (Vargo and Lusch, 2018). Along with the co-creation ability endowed by new media technology from sports fans and consumers, diversified content can be created to meet the highly individualized needs of distinct consumers. For example, for those fans who do not want to watch entire games that last 2–3 h long, they can search for game results, stats, and comments readily on various social media platforms (Singer, 2017). Some of those feeds are produced by official sources, others are created by regular fans and consumers themselves;

combined, more content production equals more value to the old customers, and the more exposure, the more opportunity to draw the attention of new customers. Moreover, most of the user generated content generated *via* social media, is not profit-driven (Cova et al., 2015a,b). Therefore, professional sport can harness this content freely to augment the value of its product without worrying about competition to capture its value.

A content-driven paradigm also favors niche sports or entrepreneurs in the professional sport industry, brings other less prominent professional or even recreational sports to the forefront, and thus potentially alters the power dynamics of the professional sport industry. In a traditional mass media market, the most popular and powerful sport organizations and their products were prioritized to be broadcasted by dominant mass media providers. Whatever was broadcast by the mass media unequivocally attracted high levels of public attention. This mutual reinforcement mechanism resulted in a structure where only a few media companies and leagues/sports dominated. In this scenario, the importance of media income and low viewership and attention made niche sports struggle. In addition to receiving little media related income, niche sports also lacked media exposure, hence the public attention that further impeded their development (Billings, 2014). However, in the content-driven culture of the new media age, niche sports can at least create their own opportunities to promote their sports.

## The Strategic Paradox of Exploitation and Exploration

“Strategic paradoxes describe organization-level performing tensions that stem from the plurality of stakeholders and result in competing strategies and goals” (Smith, 2014, p. 1593). When facing radical technological change in the organizational environment, such as the emergence and proliferation of new media technology, growing complexity and uncertainty often exacerbate the pressures on organizations to reconcile simultaneously competing internal and external demands and develop the organization’s strategic priorities (Greenwood et al., 2011; Besharov and Smith, 2014; Smith, 2014). Managing strategic paradoxes is a formidable task because “pressure to minimize internal conflict and to address external legitimacy drive leaders to choose a single strategy” (Smith, 2014, p. 1594). Although strategy scholars have acknowledged that paradoxes are persistent and hard to resolve, some suggest that altering the “either/or” mindset to a paradoxical thinking of “both/and” (Smith and Tushman, 2005) can ease the tensions between conflicting requests. In this section, we introduce the strategic paradox of exploitation/ exploration as a major challenge that professional sports need to face in a complex cross media environment. Therefore, a balancing strategy which “involves defining a novel, creative synergy that addresses both oppositional elements together” (Smith, 2014, p. 1594) simultaneously can act as a means to manage the issues faced by professional sport in the digital age.

Balancing exploitation and exploration is a typical strategic paradox that can influence the decision making process of an organization (March, 1991; Benner and Tushman, 2003). The

functional operation of an organization takes the cooperation and coordination of different units to work toward the same goal, and constant sensemaking and sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) between different units with divergent objectives and priorities increase operational costs and chances of conflict. Therefore, organizational routines have to be developed to keep the organization efficient and productive (Nelson and Winter, 1990). Often seen as a source of inertia and rigidity, strategy researchers have argued that organizational routines can facilitate change (Feldman and Pentland, 2003) as well and serve as the source of an organization’s dynamic capability (Teece et al., 1997). Management techniques and procedures stemming from organizational routines can stimulate incremental changes and innovations that tend to answer to the demands of the existing market (March, 1991; Benner and Tushman, 2003). Incremental innovations focus managerial attention on exploiting an organization’s existing resources and increase its ability to adapt to a stable environment “when technological environments are characterized by incremental refinements of an existing technological design” (Benner and Tushman, 2003, p. 249). Exploitation activities help the organization “find operational efficiencies in existing products for short-term sustainability” (Smith, 2014, p. 1593).

However, exploitation activities can hinder an organization’s capability to engage in radical innovation, or exploration (March, 1991; Benner and Tushman, 2003), which “introduce novel innovations to achieve long-term sustainability (Smith, 2014, p. 1593). Exploration is important to organizations facing a turbulent environment with radical technological change and environmental uncertainty, because “the ability to develop new technological capabilities rapidly is especially critical in environments characterized by rapid innovation and change” (Benner and Tushman, 2003, p. 249). Therefore, in times of radical technological change in the organizational environment, the strategic paradox between exploitation and exploration becomes more prominent.

Professional sports institutionalized certain business routines to exploit opportunities in the age of broadcasting mass media (Gratton and Solberg, 2007; Milne, 2017), a period characterized by the dominance of the information economy. With limited media entities from which the audience could choose, and the uniformity those media provided (Webster, 2011), partnering with the broadcasting media could almost guarantee audience attention. As mentioned earlier, this ubiquitous pattern led to the creation of powerful national or even transnational professional sports entities (Webster, 2016). Initially, professional sports leagues and teams sold sports products and services directly to sports fans, gaining ticket revenue (Mason, 1999); second, sports leagues and teams sold the attention of fans to the media and sponsors alike, in exchange for broadcasting right fees and sponsorship revenue. Effective employment of this business model was sufficient to drive enormous revenue growth for the professional sport industry in the mass media age of the late twentieth Century (Zheng and Mason, 2018).

The proliferation of digital technology has stirred radical transitions which had an impact on the professional sport industry. This business model has been eroded by the transition



from an information economy to an attention economy which facilitated online piracy and illegal streaming of sport games that challenged the exclusivity on which broadcast mass media relied to gain a high return on investment (Hutchins and Rowe, 2013a,b) and also changes to the viewing behaviors of profession sport consumers as described above. Facing the radical technological change of digitalization, many professional leagues and teams turned to incremental innovations in their existing business models, such as upgrading the transmission technology from an analog system to a high-quality digital paradigm, cooperating with online platforms to augment the sheer volume and diversity of the sport related content (Milne, 2017). They also promoted their brand, product, or those of the sponsors on social media platforms, trying to build and maintain long-term relationship with their fans and other customers. For example, the National Basketball Association (NBA) collaborates with online platforms to offer state-of-the-art services to basketball fans around the globe, beyond the basic live game television broadcast (Conway, 2014). In China, the NBA recently renewed its partnership with Tencent, one of the biggest Chinese digital media operators, and signed a new contract worth US \$ 1.5 billion which runs through the 2024-25 season (NBA eyes Chinese growth in five-year, 2019).

Under the new deal, live NBA games, video on demand and short-video content will be available for fans through Tencent's digital and social media platforms including QQ.com, Tencent Sports, Tencent News, Tencent Video, QQ, Weixin/WeChat and Weshi. Tencent will develop innovative advertising products, and launch "mini programs" for mobile devices, including the NBA's fan loyalty program in China, "NBA Qiu Mi Quan." (Frater, 2019, para. 2)<sup>2</sup>

However, these steps that the professional sport organizations took to adapt to the digitalization evolution are still characterized by non-radical innovations featuring a one-to-many mode customized for existing consumer sets (Benner and Tushman, 2003). Diversification and extension of the sport products does not change the fact that sport fans still assume a passive role as consumer with the professional sport organizations as the central active value producer, who resist embracing the co-creation power of the sport consumers *via* new media platforms with open arms (Hutchins and Rowe, 2013a,b). Future research should examine how the professional sport industry treats the agency created by social media users to generate additional value, while simultaneously circumventing risks stemming from such a dynamic and radically changing environment.

Moreover, Benner and Tushman (2003) suggested the establishment of an ambidextrous organization that can accommodate the need for operational efficiency and ferment innovation simultaneously. Specifically, an organization must both exploit existing technologies and efficiently execute incremental progression, while exploring new technology and effectively adapting to radical innovation; and these processes

should be loosely coupled from each other so that functional efficiency will not hinder innovative effectiveness (Benner and Tushman, 2003). In the same vein, Zheng and Mason (2018) proposed a "combined multisided market and brand platform ecosystem" (p. 85) to deal with the paradox of exploitation and exploration from a macro-level perspective.

A multisided market can be exploited to adjust to incremental innovation under the one-to-many mode facilitated by digital technology, while a brand platform ecosystem should be a virtual-community-based, loosely coupled constellation of brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Grant et al., 2011) subject to the autonomous oversight of various sports stakeholders, exploring radical changes sparked by the social media technology. In the brand platform ecosystem, professional sport experiments with radical innovation through trial and error, and shares co-created value with all its stakeholders. For example, NBA formed a strategic partnership with Kuaishou—a famous Chinese short video platform—on Oct 19, 2021 so that Kuaishou became "an Official NBA China Short Video Platform and the first Video Content Creation Community of NBA China" (Hubbard et al., 2018, para 1). In order to exploit and expand the brand value of NBA and Kuaishou,

Kuaishou and NBA will grant copyrighted content to outstanding creators and encourage users to make secondary creations. At the same time, this cooperation will give greater access to various rights and interests to high-quality content creators. Through the content creator backstage built by Kuaishou and the NBA, creators will be able to commercialize the creation of high-quality content. Kuaishou will provide promotion resources and commercialization opportunities for outstanding works, and jointly empower creators to monetize with platform commercial resources and NBA copyrighted content (Kuaishou Technology, 2021, para 5)

One promising future research avenue would be to empirically test the effectiveness of a brand platform ecosystem in facing and engaging in radical innovations, and its compatibility with a multisided market of professional sport.

## Organizational Social Approval Assets and New Media

Firm legitimacy, status, reputation and celebrity are crucial *social approval assets*—"intangible assets that derive their value from favorable stakeholder perceptions" (Hubbard et al., 2018)—that can bring the firm necessary resources to survive, develop and thrive in a highly competitive business environment by influencing key stakeholders' willingness to exchange resources with the firm (Deephhouse, 2000; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Rindova et al., 2006). Legitimacy emphasizes the importance of conforming behaviors for organizations in line with taken-for-granted norms and institutions derived from their institutional environment (Thornton et al., 2008). Organizational status reflects an organization's relative position in a networked environment "from accumulated acts of deference" (Sauder et al., 2012, p. 268), while firm reputation is considered the public discernment of an organization's outstanding capabilities based

<sup>2</sup>This agreement has been undermined by recent events that have strained the relationship between the two parties.



on its consistent prior performance (Deephhouse, 2000; King and Whetten, 2008). Organizational celebrity is defined as a firm's ability to attract widespread public attention and to evoke positive affects at the same time (Rindova et al., 2006). Firm legitimacy, reputation, and status are analytical evaluations based on the rational judgement of stakeholders, while organizational celebrity is more emotion-driven (Pollock et al., 2019). However, new media—especially social media—renders constructs with dominant rational aspects, such as reputation, “becoming more emotional” and therefore more unpredictable (Pollock et al., 2019, p. 464). A single disruptive event can ferment on social media and rapidly spiral into a global-level event, in turn catching the attention of the mass media, continuing to escalate until eventually becoming a crisis that heavily impacts the focal firm's reputation in an unexpected manner (Etter et al., 2019).

For example, in 2019 a crisis related to the NBA's business relationship with China started when Daryl Morey, general manager of the Houston Rockets, tweeted his point of view on Hong Kong's state of political unrest. Despite the content's non-sport nature, and in spite of the fact that twitter has been banned from Chinese market, it instantaneously became viral on various Chinese social media platforms, triggering disaffection amongst NBA Chinese fans toward the Houston Rockets club. Many fans felt offended and asserted that the fact that Yao Ming had once played for the Rockets and the Rockets had been their favorite team since then made Morey's position even less acceptable. Emotional comments were left online, fans swore allegiance to their country, vowed to never watch Houston Rocket's games or even the NBA altogether, and requested Morey's dismissal. Ironically, after an initial response from the NBA, who expressed regret that Morey had deeply offended fans in China (Tensley, 2019), media in the US took it as a sign of weakness to submit to “China's money over human right” (Smith, 2019), whereas Chinese fans saw it as exuding arrogance and refusing to apologize. As the crisis continued to escalate Adam Silver, the commissioner of the NBA, had to reaffirm the NBA's position acknowledging Morey's right to freedom of speech to alleviate domestic tensions (Wade, 2019). However, in turn this statement further exacerbated Chinese fans' anger and drew derision from the Chinese mainstream media and even the Chinese government. Although this event has not been fully resolved, it has already caused some serious backlash such as the immediate suspension of partnerships from several major Chinese business sponsors, including the aforementioned agreement with Tencent. Tencent, “the NBA's exclusive digital partner in China,” elected to “suspend live streaming for the preseason games” (Tensley, 2019, para. 3). In addition, Chinese state television station (the CCTV) refused to broadcast NBA China preseason games as well (Tensley, 2019).

Importantly, the NBA's reputation has taken a heavy blow in China, which might potentially lead to more alienation of its biggest overseas market in the future, by an incident irrelevant to its prior business performance, or even outside the parameters of its business or sport performance entirely. This offers an intriguing research avenue awaiting future empirical examination. As the example above has shown, although social media enable regular media users to create user generated content

and participate in the value co-creation process, which brings professional sport organization enormous opportunities; it also empowers fans and consumers with tools to engage in value co-destruction (Stieler et al., 2014). Value co-destruction is a nascent research topic in sport management study, thus requiring more in-depth empirical research to disclose the very nature of this phenomenon. In addition, more qualitative research—especially textual analysis—should be conducted to examine multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, in order to reveal how fans co-create or co-destruct value for the professional sport industry, or how the framing of discourse on social media platforms can influence intangible assets of the professional sport organization such as legitimacy, reputation, status or celebrity.

## MORE FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES OPENED UP

Sport management research examining the influence of the digital transformation on the industry remains in its formative stages (Yoshida, 2017; Thompson et al., 2018). With more information competing for people's attention, and a corresponding finite attention span, sport fans might choose to pay more attention to certain highlights of the games that interest them, instead of watching an entire game thoroughly. The importance of the game itself might decline, as might the uncertainty of the game outcome, as the core product of professional sport in the mass media age (Mason, 1999). This transformation will likely reduce the importance of the strategies professional leagues adopted to keep competitive balance amongst teams (Fort, 1995). Future research could investigate empirically whether professional sport leagues start to emphasize (Lewis and Yoon, 2018) celebrity athletes at the expense of competitive balance, to what extent a player's online fame compensates for his/her on-court performance, and whether the longstanding uncertainty of outcome hypothesis (García and Rodríguez, 2002) begins to be undermined and replaced by a new hypothesis commensurate with a cross media regime, or remains intact even with the attention economy of the digital media age.

Further qualitative research is needed to theoretically ground how sport managers make decisions facing the inherent strategic paradox of exploitation and exploration (Smith, 2014). Other potential strategic paradoxes such as differentiation VS conformation, value creation VS value appropriation, internationalization VS localization, or the conflicting institutional logics of the market VS the community aggravated by a cross media complex could also be studied. For example, institutional logic research sheds light on how an organization manages co-existing competing institutional logics, and how frontline actors execute a great deal of agency to solve the paradox by cooperating with others with competing institutional logics to achieve a mutual goal on one hand, while maintaining strong independent identity on the other hand (McPherson and Sauder, 2000; Lounsbury, 2007; Reay and Hinings, 2009). In a professional sport context, empirical research should examine strategies and practices

online marketing personnel employ to reconcile the competing institutional logics of the community derived from the formation of online virtual communities by fans and consumers, with the logics of the market imposed by the sport organization that they work for; and how the practices they undertake daily can result in the dominance of one particular logic, which will eventually cause field level institutional change (Smets et al., 2012).

## CONCLUSION

The professional sport industry achieved tremendous success in the traditional broadcast media age, established a multi-sided market and an effective business model for revenue growth. However, the emergence and proliferation of the new media technologies have drastically changed the media landscape, creating a much more complicated cross media environment that unites popularity and personalization, structure and agency (Webster, 2016). Such a changing environment creates transformations within the professional sport industry, and adapting to these transformations will lead to the evolution of

the professional sport industry and its success in the digital media age. For established professional sport leagues and teams who already have a large fan base, co-creation can generate considerable value; for those entrepreneurial sports, digital media presents opportunities to break through barriers of a winner-take-all media market, so that their sport organizations can be exposed more to a highly variegated public attention. At the same time, radical technological change brings unprecedented conflict and uncertainty that can incur challenges and risks to even the most established professional sport organizations. Facing a much more complicated cross-media environment, the kind of dynamic capability (Teece et al., 1997) that professional sport organizations must foster remains worthy of sport management scholars' attention.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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# Arena-Anchored Urban Development Projects and the Visitor Economy

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Cities of all sizes are actively engaged in developing various urban infrastructure projects. A common strategy used in larger North American cities is employing arena-anchored urban development projects, where a professional sports team is used as an anchor tenant of a sports facility to generate development in the city. One means of relocating economic activity is to increase visitation to the desired redevelopment area. In this paper we used the visitor economy as a lens to explore how arena-anchored projects and the professional sports teams that play there fit into a local city's tourism economy. To conduct this study, a multi case study design was used to draw data from two cities: Columbus, Ohio, and Detroit, Michigan. Interviews were goal directed and conducted in person with leaders in Columbus ( $n = 9$ ) and Detroit ( $n = 10$ ), and inductive and deductive approaches to coding were undertaken in the form of content analysis. The results indicate that growing the visitor economy through arena anchored urban development relies on planned placemaking via the strategic approach of bundling diverse amenities together. These findings provide valuable feedback to those cities considering arena development projects, and how the arenas may be combined with other civic amenities to undergird the local visitor economy.

**Keywords:** cities, arenas, stadiums, visitor economy, placemaking

## INTRODUCTION

Cities and regions of all sizes globally are actively engaged in developing and building various urban infrastructure including amenities such as museums, convention centers, and sports and entertainment facilities (Rosentraub, 2010). A common strategy used in larger North American cities, is employing arena-anchored development projects, where a professional sports team is used as an anchor tenant of a facility to generate greater development in the city. These development projects remain prominent in urban redevelopment planning for many cities, and have had both their supporters and detractors. There are several rationales that city leaders and business leaders provide for the use of public funds to build new sports facilities and attract professional sport teams, such as economic and community development, improving quality of life of residents, and tourism (Baade and Matheson, 2004; Chalip, 2006; Misener and Schulenkorf, 2016). However, it is largely viewed as a contested practice as independent academic research largely debunked the purported economic benefits of hosting teams decades ago (Quirk, 1987; Crompton, 1995; Baade, 1996; Coates and Humphreys, 2008). Despite such concerns, cities continue to allocate public funds and build facilities, often as part of comprehensive downtown (re)development efforts, in an attempt to relocate economic activity back to the city core (Mason, 2016).

One rationale for investing is to increase visitation to the redevelopment area; in this paper, the visitor economy is used as a lens to specifically explore how arena-anchored urban development



projects and the professional sports teams that play there fit into a local city's tourism economy. At the core of the visitor economy is the assumption that economic activity comes from various types of visitors (Reddy, 2006). The visitor economy is a broad term that recognizes the economic activity of all visitors to a destination, such as business travelers, those visiting friends and family members, students, and people attending sporting and cultural events (Hristov, 2015). It also considers all the elements that make a destination successful in terms of visitation. This includes the natural environment; heritage, culture, and iconic buildings; retail, sport, leisure, and cultural facilities; restaurants and hotels; transportation and parking; the services that make the place clean, safe, and welcoming; and the infrastructure that make it an accessible place to visit while shaping its sense of place (Reddy, 2006).

Sense of place, and its anticipated outcome of placemaking (Aravot, 2002) is conceptualized by several academic disciplines. Placemaking in urban studies has shifted from focusing on the physical elements of projects (Day, 1992) to a democratic intervention between all stakeholders (Shibley et al., 2003). Placemaking is viewed as a process and a means to an end; the end being the creation of quality places (Wyckoff, 2014). It is how a cultural group marks its values, perceptions, memories, and traditions on a geographic space and offers meaning to the landscape (Coates and Seamon, 1984; Othman et al., 2013). It should also be understood from both organic and planned perspectives and as an essential part of tourism destination development (Lew, 2017). While organic placemaking evolves from local, bottom-up initiatives, planned placemaking is a top-down approach that contains modern, predictable, and contrived features, designed for mass tourism consumption (Lew, 2017). It is also the most common approach used in arena anchored urban development projects. Lew (2017) reasoned that for planned placemaking to create a convincing sense of place, there must also be some space for the evolution of organic placemaking to occur.

Moreover, Richards and Duif (2019) proposed that planned placemaking only works effectively if three elements are combined with equal stakeholder support. These elements include: (1) the tangible and intangible resources available (i.e., capital, land, human, or infrastructure), (2) the meanings linking people and stakeholders with the places they live in (i.e., symbols, identity markers, values, memories, or traditions), and (3) the creative and innovative use of resources and meanings that capture the public's attention (i.e., narratives, storytelling, branding). The third element of planned placemaking may be an important device for cities to increase their competitive advantage amongst other cities (Barney, 1991).

City leaders may perceive the strategic approach of bundling a diverse amenity mix as a means to successful planned placemaking. Natural and constructed amenities that are planned in proximity to one another may contribute to placemaking as well as bridge other amenities or nearby neighborhoods as part of this amenity mix. Natural physical amenities can consist of water, climate, humidity, environmental attractiveness, while constructed amenities can consist of museums, convention centers, coffee shops, juice bars, and research libraries (Clark, 2004). City and business leaders may

perceive and advocate for the bundling of amenities near one another as the key to successful arena anchored development and broader urban re(development). There is limited research to support strategically bundling amenities for successful outcomes, therefore we draw from the existing research on the bundling of sport events, tourism, heritage, and hospitality products. For instance, Chalip and McGuirly (2004) reasoned an effective way to incorporate sport events more strategically into the host destination's broader tourism product and service mix, is to bundle sport event components with the host's current attractions via a "mixed bundling strategy" (p. 267). Meanwhile, Xu et al. (2016) investigated event bundling strategies from the perspective of various event stakeholders, illustrating that attendees' perceived experiences were enriched by attending multiple events over the course of one trip. In addition, Huang et al. (2016) contended that rural communities have shown to improve secondary attractions and diversify their tourism product by bundling heritage attractions with non-heritage activities (Huang et al., 2016). This research has informed this study as we sought to understand how planned placemaking via a mixed bundling strategy can be essential to developing the visitor economy. More specifically, this study investigated how stakeholders in two North American cities – Detroit, Michigan and Columbus, Ohio – utilize conceptualizations of placemaking to develop their broad visitor economy via arena-anchored urban development initiatives. These two cases represent examples of existing comprehensive development projects that have had varying degrees of success, in cities not extensively viewed as tourism destinations.

## METHOD

To conduct this study, a multi case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989) was used to draw data from two cities: Columbus, Ohio and Detroit, Michigan. For more context, the city of Columbus is the 14<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States and continues to be the fastest growing Midwest city (US Census Bureau, 2020a) in contrast to other major cities in Ohio such as Cleveland and Cincinnati. The *Columbus Arena District* is widely regarded as a success story for sports- facility anchored urban development. For example, Columbus' amenities strategy was found in the discourse surrounding the construction of a new arena-anchored district in Edmonton, Canada (Sant et al., 2019), acknowledging Columbus as a successful exemplar of integrated urban development comprising of commercial, residential, hospitality, and entertainment development in a mid-sized city (Rosentraub, 2014). However, despite Columbus' perceived success, it is difficult to attribute increased land values, intangible benefits and increased economic activity solely to a specific facility or sports team; as a result, there is still skepticism associated with sports facility-anchored development projects within the academic community (Propheter, 2019).

Meanwhile, Detroit provides an interesting site to explore sports facilities and urban development since it remains one of the most blighted cities in North America despite recent attempts to revitalize its downtown core. While the city of Detroit is the

27<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States and the largest city in the state of Michigan, it has had a consistently declining population for the past decade (US Census Bureau, 2020b). Detroit was known for its major role in the global automobile industry but has moved to other strategic options to sustain the local economy (Galster, 2012). The recent arena-anchored development *District Detroit* is a sports and entertainment development anchored by Little Caesars Arena, a multi-sport facility that opened in 2017. While the *Columbus Arena District* is praised, *District Detroit* has been criticized for gentrification that disproportionately affects Detroit's African American population, as well as delayed plans on proposed residential and hotel development, and historic buildings restoration (Pinho and Shea, 2019; Graham et al., 2021).

Nine interviews with nine individuals were conducted in Detroit in December 2018, while nine interviews with thirteen individuals were conducted in Columbus in February 2019. Prior to conducting semi structured interviews (Merriam, 1988) participants were recruited by researching prominent leaders in Detroit and Columbus online and sending introductory letters via email. In other words, interviewees were sought who would likely espouse and express the kinds of narratives associated with their respective cities and arena projects of interest to this study. A snowball sampling technique (Goodman, 1961) was used after initial interviews, as respondents were asked to identify other actors with whom they were linked to Rowley (1997).

**Table 1** presents the characteristics – such as job title and the sector of work – for each subject that participated in this study, which included local civic leaders, business stakeholders, journalists, city and county administrators, facility operators, an urban planner, academic consultants, and executives with the local chamber of commerce and sports commissions.

In person interviews lasted approximately 1 h and were guided by semi structured interview questions. The Detroit interviews produced 215 single spaced pages of transcribed interview text and the Columbus interviews produced 230 single spaced pages. Once the interviews were transcribed, participants were emailed transcripts and provided an opportunity to request omission of specific text.

Data were coded using a form of content analysis, which is comprised of a systematic, theory-driven approach to texts, examining both latent and manifest content (Mayring, 2000). Through an adapted method of analysis derived from both Mayring (2000) and Denis et al. (2001), both inductive and deductive approaches to coding were undertaken.

## RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that city stakeholders assert that advancing and growing the visitor economy through arena-anchored urban development relies on planned placemaking via one explicit strategy, which is the approach to bundling a variety of unique amenities in proximity together. This reveals that sport and professional sports teams are not central to placemaking but are the anchor amenity that attracts other desirable amenities and their visitors. Results from the data analysis will be presented in

**TABLE 1 |** Participant characteristics.

Job title and organization	Field of work
<b>City of Columbus</b>	
Executive Director, Franklin County Convention Facilities Authority	City administration 5
President and CEO, Columbus Chamber of Commerce	City administration 1
Director, Franklin County Economic and Development Department	City administration 2
Business Editor, The Columbus Dispatch	Journalism/print media 1
City Hall Reporter, The Columbus Dispatch	Journalism/print media 2
Executive Director, Greater Columbus Sport Commission	Non-profit 1
Director of Public Relations, Experience Columbus	Tourism/hospitality
Director of Events, Greater Columbus Sports Commission	Non-profit 2
Director of Marketing, Greater Columbus Sports Commission	Non-profit 3
City Auditor, City of Columbus	City administration 3
Director, Department of Development, City of Columbus	City administration 4
Vice President, Planning, Architecture and Real Estate, The Ohio State University	Urban planning
Associate Vice President of Business Advancement, The Ohio State University	Facility management and operation
<b>City of Detroit</b>	
Chief of Staff, Detroit Economic Growth Corporation	City administration 1
Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President of Administration, Detroit Economic Growth Corporation	Non-profit 1
Director of the Detroit Sports Commission	Non-profit 2
Director for the Department of Civil Rights, Inclusion, and Opportunity, City of Detroit	City administration 2
Vice President of Sales, Marketing, and Sports for the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau	Tourism/hospitality
Projects Reporter and past Business Writer for the Detroit News	Journalism/print media
Elected Council representative of District 6, City Council	City administration 3
Professor at University of Michigan	Academia 1
Dean at the Mike Ilitch School of Business at Wayne State University	Academia 2

more detail below, followed by a discussion and the implications of the results.

## Detroit, Michigan

In Detroit, a Non-Profit (1) official shared the significance of how diverse amenities entice visitors to the downtown core, stating:

So again.....attracting more conventions, more visitors, more bodies down to the downtown which is good for the restaurants, it's great for the hotels and we've got a hotel boom going on. You know the old fire house was converted into a new hotel.

While a city official (3) discussed the need to contain development in close proximity to one another as a means to attract people to visit, work and live in the District, arguing:

Beyond that what my hope is, is that it is going to create a framework where, I don't know how familiar you are with the arena neighborhood itself but it's a 40-square block neighborhood that's contained within the quote, unquote District. But the neighborhoods surrounding that need additional development, too. So I think the hope is that with the progressive development of The District that the neighborhoods surrounding The District also will start to see more investment because there is going to be this additional kind of corridor now where more people will be living and working.

In addition, a senior tourism/hospitality manager discussed how the District was a leisure destination that has attracted and integrated various restaurant amenities:

Whoever would've thought that we'd be a you know, a leisure destination, but with all of the buzz and the conversation changing about Detroit, we've had so many people that have really come to experience it and find out what's going on, you know we've had over 100 restaurants that have opened over the last 3 years.

Finally, a city official (1) refereed to "commercial corridors" whereby neighborhoods are revitalized via a mixed amenity bundling strategy, explaining:

We're definitely seeing some good things happen in the neighborhoods and we're seeing developers that are willing to take more of a risk in neighborhoods than they were certainly 10 years ago and even 5 years ago, but we have a lot of work to do within Detroit neighborhoods both from an affordable housing standpoint and also in the revitalization of our smaller commercial corridors.

## Columbus, Ohio

Meanwhile in Columbus similar sentiments were expressed. One city official (5) articulated how bridging amenities and neighborhoods together is mutually beneficial for all stakeholders:

We're sitting in the Convention Center now and the Convention Center is sandwiched between the arena district and the Short North Arts District and so it makes this center competitive, that adjacency and proximity, that walkability is what we call it makes it attractive to conferences and trade shows and conventions that rotate around the region and rotate around North America. And so it is the entertainment, the restaurants, the bars, the shopping opportunities in both the Arts District and the Arena District that contribute to the success of the convention, tourism, and trade, and visitor economy here. It's symbiotic.

This same city official (5) conveyed the significance of revitalizing a contaminated brownfield with a sports arena as the anchor and catalyst for economic growth, stating:

...here the arena which is now 20 years old did in fact spark growth and development of an arena district surrounding it, a mixed-use district of residential and commercial and entertainment, lots of jobs, lots of property value created, a lot of economic activity created and it has anchored that. The master developer refers to it as a mixed-use district masquerading as a sports and entertainment district. It has succeeded in anchoring a site that was formerly a brown site, brown field, formerly a penitentiary, which was with lots of contamination and lots of ugly history associated with it. It blocked the central business district from growth and development and so its removal and replacement with the arena and the arena district that surrounded it has succeeded in keeping the urban core healthy and growing.

Furthermore, a non-profit administrator (1) shared the potential benefits of bundling amenities in close proximity to one another as safety, cleanliness, walkability, and restaurant variety, stating:

I'm really proud of the density of the walkability so you're not just walking up one street where there's 30 restaurants but, you know, there's really a hundred restaurants of varying price points and I think people still feel very safe. I'm not saying we wouldn't have a mishap here and there but by and large we're known for the safety piece of it, the cleanliness, and the fact that there's such a variety, so there really is, you wanna go to a sports bar? Great, do you wanna go to a French restaurant? Sure. So I think what I love about it best is that people have so many options and they come here and they really can sort of personalize their stay.

A senior level urban planner elaborated on the way Nationwide arena anchored other inimitable amenities that not only bridged the downtown core to an neighborhood called the Short North, but also strengthened the arts community, restaurant scene, and Columbus' city national brand, arguing:

...so the Short North, if you go research it, the *New York Times* did an article, it's been a few years back now, where they said the Short North is the single best homegrown arts community in the country and at the time we had more galleries in there but as rents have gone up the only thing that can pay the rents are the restaurants and so it's become like a restaurant mecca now but yeah so we started to get some real positive publicity, like unsolicited. So the *New York Times* articles and it just kept building and I think it was largely the Arena District put it on the map, got a lot of ink for that.... the Arena District was really the big bang that was the origin of that.

## Strategic Approach to Bundling Amenities

Respondents in Columbus commonly referred to their bundling strategy in relation to the public-private partnership called *The Columbus Way*. For example, one city administrator (4) contended:

You'll hear some talk about, I don't know if in the research you've come across this phrase *The Columbus Way* where we're doing public-private partnerships and it really does come down to basically shared values. You know shared belief that the government and the private sector aren't adversarial. That what's good for one is good for the other, so long as you're focused on inclusion, quality of life, and strong governments.

While a senior level urban planner in Columbus reasoned every city has unique features that must be considered when developing and implementing a strategy for urban planning, stating:

....every city's got its own levers that you have to pull but you have to figure'em out what the levers are and then what becomes critical is you have to know the order to pull'em and that's trickier. So it takes a strategy and I can't say that we set out with a strategy but I would say that Columbus, as the strategy became apparent they didn't deviate from it... Which is one reason they're teaching a course in Harvard on it.

This defined strategy to building amenities did not emerge in the Detroit data as it did in Columbus, yet it was found that respondents in Detroit considered the importance of future narratives in relation to District Detroit and their broader downtown redevelopment plans.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal city stakeholders feel that planned placemaking via bundling amenities may be essential to developing the visitor economy in urban centers when it concerns arena and stadium projects. As such, this paper illuminates new understandings of how North American cities and their stakeholders may employ planned placemaking to develop their broad visitor economy via arena-anchored urban development initiatives.

First, professional sports teams are not viewed as the central feature of placemaking to city stakeholders but rather viewed as the anchor that can initiate placemaking through attracting other amenities to the area, and their visitors. Analysis suggests that other, intangible benefits, are secondary to the goal of tourism and economic development. This is illustrated through the description of multi-visitation strategies through a diverse amenity mix, including corporate and leisure travel, sport and international tourism, youth sport travel, experiential tourism, niche tourism (i.e., stadium specific travel), as well as resident/local visitation.

The results also show the extent to which the development of arena districts is a strategy cities and local stakeholders utilize to increase visitation in various forms under an umbrella of creating economic impact. In Columbus, respondents suggested their strategy was informed by their public-private partnership called *The Columbus Way*, which is described as shared values of community stewardship and progress (Columbus Partnership, 2021). This finding illustrates that for the respondents in Columbus, this partnership was crucial for the placemaking success of the Columbus Arena District. While their amenities bundling approach may have evolved organically to where it is now it is a deliberate strategic approach, it may be unique to Columbus making it a complicated process for other cities to adopt.

That being said, other cities referring to the success of Columbus to support their own arena anchored development plans can observe that Columbus does not possess any tangible and unique competitive advantages that contribute

to placemaking, in comparison to the placemaking success that a city such as Barcelona has had since hosting the 1992 Olympic Games (Mansilla and Milano, 2019). One reason why Columbus may have had success in developing this amenities bundling approach is that it was not battling against a negative brand image. Meanwhile, post-industrial cities like Detroit are attempting to reinvent their city brand as it was once known for its major role in the global automobile industry. This may mean that placemaking strategies may be more difficult for these latter cities.

Finally, respondents in each city highlighted the importance of meeting high quality-of-life indicators for both the residents and the visitors to the region. This challenges existing literature that contends tourism development is independent of the interest of residents (Eisinger, 2000). This finding contributes to the existing research on the visitor economy by presenting the new understanding that city stakeholders today are planning for - and seeking out - projects that will improve quality of life of both the visitors and residents.

By examining cases of various degrees of success and stages of completion, this paper provides valuable feedback to those cities considering arena development projects in their respective cities, and how the arenas may be combined with other civic amenities to undergird the local visitor economy. The success of arena districts appears to rest on the multi-faceted approach of planned placemaking via bundling a variety of leisure, sport, and entertainment amenities in a concentrated area. Therefore, cities looking to use arenas or stadiums to anchor further urban development should consider their resource and stakeholder capacities and needs to complete such a project successfully.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

DM, TB, and RT collected the data. TB analyzed the data. TB and DM wrote the article. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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# Shadow Stadia and the Circular Economy

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Most attention on stadium or arena-anchored development projects is placed on the scope and construction of the new sports facility, while less emphasis is on the facility left behind, which we describe as *shadow stadia*. Some *shadow stadia* are repurposed for mixed use development, others are demolished but have delayed redevelopment plans, while some remain abandoned and empty for years after the professional sports team or event is no longer present in the facility. The environmental impacts of *shadow stadia* are not fully understood, as limited research exists on how the immediate neighborhood anchored by pre-existing venues cope in the shadows of these new development plans and the loss of a sport venue and its events. Green strategies such as the circular economy may extend the lifecycle of existing sport facilities. To contribute to this discussion further, this perspective article will first discuss current advances in the academic literature on the circular economy. Second, it will present a comprehensive categorization of shadow stadia globally and future opportunities on integrating circularity into best practices. By doing so, this perspective article highlights several areas of future investigation that should be considered and planned for when major league sports teams and city leaders move their team and build new facilities.

**Keywords:** sport facilities, stadiums, arenas, shadow stadia, circular economy

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## INTRODUCTION

Stadium or arena-anchored development projects remain an important part of urban redevelopment planning worldwide (Johnson and Whitehead, 2000; Crompton, 2004; Rosentraub, 2006). It has been argued that urban redevelopment through sport stadium or arena projects results in both positive and negative outcomes for cities and their residents (Rosentraub, 2009, 2014; Grant Long, 2013). However, while most attention is placed on the planning, scope, and construction of the new sports facility, less emphasis is on the facility or space left behind. *Shadow stadia* are vacated sites or venues such as arenas and stadiums once occupied by major professional or amateur sports franchises. When a facility is deemed obsolete by a team and its owners, it is effectively at the end of its lifecycle. When claiming obsolescence, team owners may decry the building unsafe or unfit (Unger, 1985; Holstege, 2017), that their revenue expectations are not being met (Shapiro et al., 2012), or the facility is lacking modern upgrades to maintain it as a state-of-the-art facility (deMause, 2016).

Shadow stadia offer both challenges and opportunities for local governments, developers, and communities once sports venues are vacated. Options to renovate or to build a new facility are often debated amongst owners of sport franchises. Some sites are only temporarily shadow stadia since they are repurposed for different development, while others are demolished or remain abandoned for years after facility use ceases.

Although the merits of urban redevelopment through sport stadia have been the subject of study and debate, a focus is typically placed on the impacts of a new stadium or arena development on its associated community. Thus, there is scant empirical research examining the impact of shadow stadia or the site to their respective communities. In addition, the outgoing site is not typically incorporated into the broader analysis meant to provide a comprehensive outlook of the economic, social, or environmental impacts to local communities—resulting in a lack of insight and empirical data to draw from.

This is an important issue as, more broadly, building and construction counts for 39% of carbon emissions worldwide (UN Environment and International Energy Agency, 2017), while operational emissions from energy used to cool, heat, and light buildings accounts for 28% of global carbon emissions (World Green Building Council, 2022). With this awareness, there is an emerging trend in stadium or arena design and construction to capitalize on environmental sustainability initiatives and gain either the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 Environmental Management certification or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. Academic research focused on new stadia and urban development has also expanded recently (Mallen and Chard, 2012; Kellison et al., 2015; Triantafyllidis et al., 2018). For instance, Kellison and Hong (2015) identified growing pressure faced by architects and sport franchise owners to incorporate environmentally sustainable features into new stadia design, and found that economic savings over the lifespan of the facility is a key driver in the adoption of pro-environmental architecture and design. However, we are not aware of related published research on the potential environmental impacts of shadow stadia.

Growing pressure to incorporate green construction practices is a result of the increasing acceptance that the sport industry has a responsibility to environmental sustainability and climate justice. Sport's contribution is even recognized in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a plan of action for the planet, people, and prosperity (United Nations, 2022), and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda states (United Nations, 2022):

Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1, paragraph 37).

Two Sustainable Development Goals that sport can strive to meet include, SDG 11—make cities inclusive, safe, resilient

and sustainable, and SDG 12—sustainable consumption and production (Schröder et al., 2019). There are many ways the sport industry can meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and these two SDGs. One innovative approach is moving toward emerging circular sustainability and construction methods. Wergeland and Hognestad (2021) recently emphasized green strategies and perspectives such as the circular economy that could extend the lifecycle of existing football stadia. Bengtsson et al. (2018) argued that the circular economy, defined through specific actions and practices such as eco-design, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing (Nasr and Thurston, 2006), repair and product sharing (Chertow and Ehrenfeld, 2012), can contribute to reaching the social, economic, and environmental targets set forth by the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals.

As such, the following adopts a circular economy approach to examine and plan for future stadium or arena construction and their shadow stadia. It provides a brief overview of redevelopment trends that have emerged in cities challenged to solve blights created by vacant shadow stadia. By doing so, this perspective article highlights several areas of future investigation that should be considered and planned for when major league sports teams and city leaders move their team and build new facilities.

## SHADOW STADIA AND THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The circular economy (CE) approach has been gaining recognition and consideration from multinational companies (Lacy et al., 2014). There is also an increase in published research on the CE in both the natural and social sciences (Kirchherr and van Santen, 2019). Increased research on the subject over the last decade was arguably ignited by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation report in 2012 (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017) that called for a new economic model to address the proliferation of world-wide resource depletion (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012).

Broadly speaking, CE is an economic system whereby all types of waste are reduced through the continuous use of resources (Lacy et al., 2020). According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021), CE replaces the traditional Linear Economy that wastes materials once they have been used. CE is also based on the preservation and enhancement of natural capital, planning out waste, and lengthening the circulation of materials and products. CE is thereby defined through specific actions and practices such as eco-design, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacturing (Nasr and Thurston, 2006), repair and product sharing (Chertow and Ehrenfeld, 2012; Schröder et al., 2019).

From an urban development perspective, Corona et al. (2019) defined the concept of circular economy as a systematic approach to address and decrease urban sustainability issues through optimization of materials and energy. Kirchherr et al. (2017) explained CE as keeping energy and material flows within consumption and production by using long-lasting design, material and energy efficiency, by reusing and remanufacturing rather than recycling. Reusing can be defined as using a product

several times without changing the design or material, while remanufacturing explains how a used product is renovated or maintained to the same standard as the new or original product. Recycling is where a product is destroyed to be used for manufacturing new products (Glader, 2019).

The urban construction sector is among the most evident sectors that contribute to negative environmental impacts (Kucukvar and Tatari, 2012, 2013; Onat et al., 2014) and research has shown that CE concepts such as the adaptive repurposing of existing, abandoned, and historical buildings, is beneficial for the environment and neighborhood revitalization (Bullen and Love, 2010; Baker et al., 2017; Foster, 2020). Drawing from concepts such as adaptive reuse and maintenance architecture, Wergeland and Hognestad (2021) concluded football (soccer) stadia have potential for circularity if the broader sports community becomes more willing to preserve architectural legacy. To do so, they argued further investment in stadium restoration is required to limit demolition of historic stadia, while legislative changes are necessary to make it easier to modify existing sports venues.

There are few studies that analyze circular approaches to sport stadia. Al-Hamrani et al. (2021) contributed to the first economic impact study of a circular application in the construction of Education City, a stadium built for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. Rather than using a conventional concrete casting approach for the foundation of the new stadium, a cyclopean concrete methodology was employed, using a low-cost alternative material from existing waste products. The results of an environmental life cycle assessment found a 32% reduction in greenhouse gases. Meanwhile, Kucukvar et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive analysis on Ras Abu Aboud (RAA), a reusable stadium for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, made out of modular shipping containers that can be dismantled and relocated after the event. The authors discussed how the social sustainability aspects of the circular economy can have a post-event legacy, suggesting that a circular design can save up to 60% of human health impacts and decrease dependency on imported construction materials. Nonetheless, more empirical research is necessary so local governments, the development industry, policy makers, community advocates, and academics understand the environmental implications of shadow stadia and the benefits of the CE. This research could better inform the process and assessment of new stadium development so as to meet SDGs 11 and 12.

## REDEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN SHADOW STADIA

Shadow stadia are the facilities that remain when sports franchises abandon them for new ones. For this study, information on stadia and arenas home to professional hockey, basketball, football, soccer, rugby, or cricket teams over the last 110 years around the world was collected and analyzed to address how cities address their shadow stadia. Olympic venues, motor-specific tracks, war purpose venues, or renovated structures were excluded from the analysis. Primary sources included press releases, council reports, first-hand accounts, legal documents, sports league Bylaws and Constitutions, magazines,

newsletters, blogs, and data collected from Google Maps regarding the shadow stadia's recent physical state. The analysis also included academic studies, articles from major newspapers, and periodicals for secondary information on development trends. Through the analysis, 283 shadow stadia across 22 countries were found and collated. The redevelopment plans for shadow stadia were categorized in seven ways, including: *mixed-use redevelopment*, *grocery/retail*, *residential*, *replacement stadia*, and *infrastructure on the existing site*, *community facilities*, *site vacancies*, and *other*. Each category is described in more detail while including future circularity imaginaries for shadow stadia site redevelopment planning. **Table 1** illustrates this categorization in detail.

### Mixed-Used

Mixed-use redevelopment plans comprised of a combination of residential, retail, entertainment, and community recreation/green space have become increasingly favorable options for cities. Of the shadow stadia examined worldwide, 36 of those sites' repurposing plans included some application of mixed-use development strategy. While the mixed-use redevelopment has occurred with less frequency than other categories noted in these results, twelve countries are represented. One way these sites can integrate CE features is to use the materials from the demolition of the old facility, for example the bricks and other materials from the original site could be used in the new design. Not only can this support circularity, but an added benefit is it can contribute to the urban landscape and retain the city aesthetic.

### Grocery/Retail

Forty-two stadia were found to have involved a partnership with or received funding from a major grocery/retail chain as a part of the redevelopment of the site. This funding supported the relocation of the team, the construction of the new site, or both. Most redevelopment plans anchored by grocery chains have been concentrated primarily in the United Kingdom. One way to incorporate elements of circularity into a grocery/retail redevelopment site is to repurpose the original building or arena, rather than demolishing it. However, this requires the original building to be intact so that it can be efficiently refurbished. For future sport stadia construction projects, new facilities should be designed and built with the consideration of refurbishment, so that decades later a circular approach can be employed.

### Residential Development

A larger proportion of sites surveyed are categorized as residential developments, where seventy-nine sites which were repurposed for housing, whether it be apartment-style condominium towers, row housing, or community housing for low-income residents or senior citizens. Residential site development can also be emboldened to use CE elements in their creative planning, like mixed used development sites previously discussed. For example, the cement from the original sports facility can be remanufactured and incorporated into the foundation of the residential development site.

**TABLE 1** | Redevelopment trends in shadow stadia.

Country	Categories						
	Mixed-use	Grocery/retail	Residential	Use of existing land	Non-profit organizations	Vacant sites	Other
Argentina		1					
Australia	1		3				
Austria	1		1				
Belgium						1	
Canada	2	1		1	1		1
England	9	15	44	1	5	7	7
France						1	
Germany	2		4			2	
Ireland			3		1	1	
Italy						1	
Japan		3			2		
Netherlands	2		5		1		
New Zealand	1		1			2	
Northern Ireland		1					
People's Republic of China		2					
Scotland		4	3		1	2	
Slovakia	1					1	
South Korea	1						
Spain	1	1	4		1		2
Switzerland						3	
United States of America	14	14	9	18	36	10	17
Wales	1		2				
Total	36	42	79	20	48	31	27

## Use of Existing Land

Many municipalities and franchise owners choose to rebuild an expanded modernized facility on the pre-existing site, or on an adjacent piece of land. Twenty stadia were either being built on an adjacent piece of land while the existing site was then converted into parking or other infrastructure facilities, or the existing stadium was demolished and the new stadium rebuilt on the site while its team found a temporary home during construction. One reason for this is often attributed to a lack of space large or central enough to accommodate a new stadium in an already dense urban area. Reusing the existing land may have circularity elements already associated with this redevelopment trend, although this does not determine whether there are other negative environmental impacts associated with the reuse of land, such as increased traffic congestion. This may occur due to lack of public consultation on changes to natural green spaces and existing/adjacent site redevelopment planning.

## Non-profit Organizations

Non-profit and charitable organizations have also benefitted from shadow stadia redevelopment opportunities. Forty-eight sites reviewed are categorized as having been transformed into public parks or community recreation areas, high school or post-secondary facilities, or donated to non-profit or charitable organizations. CE can be incorporated in this trend. For example, with reconfiguration, some outdoor stadia once used

for professional football and baseball can be reused to hold local youth sport competitions.

## Vacant Sites

Thirty-one redevelopment projects experienced periods of vacancy that resulted in underutilized spaces, often in dense urban areas. These represent overlooked opportunities for tax revenue generation, and often require the support of social and emergency responder services to deal with human and infrastructure-related encounters. Often, vacant shadow stadia are a temporary situation; however, many stadia have experienced longer durations of uncertainty while negotiations took place between municipal government, lawyers, and community groups. The temporality of vacant sites may not advance the CE approach. Whether it is boarded-up stadia or unoccupied land after original buildings are demolished; vacant shadow stadia illustrate poor planning that may have negative social, economic, and environmental impacts on the nearby community.

## Other

Not all sites compiled fit into categories summarized above. Twenty-seven sites were converted into the following: commercial buildings, corporate headquarters, industrial yards, government buildings, public or private hospitals, major roadways, military barracks, hospitals, parking lots, or storage facilities.



In classifying shadow stadia and providing additional clarity regarding the complex challenges posed by shadow stadia, this perspective article has identified a subsequent circularity action to be facilitated by urban redevelopment stakeholders both internal and external to the sport industry. This will be discussed in more detail below.

## DISCUSSION

This article sought to classify redevelopment trends that have emerged from cities challenged to solve blights created by vacant shadow stadia. The classification discussed above is an important first step in understanding, defining, and explaining the types of shadow stadia that exist worldwide. In doing so, it provides context for discussing and providing potential ways forward for the complex environmental challenges posed by shadow stadia.

This paper highlights several areas that necessitate future investigation and could be the basis for future research and action. First, we reiterate the recommendation from Rosentraub (2009) that in stadium or arena anchored urban redevelopment, planning must be large in scale and purposeful, with a combination of both public and private funding and input, as opposed to an expectation that an urban area requiring revitalization will occur over time organically. Rosentraub's (2009) recommendation also extends to environmental sustainability—it must include strategic planning for long term successful outcomes.

Second, reusing materials from demolition in the redevelopment plans of shadow stadia is vital to reduce the environmental impact of construction and building materials being wasted. As such, the stadium or arena anchored urban redevelopment industry should adopt a circular economy approach when permitted. Decisions on planning for the repurposing of old arenas and stadia must be done prior to a professional sport franchise moving locations, and the city must be facilitating and driving this dialogue and planning. Furthermore, sport franchises, their owners, and master developers must be held financially accountable for any failed shadow stadia redevelopment plans and potential environmental risks.

Third, we propose a modified circular economy approach be considered, whereby race, class, culture, and gender intersect with the environmental impacts of where people live, work and play. To do so, an environmental justice lens may be useful as a problem-framing tool to diagnose what the problems are

and who is responsible for them, so a process of change can be established (Walker, 2012). One way this can be accomplished is by way of participation, where community members have access to the decision-making processes of local politicians and urban planners, through open dialogue and the opportunity for consultation (Schlosberg, 2007).

Fourth, an intersectional environmental lens that incorporates non-Western and Indigenous circularity discourses about sustaining or restoring natural life cycles (Friant et al., 2020) may be appropriate in differing global and local contexts. As such, lived experiences of residents may be gathered to examine potential concerns such as rising real estate prices, taxes, and gentrification in the surrounding neighborhood, since the “circularity discourse is not universal” (Wuyts and Marin, 2022, p. 11).

Fifth, we highlight the other potential environmental impacts that are created or maintained by using a CE approach. For example, the location of a shadow site could lead to a reduction in carbon emissions with new development and use of the site. For example, many of these shadow stadia are located on public transportation grids already, so when the site is being redeveloped the existing transit system could be incorporated into the new design, and ultimately lead to shorter commutes and decreased pollution, especially where new housing and density is created.

In conclusion, this article aimed to fill a gap in the literature by defining and examining shadow stadia; in doing we argue that circularity should be seriously considered and incorporated into planning when shadow stadia are left behind. To better understand the environmental and quality of life impacts of the communities living nearby shadow stadia, we recommend the approach of the circular economy should be explored in future research using the exemplars mentioned above.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

LH collected and analyzed the data. TB and DM wrote the article. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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# The Legacy of Sport Events for Emerging Nations

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Large-scale and mega sport events (SMEs), such as Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups, have been more frequently hosted in emerging nations. Bidding and hosting SMEs is considered an object of policy for many emerging nations, with SMEs viewed as key factors in local and national development strategies. This has largely been driven by the assumption that their legacy provides solutions to economic, social, cultural, or political challenges. A variety of legacies have predominated the literature over the past two decades, however it is proposed that there is a difference in the types of legacies anticipated or realized within emerging nations. This exploratory study therefore aimed to determine the types of legacies anticipated or realized by emerging nations as a result of hosting sport events, and to determine if these differ from those of established nations. A systematic literature review followed the PRISMA approach to identify and select peer-reviewed articles that focused on legacies from major and mega-events hosted in emerging nations. A set of 97 publications were analyzed qualitatively to reveal the key legacy themes. The findings confirm legacy as a growing body of knowledge in emerging nations, aligned with increasing event hosting. The findings reveal insights on the extent of literature on this topic in emerging nations, including the major nations, events, authors and publications represented. While the paper cannot determine unique legacies for emerging nations, it identifies key legacy focus areas for these nations, primarily: social development; politics, soft-power and sport-for-peace; the economics of tourism, image and branding; infrastructure and urban development; and sport development. This paper proposes a conceptualization of key legacy areas for emerging nations and proposes future research themes. The paper is unique in its highlighting of the significance of legacy outcomes for emerging nations from the hosting of sport mega-events. It therefore contributes to a more nuanced understanding of and imperative for legacy from sport events globally.

**Keywords:** sport events, legacy, emerging nations, mega-events, FIFA World Cup, Olympic Games

## INTRODUCTION

The devolution of wealth and power from the major developed countries to the fast-developing countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South America has been one of the most significant outcomes of the twentieth century (Grix et al., 2019). The rapid expansion of most emerging economies is a distinguishing feature of these countries. Because they have modeled or been influenced by the many commercial sport successes of the established economies in North America

and Europe, increased globalization has opened up new opportunities for sport leagues, teams, and manufacturers in emerging markets. This is especially true for sports leagues, teams, and manufacturers in emerging markets. In particular, the increased bidding for and hosting of large sporting events in emerging markets is a prominent manifestation of this. In a number of developing countries, signature or sport mega events (SME) have emerged as important components of local and national development agendas. Host cities are seeing increased tourism, local investment, and employment as a result of hosting these events, however the likelihood of truly lasting legacies is uncertain.

Emerging nations are those countries that are making investments in more productive infrastructure and human capital. They are moving away from their conventional economies, which have been based on agriculture and raw material exports. As a result, they are rapidly industrializing and transitioning to a free market or mixed economy (Morgan Stanley Capital International, 2021). The majority of emerging-market leaders aspire to improve the overall standard of living for their citizens in their countries (Tinaz and Knott, 2021). The Morgan Stanley Capital International Emerging Markets Index (Morgan Stanley Capital International, 2022) currently includes data from 24 different nations, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. These countries have similar indicators regarding sustainable economic growth, monetary policy and the maintenance of price stability, fiscal discipline, the state of the debt and trade, and the current accounts' balance.

The majority of these countries have confronted challenges that are vastly different from those faced by the established western states. Aside from the prevalent challenges of social and economic underdevelopment, several of these countries have recently witnessed political and ideological regime changes and worldwide isolation due to their political standing. Over the past several years, we have seen a shift in the sports sector, particularly in hosting sporting events, away from the rich western countries toward the developing world.

The globalization of the sports business has resulted in enhanced benefits and broader prospects for the industries of emerging nations (Tinaz and Knott, 2021). The use of sport as a vehicle to achieve social, economic, cultural, political, technological, and environmental objectives by decision-makers or investors is undeniably widespread throughout the world's emerging markets. The countries also acquire international recognition as a result of their sports-related efforts. Most emerging nations recognize sport's benefits for social and economic development. Attempts are being made by both the public and corporate sectors to harness the athletic potential in various forms to develop and promote their respective societies and stimulate their respective economies. As a result, politicians, event organizers, and other influential stakeholders seek legacy outcomes from SMEs (Brittain et al., 2017).

In the past two decades, interest in sport event legacies has grown exponentially. Thomson et al. (2019) noted that since

2012, there has been a considerable growth in the amount of literature on large-scale sport event legacy in the sports and event management fields. Yet, a relatively small number of systematic reviews or syntheses of sport event legacy research have been published (Thomson et al., 2019).

Historically, the academic study of legacy has been predicated on the notion that it can be used to address economic and social problems as well as cultural, historical, and political challenges (Byers et al., 2020), which makes it particularly appealing to developing countries' development aspirations. In the literature, there are many distinct types of legacies that have predominated, including economic; social; cultural; environmental; health; sports participation; infrastructure; politics; tourism/destination branding; and security (Byers et al., 2020). It is difficult to assess the legacy of a person or organization due to the fact that it is a "complex, fluid, and contentious term that is likely to be realized differently" across a variety of situations based on socio-economic and political aspects (Brownill et al., 2013).

In several cases, there is evidence of a difference in legacy realization or objectives between developing and developed countries. Grix et al. (2019), for example, draw attention to the political legacy of SMEs, claiming that they have evolved into the ideal soft power project for emerging economies. According to Heslop et al. (2013), SME is "a fast-track to world recognition and reputation development" for rising countries, and this is supported by both the political and tourism/destination branding legacies (p. 13).

Consequently, the purpose of this research article is to provide answers to the following questions: What types of legacies do emerging nations anticipate to realize as a result of hosting SME? and Do the legacy expectations of emerging countries differ from those of established nations?

## SPORT EVENTS AND THEIR LEGACIES

Sport events take place on a variety of levels or scales, with the "mega-event" the largest of these. Legacy has emerged as an important consideration in the development of SMEs (Spracklen, 2012), even if there has been a greater recognition of unintended repercussions (Cornelissen et al., 2011). Beyond the immediate benefits of sporting mega-events, many increasingly propose a longer-term focus on building legacies from such events (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Chappelet, 2012), with legacy being of either a planned or unplanned character (Cornelissen et al., 2011). Cornelissen et al. (2011) emphasized the necessity of understanding and assessing the legacies of sporting mega-events.

The legacy of major sport events has risen in relevance in recent years, garnering attention from both academics and practitioners alike (Preuss, 2019). The growing interest in examining the legacy of SMEs has to a large extent replaced the debate on mega-event impacts (Grix, 2012; Graeff et al., 2021). The notion of "legacy" is considered "multi-faceted and far-reaching" (Chappelet, 2012). Preuss (2007) devised a legacy cube with three dimensions: the past, the present, and the future. The paper pointed out that legacies can be deliberate or unexpected,



as well as positive or negative, and that both are possible. It also distinguished “soft” legacies, such as incorporeal or psychic communal benefits, from “hard” legacies, such as infrastructure. This led to the formulation of the most widely accepted definition of sport event legacy as:

“... all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, concrete and intangible structures generated for and by a sporting event that last longer than the event itself, regardless of the time and space in which they were created.” (p. 211).

Although there is some agreement on the definition of legacy, what it entails, and how it should be conceptualized, there is still disagreement on how it should be measured (VanWynsberghe, 2016), with Preuss (2007) advocating the importance of future research attempting to develop more generic approaches and methodologies in order to address this.

It is because of this inability to measure legacy with any precision that some authors have urged a shift in emphasis to a more “systematic and purposeful” approach, referred to as “leveraging” (Grix, 2012). Leveraging refers to short-term operations carried out by event hosts, as well as long-term activities carried out before and after the event, in order to realize aims or planned legacies.

In the past decade, there has been increased criticism of the negative potential from hosting a mega-event. Critical questions and concerns have been expressed concerning the expanding expense, feasibility, long-term legacy, and repercussions of SMEs (Byers et al., 2021). Preuss (2019) explained that the costs of hosting and debate over a host government’s expenditure of public funds, has made corruption a real possibility. This, together with corruption allegations linked to the FIFA and International Olympic Committee (IOC) hosting selections, has led to increased public and media scrutiny of the benefits of SMEs for the host. In response, the IOC established the Sustainability and Legacy Commission in 2015, responsible for consulting with, coordinating with, and monitoring the legacy of the Olympic Games (International Olympic Committee, 2017). Candidate cities are now required to track their legacy for several years after the Olympic Games as part of their host city contract (International Olympic Committee, 2017).

Although event impact studies have traditionally concentrated on visible or “hard” outcomes such as economic growth, infrastructure development, and tourism promotion, less tangible outcomes such as advantages to a country’s image and identity are gradually being recognized. Similarly, there has been an increasing recognition of social legacies. Minnaert (2012) asserted that social legacies might occur at the personal level, such as health benefits and skill acquisition or at the community level, such as improved links and cooperation between community members, particularly from different backgrounds. Ma and Kaplanidou (2017) emphasized the time dimension of social legacies and explained how they could manifest themselves before, during, and after a particular event.

The literature reveals a wide variety of different types or categories of legacies that could result from sport events.

Chappelet and Junod (2006) compiled these into five types or themes, as follows:

- Sporting legacy: e.g., sporting facilities and related infrastructure upgrades; and an increase in sport participation, support and sponsorship.
- Urban legacy: e.g., changes made to the urban structure of the host city as well as the development of new urban districts and specialized areas.
- Infrastructural legacy: e.g., networks, ranging from transport to telecommunications, which are renovated or developed for a mega-event; access routes by air, water, road or rail; and the modernization of basic services, such as water, electricity and waste treatment.
- Economic legacy: e.g., changes in the number of permanent jobs created and changes in the unemployment rate; economic investment opportunities; foreign investment attraction; and small business development/ entrepreneurship; the increase in tourists to a host region that stimulates the local economy.
- Social legacy: e.g., nation building and contribution to national pride; changed perceptions of residents; education; racial harmony; and environmental awareness.

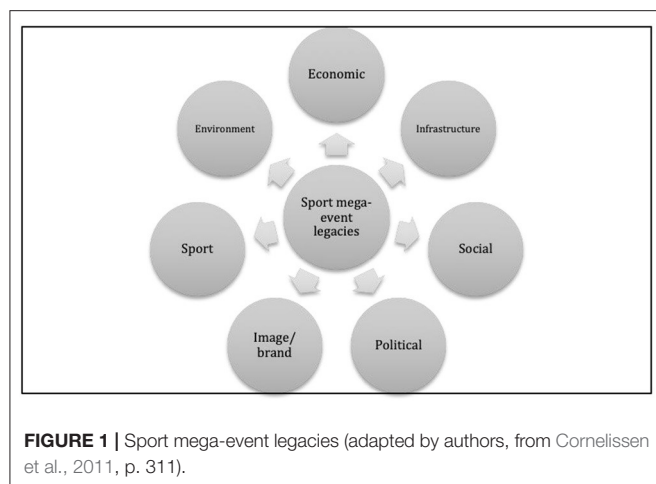
Cornelissen et al. (2011) added three more legacies to this set, namely:

- Environmental legacy: e.g., reducing carbon footprint; integrating greening principles; and climate-responsiveness.
- Political legacy: e.g., the promotion of democracy, human rights and improved governance; enhancement of capacity within the public sector; improvements in skills and human resources capital in public and private sectors; interventions by government or non-government organizations.
- Image/ branding legacy: e.g., destination-profiling; host-region exposure; setting or changing the image of a host destination; changes in tourist image and reputation; and brand marketing for a host region.

**Figure 1** illustrates these different aspects of legacy. Adapted from Cornelissen et al. (2011), it uses the five aspects of Chappelet and Junod (Chappelet and Junod, 2006), but combines urban legacy with infrastructure, and adds the additional three elements discussed above.

According to Preuss (2015), the five most frequently mentioned legacy areas are economics (including infrastructure), social, sport, and culture. Grix et al. (2017) added to this list: urban regeneration, national pride/ feel-good factor, increased involvement and participation in physical activity, international reputation and ‘soft power’. Increasingly, attention is being paid to the possibility that sporting events and their legacies could serve as a platform to address global concerns and effect social change (Byers et al., 2021). For example, the United Nations (UN) has highlighted the significant role that sport plays in promoting the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Preuss (2007) noted the following three issues that create challenges in developing a standardized legacy measurement approach:



- The same event creates different legacies if staged twice in one city/ nation: Both the events and the cities/ nations staging them are continuously developing such that the event has different requirements at a later stage of hosting and the host city/ nation has different environmental factors to consider (e.g., FIFA Football World Cup in Germany hosted in 1974 in comparison to 2006).
- Different events create different legacies if staged in the same city/ nation: Differing infrastructural requirements, social interests, media exposure, and location requirements result in a unique legacy. For example, Rio de Janeiro hosted both a FIFA World Cup in 2014 and an Olympic Games in 2016. Yet, the legacies attributed to these events differ substantially.
- The same event creates different legacies in different cities/ nations: This may be a result of a number of factors, including different infrastructure of the cities/ nations and the political targets pursued for the event. For example, a FIFA Football World Cup held in Germany in 2006 may yield very different legacies compared to the same event held in South Africa in 2010.

These challenges led the writers to propose that perhaps emerging nations may produce legacies or at least aim to produce legacies more akin to each other than from more developed nations.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research aimed to draw attention to the subtle nuances and distinct variations in the sport event legacy discourse among emerging nations by obtaining research findings from peer-reviewed, academic journal-based literature. As a means of accomplishing this, the authors conducted a systematic qualitative review of scholarly articles that empirically investigate the legacies of sporting events hosted by emerging nations and that have been published within the last 20 years (between 2002 and 2022). Literature reviews, particularly for emerging topics, are becoming increasingly accepted as worthwhile research endeavors in the social sciences field (Pickering and Byrne, 2014). Although there has been some research into event legacy

literature in emerging nations, there has been no systematic review of this literature to date. According to Thomson et al. (2020), researchers in event legacy studies are disproportionately concentrated in Western countries, and legacy research has been disproportionately biased in terms of geography.

This study was structured following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines for conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Liberati et al., 2009). An official protocol for the electronic search was devised, which was limited to sources in the English language. The research topic guided the selection of databases, as did the likelihood of those databases to hold articles of relevance to the study. Articles were searched for using the following databases: SCOPUS, SPORTDiscus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Business Source Complete (EBSCO), Science Direct (Elsevier), and Emerald. We used the phrases “sport event” and “legacy” to search for full-text, peer-reviewed academic journal papers published between 2000 and 2022. The starting date of 2000 was chosen as it symbolizes the period when conceptual development and debate surrounding sport event legacy intensified (Thomson et al., 2019). The computerized search produced 270 sources; once duplicates throughout the database were removed, a manual screening of these sources was conducted to select only the papers that referred to emerging nations. The final number of sources selected was 96.

The sources were captured in an Excel spreadsheet, with the following bibliographic details captured from each source: title; authors; 1<sup>st</sup> author nationality; journal; year; event focus; country focus; and keywords. A quantitative analysis of the bibliographic data was conducted using descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies), with matrices, tables or graphs produced to reflect the key findings.

A manual, qualitative assessment was conducted in order to determine the legacy focus of each article. The seven legacy types proposed by Cornelissen et al. (2011) were used as the legacy categories. The authors assigned the legacy focus, and in some cases a secondary legacy focus, after reviewing the title, keywords and abstract of each source. This review process also helped to eliminate any papers that did not fit the ambit of this investigation, such as articles focused only on theoretical constructs of legacy, rather than relating to an event or emerging nation context.

Once the legacy focus was assigned, a further, deeper analysis of the sources was conducted, combining the bibliographic findings, to allow for the discovery of key legacy themes from the sources. The findings are detailed in the following section, with the deeper analysis forming the basis of the discussion that follows.

## FINDINGS

The section above indicated that a final sample of 97 peer-reviewed articles on sport event legacy in emerging nations, published between 2000 and 2022, were included in the systematic literature review. This section sets out the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of these articles in terms of: (1) bibliographic details; and (2) types of legacy.

**TABLE 1 |** Event type.

	(n = 97)
FIFA World Cup	44
Olympic and paralympic games	25
Sport mega event (multiple)	10
UEFA EURO	5
Major event (multiple)	4
Commonwealth games	2
University olympiade	2
Asian games	1
European youth olympic games	1
Formula one	1
Pan-American games	1
Tour de Taiwan	1

**TABLE 2 |** Country focus.

	(n = 97)
South Africa	29
Brazil	26
Various	9
South Korea	8
Poland	5
Qatar	5
China	3
Russia	3
Taiwan	3
India	2
Turkey	2
Colombia	1
Greece	1

## Bibliographic Details

### Lead Researchers and Location of Universities

The nationalities of the first authors, according to their university affiliation, represented 22 different nations. Only 13 of these are emerging nations. The nations with the largest representation were: South Africa (24), UK (17) and Brazil (14). These three nations alone accounted for 57% of the articles. The first authors with the most papers were: Knott, B. (5 papers); Lee (2019) (4); Cornelissen, S. (3); Kim et al. (2006) (3); and Rocha, C. (3).

### Year of Publication and Journal

The Journals with the most articles were: Sustainability (6); Leisure Studies (5); and Development Southern Africa (4). The years of publication with the most articles were: 2019 (15); 2020 (11); 2021 (10) and 2015 (10) [see **Figure 2**]. Thirty-eight percent of articles were published between 2019 and 2021. Only 7% of articles were published before 2011.

**Table 1** also clearly shows the impact of the 2010 FIFA World Cup (South Africa), the 2014 FIFA World Cup (Brazil); and subsequent mega-sport events in the following years that were held in emerging nations, such as the 2016 Olympic Games (Brazil), 2018 Olympic Games (South Korea), and 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cups (Russia and Qatar respectively).

### Event Type and Country Focus

Sport mega-events dominated the focus of the papers, with FIFA World Cups (44) and Olympic Games (25) combining to account for 71% of the events featured. A further 10 articles covered more than one sport mega-event in the article. The remaining mega and major events that featured are listed in **Table 1**.

A total of 12 emerging nations were the focus of the papers reviewed. The countries most focused on were: South Africa (29), Brazil (26), South Korea (8), Poland (5) and Qatar (5). South Africa and Brazil clearly dominated the article count, accounting for 57% of the papers. A further nine articles featured a combination of emerging nations. The full list of nations featured is found in **Table 2**.

## Types of Legacy

### Keywords

An analysis of the keywords listed in each of the papers revealed the following most frequently listed keywords not surprisingly: sport mega event/ mega event (85), legacy (55), World Cup/ FIFA World Cup (53), Olympic Games (20). Among the keywords that indicated a legacy focus, the following featured most commonly: sport participation (5), sustainable development (5), stakeholders (5), nation branding (4), sport tourism (4), quality of life (3) and social impact (3). **Figure 3** displays a word cloud of the keywords. However, these represent very low numbers and indicate that most of the papers did not clearly specify a legacy focus within the keywords of the paper.

### Legacy Focus

The writers assessed the legacy focus of each paper by reviewing the article title and its keywords, followed by the article abstract. If the legacy focus was still not clear, the full paper was then consulted. The authors used the classification of legacy types as compiled by Cornelissen et al. (2011), namely: economic; environment; image/ brand; infrastructure; political; social; and sport. **Table 3** indicates the allocation of papers to the legacy types. Seven of the papers had a distinctive secondary legacy focus, so they were included in two categories.

As depicted in **Figure 4**, the papers were distributed as follows, from highest to lowest: social (31.7%); political (17.3%); economic (11.5%); infrastructure (11.5%); sport (10.6%); environment (8.7%); and image/ brand (8.7%).

These findings give an overall indication of the distribution of legacies from the papers reviewed. This distribution in itself does not reveal a unique legacy focus for emerging nations compared to the general legacy literature. However, the authors noted a few nuances within this distribution that may highlight key legacy focus areas for emerging nations. The following section discusses these nuances from the findings, providing deeper insights and meaning.

Year of publication (n=97)

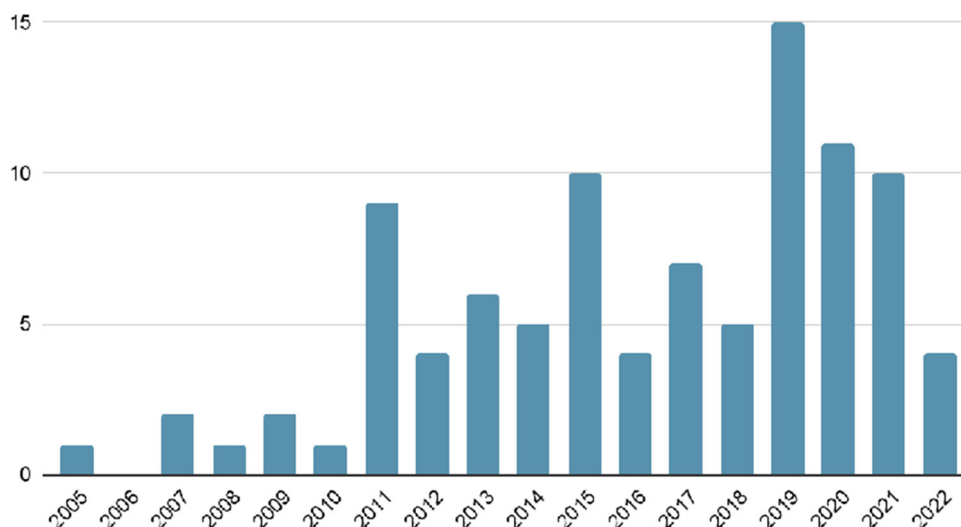


FIGURE 2 | Year of publication.



FIGURE 3 | Keywords.

## DISCUSSION

Although there are many similarities among emerging nations in terms of their socio-economic developmental status and challenges that they face, they also each face their own unique circumstances, priorities, policies and development agendas. Therefore, MSE legacy in these emerging nations must be

understood within the context of each nation's social and economic sphere, as well as its historic and political legacy. This section now integrates a discussion of the exploratory findings with selected evidence and examples from the papers reviewed. The five key legacy focus areas form the structure of this discussion.

### Social Development

While social legacy was clearly the major legacy type featured, the category was by no means uniform in its legacy focus. In its broadest uniformity, the papers largely related legacies for local residents and populations most impacted by an event. There was an indication that within this legacy type, a focus on wellbeing or quality of life of residents (e.g., Ma and Kaplanidou, 2017), which is not specifically related to sport participation, may become a growing legacy focus in future.

Within this categorization, there were multiple examples of negative legacies, with examples of negative social ills attributed to event hosting (e.g., human trafficking) or disruptions to communities through resettlement programmes (e.g., from Brazil's 2014 FIFA World Cup). However, these may not be unique to emerging nations only. The issue of human rights as a legacy outcome was mentioned in the context of social legacies, but only in a few papers (e.g., Graeff et al., 2021). This is perhaps surprising as a number of emerging nations have faced global media criticism surrounding human rights issues highlighted through the hosting of a sport event.

What does appear to be a more unique focus within this legacy type for emerging nations, is a focus on social development. Whether emerging from a colonial past (e.g., Brazil), a repressive regime (e.g., Poland), isolation and fragmentation (e.g., South Korea) or legislated racial and societal divisions (e.g., South



**TABLE 3 |** Legacy types.

Economic (incl. Tourism)	Antonio et al., 2011 Bondarik et al., 2020 Coakley and Souza, 2013 Duignan et al., 2022 Fourie et al., 2011 Gezici and Er, 2014 Kobierecki and Pierzgalski, 2022 Lee et al., 2013 Moyo et al., 2020 Rogerson, 2009 Tichaawa and Bob, 2015 Ziakas and Boukas, 2012
Environment (incl. sustainability)	Ermolaeva and Lind, 2021 Gulak-Lipka and Jagielski, 2020 Kim and Grix, 2021 Kim et al., 2006 Lee, 2019 Melo et al., 2014 Spanos et al., 2022 Talavera et al., 2019 Yoon and Wilson, 2019
Image/ brand	Allen et al., 2013 Hemmonsby and Tichaawa, 2018 Knott et al., 2013 Knott and Hemmonsby, 2015 Knott et al., 2015a Knott et al., 2016 Lee et al., 2005 Maiello and Pasquinelli, 2015 Swart et al., 2019
Infrastructure	Azzali, 2016 Azzali, 2019 Bason et al., 2015 Dendura, 2019 Gezici and Er, 2014 Kirby and Crabb, 2019 Lee, 2021 Lu and Lin, 2020 Malhado et al., 2013 Molloy and Chetty, 2015 Domareski Ruiz et al., 2019 Zawadzki, 2016
Political (Including security)	Black, 2007 Byun and Leopkey, 2020 Cornelissen, 2007 Cornelissen, 2011 Cornelissen, 2012 Curi et al., 2011 Dowse and Fletcher, 2018 Eisenhauer et al., 2014 Filho et al., 2018 Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010 Kobierecki and Pierzgalski, 2022 Majumdar, 2011 Ntloko and Swart, 2016 Pauschinger, 2020 Samatas, 2011 Sengupta, 2017 Wloch, 2020
Social	Al-Emadi et al., 2017 Al-Emadi et al., 2022 Azzali, 2016 Bob and Swart, 2011

(Continued)

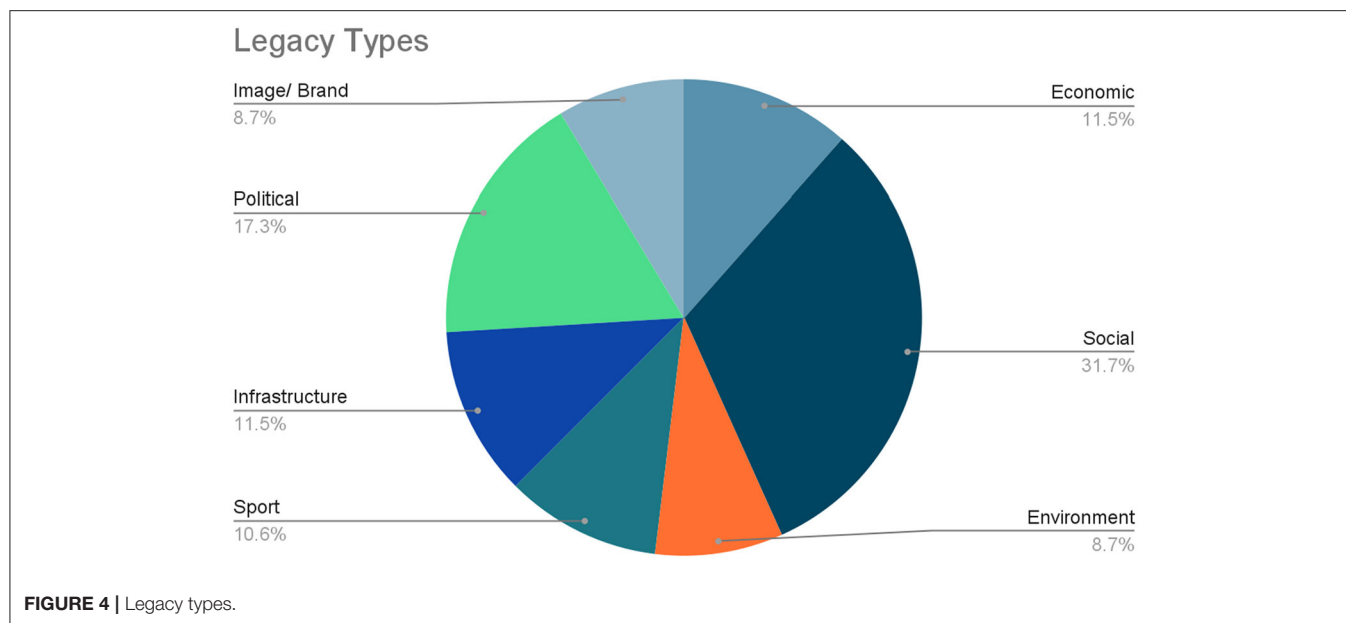
**TABLE 3 |** Continued

	Bob and Swart, 2009 De Lisio et al., 2019 Graeff et al., 2020, 2021 Gursoy et al., 2017 Jaskulowski and Surmiak, 2016 Knott et al., 2015b Kolmakov, 2021 Kossakowski, 2019 Koutrou and Berber, 2021 Lee et al., 2013 Liu, 2016 Ma and Kaplanidou, 2017a, Ma and Kaplanidou, 2017b Maharaj, 2015 Ntloko and Swart, 2016 Patreze et al., 2020 Pillay and Bass, 2008 Prouse, 2012 Rocha et al., 2017 Rocha, 2020 Sullivan, 2018 Talbot, 2021 Tichaawa and Bob, 2015 Vico et al., 2019 Waardenburg et al., 2015 Xing and Chalip, 2012 Zawadzki, 2016
Sport	Bek et al., 2019 Feng and Hong, 2013 Kim and Kaplanidou, 2019 dos Santos, 2019 Reis et al., 2014 Reis et al., 2021 Ribeiro et al., 2021 Rocha et al., 2021 Sousa-Mast et al., 2013 Swart et al., 2011 Wodniak, 2021

Africa), MSE have been embraced for their social unifying effect for many historically or currently divided populations. This is sometimes referred to as “nation-building.” Even with a focus on the future of MSE hosting, the legacy focus for Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup appears to be positive socio-cultural development initiatives (e.g., Al-Emadi et al., 2022).

## Politics, Soft-Power and Sport-for-Peace

A political legacy emerged as the second most common legacy type from the papers reviewed. It appears that emerging nations consistently expect mega-events to deliver on politically motivated aims. However, these aims can be divergent in their nature, from peace-related initiatives to global prestige and soft-power. For example, joint athlete participation in sport mega-events across the Korean peninsula has proved to be one of the sole means of bridging the divisions between the north and south, even normalizing relations to some extent. The international media narrative highlighted a unification story surrounding the Pyeongchang 2018 winter Olympic Games.



A different example, more akin to global prestige, is linked to Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup. An international communication strategy was employed by Qatar to emphasize the host nation's role in contributing to international aid, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding in the region (Al-Emadi et al., 2022). This may also have been an aim to counter the largely negative publicity surrounding the lead up to the event, relating to its bidding process and the rights of migrant workers involved in the mega-event construction projects.

Although the South African example of historic division is rather different and based on racial classification and economic inequality, SMEs such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup and the 2010 FIFA World Cup, left a legacy as both socially and politically unifying catalysts, even if more symbolic in their effect (Black, 2007). The majority of the papers published in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 FIFA World Cup reflected on the social, historical and political context of the event, emphasizing the legacy of the event in national identity formation and political symbolism for the host nation. The government's social transformation aim was also highlighted as a legacy priority in papers that focused on South Africa.

As mentioned previously, it is not always easy to isolate the legacy types. An example of a political legacy that impacted economic, social and sport legacies, is that of Brazil. In Brazil, there was an intentional political strategy behind its government bidding for and hosting serial sport mega-events for both political and economic benefits. The hosting of sport mega-events impacted public policies, funding, and communities in host cities. While this may have been beneficial to a few sport sectors, it negatively disadvantaged certain population groups. It had adverse outcomes for Brazil's more excluded communities, while temporary funding was mainly channeled toward elite sport (Graeff et al., 2020).

In some instances, sport events are accused of being politically motivated from the perspective of the sport federation.

Particularly in the case of SMEs, these global events could be seen as a means to promote globalization and a neoliberal legacy. Governance and the politics of development are particular issues affecting emerging nations. These aspects raise awareness of a more sinister side to the political legacies within emerging nations, mentioned particularly in the cases of Brazil's 2014 FIFA World Cup and Russia's 2014 winter Olympic Games.

A related theme under political legacy, according to the legacy model used, is security. Five papers reviewed were focused solely on investigating improved security, crime reduction, or security risk mitigations as a legacy. These were mostly focused on the events from Brazil and South Africa, but also various events among emerging nations. Also linked to political security, there was mention of negatively perceived legacies such as the pacification and militarisation of host populations (Prouse, 2012).

## The Economics of Tourism, Image and Branding

It is difficult to isolate different aspects of the economic legacy from sport events. While the model used in this study includes the tourism legacy as part of the economic legacy, others have preferred to separate these aspects. Furthermore, Byers et al. (2020) combined included destination branding as part of the tourism legacy. While the aim of this paper was not to define legacy types, it serves to highlight the connected nature of legacies.

Almost half of the economic legacy papers related specifically to a tourism legacy. Economic legacies reviewed were typically related to: economic growth; GDP increase; and small enterprise development. However, tourism-related economic legacies included: increased tourism budgets; new source markets; increased urban tourism; sport tourism development; improvements of travel services; and repeat visitation.

Although related as a distinct legacy type in the model used in this study, “image/ branding” (accounting for over 8% of publications reviewed) is closely related to tourism legacy. The case of South Africa’s hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup is preminent in its focus on this legacy, with seven (out of nine) papers focusing on nation branding as a legacy for South Africa from the 2010 mega-event. These papers indicated that the SME left a legacy of global branding gains for the host nation, providing a boost to its emerging status and aiding the development of its sport tourism industry (e.g., Knott et al., 2017).

Brazi, Poland and South Korea were also featured examples of image/ branding legacies for the host nation. For Poland, the hosting of the UEFA EURO 2012 was perceived as successfully showcasing the country’s “new face” internationally as it emerged from its communist legacy. The event is believed to have strengthened the Polish image among visitors and football fans and enhanced its international competitiveness (e.g., Włoch, 2020). Similarly, through its hosting of events such as the 2002 FIFA World Cup (and subsequently the 2018 winter Olympic Games), South Korea aimed to portray its “global” identity - highlighting its economic liberalization and global prestige (e.g., Lee et al., 2005).

## Infrastructure and Urban Development

Infrastructure legacy emerged as another contested legacy within the emerging nation context. A combination of positive and negative legacies were explored from a range of examples, including Brazil, Colombia, Poland, Qatar, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan and Turkey. A broad set of themes are explored within this legacy, such as: urban planning; event planning; local development; sustainable development; post-event occupancy/ usage; mega-project construction; architecture; mobility; liveable open spaces; and public facilities.

A key area for papers with a focus on infrastructure legacy was “sustainable development” (e.g., Gulak-Lipka and Jagielski, 2020). While large-scale infrastructure development has been a hallmark legacy for most sport mega-events globally, within emerging nations, these events have been more catalytic in nature. It appears that the sport events can play a central or focal role for broader development within the host nation. For example, UEFA EURO 2012 became a central point for many development projects in Poland, primarily relating to sport infrastructure development. However, in many instances, the infrastructure legacies reported were far beyond merely the sport infrastructure required to host the events. Public transport, urban development, housing and public facilities (including parks and recreational spaces) were all cited as examples.

There was a strong link between infrastructure legacy and environmental legacy, through the lense of sustainable development. While environmental legacy was the least of the legacy types featured in the analysis, the papers on this topic emphasized a legacy through sustainable events. They also highlighted the positive role the events can play in environmental communication and messaging.

## Sport Development

The key standout focus of a sport legacy was the focus on sport participation, which accounted for nearly half the papers. This does not appear to be unique to emerging nations, yet it is still a key legacy feature. Other legacy aspects related to: sport development; sport facility usage; sport involvement; corporate social responsibility; and support for future sport events.

However, it should be noted that it proved difficult to isolate the sports legacy. For example, some papers referred to sport-for-peace initiatives, although the focus was clearly aligned to political legacy. Furthermore, outcomes from these initiatives emphasized positive social legacies.

## CONCLUSION

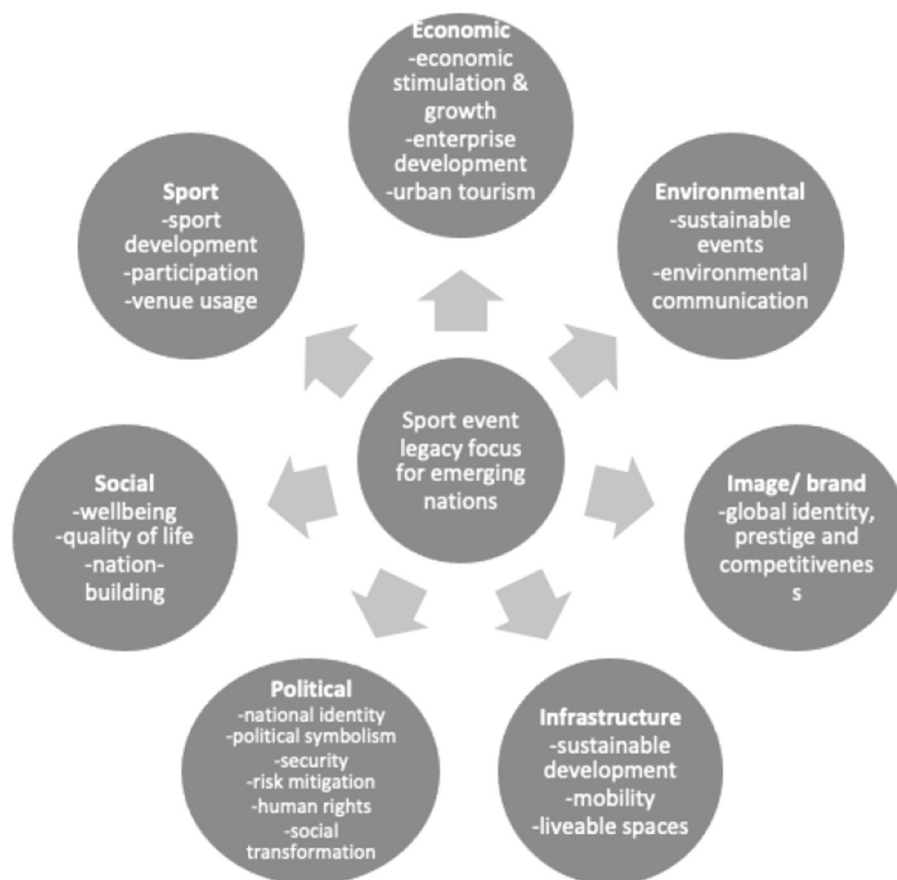
This paper set out to ascertain if there is a difference in the legacy focus within emerging nations, by reviewing all peer reviewed journal articles on this topic that focused on examples from emerging nations. While not proposing that these nations be considered as a singular entity, this paper has highlighted the similarities across the papers reviewed and has drawn attention to the most pertinent examples.

The findings certainly highlights the need for a more critical assessment of sport event legacies in emerging nations. While the paper has attempted to isolate legacy types according to accepted frameworks, the findings indicate that legacies can very seldom be separated from each other. Legacies are certainly inter-connected. While of some merit for identifying differences from established nations, the broader legacy types reviewed in this paper are perhaps too broad in order to reflect the key legacy issues of importance for emerging nations. A deeper, qualitative analysis of the papers revealed nuances in legacy aims and delivery that highlights the differences within emerging nations more clearly.

For example, this paper has revealed legacy focus areas that may be already or become the focus of event planning or legacy research in these nations. The list below (and depicted in **Figure 5**) indicates the authors’ summary of the key legacy focus areas for emerging nations at present and into the near future, namely:

- Economic legacy: economic stimulation and growth; enterprise development; and urban tourism.
- Environmental legacy: sustainable events; environmental communication.
- Image/ brand legacy: global identity, prestige and competitiveness.
- Infrastructure legacy: sustainable development; mobility; and liveable spaces.
- Political legacy: national identity formation; political symbolism; security; risk mitigation; human rights; and social transformation.
- Social legacy: wellbeing; quality of life; and nation-building.
- Sport legacy: sport development; participation; and venue usage.

The authors recommend that future legacy papers consider the paradoxes of development within underdevelopment among the



**FIGURE 5 |** Legacy focus for emerging nations.

emerging nations. For example, there is often little critique of apparent positive legacies such as investments in world-class sport facilities that cause exclusion and the redirection of investment from other means of development. The opportunity costs associated with these legacies certainly need to be considered. Another broader critique of the legacy studies in emerging nations is the consideration of the host population's approval of the event. Many of the emerging nations are countries where democracy is not entrenched or where citizens have less say in the selection of events and the decisions surrounding the legacy aims. Greater citizen partnership and inclusion is therefore encouraged in the setting of legacy agendas. This paper has therefore laid the groundwork for future publications that follow this exploratory review, that aim to

connect and examine the social fabric and underpinnings of these findings.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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# “It’s My Country I’m Playing for”—A Biographical Study on National Identity Development of Youth Elite Football Players With Migrant Background

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Sport represents a prominent topic for public and scientific debates on national identity. Looking at Germany, public discourses on national belonging have primarily focused on national elite football and on German-born international football players with Turkish background. Representing the biggest ethnic community in Germany and being highly represented in German youth elite football, athletes with Turkish background are prime examples for the complexity and ambiguity of identity formations in modern immigration countries in general and in youth elite football in particular. Current research has particularly focused on national identity formations of (youth) elite players with migrant background. However, there is a lack of studies that address the process of national identity development in youth elite sport. For that reason, the study aimed to explore stories of national identity development from the perspective of youth football players with Turkish background in German youth elite football. By conducting 10 expert interviews and biographical mappings, we identified specific types, strands, and trajectories of national identity development. Overall, we identified three types of narratives on national identity development: “going with the nomination(s),” “reconsidering national belonging,” and “adding up chances”. Our findings illustrate that national identity development in youth elite sport is particularly shaped by youth elite sport and the national team question. Hence, the stories indicate that international careers not necessarily foster national identification with a nation but can also reduce feelings of national belonging sustainably.

**Keywords:** national identity development, elite sport, narrative, national team, youth elite football, migrant background, identity work, mapping

## INTRODUCTION

Within the last decades sport has become a prominent topic for public and scientific debates on national identity. In sport research, the topic of *national identity* has mostly been linked with aspects of (post-)migration, particularism and (re)nationalization (Hargreaves, 2002; Wong and Trumper, 2002; Bruce and Wheaton, 2009; Topić and Coakley, 2010; Maguire, 2011; Bairner, 2015). While sport is defined as “a hugely important marker of national identity” (Bairner, 2015, p. 378), football is supposed to be “a key area in expressing national belonging” (Dóczi, 2011, p. 2).



Consequently, several studies aim to trace collective constructions of nationhood that are attached to or symbolized by national elite football (Maguire and Burrows, 2005; Wise, 2011; Griggs and Gibbons, 2014; Chiu, 2021). One of the main findings is that athletes are considered, at least in public perception, “representatives of the nation” and “iconic figures (...) in the international sporting arena” (McGee and Bairner, 2011, p. 439). Similarly, research on German elite football shows that the German male national football team serves as a symbol for collective constructions of national identity, for ethnic diversification, and for a “modern sense of national identity and a playful, non-threatening patriotism” (Merkel, 2014, p. 248).

Looking at Germany, public discourses on national belonging have primarily focused on German-born international players with Turkish background<sup>1</sup> who—with regard to their international career—had the option to choose between playing for Germany as their country of birth and Turkey as their ancestors’ country of origin. Knowing that the German Football Association (DFB) competes with the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) for German-born players with Turkish background on a junior level, it is obvious that these highly talented junior players are confronted with the question of which *nation* they want to play for within their international (junior) football career (Seiberth et al., 2017; Seiberth and Thiel, 2021).

Accordingly, athletes with Turkish background are highly interesting cases for migration research. This is not just because they represent the biggest ethnic immigration community in Germany but also because the Turkish community has a very special status in the German public. This status is closely linked with Germany’s immigration history and politics. When Turkish “guestworkers” started immigration to Germany in the course of the labor agreement in 1961, they were—in contrast to the guestworkers from Italy, Spain or Portugal—perceived as prime examples for cultural difference and religious otherness. In the 1970s, the public and media images of Turkish immigrants became increasingly negative. Since then, the Turkish community has often been labeled as a problem group in German public, media, politics, and science (Sökefeld, 2004; Thelen, 2016). While people with Turkish background are particularly confronted with disadvantages in some of the relevant fields of German society (Skrobanek, 2009; Kaas and Manger, 2012; Canan and Foroutan, 2016), they are, at the same time, highly represented in German (elite) football and in the various national junior squads of the German Football Association (DFB).

Interestingly, German-born international players with Turkish background seem to be under intense public scrutiny. Particularly, within the last years, there has been an ongoing debate about the question whether German internationals with Turkish background should be obliged to sing the national anthem in order to demonstrate their sense of belonging to and identification with Germany<sup>2</sup>. Besides, public debates have also focused on players with Turkish background who decided not to play for the DFB but for the TFF. These debates often assume a lack of national identification with Germany as the country of birth. Hence, media debates frequently revolve around the national team question and whether the choice of German-born players with Turkish background to play for Germany indeed symbolizes German national identity (Seiberth et al., 2018; van Campenhout and van Houtum, 2021).

Against this background, players with a Turkish background represent a typical *integration paradox*. On the one hand, the players become subjects of public debates on patriotism, notions of Germanness and national identification. On the other hand, national football teams of the DFB have become symbols for the ethnic diversification of German society and the chances that go along with transnational migration processes (Blecking, 2008; Meier and Leinwather, 2013; Merkel, 2014; Kaelberer, 2017). It is this paradox that makes German-born players with Turkish background an excellent subject of research for examining processes of national identity development in German immigration society.

Within academic research, athletes with migrant background and with bi-national references represent interesting case examples for interrelations between (post-)migration, national identity and elite sport. For example, Grainger’s study on New Zealand’s rugby team (Grainger, 2006), McGee and Bairner’s (2011) study on (Northern) Irish football and Seiberth et al. (2017) work on German youth elite football point to a fluidity of national identity indicating that practices of otherness, public notions of nationhood and athletes’ experiences during their international career can affect athletes’ constructions of national identity. On the one hand, this fluidity is closely related to what is called “sporting pragmatism” (McGee and Bairner, 2011, p. 442). Being nominated by a federal sport organization can have an impact on personal constructions of national identity just as having negative personal experiences with a national football association. On the other hand, the studies illustrate that experiences of othering and experiences of not feeling fully accepted as a member of a national group or a national team have the potential to irritate athletes’ national affiliations.

<sup>1</sup> According to the German Federal Statistical Office more than 26% of the German population currently has a migrant background (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). Although the distinction “migrant background” is frequently used in German administration, politics and migration research there is a critical debate in social sciences that relativizes the explanatory value of the term (Thiel and Seiberth, 2017). Having a migrant background means that a person “or at least one parent did not acquire German citizenship by birth” (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022). Among the population with migrant background, people with Turkish background represent the biggest ethnic community in Germany. At the same time, and curiously, it also represents a “particularly under-researched community” (Faas, 2009, p. 303).

<sup>2</sup> Evidently, these debates are associated with the political and social trend of growing nationalism, national isolationism and particularism. Particularly, the constitutional referendum of the Turkish president Erdogan in 2017 reinforced a controversial debate about (dual) citizenship, sense of belonging and national identification of people with Turkish background in the German public. This debate was re-launched in 2018 when some newspapers published photos showing the German international football player Mesut Özil familiarly signing a club jersey for the Turkish President Erdogan just before the FIFA-World Cup 2018 in Russia. These photos had significant consequences as they intensified the public debate on national identification of people with Turkish background and as they made Özil break with the DFB.

According to this line of research, (elite) sport can be considered as “a significant contributor to the formation and sustenance of national and other identities” (Bradley, 2006, p.1202).

While current research has significantly contributed to understanding national identity formations in the context of (youth) elite sport, most studies exclusively focus on individual's current state of national identity. Consequently, there is a lack of studies that adopt a processual perspective particularly addressing the process of national identity development in (German) youth elite sport from the athlete's perspective. This is even more surprising as junior athletes with migrant background represent prime examples for the complexity and ambiguity of “identity work” (Andersson, 2002) in modern immigration countries.

Assuming that national identity formations in elite sport are the provisional result of a process that implies developmental trajectories and takes place under specific conditions in elite sport, our article focuses on national identity *development* in German junior elite football. Intending to contribute to elite sport and migration research we ask how national identity develops in German-born youth international football players with Turkish background and how the national team question affects player's national identity development. For this purpose, 10 stories on national identity development of German-born youth international football players with Turkish background have been analyzed to reconstruct national identity development within the players' (international) career by analyzing players' narratives and mapped memories. Based on a reconstructive approach we used narrative analysis to identify specific types, strands and trajectories of national identity development in German youth elite football.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To identify types and strands of national identity development in German youth elite sport, we chose an *identity theoretical approach*. Although, identity theories have come up with various definitions, there is a broad consensus that identity is a diverse, dynamic and idiosyncratic construction of the self. Evidently, this construction is closely linked to the question of “how we perceive and define ourselves” (Turner, 2010, p. 16). In line with this conceptualization, we understand identity “as a subjective, constructed, and evolving story of how one came to be the person one currently is” (McLean and Syed, 2015, p. 320). In this sense, identities result from subjectively processing experiences, social contexts (such as youth elite sport) and cultural conditions. This process of exploring, reflecting and negotiating is assumed to be the condition for identity development. Although, childhood and adolescence are crucial developmental periods, identity is conceptualized as a life-span process. Generally, identity theories assume that this process is not fixed in an essentialistic way, but rather fragile, mutable, transitory, and constantly in progress (Schimank, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Hogg et al., 2004; Turner, 2010).

Therewith, identities are “signifiers of the self” (Ezzell, 2009, p. 111) that report on the current status of identity development. When intending to reconstruct this process of

identity development (and not just single formations of identity), it is therefore necessary to understand the individual story. For that reason, biographic approaches rely on stories as a source for reconstructing developmental processes. In current narrative approaches “personal narratives” are relational constructions by which a person positions him- or herself to what is called “master narratives” (McLean and Syed, 2015). While master narratives represent “culturally shared stories that tell us about a given culture, and provide guidance for how to be a ‘good’ member of a culture”, personal narratives in the form of stories “negotiate with and internalize these master narratives” (McLean and Syed, 2015, p. 320).

In this sense, identity is an “interactional accomplishment” (Cerulo, 1997, p. 387) that emerges from a “dialogical process through which we negotiate the implicit and/or explicit identity ascriptions we encounter in everyday life” (Andersson, 2002, p. 85). This process of “identity work” is supposed to be multidimensional as individuals permanently “work” on different components of the self. For that reason, (social) identity theories assume that “[p]eople have as many social identities and personal identities as there are groups that they feel they belong to or personal relationships they have” (Hogg et al., 2004, p. 252). *Social identity* is defined as “that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). One typical features of social identity is context dependency. Thus, “social identity is context dependent not only in terms of which social identity is salient but also in terms of what form the identity may take” (Hogg et al., 2004, p. 252). The concept of salience explains how different social identities relate to each other. It is assumed, that in any social context and in any situation, there is one specific social identity that takes the lead (Hogg et al., 2004). In this respect, however, it is noted that social identity “seems to be ‘switched on’ by certain situations in ways that we do not as yet fully understand” (Turner, 2010, p. 21).

Reconstructing national identity development means to focus on one specific component of social identity resulting from a sense of belonging to a nation. In this context, the nation state is supposed to be “one of the most important agents of identification” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p. 16). According to current research, *national identity* is based on a “shared sense of nation-hood grounded in the images and stories associated with an identifiable nation-state or longstanding ethnic population” (Topič and Coakley, 2010, p. 373/374). Typically, national identity comprises cognitive and emotional aspects of identification (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; David and Bar-Tal, 2009). Obviously, constructions of national identities are associated with “particularistic configurations of ethnic cores, myths and memories, religious beliefs, language, connections with territory, and political values” (Moran, 2011, p. 2155).

National identity development starts in (late) childhood and consolidates in adolescence. For youths and adolescents with migrant background, national identity development turns out to be a complex developmental task. This is because it is closely linked to the exploration of a person's ethnic origin and his

or her affiliations with the ancestors' country of origin and the own country of birth. Consequently, national identity results from subjectively exploring these relations and positioning oneself toward national groups (Phinney, 1992; Berry et al., 2006; Barrett, 2013). This process of exploration is assumed to be highly individual, dynamic and not predictable, which can also be seen within German migration research. Immigrants (of Turkish origin) and immigrant descendants with Turkish background in particular, often develop hybrid identities, which can imply strong feelings of belonging to both countries at the same time. These mixed and highly individualized identity formations represent typical phenomena of modern immigration societies—such as Germany (Faas, 2009; Wippermann and Flaig, 2009; Foroutan, 2013).

Knowing that national identity is context dependent and being “switched on” by certain situations, it must be considered that (youth) elite sport represents a social context providing specific conditions and constellations for (national) identity development. One reason for this is, that youth elite sport requires an extreme form of inclusion. This “hyperinclusion” (Göbel and Schmidt, 1998, p. 111) results from an extraordinary level of obligations linked to elite sport. Being socialized into elite sport, young athletes tend to integrate elite sports contextual logic prominently into their self-concept. This is particularly evident in German junior elite football. As competition is very high due to a large number of young talented players, players are expected to invest huge personal and time resources into football to increase the likelihood to succeed. The increasing internalization of master narratives of elite sport (such as having to subordinate all aspects of their lives to sports) lead (young) athletes into an “identity tunnel” (Curry, 1993, p. 289). Having entered this “tunnel”, *athlete identity* often becomes the dominant self-concept of (young) athletes with a potentially sustainable impact on sport-related decisions such as the national team question (Schubring and Thiel, 2014; Seiberth et al., 2017).

A second reason why (youth) elite sport provides specific conditions for social identity development is its attachment to the concept of nation. Elite sport in general and youth elite football in particular is organized in national units and promoted by national football associations that compete with each other on the level of national teams. For example, being included into German youth elite football means to participate in the Talent Development Program of the German Football Association (DFB). Typically, these players train in and play for German Youth Performance Centers (YPC)—usually on the highest national level of competition. Playing for a German club usually also means that players are recruited for DFB state teams before they become international players. Generally, national talent promotion is always aiming to produce international players who represent their nation, nation-state or national football association. At the same time, becoming an international player is one of the highest achievements in (youth) elite sport. For players with migrant background this constellation not just includes a major challenge on the level of decision making but can also initiate a process of reflecting and “reworking” one's national identity. Generally, it can be assumed: “Through the life course, people extend, personalize, and revise their national

identities as they connect themselves to stories told across multiple institutional spheres, including family, religion, politics, education, science, economics, and sport” (Topič and Coakley, 2010, p. 374).

While personal constructions and narratives of national identity are typically not public but rather private, they become an object of public interest when athletes with migrant background have to choose between two nations, which oftentimes becomes part of public and media debates. These public and media debates might provide master narratives that are received and processed by young athletes with a migrant background. Typically, within these debates the issue of national identity is linked to moral assessments such as “player eligibility” (Hassan et al., 2009). Therewith, the national team question turns out to function as a public visualizer of national identity. At the same time, it points to the relevance of media debates for the process of “encouraging the ‘imagined communities’ of nations” (Ward, 2009, p. 527).

In German media debates, the choice of a national team has been instrumentalized as a question of emotional identification with the country of birth claiming national identity to be a major predictor for the players' choice. Furthermore, the public debates on German-born internationals with Turkish background often imply a low emotional identification with German society and “a virulent Turkish nationalism which finds its level of identification precisely in football” (Blecking, 2008, p. 965)<sup>3</sup>. We assume that players with migrant background take note of these debates and potentially integrate them in their self-concept.

We conclude that *national identity development* in elite sport takes place under very specific conditions in which sport specific narratives, public and media narratives, and broader sociocultural narratives must be reconciled. Under these conditions, ‘identity work’ in general and ‘national identity work’ in particular become very challenging for adolescent athletes with Turkish background. However, the national team question, the experiences during national training camps or international games, conversations with national coaches or representants of the national football associations can also represent special occasions to productively deal with personal and public constructions of national identification.

In order to reconstruct individual processes of national identity development in German junior elite football, research relies on stories in which changes, transitions, and switches on the level of national identification are linked with biographical experiences, career events, and contextual conditions. Life and career events, situations, and personal experiences are all assembled within the story plot that can provide insights into the storytellers' perspectives on the subject. The individual stories can also reflect broader narratives on national identity and the

<sup>3</sup>The media debate on Mesut Özil is an excellent example for this. Although, Mesut Özil opted to play for Germany during his career and despite the fact that he justified his decision several times by referring to his cognitive and emotional identification with Germany as his country of birth and his home country, he got in the center of a media debate criticizing some German internationals with migrant background for not singing the national anthem before the start of international games (Seiberth et al., 2017; Seiberth et al., 2018).

national team question (cf. Smith and Sparkes, 2009; McLean and Syed, 2015).

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study is based on a *narrative research approach* combining guided expert interviews and biographical mappings comprising 10 case studies with male German-born international football players with Turkish background aged 15–21. Overall, our research is informed by an interpretative paradigm highlighting the multiple and subjective nature of reality (Poucher et al., 2020). In this regard, we aimed to assess the subjective meanings that young football players with a Turkish background attribute to their experiences of having to choose for which national team they want to play and how this decision has impacted their national identity development.

### Participants

We focused on players with Turkish background for two reasons: Firstly, people with Turkish background represent the largest immigrant population in Germany; secondly, the public and media debate on the national team question in Germany almost exclusively refers to players with Turkish background—such as Mesut Özil (Seiberth et al., 2017)—and thereby might provide powerful master narratives surrounding the national team question and national identity for German-born players with Turkish background.

In order to find potential interviewees, we conducted a web search using the online database [www.transfermarkt.de](http://www.transfermarkt.de). This website provides a wide range of relevant data on elite (junior) football players in German (junior) teams. By concentrating on the feature nationality, we identified numerous top-level players who were characterized as being both “German” and “Turkish”. Case selection was based on the following criteria: The players were expected to have a Turkish background, to have been born in Germany (but not necessarily have German citizenship)<sup>4</sup>, to be between 15 and 21 years old, and train at a Youth Performance Center (YPC) of the DFB. A further essential requirement was that the players had played at least one international match during their career—either for the Turkish Football Federation or the German Football Association. In order to avoid a systematic distortion of results due to sampling bias, we aimed to select players from three different status groups: players who had played only for the German Football Association (DFB), players who had only played for the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), and players who had played for the German Football Association (DFB) and the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) during their

youth career—which was in accordance with FIFA’s eligibility regulations<sup>5</sup> (FIFA, 2016).

We identified 31 players who matched the selection criteria. In a next step we officially contacted the YPCs in their function as gatekeepers. We informed them about the aim of the study, the specific target group, and the players we aimed to interview. Subsequently, the YPCs examined our request and autonomously decided whether to inform the respective players and their parents. If the YPCs assessed our request positively, we received either date proposals for the interviews or the contact details of the players to arrange an interview on-site. In this way, we respected the competences of the YPCs. At the same time, we avoided ethical concerns by directly influencing the players in their decision to participate in the study.

During the recruitment process, we experienced typical problems researchers face when attempting to recruit (youth) elite athletes for research purposes (Bairner, 2015). These problems were primarily associated with the players’ hyperinclusion into youth elite sport. Having to coordinate youth elite football with a school career makes youth elite athletes a group with very limited time resources. However, we were not just dependent on the athletes’ commitment to participate in the study but also on the willingness of the gatekeepers (YPC) to support the study. Although the recruitment and scheduling process was difficult and time-consuming, several YPCs and 10 top-level players responded positively to our request. Comparable sample sizes have also been used in prior published narrative analysis studies (Busanich et al., 2016; Cavallerio et al., 2017; Everard et al., 2021). As narrative studies aim to embrace the complexities and ambiguities inherent to experiences (Papathomas and Lavalée, 2012), small sample sizes are quite common.

### Data Collection

The overall aim of the study was to reconstruct the decision-making process of young football players who had to choose whether they want to play for a German or a Turkish national team on a junior level. Within the context of the overall study, we aimed to identify relevant reasons for this decision and asked for the role of ethnic and national identity in this decision-making process. As we assumed that national identity changes during the youth elite football career, the study also aimed to reconstruct trajectories of national identity development and to locate this process over the course of the players’ football career. The present article focuses on the latter objective and presents multi-methodological data about this topic.

<sup>4</sup>This methodological decision resulted from the fact that neither the status “migrant background” nor the fact of being born in Germany allows to draw conclusions on the level of citizenship. In fact, being born in Germany does not automatically lead to German citizenship. In 2000, German citizenship law supplemented the principle of descent the principle of birthplace (Gerdes et al., 2016). Since then people with migrant background had the choice to decide whether they want to acquire the German citizenship or not. Until today, among the highly heterogeneous group of people with migrant background there is a comparatively high number of people who are born and socialized in Germany without having a German or dual citizenship (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022).

<sup>5</sup>Since 2004, FIFA allows players to switch between junior national teams and national football associations up to the age of 21 until they play for the senior national team in a competition match. This is particularly important for players with migrant background as the FIFA statutes entitles them (under specific conditions) to represent more than one national football association. One recruitment condition is that a player’s “biological mother or biological father was born on the territory of the relevant association” (FIFA, 2016, p. 70). However, previous research indicates that the DFB’s and TFF’s recruitment strategies differ substantially when it comes to citizenship. While the DFB is reported to exclusively recruit players with German citizenship, having a Turkish citizenship is not required by the TFF (Seiberth et al., 2017).



To reconstruct national identity development over the player's career, we employed a *multi-method design* that generated verbal data and graphical data by combining guided expert interviews with biographical mappings. We chose guided expert interviews as this method opens “windows into peoples' lives” (Denzin, 1989, p. 14) and provides detailed insights into experiences, relevant career events, and courses of development. Biographical mappings were used to support the athletes in their biographical “memory work” (Schubring et al., 2019, p. 1). Biographical mappings consist of a two-dimensional grid, with the x-axis representing a timeline and the y-axis representing an intensity scale ranging from 0 to 10. We used the biographical mapping technique for the reconstructive visualization of the sports careers, the national team decision-making process, and the development of national identity over the player's career. Being embedded in the interviews, the tool allowed to visualize life and career experiences on a timeline and “to express gradual differences in subjective experience” (Schubring et al., 2019, p. 1). The aim of this participatory visual method was to identify “trajectories, biographical turning points, and intersections of development strands” (Schubring et al., 2019, p. 1).

To keep players' time expenditure to a minimum and to use familiar surroundings, the interviews and the mappings were conducted at the players' club facilities. Since the players were born and socialized in Germany and spoke German fluently, the interviews were carried out in German. Data collection was initiated with an open question asking the interviewees to state important career events and experiences. This also included events and experiences, which referred to the national team question and the players' international career. In a next step, the interviewees were asked to locate these experiences on the timeline (x-axis) and to plot a *sporting success* line on the y-axis. The career events and biographic experiences were also the frame for separately mapping the players' *identification with Germany* and their *identification with Turkey* within their career using the intensity scale on the y-axis. Finally, interviewees explained the line drawings by particularly focusing on changes and turning points. The combination of interviews and mappings “allows interviewees to narrate and ‘map’ strands of development within their life courses” (Schubring et al., 2019, p. 1). The interviews and mappings lasted between 45 and 90 min.

The interviews and mappings were prepared, organized and conducted by the lead author who does not have a (Turkish) migrant background. Although it has to be assumed that “pure objectivism is a naïve quest” (Bourke, 2014, p. 3), we constantly reflected on aspects of subjectivity and positionality. This was even more important as the interviews included several sensitive topics (such as family immigration history, ethnic identity or national identification). In order to encourage the players to express their views freely and in order to avoid socially desirable answers, the lead author explicitly indicated not to be interested in any kind of moral assessments of the players' stories. Retrospectively, these reflections on positionality were supposed to be crucial for balanced power relations and for data quality. Nevertheless, assessing the extent by which the researcher's “own identity may or may not have interacted with the interviewees' self-perceptions” (Faas, 2009, p. 303) has proved to be difficult.

In order to achieve data saturation, participants were given the opportunity to share further thoughts and reflections at the end of the interviews. When both, the interviewer and participant, felt that there was nothing more to share, we assumed that data saturation was reached with regard to the individuals' stories on their national identity development. However, we acknowledge that our findings might only offer a glimpse into our participants' rich and complex experiences of national identity development, as “to the extent that each life is unique, no data are ever truly saturated: there are always new things to explore” (Wray et al., 2007, p. 1400). Hence, it is important to keep in mind that narrative research is always tentative and that our proposed typology of narratives should not be treated as fixed and exclusive categories (Frank, 2010; Cavallerio et al., 2017; Ronkainen and Ryba, 2019).

## Data Analysis

For data analysis, we used both, the interview data and the biographical mappings. The lead author transcribed all interviews verbatim in German; key statements were translated into English by the authors and checked by a professional translator. The paper-pencil mapping grids for each player were processed and digitalized so that the different line drawings (for the purpose of this study mainly *identification with Germany* and *identification with Turkey*) could be compared during the data analysis.

For data analysis, we adopted the story analyst position (Smith, 2016). The lead author conducted the analysis in regular discussion with the research team, who acted as critical friends (Smith and McGannon, 2018). Data analysis started with a process of “indwelling” during which the lead author read the transcripts and assessed the biographical mappings for each player to identify themes and story plots inductively (Smith and Sparkes, 2009).

We conducted a thematic narrative analysis (Smith, 2016) of the interview data to identify the main themes within each player's story of the national team decision making process and his national identity development. In an initial step, we created case profiles for each player in which we summarized relevant contextual information such as family immigration history, citizenship, identity formations, and (international) junior career stages. Next, the lead author marked the transcripts with conceptual comments, which primarily focused on the semantic and latent content of each story. During this process of categorizing and sorting data, we identified main categories, statements, and themes using MAXQDA software. We specifically focused on the parts of the stories where interviewees made references to their identification with Germany and Turkey before, during, and after having made the decision for which national team they want to play. In a next step, the first author prepared extensive case summaries for each player focusing on his national identity development.

Next, to come to terms with the story's structure, we particularly focused on the biographical mappings, specifically the national identity development lines. For getting to grips with stories, Smith (2016) suggests that researchers depict the story's structure within a graph. Within our study, the biographical

mappings served as visual images of the story's structure and were created by the participants themselves. Thus, we supplemented our case summaries with the graphic data from the digitalized mapping grids. During this step, quotes from the interviews that contained specific information as to the strands, turning points, and bifurcations in the national identity development lines (i.e., *identification with Turkey* and *identification with Germany*), were entered into the digitalized mapping grid as well as when the respective player first started to ponder for which national team to play and when he made his decision.

Once these analytical steps were concluded, we aimed to build a typology of stories on national identity development of German-born national youth football players with Turkish background. To this end, in a first step, we systematically compared the national identity development lines within the biographical mappings of each player and the case summaries to identify "the most general storyline that can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories" (Frank, 2013, p. 75) with regard to national identity development. To make sure that our developed types of narratives are grounded in the actual participant's stories, we revisited the original interview data.

## Methodological Rigor

As our research is based on an interpretative paradigm, we abstain from employing a "criteriological approach" (Sparkes and Smith, 2009) to assess the quality of our data and analysis. Instead, we perceive quality criteria as characteristics of our research. As a point of departure, we have used the work of Tracy (2010) and Smith and Caddick (2012) and invite researchers to take into consideration the following criteria that align with our study: transparency, sincerity, and worthy topic.

Based on our identity theoretical perspective, we assume that national identity is a particularly sensitive issue for players with migrant background as the players are supposed to be aware of public expectations and media debates on national identity in Germany. Against this background, it is not surprising that McGee and Bairner (2011) resume that "understanding of such matters has been hindered by a marked reluctance on behalf of professional athletes to discuss their experiences with researchers" (p. 439). For this reason, it was assumed to be particularly important to be transparent in the study's aims and to clearly distance from public allegations and normative valuations. Considering that interviewing young people requires specific reflections on ethical issues, we made transparency, confidentiality and balanced power relations our highest priorities. According to the ethical standards of qualitative research, our study was based on the concept of informed consent. Participation in the study was thus entirely voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to interviewees and to their clubs. In order to encourage the players to express their views freely and to avoid socially desirable answers, we accentuated the fact that we were not interested in any kind of moral assessments regarding the players' national team choice.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We decided to combine results and discussion. Overall, we identified three different *types of narratives on national identity development* of German-born youth international football players with Turkish background. In the following section, we present one case for each type of narrative to allow for analytical depth and to stay closely to the participants' own stories, while being aware of the fact that a single story does not necessarily contain all characteristics of the respective narrative type (Kuckartz, 2020; John and Thiel, 2022). However, this representational strategy is frequently recommended and employed in narrative studies (e.g., Phoenix and Smith, 2011; Cavallerio et al., 2017). In addition to the interview data, we also refer to the digitalized biographical mapping of the player whose story represents the respective type of narrative. Within the biographical mapping, we have also entered the most important events to which the player referred to when narrating his personal story on national identity development and his football career. Therewith, the biographical mappings serve as visualized reference points that help in understanding the players' stories on their national identity development.

Each type of narrative is characterized by specific features and strands of development. In the following, we characterize and discuss each type of narrative on national identity development by identifying notions of national identity and by interrelating the national identification with Germany (as the country of birth) and Turkey (as the family's country of origin) during the sport career and against the background of the international career. Although the stories are highly individual, we also aim to trace similar features within the players' narratives on national identity development.

### Type 1: "Going With the Nomination(s)"

The "going with the nomination(s)" narrative (Figure 1) is characterized by an inseparable connection between the nomination of a player by a federal football association (DFB or TFF) and the development of national identification with Germany and Turkey. Dynamics in national identity development particularly arise in the context of the national team question. Typically, national identification is attached to being recruited for a national team; here, the identification with the nation that recruited the player for an international game or tournament rises significantly. At the same time, this rise is accompanied by a decline of national identification with the other nation. The following biographical mapping of Emir (name anonymized) is typical for that type of narrative.

Emir is a descendent of a former "guestworker". His grandfather immigrated to Germany in the course of the big labor agreements with Turkey at the end of the 1960s. Just like his grandfather, his parents were born in Turkey and immigrated to Germany during childhood in the early 1970s. The player is the first generation of his family who is born in Germany. His first language is German, his second language (albeit at a lower level) is Turkish. Although he reports to have a dual citizenship, nationality is not a relevant personal issue for him. Nevertheless, as the German Football Association (in contrast to the TFF)

## Type 1: »Going with the nomination(s)«

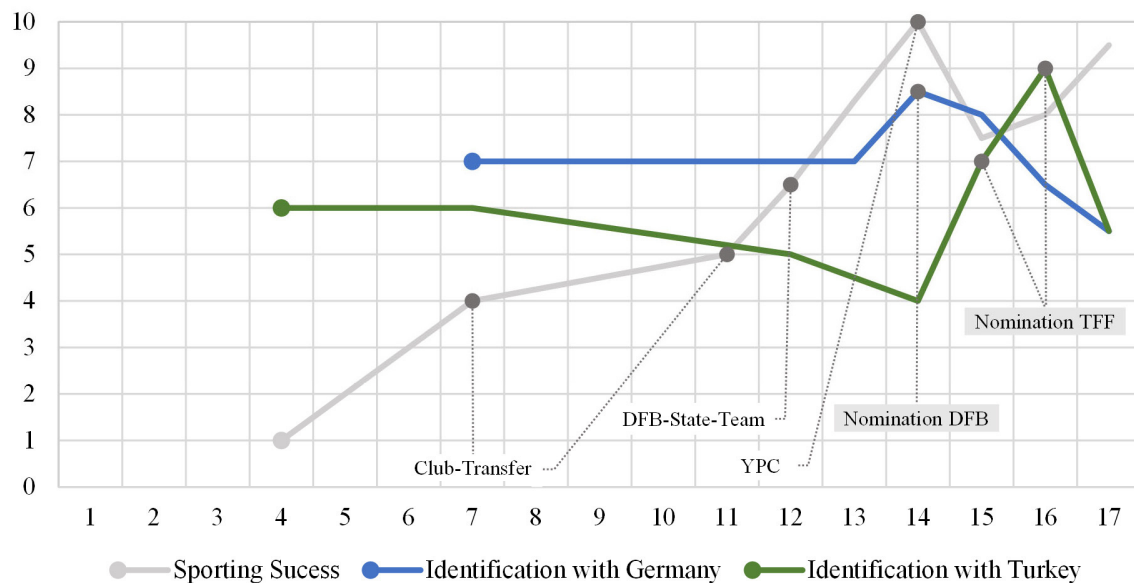


FIGURE 1 | Mapping Type 1.

defines German citizenship as a recruitment condition on the level of national teams, his nationality status qualifies him for playing for both national football associations. Actually, during his junior elite sport career, the player was recruited for several national junior teams by both national football associations (DFB and TFF). Generally, Emir describes himself as a “German-Turk”, but at the same time he points out to rather have a strong local identity that is closely connected to his city of birth in Germany. His bi-national references are illustrated by sport related examples—such as supporting Germany and Turkey during World Championships and by placing both national flags at the car of their family during the tournament:

*“Even at the World Cup and so on, we have, for example, Germany and Turkey, these flags on the cars, we had Germany and Turkey. So (.) there is not such a difference.”*

Looking at the strands of national identification in his biographical mapping, it is evident that the reconstruction of national identity starts in (early) childhood. Obviously, the player’s story of national identification with Turkey starts earlier and on a lower level than the story of national identification with Germany. When asked about this issue, Emir marked this as an unconscious differentiation. His appointment by the German and later by the Turkish football association were reported to be massive boosters for his national identity development. Both peaks in his biographical mapping result from being nominated for international games or tournaments. The first international game for Germany represented a crucial point in his national identity development story. The rise and peak of the national identification with Germany was explained by his surprise and

satisfaction of being selected by the DFB for a game with the junior national team. Emir recounted:

*“With Germany, it was like, maybe I was so happy because I never thought I would play for the junior national team.”*

He went on and specifically compared the feelings he had when being nominated for Germany with the ones he experienced when being invited to play for Turkey:

*“Yes, when I (...) have sometimes seen who was invited to Turkey, so (...) I was now not so much pleased; so also already very pleased, nevertheless for the invitation [by the TFF], but not so much as for Germany, because actually I was there still a player of [name of a small football club]. This was also still on the list for the DFB training course. There were always the players, there stood Borussia Mönchengladbach, VfB Stuttgart, Bayern Munich and then there was I from for example [club name]. Among the Turks who were from Germany, there were many from smaller clubs who were invited. Yes. So, at first I thought it was better [to play] for Germany.”*

A special feature of this type of narrative is that the story of national identity development is inextricably linked with the interest of and the act of being recruited by a national football association. Changes in this development process result from either being nominated or not being nominated. Being nominated leads to a rise of identification with a national football association and a nation. Conversely, if a national football organization loses interest in a player and does not nominate him for a current training course or international game, the level of national belonging rapidly sinks to a level that is even below the

initial level. In the interview, Emir explained the decline in his national identification with Germany with his disappointment about not being recruited for the next international game of the DFB and the feeling of not being treated fairly by the coach of the German youth national team.

*“Yes, until [a certain game] I was in the A squad. [...] Yes, and then there was an international match against [nation] and then my competitor on my position was invited, even though he was not in the training camp for two weeks. That’s why I didn’t want to play anymore. (...) That’s why I was angry, because he wasn’t there for two weeks and in [nation state] he was, when we had two international matches. That was so obvious. (...) So after each game we were graded and in [nation state] he once gave me the same grade as my competitor even though he played much worse and many have seen that. That they did unfair things.”*

Against this background, it seems appropriate to point out that we find similar episodes in various interviews. Accordingly, another athlete who played for the TFF first and then for the DFB reports:

*“But as I said at the beginning, the Turkish national team (-) the Turkish players from Turkey were preferred and I perceived that as a disadvantage and not so positive. And that’s why I also directly (-) so when I came back, I also said to my parents that I want to play for the German national team. And since then, I haven’t played for the Turkish national team.”*

It can be concluded that national identity development coalesces with athlete identity and the performance logic of elite sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Carless and Douglas, 2012). In line with our theoretical assumptions, Emir’s story shows that national identity development is framed and triggered by the social context of youth elite football. Accordingly, changes in the strands of national identification are presented from the angle of a youth elite athlete striving for an international career and, for that reason, conceptualizing nominations for international matches as major events in terms of national identity development.

A further characteristic of the “going with the nomination(s)” narrative is that national identity is not a stable construct as can be seen within the player’s biographical mapping. When referring to one specific experience he had after an international junior game with the TFF, Emir offered the following account:

*“Last year, after the European Championship qualifiers [TFF], we were at the airport and our Turkish national team coaches, I don’t know from where, also heard that two or three players had been invited [by the DFB]. Yes, the coach said that, but I also thought he was right, ‘whoever goes there won’t be invited to the Turkish national team, because you all think we’re only second choice and we don’t need players like that’, he said. I thought he was right. Then I think two players left anyway. They weren’t invited back for a while, but they were invited back the other day.”*

Although, the player agreed with the national coach who tried to establish the emotional identification with Turkey and the TFF as an unconditional commitment, this experience, however, did not lead to a stable national identification with Turkey afterwards for

Emir. As the player was not nominated by the coach and the TFF, his identification with Turkey sinks significantly again.

*“In Turkey [at the TFF] I wanted to stay for the time being, but I don’t know (-) Now there was a tournament the other day and I just wasn’t invited.”*

The second decline of the national identification with Turkey line indicates that the emotional attachment to Turkey as a nation seems to be binding just as long as the TFF decides to recruit the player for the next international games of the age group.

Against the background of this story, national identification development in German youth elite football appeared to be fundamentally shaped by elite sport socialization and by transnational talent recruitment in elite football. Besides, the story is characterized by variability, volatility, and instability. It is the current status of being and of being not recruited for international games that initiates short-term changes in the identification with Turkey or Germany. Within this type of narrative, national identification is conceptualized as a highly variable and situative construction that is, in line with previous research, crucially affected by “sporting pragmatism” (McGee and Bairner, 2011, p. 442). This type of narrative is an excellent example for the fluidity of national identity in the context of elite sport. Apparently, this fluidity results from processing the recruitment decisions of the national football associations and the experiences during the national training courses. Within the “going with the nomination(s)” narrative, national identity development can be compared with an elevator that drives up and down and that is steered externally by athletic events or non-events such as nomination and deselection for a national team. Consequently, national identities are under threat if former nominations are not refreshed. Accordingly, the quality of identification with Germany and Turkey is primarily driven by recruitment decisions of the TFF or the DFB. In this sense, national identity is functionally linked with the prospect of success and of perceptibility in elite sport. Accordingly, the identification with a nation rises when there are constellations or options to increase the players visibility.

*“So, you can already see when you’re playing for Germany right now (-) you’re already seen more because they’re more often at the World Cup and so on. European Championship, World Cup and so. And at the moment they are also more successful.”*

## Type 2: “Reconsidering National Belonging”

While the first type is characterized by the rise of the national identification with the nation which had nominated the player for international games, the “reconsidering national belonging” narrative (Figure 2) is characterized by a reverse dynamic. In the aftermath of being recruited for a specific nation, the identification with this nation declines rather than rises as it is the case within the “going with the nomination(s)” narrative. This reverse dynamic typical of the “reconsidering national belonging” narrative can be seen within the biographical mapping of Cem.



## Type 2: »Reconsidering national belonging«

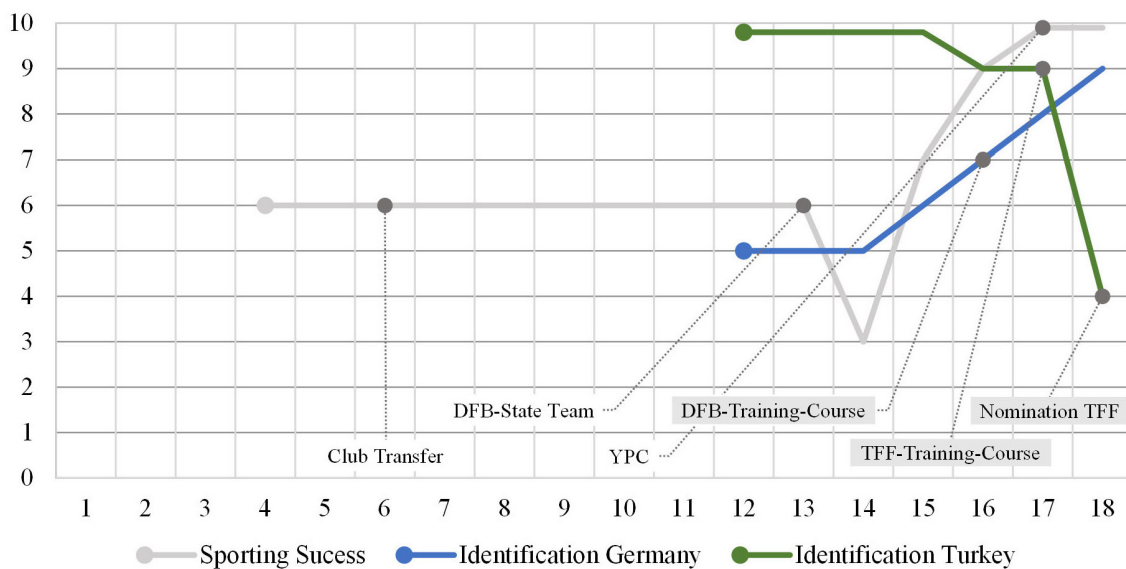


FIGURE 2 | Mapping Type 2.

Within his family's immigration history, Cem belongs to the third generation. It was his grandmother who immigrated from Turkey to Germany as a working migrant at the beginning of the 1970s and reunited the family later in Germany. The player's parents were born in Turkey and immigrated to Germany in childhood. Thus, the player is the first generation being born in Germany. He has a Turkish passport but not the German citizenship. At the time of the interview, Cem tells about having applied for German citizenship and planning to return his Turkish passport then. Although Turkish is the dominant family language, the player speaks German and Turkish fluently. With regard to his football career, Cem was intensively involved into the federal talent development program of the DFB. He trained at a local DFB-base, later at a YPC and played for German junior state teams. On a junior international level, he initially was invited for two national training courses of the DFB before he chose to play for Turkey. Subsequently, he played for the TFF in several junior teams.

Cem's graphical reconstruction of national identity development starts in late childhood. It is evident, that the two lines start at the same time but on absolutely different levels of national identification. While the identification with Germany is marked on an intermediate level, the identification with Turkey is mapped on a maximum level. In his verbalized story, his national affiliations with Turkey became apparent when he described himself as a "Turk".

*"If I'm in Germany, or people in the street ask me, 'What are you? German or Turk?', of course I answer I'm Turkish."*

A recurring theme in his story of national identity development is "Heimat" (a German word that cannot be directly translated

to English, but approximately describes a sense of emotional belonging). This term is very present when speaking about Turkey as his family's country of origin. For example, when speaking about his parent's city of birth in Turkey, he uses the term "hometown".

It is evident that this term has an emotional connotation for the player. It can be assumed that this emotional attachment with the "home country" Turkey is the reason why his visualized story is characterized by a very strong affiliation with Turkey. It can be assumed that this emotional identification with Turkey was transferred to elite sport by the idea of someday playing for Turkey. Cem recounted:

*"My dream was always to play for Turkey. That was just this decision, because I wanted to fulfill my dream that I had as a child."*

*"My mother really wanted me to play for Turkey, and my mother is everything to me, and that was actually the thing where I said 'yes' to Turkey."*

While both national identification lines are stable in late childhood, the interrelation between the two lines starts to change at the beginning of adolescence. While the affiliation with Germany rises, the sense of belonging to Turkey significantly falls. The rise of the identification with Germany fell into a career period in which Cem became Junior-Bundesliga-Player, changed the club, and started his international junior career for the TFF. The two lines cross at the time when the player transferred to his new club and its YPC.

This major switch is particularly explained by experiences the player had during his international junior career with the TFF. In contrast to Type 1, the nomination for the TFF did not result in

an intensification or assurance of national affiliations with Turkey but initiated a process of revision and regression. Crucial for Cem's story are some experiences he made during the training courses and international games in Turkey. He experienced the training courses and the selection of starting-players to be less performance-related, disciplined, and transparent than he was used to at his German club.

*"So (.) for example (.) the Turks rather do not look at the performance of the other players, there have played very many who have not earned it or no idea, it was just very strange, not (-) so to speak not as much discipline as the Germans and I just did not like it and I'm just used to the Germans with this discipline that only those play who also perform."*

Besides, the story also revealed experiences that seemed to irritate his emotional identification with Turkey and his self-description as a "Turk". Apparently, his trips with the national team and the trips to Turkey intensified his feeling of not being perceived as a Turk in Turkey. This feeling of unfamiliarity and not belonging is reported to be a major turning point that made him rethink/reassess his understanding of "Heimat", his emotional commitment to Turkey and his general affiliations toward the two nations:

*If I'm in Germany, or people in the street ask me, 'What are you? German or Turk?', of course I answer I'm Turkish. However, if I'm in Turkey, people there say, 'You're not a Turk.' Most people say, 'You're a German Turk. You're German.' They don't see me as a Turk. Even if I go to my hometown [in Turkey] they tell me this."*

Apparently, processing these experiences led the player to recheck his affiliations with Turkey and to rethink his emotional linkage. This finding is in line and, at the same time, not in line with current research on national identity assuming that "[w]hen individuals experience a sense of belonging by means of self-categorization as group members and then become aware that their fellow members share the same identification, their world changes" (David and Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 371). On the one hand, the player categorized himself as a "Turk" and defined himself as a member of a national group. On the other hand, he experienced to be not perceived as a Turk by this group. As a consequence, his "world changes" indeed—but not in the way that his national identification with Turkey rises. Instead, processing these experiences led to the recognition that Germany actually provided more reference points for national identity than Turkey:

*"I'm in Turkey just, let's say, every other year; thus, I'm not there often. I don't really see Turkey as my home country since I'm never really welcome. In Germany, I feel comfortable. Actually, I see Germany as my home country. Sometimes I even ask myself, why I say 'I'm Turkish' although Germany offers me everything I want and I feel comfortable here."*

### Type 3: "Adding Up Chances"

The "adding up chances" narrative (Figure 3) is characterized by an increase of both strands of national identification, that with

Germany and that with Turkey. In contrast to the first two types of narratives, these stories do not include (significant) decreasing trends with regard to national identification with one nation. The participants whose stories follow the "adding up chances" narrative particularly refer to the chances and opportunities in their (sport) biography and highlight the resulting positive effects on their national identity development. Although the level of identification with Turkey and Germany differs to some extent, national identity development is the result of adding up these chances and effects. The "adding up chances" narrative can be seen within the biographical mapping of Murat.

The player's migrant background results from his father's family who originally comes from Turkey. His fathers' grandparents immigrated from Turkey to Germany—and went back to Turkey later on. His father was born in Germany. Murat's mother is German without having a migrant background. The German-born player is German citizen, which gives him the option to play for both national football federations. He does not have a Turkish passport. His first language is German. He barely speaks Turkish. On a level of self-positioning, he describes himself as rather German than Turkish. In terms of his football career, Murat played for a YPC and for a state team of the DFB. In the course of his international junior career, he was (at different times) nominated for Turkey (TFF) and for Germany (DFB).

The visualized story of national identity development starts in early childhood. Looking at the two strands, it is evident that the level of identification with Germany is constantly marked higher than with Turkey. At the same time, Murat reports to also have a strong local identity that refers to his city of birth in Germany. Generally, Murat's story implies several references to his "subjective sense of togetherness, we-ness, or belongingness" (Turner, 2010, p. 16) to Germany and to Turkey:

*"Well, I would see myself a bit more as German, because I don't know the language either, the Turkish language. But so, so I have a bit of Turkish blood in me, so in the emotions sometimes, but yes, of course I see myself more as a person from [name of a German city] than a Turk, quite clear. [...] Well, I see myself as German, but it wouldn't also be difficult to identify myself as Turkish. This wouldn't be a problem. I get along with the [Turkish] people. They are kind-hearted. Therefore, I see no problem there."*

Within Murat's story, Turkey represents the residence of the relatives on his father's side. Since his childhood and despite the hyperinclusion into elite youth football the player travelled to Turkey almost every year for vacation in order to meet and spend time with his grandparents and his father's family of origin.

*"From the private side, it was always so that we went to Turkey almost every year for vacation, to the relatives. Whether it was now the uncle of my dad or just my grandparents, no matter whether it was now in [name of a Turkish city] directly, I have actually always felt very connected with Turkey."*

Several players reported a strong attachment with Turkey resulting from family holidays in Turkey. The following statement of a Turkish international junior player, however,

### Type 3: »Adding up chances«

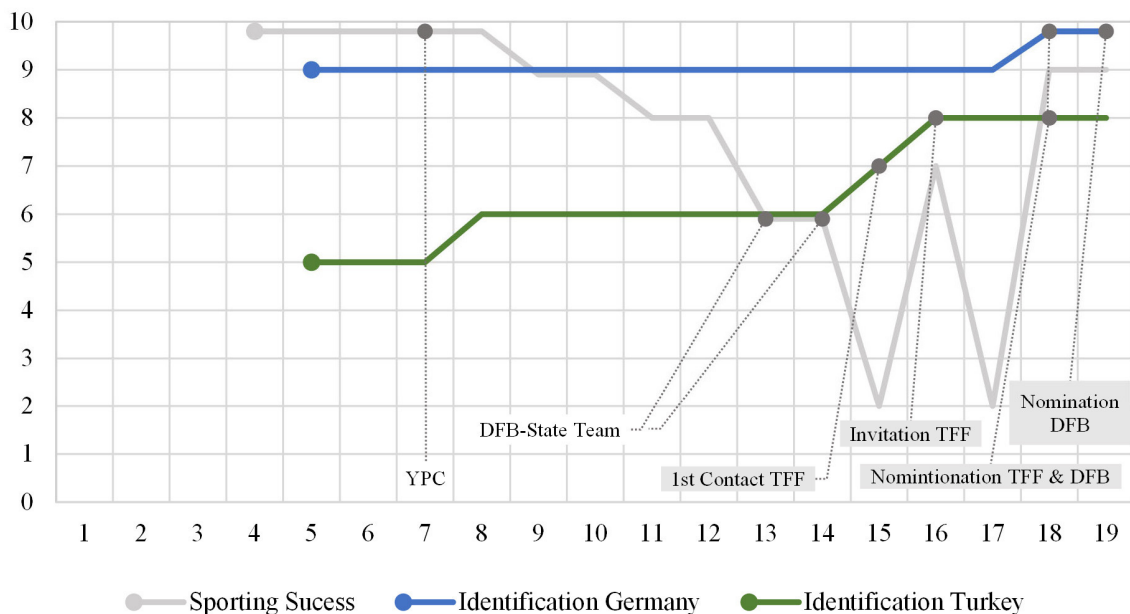


FIGURE 3 | Mapping Type 3.

points out that this emotional attachment decreased as the player had to invest more time resources into youth elite football. This biographical fixation stopped him from traveling to Turkey and to sustain his emotional attachment:

*“The connection with the homeland [Turkey] started relatively early because (-) we were often in Turkey when we were young or I was often in Turkey when I was young. (...) Yes, then it [the connection to Turkey] was actually relatively lost. Through soccer, because I personally was no longer so often in Turkey.”*

Within the case of Murat, the rise of the identification with Turkey line is explained by two aspects. Firstly, the player reported to be impressed by the TFF’s commitment. Since 2010, the TFF was in contact with the player and his parents. In this context, the player tells about meetings with the head of the European Office (TFF) aiming to convince the player and his parents of playing for Turkey. Apparently, the first invitation for a national training course of the TFF was refused by the player’s club. A second reason for an increased identification with Turkey is that being invited and nominated for international games by the TFF amplified Murat’s feelings of belonging to Turkey. The nomination and the experiences around the international game initiated a process which intensified and emotionally charged his relations with Turkey sustainably.

*“Of course, it [the identification with Turkey] became stronger when I was invited here, then I listened to the anthem so that I knew the melody at least a little bit [laughs] and then my interest for Turkey clearly became stronger, because I somehow also wanted to be interested in it, wanted to know a little bit more about the*

*country than I knew before, but (-) and that actually continues until now, that I now also root for them or root more for them now when they have a game, that I then also get upset why they do not win now. That they are not in the World Cup, for example, that makes me very sad. I would also quite clearly cheer for them, no question. So in general, the interest in Turkey or the attachment was actually relatively high because we were there actually every year.”*

The identification with Germany line already starts at a high level and is linked with the feeling of being rather “German”. From early childhood until late adolescence, this line is very stable. Interestingly, and in contrast to the other two types of narratives on national identity development, being invited by the TFF (and not by the DFB) in the first place, did not have an impact on Murat’s identification with Germany at all. The peak of the identification line coincides with the nomination by the DFB. To wear the official dress and the feeling of representing his country of birth are told to be boosters of national identity development.

*“Yes, that’s actually from the beginning, I would say maybe at nine [the identification with Germany] and then where it got straight down to the nitty-gritty, with the national team, that I have then properly identified with it, and that I then just run around with the clothes that I represent my country (...). That was actually the greatest for me, is still the greatest for me.”*

Another athlete who played exclusively for Turkey tells quite a similar story:

*“So I was relatively proud of myself that I got an invitation from the national team, the Turkish team. Yes, I remember exactly how*

*much I was looking forward to it. And when I played my first game, when I was already wearing the jersey, I still remember how it made me tingle. Of course, when I listened to the national anthem, for me, that was such a goosebump feeling. That's when I realized how connected I am to my homeland [Turkey]."*

Generally, within the “adding up chances” narrative, the identification with Germany and Turkey lines are comparatively stable. The biggest leap in Murat's story resulted from the nomination for the TFF. Characteristically, not being nominated initially by the DFB and later by the TFF did not affect his feelings of belonging to a nation. At the time of the interview, the initial difference between the two identification lines is significantly reduced. Typically, within the “adding up chances” narrative, having reached a certain level of national identification means that this level is at least maintained. National identity is conceptualized as a rather stable construction that is reinforced by becoming an international player. In this type of narrative, youth elite football offers various chances for processing national identification. Interestingly, national identity is presented as a growing resource that is fed by the opportunities that go along with a migrant background and an international career in youth football. In the course of this process, experiences are positively aggregated, which is typical for hybrid identity formations in immigration countries (Faas, 2009).

## CONCLUSIONS

In contrast to previous analyses that asked for the role of national identity and network actors for the national team question of German-born international youth football players with a Turkish background (Seiberth et al., 2017; Seiberth et al., 2018; Seiberth and Thiel, 2021), the aim of this analysis was to explore the national identity development stories of these players. By conducting and analyzing 10 expert interviews and biographical mappings, we constructed a typology of narratives, namely “going with the nomination(s),” “reconsidering national belonging,” and “adding up chances,” that players rely on when constructing their personal stories.

Generally, the study confirms the assumption that national identity “is not a static foundation passed down from generation to generation” (David and Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 373). Rather, our findings illustrate that national identity development in youth elite sport is a highly individual and dynamic process that is particularly shaped by the experiences in the context of a career in youth elite sport. In this sense, the stories describe (German) youth elite football as a specific social context that “provides multilayer conditions of different types, scopes, qualities in which individuals and collectives operate” (David and Bar-Tal, 2009, p. 371).

In line with current research, the stories on national identity development mostly start in (early) childhood. Regarding this early stage of (national) identity development, the stories include episodes of relevant family-related experiences, like family holidays in Turkey, or of the family supporting a specific Turkish football club. Although it can be assumed that these experiences

had an impact on personal national identity formations, this pre-elite-sport period is characterized by a rather constant level of national identification with Turkey and Germany. Apart from that, our findings indicate that the specific family background or the status of the parents (e.g., being born or not being born in Germany) did not play a specific role for the players' national identity formation. In fact, the stories rather show that several of the interviewed players only have very limited knowledge about the family's immigration history. Furthermore, the increasing commitment to elite sport usually leads to a decreasing contact frequency with the family. At the same time, the contact frequency with elite sport actors (such as coaches) rises (Seiberth and Thiel, 2021).

Generally, the stories indicate that significant changes in national identity development take place in adolescence. Indeed, the closer the players come to the age when the national football associations start to recruit their players, the higher are the dynamics within the strands of national identity development. On the one hand, this can be explained by an increasing hyperinclusion into elite sports that leads the players to focus on the next career step “junior national team” and for that reason to closely attach constructions of national identity to the national team question. On the other hand, it must be considered that dealing with aspects like ethnic origin and reflecting on one's relation to the country of birth and the country of one's ancestors is typical in adolescence. However, whether the dynamics of national identity development are age-specific consequences of processing questions of ethnic origin and national belonging or an effect of the recruitment structures in junior elite football (starting with the Under 15-Team) is hard to tell. We assume that both effects aggregate if a player is nominated by one or both national football associations.

In fact, our study shows that erratic changes of national identification are always coupled with becoming an international player, but that the nomination for a nation does not reliably and sustainably booster feelings of belonging to that nation. Hence, the stories indicate that international careers not necessarily foster national identification with a nation but can also reduce feelings of belonging to a nation—even with the nation the athlete plays for. Particularly negative experiences with the national football federation or in the context of international games have the potential to reduce national identification with that nation.

This brings us back to a basic assumptions of identity theory and biographical research, pointing out that individuals process such experiences and life events differently and come to alternative conclusions (John et al., 2019). The three different types of narratives within our study illustrate this impressively. Overall, the study confirms that sport is indeed “an identity forming factor” (Dóczy, 2011, p. 3)—one way or the other. Nonetheless, since we assumed public and media narratives to play a role within the players' stories and although we mentioned these media narratives during the interviews, it was particularly surprising that such master narratives were not marked as “identity forming factors” in the stories. We assume this finding to be closely connected to the dominant role of athlete identity in youth elite sport (Schubring and Thiel, 2014;



Seiberth's et al., 2017). Apparently, this elite sport identity not just shapes the national team question sustainably, but also has the potential to override other narratives. In this sense, athletic identity becomes a driving force for processing national identity formations in youth elite sport. While non-athletic adolescents with migrant background tend to deal with issues of national identity incidentally, youth athletes with migrant background are forced to deal with this issue (at least at the career level) as soon as the national team question arises. We conclude that, although the concept of nation states has dwindled in importance the study highlights that nation states in elite sport still are “powerful identifiers” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000, p. 16).

Finally, the study needs to be discussed in the light of its limitations. One limitation refers to the number of participants. Apparently, our sample consisted of a comparatively small number of athletes in German youth elite football. The number of 10 interviews resulted from our explorative design that aimed to reconstruct individual stories of national identity development in youth elite sport and to identify specific types of narratives. Rather than focusing on representativity, we aimed to explore the process of national identity development in detail. Accordingly, the ten athletes are not a “representative sample, but rather a contrastive selection of youth elite athletes” (Schubring and Thiel, 2014, p. 81). However, it has to be considered that the interviewed players belong to the group of absolute top performers in German youth elite football. This group is not just hard to recruit but also limited in its number.

The second limitation refers to the fact that the study focused on youth players with Turkish background only. We decided to address this specific population because people with Turkish background represent the biggest ethnic minority group in Germany and are highly represented in German youth elite football (Seiberth's et al., 2017). Nevertheless, focusing on this specific group of youth elite football players further reduced the number of potential interviewees significantly. Knowing that the number of German-born international youth players with Turkish background training in YPCs in Germany is very limited and having identified only 31 players overall who matched the selection criteria at the time the study was conducted, 10 interviews and mappings are supposed to be a solid basis for a first exploratory analysis. Nevertheless, we recommend future studies to include athletes with different migrant backgrounds.

A strength of our narrative approach was the triangulation of methods and data by combining expert interviews and

biographical mappings. Therewith, we have extended current narrative approaches that tend to focus only on the verbal story through incorporating a graphic depiction of developmental processes created by the participants themselves (i.e., the biographical mappings). The retrospective on their career and on national identity development in particular gave the participants the opportunity to tell their story with a temporal distance and to analyze the development of national identity over time. Such a processual and narrative perspective adds to current research on national identity formations in (youth) elite sport (Grainger, 2006; McGee and Bairner, 2011; Seiberth et al., 2018). However, in line with our narrative perspective, stories on national identity development represent contingent constructions of reality that likely evolve in the light of future events. Hence, types of narratives are always tentative (Frank, 2010; Ronkainen and Ryba, 2019). Future studies could aim to identify and characterize other subtypes of narratives to expand our understanding of the dynamics, complexity, and ambiguity of “identity work” (Andersson, 2002) in (youth) elite sport even further.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical approval was not required for this study.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

KS and AT contributed to conception and design of the study. KS organized the data collection and the database and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. KS, AT, and JJ performed the data analysis. JJ and AT wrote sections of the manuscript. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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# Portugal nautical stations: Strategic alliances for sport tourism and environmental sustainability

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Nautical tourism is a tourist product with great development in the European space and a lot of potential to promote and develop tourist destinations. Considering the dynamics of nautical tourism management and the importance of meeting the specificities of this market niche, the objective of this study was to analyse the strategic alliances for the development of the offer of nautical tourism products, namely the strategic goals and sustainable environmental practices adopted by their actors which integrated the strategic alliances in order to certificate a plethora of nautical stations in Portugal. Between September and December 2021, 17 Portuguese nautical stations' application forms were collected. Content analysis using Nvivo software was the technique used for data analysis. The results showed a multiplicity of strategic objectives associated with the strategic alliance established between the nautical stations. The strategic vision of nautical stations for the development of strategic alliances is built, firstly, on the objective of structuring the tourism offer, followed by increasing governance and promoting and marketing nautical tourism using the image of the destination. Based on these results, it is possible to infer the importance of nautical stations in destination competitiveness and the role of strategic alliances in facilitating penetration in the nautical tourism market. The managers of nautical stations should consider the use of strategic alliances to make a cooperative marketing in order to improve the experience of the clients. Regarding environmental sustainability practices, the results exposed the prominence of environmental education actions in contrast to the reduced number of nautical stations developing actions for the adoption of sustainable transport. This study contributes to a better understanding of nautical tourism and Portuguese nautical stations, a project of strategic investment in sport and tourism, inferring on the objectives underlying the formation of strategic alliances and on the adopted environmental sustainability practices. The conclusions of this study point to the need for future scientific research on the actual operationalization of the objectives underlying the formation of strategic alliances, as well as the environmental practices developed by nautical stations.

## KEYWORDS

nautical stations, strategy, sustainability, alliances, sport tourism



## Introduction

The last decades of the twentieth century have observed the development of strategic alliances as the most significant change in the business context (Peroff et al., 2017). According to the authors, the establishment of strategic alliances is the only way by which organizations have attempted to respond to changes in the market, while simultaneously maintaining relationships with current customers and expanding their relationships with the main customers. The main objective of forming strategic alliances is to minimize risk, while maximizing market presence (Harbison and Pekar, 1998) and synergistically increase the organization's competitiveness, through access to external sources and promoting learning and rapid changes.

A strategic alliance is a long-standing relationship between two or more partners within a demand chain to improve and develop mutual agreement strategies in terms of common goals and contextual opportunities (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1996). Bitran et al. (2002) define a strategic alliance as a strategic agreement between two or more organizations who want to improve their competitive position and performance through shared resources.

The loss of identity and independence of corporations, as the result of strategic alliances, has become an obsolete idea. Hence, the creation of a strategic alliance between organizations requires considering the process of alliance adaptation and its drivers (Reuer and Zollo, 2000). In some national and international markets, strategic alliances have changed the underlying model of competition, from the traditional competition of the company to the company to compete against the network (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Strategic contributions differ in terms of the level of cooperation of partners and value (Larrinaga, 2017).

In general, the notion of strategic alliances is based on three principles (Masselink et al., 2016): (i) the partnership between partners is formal and informal; (ii) existence of at least two partners; and (iii) achieving strategic goals. Also, four types of strategic alliances can be introduced (Rodrigues, 2016): (a) joint venture—it is the most common type of unification, by which a business partnership activity is formed by two or more organizations with strategic objectives, generating independent institutions, and each of these entities allocates operational responsibilities, financial hazards and rewards while their independence and identity are maintained; (b) consortium of mutual services—it is the involvement of similar firms in industries that integrate their resources to obtain advanced benefits and technology, which otherwise, would be highly expensive to achieve; (c) licensing agreement—it is an agreement under which the exporting company grants a legal license to another company to produce commodities, and the receiver company pays a license to the issuing company. This alliance is useful when the business sign of the donor company is

well-known; (iv) participation in the value chain—it is a strong and close union where a firm or business unit forms a long-term agreement with suppliers or key distributors to gain a competitive advantage.

Creating a strategic alliance has many benefits (Carayannis et al., 2000), such as: (a) scale savings and savings resulting from the scope; (b) quick and easy access to knowledge and market; (c) reducing the capital needs and the risks involved in the development of new products and technology; (d) effect of competition on relevant markets; (e) reduce the political and financial risk; (f) achieve a competitive advantage; (g) improvement of sales growth; (h) generating engagement in the business portfolio; and (i) increasing revenue. Several authors have stressed that in small and medium enterprises (SME) this business strategy is much more important (Kipley and Lewis, 2008; Zhao, 2014; Sefiani et al., 2018). The strategic alliances are also highlighted as beneficial in the production and in the service sectors, such as tourism (del Barrio-García and Prados-Peña, 2019) and sport tourism (Wäsche and Woll, 2013).

Tourism and sport are key elements of today's culture and have a special effect on social behavior. Sport is an important activity of tourists during tourism, and tourism and travel products/services are accompanied by different types of sports offers (Ito and Higham, 2020). Sport is a common motivation for tourists, highlighted by their tendency to participate in sports (Ito and Higham, 2020).

Sport tourism is interpreted as a leisure sport trip that temporarily pulls individuals out of their community (Gibson, 2006). In this way, it can cover trips away from home aiming to practicing sports and play, sport watching, visiting sports attractions, involving both competition and competition activities (Hudson, 2003). Therefore, it can be said that any type of travel for sport activities is called sport tourism and may take place individually or collectively (Luković, 2013).

The sport tourism product is a multi-dimensional combination of services and experience opportunities such as transport, lodging, sport activities and facilities, infrastructure, natural surroundings, and social contacts (Murphy et al., 2000; Tuppen, 2000; Thwaites and Chadwick, 2006). As the authors stressed, this kind of offer are provided by a vast array of actors in the visited region contributing to the sport tourism experience. Thus, the quality of the whole sport tourism experience is determined by the combination and coordination of a bundle of diverse services and goods provided by different stakeholders (actors) within the tourist region (Woods and Deeganm, 2006; Elbe et al., 2009). Furthermore, aspects of physical appearance such as beautiful landscapes, attractive and well-maintained areas and spaces for sport tourism, and the attitude of local residents toward sport tourism activities, are relevant. Since quality in sport tourism depends on of many different elements, the sport tourism product must be understood as the overall sport tourism experience as perceived by a visitor (Harrison-Hill and Chalip, 2005). Different social systems such as sport,

economy, the systems of health, leisure, ecology, and politics, as well as several subfields with differing interests, create the sport tourism context and therefore a complicated field (Hinch and Higham, 2004). Wäsche and Woll (2010, 2013) have stressed that this inherent complexity results in a great number of actors from different sectors with different organizational cultures, interests, and goals. For the authors, public organizations (e.g., regional administration and infrastructures, tourist boards, and public sport spaces/facilities), non-profit organizations (e.g., sport clubs) as well as for-profit organizations (e.g., skiing schools and sport rentals) play an important part in contributing to a regional sport tourism product. Furthermore, hotels, retailers, farmers, local residents, and pressure groups (e.g., environmental protection bodies) must be considered. It is a key issue in sport tourism that requires nature-based resources and infrastructural arrangements which might have significant ecological and social impacts and subsequent problematic issues (Bull, 2005; Hall, 2005). In sum, the highly heterogeneous group of actors constitutes a specific feature of sport tourism and contributes to making the management of a sport tourism destination a complex task (Tuppen, 2000; Hall, 2005; Wäsche and Woll, 2010, 2013; Ziakas and Costa, 2011).

Fredline and Faulkner (2001) advocate that one of the most important ways by which sport tourism industry can improve global competitiveness is to create strategic alliances with other members of the industry. Concerning regional sport tourism development, the cooperation of a very diverse group of actors (individual or corporate) from different social systems is crucial. Specifically, the differing interests of various regional stakeholders in sport tourism have to be coordinated. Also, collective efforts are required to provide a sport tourism experience for visitors with a diverse range of products, aiming for a positive and sustainable regional development. Subsequently, a key challenge in managing regional sport tourism is the intersectoral integration of a heterogeneous group of actors (Tuppen, 2000) who act both as single actors, and simultaneously, as a collective actor in organizing and providing the overall sport tourism product of a region. However, there is only limited scientific knowledge about organizational structures, mechanisms, and processes in strategic alliances (Wäsche and Woll, 2010, 2013; Kennelly and Toohey, 2014). Hence, it is crucial to understand the complex interplay of single actors' actions and the development of collective structure through regional cooperation in sport tourism (Mollah et al., 2021).

For a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and since sport tourism is highlighted by the World Tourism Organization (2019) for its potential to promote environmental sustainability, both by raising awareness and encouraging the adoption of pro-environmental measures, being one of the fastest growing tourism segments (Alexandris and Kaplanidou, 2014), it is important to understand this complex interplay also in an environmental sustainability perspective.

According to the European Commission (2014), coastal tourism is a large part of tourism, which employs more than 3.2 million people, produces more than one-third of the world's economy, a total of 183 billion euros. Around 51% of the EU accommodation capacity is concentrated in coastal areas (Weston et al., 2019).

Nautical tourism activity is a scattered industry based on small businesses, hampering managers' control of all components of the tourism system and/or all elements of the decision-making process (Goni and Yustika, 2019). Verdet (2002) places nautical tourism within the framework of a set of relationships between people who come together when they travel for less than a year and whose main motivation is to carry out nautical activities. Due to the multifaceted nature of tourism, new typologies have come into existence and many different forms of tourism have co-existed over the last decades, as water tourism (Jennings, 2007), lake tourism (Hall and Härkönen, 2006) and more recently, nautical tourism (Luković, 2013). Jennings (2007) advocates the concept of water-based tourism because it "relates to any touristic activity undertaken in or in relation to water resources, such as lakes, dams, canals, creeks, streams, rivers, waterways, marine coastal zones, seas, oceans and ice-associated areas" (p. 10). In this point of view, this form of tourism is strongly resource-based, i.e., the natural resource (water) firmly determines the whole development and activity (boating, sailing, surfing, fishing, 1-day tours, scuba diving, etc.). Luković (2013) defines nautical tourism as a sum of poly-functional activities and relations that are caused by the tourist stay within or out of the ports of nautical tourism, and by the use of vessels or other objects related to the nautical and tourist activities, for the purpose of recreation, sport, entertainment or other needs. In relation to the differences that may exist between nautical, maritime, and marine tourism (Forteza et al., 2017), there is no unanimity or clarity among the authors. In general terms, the differentiating element attributed to nautical tourism is the practice of sporting activities at sea (Carrasco, 2001; Luković, 2013) which can also be carried out in other aquatic environments (Jovanovic et al., 2013).

Nautical tourism is considered a recent commercial activity that has been developed between ordinary tourism and maritime activity, comprising characteristics that make it a special type of tourism (Kovačić et al., 2006). The authors point out the importance of developing a relatively new nautical market, defining it as a system that is divided into technological subsystems at sea and on land (Kasum et al., 2011). Nautical tourism is a diversified branch of general tourism that has significantly changed the structure and peculiarities of the tourism industry (Kovačić and Favro, 2012). These authors underline that nautical tourism is a variety of tourism with the sea as a distinctive element where the marinas are considered central facilities of nautical tourism, dedicated to satisfying the complex and growing demand of the nautical tourist (Benevolo and Spinelli, 2018). It is a complex system that uses various

forms of technical and technological processes, hence it is exposed to certain risks (Kasum et al., 2018). Nautical tourism is a relevant category of maritime tourism, since it generates direct impacts on coastal development and destination promotion and has become one of the most important areas of research (Bal and Czaczyńska-Podolska, 2019). As highlighted by Vázquez (2020), nautical tourism in the Mediterranean Sea is greatly dynamic and developed. Especially, for tourists from the cold North of Europe, the mild Mediterranean climate gives the opportunity to go on vacation almost all year round. Nevertheless, the summer season remains particularly popular, creating a strong seasonal character in nautical tourism. The European Atlantic coast nautical tourism is very well developed despite the climate, which is a consequence of the high degree of development of countries in this part of Europe (Masselink et al., 2016).

Nautical tourism is a highly dynamic product with great potential to develop consolidated destinations and can serve destinations that are not attractive for development (Javaloyes, 2012). The success of this type of tourism depends on the wide range of activities it offers and on the possibility of integrating it with active tourism and contact with nature (Perelló, 2013). However, due to the fragility of coastal ecosystems and landscapes, the European Union (EU) and numerous international organizations have concerned about the most appropriate approach for the development and the management of coastal zones.

Currently, the pursuit of the implementation of sustainability by society has a guiding political panel—the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) within the United Nations Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015). The environmental pillar of sustainability, defined as “a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity” (Morelli, 2011, p. 6), is contemplated by the SDG and has already been embraced by the main international organizations that lead sport (International Olympic Committee, 2012), and particularly, sport tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2019). The creation of the Sports for Climate Action Framework (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2019a) is an example of the sport community’s willingness to act on behalf of the environmental cause. This framework calls for the commitment of sport organizations to adopt strategies that aim and operationalize the climate action, spreading the environmental message within the sport community. Among the participating organizations, there are several acting in the coastal and maritime context (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2019b), namely: (a) federations and leagues (e.g., World Surf League, CSA Surf Canada, World Sailing, World Rowing Federation, International and World Rafting Federations); (b) national teams (e.g., Sail

GP team—United States, Great Britain, Australia, Japan, France; and (c) sporting events (e.g., The Ocean Race).

In the context of nautical tourism, the Fédération Européenne de Destinations Touristiques Nautiques prepared a declaration (Fédération Européenne de Destinations Touristiques Nautiques, 2012), exposing the sector’s concern regarding the integration of sustainability, in which 10 objectives are proposed, highlighting: preservation of coastal ecosystems; protection of natural areas and endangered species in the exercise of nautical activities; reduction in the consumption of natural resources, waste and polluting products; promoting environmental education and awareness; innovation in the management and marketing of nautical products and services in order to promote environmental sustainability; and introduction of environmental criteria in the involved organizations’ management policies. In this scenario, the Portuguese organization “Fórum Oceano: Associação da Economia do Mar,” an association that manages the Portuguese sea cluster, established the regulation for the certification of nautical stations that intend to integrate the network of Portuguese Nautical Stations, including a criterion for environmental sustainability, asking for “reference to actions to ensure the environmental sustainability of interventions” (Fórum Oceano, 2019, p. 10). Recognizing the importance of implementing and measuring environmental sustainability in nautical tourism is not only desirable, but absolutely necessary.

The environmental sustainability of sport tourism developed in the context of coastal and maritime areas has been investigated in order to understand the influence of the various factors that contribute to its implementation (Mascarenhas et al., 2021). For instances, a greater sporting experience of divers has been associated with a sport practice that is less harmful to the marine biota (Hammerton, 2017). Conversely, the use of accessories, such as cameras or musk sticks, has been associated with higher levels of destruction of the marine space used by snorkelers and divers for sporting purposes (Hammerton, 2017; Giglio et al., 2018). Several strategies have been advanced to mitigate these negative impacts on marine biota (Giglio et al., 2018), such as: zoning, i.e., limiting the access of tourists (or those with low sport practice experience) to more environmentally sensitive locations; and the promotion of good diving/snorkeling practices through short video-briefings. Additionally, resorting to the implementation of artificial reefs can satisfy the various segments of dive tourism, where tourists with less sporting experience can dive in a space suitable for their sport skills. These strategies promote the protection of fauna and flora in diving spaces, relieving the pressure of mass tourism in the natural space (Belhassen et al., 2017).

The environmental impact of sport tourism is not just a result of the pressure of recreation in the natural space. Unequivocally, it is also necessary to monitor and analyse the carbon emissions generated by the activities carried out in the context of sport tourism (Mascarenhas et al.,

2021). The promotion of energy efficiency, consumption of environmentally friendly products and implementation of recycling/reuse programs by sport tourism operators are frequently cited examples of good environmental management practices by coastal tourism operators (Carneiro et al., 2016; Yfantidou et al., 2017). In conjunction with these environmental practices, the importance of the collaborative factor for the implementation of more environmental management has also been highly recommended (Mascarenhas et al., 2021). Examples of positive results for the environmental sustainability of nautical tourism support the recommendation for processes of collaboration and participation of the main stakeholders: in Aljezur, Portugal, a municipal charter for sustainable management was elaborated with the collaboration of the main stakeholders, taking into account the convergence of several indicators, including environmental indicators regarding the surfing activity and the necessary actions for a better environmental management of the surf tourism in the destination (Machado et al., 2018); in Villefranche-sur-Mer, on the French Riviera, the management of the local nautical station was reconverted to meet the objective of presenting a current and environmentally conscious nautical tourism offer. The objectives relating to the promotion of high environmental quality supported the design of strategies that included the increase in the offer of recreational and sporting activities that meet certain environmental requirements, such as aqua gym, nautical trails, all derivatives of windsurfing, paddle, sea triathlon, sport swimming on the high seas, pedal boats, water polo and scuba (Coglievina et al., 2016).

However, as has been widely emphasized, transport is the biggest contributor to the generation of carbon emissions in the tourism sector (Scott et al., 2016). For this reason, nautical tourism also has to implement strategies and practices capable of mitigating climate change, with a special focus on transport sustainability.

Within the management tools intended to facilitate the implementation of environmental sustainability in coastal tourism, some can be highlighted, namely those focusing on: (i) the need for coordinated collaboration between all stakeholders, in order to infer on converging and divergent topics, enhancing possible synergies between extractive, recreational and natural space conservation use, framed in the ecosystem concept (Biggs et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016); and (ii) the identification of indicators for assessing sustainability (Drius et al., 2019; Coccossis and Koutsopoulou, 2020). For example, Drius et al. (2019) present a conceptual framework that addresses the management of the environmental impacts of nautical tourism by analyzing the trade-offs between environmental threats from coastal tourism and other human activities and coastal ecosystem services. In turn, the study developed by Coccossis and Koutsopoulou (2020) elaborated and applied a tool for measuring and monitoring sustainability at the local level (e.g., a nautical station). This tool integrates

three types of indicators to assess sustainability in nautical tourism: core indicators (i.e., general indicators for sustainable coastal tourism); destination indicators (i.e., to access the unique characteristics of different tourism products, such as beach/maritime tourism, urban/cultural tourism, cruising, recreational boating and nature/ecotourism); and area-specific indicators (i.e., incorporating the crucial and specific aspects of each destination to monitor sustainability). To ensure the effectiveness of the operationalization of this tool, the importance of collaboration among key stakeholders in selecting and prioritizing indicators, and obtaining data, is also highly recommended (Coccossis and Koutsopoulou, 2020).

In addition to applying tools to monitor and analyse environmental indicators, another alternative for the promotion of environmental sustainability involves the inclusion of marketing strategies to enhance the message and environmental action of nautical stations, such as co-branding. As a marketing strategy, co-branding “in which two or more brands are presented simultaneously to the consumer as one product to create a sum of brand assets, that is greater than that of the individual brands” (Turan, 2021, p. 1), may allow a more effective connection between the environmental image of the nautical stations and the corresponding tourist offer, highlighting the fact that the brand image fit is one of the success factors of this strategy (Turan, 2021). In this regard, the study developed by Hsiao (2018) exposed the incongruity of the co-branding strategy in relation to the image of a low carbon island that was presented to tourists incorporating a recreational offer that included high carbon activities, namely motorized nautical activities, which culminated in a mismatch between the image of the island and its tourist offer.

In this sequence, to achieve mutual benefits (i.e., either for the environmental image for a nautical station, or for the implementation of the environmental sustainability of the different products and services of nautical tourism), the following recommendations must be observed: (i) enhancing the offer of more sustainable alternatives from the inventory of nautical sport activities; and (ii) operationalization and dissemination of more environmentally friendly choices in other areas of the tourism offer, namely, in terms of accommodation and transport (Hsiao, 2018).

According to the exposed, the focus of this research is to analyse the strategic alliances for the development of the offer of nautical tourism products, namely its strategic goals and sustainable environmental practices adopted by the actors which integrated the strategic alliance in order to certificate a plethora of nautical stations in Portugal.

## Materials and methods

According to the National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2027 (Turismo de Portugal I. P., 2017), Portugal has an excellent



coastline for surfing, recognized worldwide, as well as for sport and nautical activities; vast marine biodiversity; and natural and infrastructural touristic conditions for cruises. Some of the lines of action of the National Strategic Plan for Tourism 2027 are based on the axis of valorization of the territory with the affirmation of tourism in the economy of the sea, namely: (i) Reinforcement of Portugal's position as a destination for nautical, sport and leisure activities associated with the sea, on the entire coast, and as an internationally recognized surfing destination; (ii) Dynamization and valorization of infrastructures, equipment and services to support nautical tourism, namely, ports, marinas and nautical centers; (iii) Nautical activities for enjoyment of the sea connected to diving, sailing, canoeing, observation of cetaceans and seabirds, fishing, sightseeing tours and beach activities that integrate sustainability in the nautical culture of the sea; (iv) Promotion of "routes of experiences" and tourist offers around the sea and nautical activities; (v) Coastal enhancement actions, including the requalification of marginal areas and the appreciation of beaches; (vi) Tourism projects including health tourism' projects associated with the therapeutic properties of the sea; and (vii) Appreciation of seafood associated with the Mediterranean diet (Turismo de Portugal I. P., 2017). The inclusion of nautical tourism as a strategic product for Portugal is essential for valuing the product, both in tourism and in sport (Morais de Brito and Cordeiro, 2020).

In line with this recognition, between 2014 and 2015, the Business Association of Portugal, in cooperation with the Fórum Oceano (FO), developed the project entitled Nautical Portugal (Fórum Oceano, 2019). The main goal of the project was to potentiate the development of a collective strategy to accelerate the structuring of the nautical sector in order to compete in the global market. The aim of FO was to create, promote and certify nautical stations in Portugal (Fórum Oceano, 2019). The Regulation for the Certification of Nautical Stations (NS) of Portugal (Morais de Brito and Cordeiro, 2020) states that nautical stations are, for the most part, coastal destinations and nautical tourism with an excellent opportunity to reorient some sun and beach tourism destinations. Alongside, there are conditions in the interior territories for the certification of NS, in stable water plans, namely rivers, lakes and reservoirs of dams. For potential visitors, the network offering, under the name of NS, guarantees the quality of the tourist product and the services provided, as well as information support and reservation of accommodation and services (Morais de Brito and Cordeiro, 2020).

The Portuguese nautical stations (PNS) is our case study as an organized network that contributes to the valorization of nautical resources present in the territory (for more information visit <http://www.forumoceano.pt/index.php>). This network includes nautical activities, facilities such as accommodation, restaurants, and other important services for attracting tourists. The main goal of the PNS is to create and

add value to a diverse and integrated experience, based on a cooperation platform between players who offer an organized touristic product or service. The data collection was developed through the establishment of a protocol with the FO. The FO streamlined the authorization process for nautical stations to allow us access to the NS application forms to obtain certification. Portugal has 29 nautical stations certified from north to south and from the coast to the inland waters, of which 17 allowed the research team to consult the official applications forms. As such, in this study the official application forms of 17 certified Nautical Stations were collected and analyzed. For the purpose of the present research, two dimensions of the applications forms were analyzed, namely the strategic goals and the environmental practices described by the different partners of the network. The inductive content analysis was the method pursued related to the study of the mentioned dimensions. According to Bardin (1977) "the content analysis appears as a technique conjunction of communications' analysis that uses systematic procedures and description objectives from the message content" (p. 38). That is why it is an effective method to many areas in the social empirical sciences and often used in tourism research (Rejowski, 2010). The emergent references related to strategic goals and environmental practices were coded in open concepts. Systematically, comparison of concepts led to the definition of the key code followed by an axial and selective coding which in turn, allowed the definition of the subcategories in the two analyzed dimensions. This process was done based on intercoder reliability procedures between two of the co-authors. The NVIVO software was used to the codification process in order to explore patterns related with the dimensions in study.

## Results and discussion

The results show the multiplicity of strategic objectives associated with the established strategic alliance related to sport, namely nautical sport (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Strategic goals per nautical station.

Strategic goals	Nautical stations (n)
Structure the offer	16
Increase governance	11
Promote and market destinations	11
Increase sustainability	8
Train human resources	7
Create and improve facilities	7
Organize events	6
Intensify service quality	5
Develop accessible and inclusive services	4
Others	2

The nautical stations as a strategic alliance confirm the Masselink et al. (2016) theory since the following assumptions are verified: (i) the partnership is formal and informal; (ii) the existence of at least two partners; and (iii) the achievement of strategic goals. In sport tourism industry, strategic alliances can improve global competitiveness and the cooperation of a very diverse group of actors (individual or corporate) from different social systems is crucial (Tuppen, 2000).

Nautical stations can be framed in the concept of tourism destination competitiveness with a particular focus on sport (Happ, 2021), as defined by the author as “a place’s ability to optimize its attractiveness for residents and non-residents, to deliver high-quality, innovative, and attractive sports tourism services and to gain market shares in domestic and global marketplaces, while ensuring that the available resources supporting tourism are used efficiently and sustainably” (p. 67).

The data show the importance attributed by most nautical stations to the structuring of the offer as illustrated by several quotations, such as: “create an integrated strategy for the development of the nautical product, aggregating the offer, with the involvement of all sectors of activity directly connected and other complementary ones (NS5). Or:

*Structuring the tourist offer, in terms of nautical, entertainment activities, catering, accommodation and other services relevant to the attraction of tourists. For this purpose, it is important to create packages that are sufficiently attractive to customers in terms of the offer per se, quality, follow-up and its relationship with the price (NS1).*

Or:

*Enhance the offer of nautical activities, in particular wakeboarding, water skiing, canoeing, rowing, stand-up-paddle, tourist fishing and nautical tours, namely through the creation of a network of partners, including operators of nautical activities, clubs and nautical sports centers, accommodation, restaurants and bars, and the main municipal and regional entities (NS2).*

The structuring of the offer is a fundamental strategic objective as the sport tourism product is a multi-dimensional combination of services and experience opportunities such as transport, lodging, sports activities and facilities, infrastructure, natural surroundings, and social contacts (Thwaites and Chadwick, 2006; Woods and Deeganm, 2006; Elbe et al., 2009). Some authors Zehrer et al. (2017), Aicher and Newland (2018), Newland and Aicher (2018), and Happ (2021) stressed that there are different types of experiences and different types of sport tourism consumers, such as active tourists and athletes; summer and winter sport tourists; different views in the range of stakeholders; new sports trend. For example, for active sport tourists, the quality of the sport experience and sport

entertainment were vital (Aicher and Newland, 2018); on the contrary, for athletes, the event’s reputation and status, constantly renewed event experience, and playing to the limit were more important (Getz and McConnell, 2011). On the whole, as there are different consumers with different interests, when working as a NS approach, the destination should offer different experiences, creat packages composed by different sports and atribbuts/atractions of the destinations and design specific offers for each target group (e.g., athletes or active).

Promoting and marketing destinations, as well as increasing governance, were also mentioned as strategic objectives by a large number of nautical stations (11 of the 17 NS). Regarding promotion, the role of NS in projecting the image of the destination as a nautical destination is mentioned (e.g., NS1; NS3; NS10; and NS14). As attested by the quotation of the NS1 “project the [] as a nautical destination in international markets, through a communication campaign aimed at specific target groups that have as aspiration the practice of nautical in articulation with the natural and cultural heritage,” or “promotion of the territory to increase the market share of visitors from abroad (mainly from Spain)” (NS14).

This objective falls within the meaning of Carayannis et al. (2000) when considering that strategic alliances are a quick and easy way of access to market. Wäsche et al. (2013) stress that sport tourism organizations should engage in cooperative marketing in order to improve the experience to the clients. Specifically, in regions “characterized by small businesses this ‘imperative for cooperation’ is critical for successful marketing and management in tourism” (Wilkinson and March, 2008, p. 27). The Portugal nautical stations are a model of promotion on an international scale. The study by Lam-González et al. (2019) shows the relevance of internationalization in the context of nautical tourism to increase competitiveness for destinations.

With regard to governance, the importance of NS is highlighted to “encourage the articulation of promoting agents with public and private entities, creating partnerships that generate value in the development of nautical tourism” (NS16), or “establish with partners and associated nautical actors, a regular policy of internal and external communication” (NS17). Or, as added in another quotation:

*Implement a collaborative network between local public and private actors representing civil society that works as a discussion group for different themes associated with nautical and is an aggregator element, lobbying institutions and guardianship in order to influence facilitating policies and modes of action of the economic exercise of the tourist activity and in particular the nautical one (NS1).*

Thus, a vision of governance was highlighted in this study to the extent that shared management—a collaborative network between local public and private actors that functions as a discussion and decision-making group—was understood as a

strategic objective associated with the creation of the nautical stations. Klijn (2008) accentuates that the term governance appears associated with the purpose of improving coordination between related actors in solving society's problems. It is underlined by Emerson et al. (2012) that this concept integrates, in addition to public administration, stakeholders, civil society and the community, which is in line with the findings of this study, as stressed by the quotation “ensure greater access for local populations to nautical activities—involvement and access of populations, with special emphasis on school and competitive sports” (NS5). Governance acquires even more relevance insofar as, since tourism is considered as a complex system (Baggio et al., 2010), sport tourism, due to the intensification of the defined characteristics, can also be considered a complex system, implying that “the governance of a destination is controlled by a limited number of entities and is further confirmation of the necessity of creating cohesive inter-organizational networks for the production of integrated tourism experiences” (Baggio et al., 2010, p. 55). Moreover, the cooperation is considered crucial for the operative field of sport tourism management (Wäsche and Woll, 2013).

Sustainability, namely from a perspective associated with environmental protection and sustainable mobility, is a strategic objective for eight of the nautical stations under study. Quotes such as: “promotion of awareness-raising actions for the protection of the coastal area, promoting sustainable behaviors” (NS16), or “betting on sustainable development as a collective commitment, valuing and respecting the environment and territorial balance” (NS11) attest to the aspect of ecological sustainability. Moreover, “create sustainable dynamics of use, enhancement and preservation of the natural and environmental heritage linked to nautical activity, as well as the cultural and identity heritage of the region” (NS5).

Attending to cooperation as a determining factor for the implementation of a more environmental management in sport tourism (Mascarenhas et al., 2021), strategic alliances in sport and tourism should consider the strategic dimension related to the environmental sustainability (e.g., social and ecological compatibility: Wäsche et al., 2013). This dimension is particularly relevant since the nautical stations inscribe their action in natural ecosystems and the respective resources are key elements from the perspective of the sport tourist experience and have a powerful effect on the tourist perception of a chosen sport tourism destination (Hinch and Higham, 2004). As Perić et al. (2016) advocate, the environment is one of the vital elements in the key resources of the business model in sport tourism. Thus, it is important to integrate this dimension in product design, in the analysis of tourist flows and consequent carrying capacity, in the analysis of threats and enabling factors for tourism sustainability, littoralization and urbanization, land-sea interactions, coastal erosion and protection measures, water management, transport and accessibility, monitoring and measuring results.

The remaining strategic objectives—i.e., objectives focused on training human resources, creating and improving facilities, organizing events, intensifying service quality and developing accessible and inclusive services—were not mentioned in most of the analyzed forms, but worth to be mentioned as results of this study. As for example “NS will emphasize its strategy in training existing nautical operators in the surroundings, to attract new target groups” (NS8), or “promotion of nautical and safety training with nautical education institutions promoting a close relationship between the nautical sector, companies operating in the field and the school community” (NS16).

The importance of training of human resources and knowledge transfer, as pointed out in this study, are related to the strategic alliances. In this line, Ferreira and Franco (2020) showed that strategic alliances create important benefits on the human capital of the small and medium enterprises. As the authors point out, human capital is affected by strategic alliances and the relationships developed between SMEs and other companies are increasingly important for their growth. An isolated performance in the market can negatively influence the development capacity of this type of enterprises.

The creation and improvement of facilities/infrastructures was considered a priority insofar as many of the existing structures are geared toward a purely sporting and non-sports-tourist offer. As stressed in the quotation “dynamize and enhance the infrastructure, equipment and services to support nautical tourism” (NS10) or “creation of conditions and incentives for the requalification of existing spaces linked to nautical and/or implementation of new support structures” (NS12). In fact, Ivanić et al. (2018) refer to investment in infrastructure construction as an important factor in the development and enhancement of nautical tourism insofar as the existing facilities do not include the tourist vocation.

It should be noted that sporting events are referred to as strategic for attracting tourists, but also as a way to prolong the stay (NS1; NS10) in association with other events, as quoted:

*Promote, in partnership, a set of nautical events in complementarity with other entertainment events linked to the local culture and environment that offer the visitor the possibility of experiencing diversified experiences that contribute to increasing their stay in the territory (NS1).*

The category “others” includes objectives with only one occurrence, namely, “capitalizing on knowledge networks and their transfer between territories” (NS1), as well as “creating normative elements for the development of nautical activities” (NS13).

The results of the practices of environment sustainability were categorized into five areas of action (Table 2), evidencing the concern of the NS coordinators for this world urgency.

The results lead to the conclusion that the environmental sustainability practices of the nautical stations follow the

TABLE 2 Environmental sustainability practices per nautical station.

Environmental sustainability practices	Nautical stations (n)
Environmental education	13
Resources management	8
Monitorization	7
Guidelines for environmental responsibility	7
Sustainable transportation	3

trend of implementing the environmental practices identified in the context of sport tourism, namely, the prevalence of environmental education and awareness actions (Mascarenhas et al., 2021) but little attention given to the implementation of the sustainable transport (Martins et al., 2021; Mascarenhas et al., 2021). Practices in terms of environmental education are mentioned by most of the EN in the study, namely through “awareness actions on sustainable tourism and environmental protection” both for the network partners and for local communities, as well as for the customers of the NS (e.g., NS2, NS4, NS6, NS7, and NS14), namely: “awareness-raising actions on sustainable tourism and environmental protection” (NS2); “awareness-raising and information activities, dedicated in particular to these issues (among which the effects of climate change, the presence of plastics in the oceans and the threat of protected species gain increasing expression” (NS4); “environmental awareness actions among network partners” (NS6); “creation of the Environmental Guide for sailors, whose objectives are: to improve environmental quality, safety, educate the youngest and participate in the preservation of natural resources” (NS7); and “develop and promote educational programs that encourage good practices in schools” (NS14).

As the results showed, the environmental education practices integrate several levels and involve different types of actors, such as children, providers and sport tourists. This way, by one side, it is important a high degree of training of the managers in the environmental items, as they influence several actors and practices; by the other side, the providers in sport tourism must be informed about sport tourists behaviors in order to create clear explanations about the activities and their rules so negative impacts may be minimized (Perić et al., 2016) and benefits may be maximized whenever it is possible (min-max approach). It is also important to raise the awareness of the actors involved in the offer of nautical tourism to the need to create more benign alternatives for the environment, and to communicate and promote them in an effective and persuasive way, anticipating the factors that will influence their adoption by sport tourism consumers (Martins et al., 2021; Mascarenhas et al., 2021). Nautical stations are based in water/outdoor sports, mainly held in natural spaces, and therefore, consumers and providers must be aware of the variables that can damage the environment. There are several examples of the negative

impact of sport tourists activities and equipments on aquatic resources, namely, the erosion of marine biota caused by divers (Hammerton, 2017; Giglio et al., 2018) and the various types of pollution produced by recreational boat engines (e.g., noise, light pollution, oil discharges, and other waste: Perić et al., 2016). Nevertheless, water sports as, for example, sailing, rowing, canoying, surf, and other less polluting sports, could be inspiring to create a more environmentally friendly human-nature relationship.

Within the scope of resource management, practices focus on the management of water, beaches, nautical centers, marinas and other nautical support infrastructure as well as recyclable waste (NS8, NS9, NS11, and NS16). There is a NS that presents a management plan with the responsibility of each actor by area of intervention (NS17):

*Partner [X] undertakes to inspect all those involved in the events of good practices for the preservation of the aquatic environment, at the request of the partners responsible for them; as well as inform the authorities of any anomaly detected, either in the aquatic environment or on its banks. Partner [Y] undertakes to carry out at least one environmental awareness campaign in schools. Partner [Z] is committed to cleaning the space surrounding the water access platform and raising awareness of the adoption of behaviours consistent with protecting the environment, such as not throwing debris on the floor, using reusable bottles/drums and not voluntarily expel secretions into the surrounding environment.*

Monitoring is referred to at several levels: (i) number of visitors and their impacts/carrying capacities (NS4, NS10); (ii) waste (NS4); (iii) waters (NS9, NS10, NS11, NS15); (iv) biodiversity (NS11, NS15); and (v) consumption (energy and water) (NS11). For example:

*The environmental and territorial enhancement and qualification of the Municipality is supported by an integrative, dynamic and technologically advanced management model that allows the permanent availability of information on the various environmental components, thus contributing to the permanent and objective monitoring of the consequences associated with taking decision. On the coast, there is monitoring of bathing water quality, and biodiversity monitoring is also carried out (NS15).*

In the application forms of the nautical stations, the adoption of guidelines for environmental responsibility was pointed out: (i) already created by other entities (e.g., European Charter for Sport and Sustainable Tourism; Code of Conduct and Good Practices of Portuguese Geoparks); (ii) created (NS1) or being created (NS2, NS4), within the scope of the nautical station [e.g., “in the process of adapting various models/regulations



and existing manuals, to create a specific behavior manual, for the station [NS name omission] or the [NS name omission], which covers partners in the five municipalities, has a quality benchmark in preparation” (NS4)].

Resources management, monitoring and guidelines for environmental responsibility should be incorporated into practices associated with strategic management of the environment. Coccossis and Koutsopoulou (2020) elaborated and applied a tool with three types of indicators to assess sustainability in nautical tourism: core indicators (i.e., general indicators for sustainable coastal tourism); destination indicators (i.e., to access the unique characteristics of different tourism products, such as beach/maritime tourism, urban/cultural tourism, cruising, recreational boating, and nature/ecotourism); and area-specific indicators (i.e., incorporating the crucial and specific aspects of each destination to monitor sustainability).

It was found that there are nautical stations with holistic solutions, which could constitute cases to be analyzed in more depth in order to replicate in other nautical stations. For example, NS15 has an Environmental Management and Information System, within the scope of the Municipal Geographic Information System, which constitutes an online platform that integrates information on various environmental descriptors: Water, Air, Biodiversity, Energy, Soils and Landscape, Waste, Noise and Environmental Education. As advocated by Carneiro et al. (2016) and Yfantidou et al. (2017), this type of measures lead to environmental savings, e.g., the promotion of energy efficiency, consumption of environmentally friendly products and implementation of recycling/reuse programs, and are developed by sport tourism operators. Perić et al. (2016) advocate that “one of the possible solutions for reducing negative effects on the environment is fostering eco-innovations, a technological term usually closely correlated to eco-efficiency and ecological design”. Kelly et al. (2007) have found that significant tourist support existed for options that could increase the overall eco-efficiency of destinations. The study developed by Trstenjak et al. (2020) on nautical tourism in the Mediterranean shows that it is important to have more information about the creation of more environmentally friendly processes as it concludes that there are three major obstacles to greater renewable energy sources: “a lack of awareness and knowledge related to available EU funds intended for achieving sustainable business models and products, attractive financing opportunities for sustainable projects, and complicated bureaucratic procedures” (p. 12).

The area of sustainable transport is contemplated through the implementation of more ecological modes of mobility, such as electric vehicles and bicycles, the evaluation of the various flows related to demand and feasibility studies regarding the implementation of public transport (NS5, NS6, NS11). As pointed out in these quotations: “implementation of sustainable mobility measures” (NS5); “smooth modes of mobility such as

electric vehicles and bicycles are available on the routes” (EN6); “assessment of demand-related road flows and feasibility studies for the implementation of public transport” (EN11).

The development of alternatives to include sustainable transport is in fact a measure that must be considered in a context where natural resources are the key to tourist attractiveness. In this sense, Hsiao (2018) has already recommended for the implementation of the environmental sustainability of the different products and services of nautical tourism, the operationalization and dissemination of more environmentally friendly choices in other areas of the tourism offer, namely, transport. The specification of sport services, taking into account the characteristics of consumers for the adoption of more sustainable behaviors, is important for the implementation of more ecological services, such as the inclusion of sustainable transport alternatives (Martins et al., 2021; Mascarenhas et al., 2021). In this sense, it is of great importance to promote these services given the fact that sport consumers are influenced by a greater aesthetic need and a stronger connection to the local community when considering using sustainable transport in the context of sport tourism (Martins et al., 2021).

## Conclusion

To conclude, this study analyzed the strategic alliances for the development of the offer of nautical tourism products, allowing for a first overview of a pioneering project in Portugal of strategic investment in sport and tourism. The main strategic goal with these alliances was to structure the nautical tourism offer, as well as to increase governance and to promote and market destinations. Although in a less pronounced way, a concern to integrate sustainability in its ecological aspect also emerged as a strategic goal. The results of the adopted environmental sustainability practices showed that there are nautical stations with holistic solutions, which could constitute cases to be analyzed in more depth in order to replicate in other nautical stations, namely, the environmental education practices.

As PNS is a pioneering project and the structuration of the nautical tourism offer is a new area of sport management in Portugal. FO and managers of the nautical stations should create workshops and workgroups to training and to promote the discussion of solutions, sharing of knowledge and development of such offer.

Bearing in mind the urgency of climate action, it is important to raise awareness of FO for the importance of all nautical stations prioritize the integration of sustainability as a strategic goal; future studies should focus on case studies on nautical stations that develop alternatives for sustainable transport. In this way, it will be possible to understand the context of the implementation of this type of actions,

as well as the different factors that facilitate and constrain their effectiveness.

Future research should try to analyse all the PNS and also the remaining dimensions of the applications forms 1. In accordance with the objectives of the study, the direct observation of the environmental sustainability practices implemented by the nautical stations was not carried out, which constitutes a limitation of this study. Thus, future studies should carry out the scientific follow-up of the operationalization of the strategic objectives and practices exposed by the entities, as well as the respective impacts on the management of nautical stations in order to create scientific knowledge for the management of sport tourism, particularly, the nautical tourism.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Author contributions

EP, AF, JM, VA, and MM contributed to conception and design of the study. VA organized the database. EP, VA, and AF performed the analysis. EP and VA wrote the first draft of the manuscript. EP, AF, JM, RM, VA, and MM wrote sections of the manuscript. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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# Building bridges: Connecting sport marketing and critical social science research

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Recently, sport management scholars have called for researchers to critically evaluate the ways in which research questions and resulting contributions truly disrupt what is known, how it is known, why it is important to know, and for whom. Historically, sport marketing research has adapted traditional research approaches from the parent marketing discipline to sport. Yet, sport is a constantly evolving social and cultural phenomenon and a reliance on conventional theories, concepts, and methods can serve to crystalize the discourse in sport marketing in ways that may limit knowledge production. Responding to this call, we believe that sport marketing research has much to gain from engaging with critical social science assumptions, worldviews, and perspectives to examine complex issues in sport. We position this paper as a starting point for advancing the field of sport marketing in meaningful and impactful ways by offering two research propositions, each accompanied by four actional recommendations. We employ a particular focus on the marketing campaigns that activate and promote corporate partnerships in sport to frame our two propositions, which discuss (1) consumer culture theory and (2) the circuit of culture as two important frameworks that begin to build bridges between sport marketing and critical social science.

## KEYWORDS

consumer research, commercialization, circuit of culture, consumer culture theory, corporate partnerships

## Introduction

Researchers of sport and sport-related groups are being nudged by institutions, funding bodies, and publication “gatekeepers” (e.g., editors and reviewers) to justify the value of their work in ways that move beyond addressing a gap in the literature. While “gap-spotting” is a common way to formulate research questions from existing literature, Sandberg and Alvesson (1) claim that “it does not actively challenge the assumptions underlying existing theory” (p. 33). Alternatively, they suggest that problematization leads to more innovative and novel research questions that “disrupt the reproduction and continuation of an institutionalized line of reasoning” [(1), p. 32]. Recently, Stenling and Fahlén (2) call for sport management researchers (broadly interpreted) to consider what is “worthwhile knowledge” and to “clarify on whose behalf a study is conducted and, thus, for whom, in what ways, and why its contribution is important” (p. 16). Further, their recommendations for sport management researchers align with Sandberg and Alvesson

(1) in that research should disrupt prevailing assumptions to build “new, significant, and meaningful knowledge that alters the way we understand and explain sport management practice” [(2), p. 16]. In the field of sport marketing specifically, Kim et al. [(3), p. 59] argue that sport marketing research has historically “been more normal research practice focusing on post-positivistic [consumer] behavior-based studies,” with the notion of “normal research” stemming from Kuhn’s [(4), p. 163] reference to a “highly convergent activity based firmly upon a settled consensus acquired from scientific education and reinforced by subsequent life in the profession.” Kim et al. [(3), p. 59] highlight the need for “optimal balance between normal research with convergent thinking and innovative practices with divergent ideas” for scientific progress.

The purpose of this commentary is to serve as a point of departure for discussions on progressing the field of sport marketing in meaningful and impactful ways. We echo Stenling and Fahlén’s (2) “call to arms” with an explicit focus on bridging sport marketing and critical social science. We agree with others who advocate for collapsing disciplinary silos [e.g., (5, 6)], and assert that sport marketing research has much to gain from engaging with critical social science assumptions, worldviews, and perspectives to examine complex issues in sport. We outline how sport marketing researchers may challenge the pre-existing assumptions in the field by encouraging others to “read ‘horizontally’ to gain a ‘multi-silo’ perspective of the phenomenon of interest, thereby facilitating the creation of knowledge that makes us think of phenomena in new ways” [(2), pp. 16–17]. In what follows, we discuss two research propositions, (1) consumer culture theory and (2) the circuit of culture, as two important frameworks that integrate sport marketing and critical social science. From the outset, we acknowledge that these are only two of many potential areas for synthesis, and even within these frameworks, there are numerous possibilities to explore. However, to help others envision our proposals, for each proposition we offer actionable recommendations as innovative research directions that promise new knowledge discovery.

Frisby [(7), p. 2] describes critical social science as “a way of empowering individuals by confronting injustices in order to promote social change.” Research that adopts critical approaches features prominently in sport sociology, with scholars suggesting that incorporating these perspectives into sport management research can advance the field (8). Researchers that utilize a critical view “are concerned about goals other than profit and with representing the interests of those affected by managerial actions, such as workers, athletes, volunteers, customers, marginalized populations, and the public at large” [(7), p. 6]. These approaches appear infrequently in journals within the domain of sport marketing, despite their

importance in sport management research for “unpacking the less-desirable aspects of sport as a social system,” resulting in a stable foundation “upon which positive change in sport can be made” [(9), p. 9]. According to Sayer [(10), p. 768], the job of critical social science is “to ‘unsettle’ existing academic ideas.” Therefore, incorporating critical social science approaches into sport marketing research may help to “expand our understanding of sport’s role in society, how it may be an exclusionary space and to provide a strong theoretical basis for practical improvements by challenging power relations” [(9), p. 2].

Sport is a commodity and practice, and is a globally popular, highly visible, and influential part of society. Corporate brands use the appeal and excitement of sport to communicate their messages to consumers (11) and accomplish their business objectives (12). Currently there is momentum—and arguably a strong need—for professional sport (and related corporate partnerships) to have positive social impact, to help achieve social justice, and to minimize (the effects of) inequality. Arguably, sport marketing plays an equally important role in attracting large audiences to sport and associating corporate brands with the social and cultural values of sport. In this sense, marketing campaigns that activate and promote corporate partnerships with sport are “privileged form[s] of social communication” that can be utilized by marketers to influence culture, social interactions, and identities [(13), pp. 103–104]. Through marketing, brands create powerful stories and compelling narratives that consumers use to process their own tensions, desires, and anxieties that originate from broader societal problems (14). For example, Nike’s “For Once Don’t Do It” advertisement following the Black Lives Matter Movement, Amazon’s Climate Pledge Arena in Seattle, and Scotiabank’s “Hockey for All” campaign, to name a few. Yet, the “corporatization, privatization, and branding” of social justice issues by commercial organizations has become “increasingly complex, messy, and blurred” [(15), p. 523], with regards to corporate intentions and “rising consumer expectations of corporate social responsibility” [(16), p. 132]. As consumers become more discerning of corporate partnerships with sport, brands may be perceived as exploitative, disingenuous, and superfluous (17–20). Additionally, athletes and coaches, given their celebrity status and large followings, can “shape fans’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors” [(21), p. 36], which can influence how sport marketers communicate with consumers. Crucially, framing sport marketing and consumer research from a position that upholds sport as a distinct social and cultural practice and queries *why* and *how* definitions and meanings of sport serve some interests over others [e.g., professional athlete, sport organization, corporate entity, fan/consumer; (22)], begins a long, convoluted journey to problematize and disrupt our assumptions about the association of corporate brands with sport.

## Consumer culture theory

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) “refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationship between consumer actions, the culture marketplace, and cultural meanings” [(23), p. 868]. It consists of four salient, interconnected theoretical dimensions consisting of: “(1) consumer identity projects, (2) marketplace cultures, (3) the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies” [(23), p. 871]. According to CCT, supporters can create and attribute meaning to the images, texts, and objectives that are commercially produced and through which consumers make sense of their environment, which can lead to consumers redefining the meaning of a brand based on their collective interpretation thereof (14, 24). Thus, supporter groups may dictate the symbolism of brands associated with sport, with positive values (e.g., distinctiveness) benefitting the brand (25), and resistance occurring if they do not perceive that the team derives value from the connection (18). Rokka [(14), p. 114] recently commented that “CCT’s future looks promising in its commitment and ability to foster critical, contextually sensitive, and reflexive cultural insights into marketing—an important foundation for marketing strategy and practices.” As such, CCT can play a role in exploring the contextual factors that influence how supporters and supporter groups interpret and attribute meaning to a brand.

At present, much sport marketing consumer research is largely informed by cognitive psychological (behavioral) or economic theories. While these studies are important for continued understanding of consumer attitudes toward products/services and purchasing behaviors, there is an opportunity to engage with CCT and social theories (e.g., social constructivism, feminism, critical race theory) to critique “the structural foundations and limitations of the consumers’ experiential universe” [(26), p. 386]. CCT is often set within the context of social historical production as well as the prevailing socio-economic conditions, which contextualizes consumer-based practices and perspectives within the structures and systems that transcend lived experience. This allows “CCT researchers [to look] toward understanding market systems and dynamics and [approach] consumer culture not just as a matter of what consumers do but also how the world in which they do it is constituted” [(27), p. 135]. Ultimately, the goal is to give greater consideration to “the context of contexts” [(26), p. 396]. That is, to “pay increased attention to the contexts that condition consumption” [(26), p. 389]. Sport marketing research needs to, in the very least, consider how consumption experiences are embedded within broader social structures, cultural norms, and ideological injustices, including (among others): racism, gender relations, homophobia, and classism. These contexts cannot be ignored as consumers navigate, engage in, and

challenge everyday consumer culture. “Looking at the ways that everyday consumption practices reproduce larger cultural and social frameworks is also a matter of asking not only how consumption is influenced by social forms and processes, but how it participates in the constitution of society” [(26), p. 396]. Given this discussion, we offer our first research proposition and four corresponding actionable recommendations.

*Proposition 1:* Critical engagement with CCT can provide a lens to examine realities beyond the individual sport consumer/fan.

### Actionable Recommendations:

- Develop a better understanding of the meanings and values linked with signs, symbols, rituals, and traditions that shape brand community identity creation and development in sport.
- Generate a better understanding of the micro- and macro-level contextual influences (systemic and structural) of market and social systems that guide sport consumption experiences, identities, and communities.
- Seek a better understanding of the important actors (e.g., marketers, sport organization executives, brand executives) that participate in the contexts of sport consumption—actors that have their own social and cultural values.
- Establish a better understanding of ‘sport consumer-brand consumption’ relationships as functions of sport, wherein both sport and consumption are recognized as social and cultural practices that can confer identity, values, and beliefs.

## The circuit of culture

Previous research on sport-related advertising and the communication of corporate brand partnerships in sport have adopted the circuit of culture as a framework to critically analyze sport-related promotion and advertising (28, 29). Accordingly, the circuit of culture, which traces the “lifecycle” of a commodity in contemporary society (30), has become an important component of research related to the growth of advertising, consumption, and commercialization within society (31). It consists of five interrelated cultural processes: production, representation, consumption, and identity, the components necessary to adequately examine commodities (30). As a circuit, the starting point is irrelevant, since the journey of explaining the meaning of an artifact involves analysis at each moment; cognizant that the processes are not distinct, rather each element converses with and blends into the next (30), overlapping one another and, hence, mutually defining and jointly dependent (32). It is the combined articulation or linkages of these processes that begin to explain the meaning cultural artifacts possess and the identities that they construct

and/or embody (30). According to du Gay et al. [(30), p. 3], the five interlinked spheres facilitate the exploration of cultural artifacts in terms of “how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution.”

In sport contexts, research often focuses more on the representation and identity components, and fails to examine consumption and regulation (31). Thus, this research captures more of the critical perspective that misappropriation and inaccurate representation can have on groups of people (28), while analyzing the individuals that are responsible for generating the advertisements (33). Conversely, sport marketing research often does not consider the content or sociocultural implications of advertisements (particularly on marginalized groups), nor that of the activations undertaken by brands involved with sport, instead focusing on the consumption of products (e.g., purchase intention), attitudinal outcomes (e.g., sponsor image), and other sponsorship constructs, including supporter identification, fit, and awareness (34, 35).

In critical social science research, sport-related advertisements are critically analyzed using the circuit of culture framework to examine the content, how the advertisement was produced, how the cultural intermediaries responsible for creating the advertisement chose to represent the sexuality, gender, and race of the people that appeared in the advertisement, and how the advertisement was consumed and interpreted by viewers (28). However, the focus of this research adopts the critical perspective without considering the marketing-related outcomes for the advertised brand (e.g., awareness, attitudes) after the advertisement has been processed and interpreted. Therefore, marketing research evaluating corporate brand partnerships in sport should incorporate critical analysis of the production, identity, and consumption contained within the circuit of culture to move beyond the individual consumer into the broader societal and cultural context surrounding the positioning of the advertised brand. Given this discussion, we offer our second research proposition and four corresponding actionable recommendations.

*Proposition 2:* The circuit of culture offers a framework to explore how consumers react to and interpret the content of marketing campaigns that activate and promote corporate partnerships in sport.

#### *Actionable Recommendations:*

- Examine how advertising content and messaging influences consumers’ subsequent attitudinal and behavioral responses to the advertisements.
- Explore the power relations between cultural intermediaries and marginalized populations and any resulting social injustices.
- Investigate how marketers’ idealized and/or stereotypical representations of particular groups (e.g., men/women,

racial, Indigenous, LGBTIQ2S+, etc.) can impact a group’s identity and consumption behaviors.

- Analyze the manner in which a product’s intended meaning is altered through consumption experiences and identity regulation.

## Conclusion

In this commentary, we propose two research propositions that connect sport marketing and critical social science research. These are unorthodox but imperative proposals that require radical reconsideration of two research fundamentals. First, these propositions challenge traditional ontological marketing worldviews that embrace a (post)positivist paradigm (3), and instead advocate for ontological claims that “reality is created through [macro and] microsocial interactions” (interpretivist paradigm) and/or “reality is rooted in the tensions surrounding historically entrenched power relations” (critical realist paradigm; [(7), pp. 2–3]. Second, these propositions prompt the need for new research designs (e.g., ethnography) that necessitate the integration of qualitative or multi/mixed methods, which diverts from the “normal research” [(4), p. 163] that is generally conducted in sport marketing. Taken together, we uphold that these propositions open up possibilities for sport marketing research to be innovative and impactful, to disrupt repeated and institutionalized lines of reasoning/inquiry, and to create new expectations for what is worthwhile knowledge in the field.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

## Author contributions

ZE was responsible for conceptualizing and writing the manuscript. SG and TE offered guidance on the conceptualization and writing of the manuscript, in addition to edits, revisions, and helping to re-write some parts of the final manuscript. All authors have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to this manuscript and approved the manuscript in the form in which it was submitted.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



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# Alone in the wilderness—Cultural perspectives to the participants' motives and values from participating in a danish reality TV-show

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This paper focus on the participants in the Danish version of the reality TV-show Alone, named Alone in the wilderness (AIW), and seeks to explore *What motives and values are important to the participants in the TV-show (AIW) and how can the show be understood as a cultural phenomenon?* The study is qualitative with a design based on a triangulation of different methods: single interviews, transcripts of programs and autoethnographic notes. The analysis is inspired by a hermeneutic approach applying a 6-phased thematic analysis. The participants motives and values from their participation in the TV-show reflect ideas that may be related to the solo experience. On one hand the participants are motivated by the challenges of being alone in the wilderness and they value the possibility of personal development. On the other hand, they value nature and simple life in the outdoors, an experience that seems to grow more important to the participants as time goes. AIW is a competition and some of the participants are highly competitive aiming at winning the show, which however becomes less important during their stay in the wilderness. AIW as a cultural phenomenon reflects ideas and values related to an understanding of adventure and the Nordic tradition of *friluftsliv* (simple life in the outdoors) and can be related to theories on late modernity focusing on reflectivity and self-identity. The study presents new empirically based knowledge on the motives, values and experiences of people participating in AIW and it presents new theoretically based knowledge on how these motives, values and experiences can be understood as part of outdoor education and recreation and as a cultural phenomenon in late modern society.

## KEYWORDS

outdoors, solo experience, friluftsliv, adventure, extreme sports, reality TV-show, media, cultural analysis

## 1. Introduction

The American reality TV-show concept Alone is well known in many western countries and has become extremely popular in recent years. Denmark is no exception. Since 2016 five seasons of a Danish version of the TV-show, Alone in the wilderness (AIW), which is taking place in the northern Norway, has been shown on the national channel 1 (DR1) on Saturday evenings at primetime.

Reality TV as a genre has a long history (1) but the American TV-show Alone is a rather new concept, building on a series of reality shows that take place in natural landscapes. In the

concept Alone a group of carefully casted, but otherwise “ordinary” people, are placed alone in the wilderness. Their challenge is to manage and survive using a limited amount of survival equipment. Except for medical check-ins, the participants are isolated from each other and all other humans. They must deal with inclement weather, hunger, and their own solitude, with the aim of staying out longer than their competitors, which they know nothing about while staying in the wilderness. They have an emergency phone to call for help and a “tap out” button to push if they want to be brought back to civilization.

The participants use video-record to self-document their experiences in solitude. From the large amount of material gathered the production company chooses the most interesting parts and creates a series of audience friendly episodes. The participants are carefully casted to ensure dynamic, excitement and emotions in each episode, and they are shown in different, often critical, and emotional situations. The episodes often contrast the participants’ approaches to survival and each episode usually ends with one of the participants deciding to tap out and return home (2).

The participants are isolated from their friends and families, they are being exposed to extreme conditions in the wilderness, and they are being exposed to a large audience, depending on the producer team to present them in a reasonable positive way. In the Danish TV-show AIW there is no big prize, and the winner primarily gets the experience of participating and the fame of winning.

Being alone in nature has fascinated people for many years and in many ways, and there seems to be an attraction and power related to the solo experience (3). In the TV-show AIW the solo experience becomes a mainstream phenomenon, produced by commercial production teams, and being globally exposed *via* modern mass media. Solo experiences thus are brought into people’s living-rooms in the form of an international concept of reality TV-shows, and the participants become celebrities. It can be mentioned that in February 2020 the Danish TV-show AIW was the 7. most viewed TV program in Denmark (<https://mir.dk/2020/03/10/alle-snakker-seertal/>) and in 2019 the finale of AIW was seen by 862.000 viewers putting it on top 3 of the most viewed TV programs in Denmark at that time (<https://www.dr.dk/om-dr/nyheder/ugens-tv-top-10-vi-var-vilde-med-vildmarken>). The American reality concept has been exported to many different countries and millions of people watch the TV-show, following the participants and discussing how they cope with being alone in the wilderness and who will win? The notion of the untouched natural landscape in combination with the extreme situation—being alone in the wilderness—together with the element of competition seems to hold a great power of fascination. Like other reality TV-shows, it is good entertainment as it offers the possibility of personal identification with real characters (4).

The participants in AIW voluntarily choose to participate in the production of a reality TV-show that for a period radically changes their lives. With a focus on the participants in AIW we find it interesting to explore why people want to participate in the TV-show—exposing themselves to extreme challenges and to a vast and broad audience. In this paper we aim to question and

understand: *What motives and values are important to the participants in the TV-show (AIW) and how can the show be understood as a cultural phenomenon?* These questions are interesting, as the TV-show, like other cultural phenomena, tells us about society and culture (5). Taking a closer look at the program and getting a deeper understanding of AIW might point to and perhaps challenge taken-for-granted understandings in our own culture. Challenging and gaining greater knowledge of these understandings may be seen as the foundation or first step towards change, e.g., according to the way people understand and use media and nature.

First, we introduce the background pointing to different traditions, trends, and cultures in outdoor education and recreation with a reference to theories on late modernity. After having lined up the materials and methods used in the study results are presented followed by a discussion with reference to different traditions, trends, and cultures in outdoor education and recreation, and drawing on Giddens theories on late modernity. The paper is rounded off with a conclusion and reflections on possible implications.

## 2. Background

In this section the ambition is to present the background for studying AIW as a cultural phenomenon. AIW is basically about being alone in nature and thus the starting point is literature on solo experiences. After that we present different traditions, trends, and cultures in outdoor education and recreation with a specific focus on adventure and *friluftsliv*, as two prominent categories relevant to understand motives and values in AIW. Theories on late modernity are presented to understand and explain AIW as a cultural phenomenon focusing on the diversity and development in outdoor education and recreation as part of modern society.

### 2.1. The solo experience

AIW basically is about being alone in nature, and as a cultural phenomenon it can be related to the solo experience. In literature we find numerous examples of the fascination and power related to being alone in the wilderness, often referred to as a solo experience. One good example is Henry David Thoreau, living alone for two years in the woods near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, who presented philosophical reflections on the relationship between “man” and nature and argued for the value of a simple life in nature (6). The Norwegian polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen, as an early ambassador for the Nordic concept of *friluftsliv*, explicitly advocated for the value of being alone in nature as an indispensable element in young people’s character building including a critique of modern city life (7). Bjørn Tordsson, a contemporary Nordic pedagogic philosopher, described the core of *friluftsliv* and simple life in the outdoors as valuable existential experiences which—due to *nature’s open indictment*—creates an opportunity to make meaning for the individual (8). Knapp and

Smith (3) investigated the background to solo trips pointing to indigenous people, monks, and hermits, and to solo trips as rites of passage facilitating a special relation to animals and the natural world often involving spiritual experiences.

Solo experiences are used in therapeutic contexts with different groups, for example by women with the aim of personal growth (9), or in educational contexts as a pedagogical method to build up young people's self-awareness (10, 11). Quite a few studies point to the importance of participants volunteering to do a solo, the pre-solo mindset and to the facilitation process and the role of the instructor (10–13).

Personal development and the relation to nature seems to be closely related to the solo experience and AIW may be seen as a modern TV-show that builds on the history and tradition of the solo experience but staged as a reality TV-show. The TV-show follows the characteristics of reality shows (4), e.g., with a particular challenge to the participants as to how they perform and manage different roles (2). Following the overall research question in this paper, we will not include the aspects of media, performance, or the participants different roles.

## 2.2. Different traditions, trends, and cultures

Aiming at understanding motives, values, and the fascination of the reality TV-show AIW it seems relevant to investigate and further discuss different traditions, trends, and cultures in outdoor education and recreation, e.g., adventure and friluftsliv.

The concept of Adventure is generally understood as challenging situations in natural landscapes including risk, uncertainty, real consequences, and a demand for an active personal effort from the participants (14–18). Challenge is used pedagogically in an educational or therapeutic context with an expectation to achieve personal development leading to for example, increased self-efficacy, self-awareness, or resilience. The notion, although criticized (19–21), is that being exposed to challenge, one will learn about physical and mental limits and capacities and that this inevitably will lead to personal development.

Another prominent tradition is found in the Nordic tradition of friluftsliv (19, 22–24). Here the focus is on simple living, identification with nature and reflections on human-nature relations. The values of simple life in nature according to the Nordic tradition of friluftsliv are basic life in preferably unspoiled nature, plentiful of time, managing life with simple means. In a pedagogic context, friluftsliv and simple life in nature is often connected to democratic values, deep reflections, environmental awareness, and a close relation to tradition and a special place (19, 24, 25).

Adventure is overall understood as a global concept within outdoor education and recreation with roots in USA, GB, Australia, and New Zealand. Friluftsliv on the other hand is understood as a Nordic concept which relates to a special history and special values, but today seems to be spreading beyond the Nordic countries. The tradition of adventure, however, is not a straightforward and well-defined concept with studies pointing to

different countries having distinct adventure cultures (18). The same can be said about the Nordic tradition of friluftsliv (19, 22, 23) pointing to the diversity and complexity within Outdoor Education and Recreation with more trends and values.

## 2.3. AIW as a cultural phenomenon

The TV-show *Alone* is understood as a cultural phenomenon that might tell us about human motives, habits, patterns of behavior and values related to nature and society. The TV-show is global and reflects different trends, which makes it an interesting and complex, new cultural phenomenon. Despite its global distribution and immense popularity, very little has been investigated in terms of its meaning to people and the relation to nature and to society.

Within Outdoor Education and Recreation, more concepts and cultural trends can be identified which seem to reflect geographical and cultural diversity as well as historical development. Culture in this context is understood as habits, patterns of behavior as well as values and motives for being active in natural landscapes. Within the last 20 years some studies have been published on the cultural aspects of Outdoor Education and Recreation (18, 19, 26–29). On one hand they point to the significance of Outdoor Education and Recreation to society and the ways in which traditions and programs reflect general values and trends in society. On the other hand, the studies point to social and cultural diversity within Outdoor Education and Recreation with more traditions, trends and cultures being promoted at different times and different places.

Theories on late modernity (30, 31) have been used to understand and explain the development and diversity within Outdoor Education and Recreation in modern society. Giddens and other social theorists' points to modern society being a continuation of modern institutional transitions and cultural developments. Giddens argue that the modernity of contemporary society is a developed, radicalized, "late" modernity which tend to be self-referring, instead of being defined in opposition to traditionalism, as in classical modernity. Modern societies are detraditionalized leading to enhanced reflexivity, both at the level of individuals and at the level of institutions. In the post-traditional order self-identity is reflexive and people are increasingly free to choose what they want to do and who they want to be leading to an increased focus on lifestyles. People thus need to create, maintain and revise a set of biographical narratives, social roles and lifestyles which can be seen in different aspects of modern life e.g., in their choices of outdoor activities and maybe also in their choice to participate in reality TV-shows.

Theories on late modernity, e.g., Giddens perspectives and focus on reflexivity and self-identity (30, 31), are often used to understand and explain motives and values in adventure and extreme sports (18, 19, 27, 32, 33) in a sociological and cultural perspective.

In this paper the focus is on the Danish version of the TV-show *Alone* in the wilderness (AIW), questioning the participants



experiences in relation to their participation in AIW trying to understand their motives and values and why they chose to participate in the production of a reality TV-show that for a period radically changes their lives. By doing this we intend to get a deeper understanding of the inherent values and cultural meanings of AIW as a modern cultural phenomenon.

### 3. Materials and methods

This qualitative study intends to examine, identify and discuss motives and experiences among a particular group of people, and can be seen as an explorative case study (34–36) intending to produce new knowledge about a known phenomenon. The design aims to facilitate triangulation involving three different methods and sources of empirical material from AIW: (1) Qualitative single interviews (37) with two participants from season 3; (2) Transcripts of programs from season 1 and 2; and (3) Autoethnographic notes (38–40) from a participant from season 2 (co-author).

The empirical material (see **Table 1**) covers season 1–3, which are, if not identical, comparable in terms of structure, episodes, participants, and location. The two respondents (R1 & R2) in the single interviews, the transcript programs (P1–P7) and the auto-ethnographer (AI) were selected to have a broad material representing different seasons and different participants in terms of gender, age, and experience with outdoor activities. The empirical data can be criticized for containing different amounts of data from the different seasons and for a bias in relation to gender distribution (only men in transcripts). The total amount of empirical material, however, reflects a reasonable breadth in relation to both gender and the different seasons of the TV-show.

The two interviews ranged from 60 to 80 min in length and were audio recorded to ensure the accurate representation of participants' responses. The semi-structured interviews encouraged the development and elucidation of responses to understand participants' motives and experiences (41). The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers before analysis.

Transcripts from the programs focus on the spoken language and not on nonverbal actions or appearances, as the purpose was to understand motives and experiences among the participants.

Analytically it is important to recognize that the programs represent an edited version of an interpreted reality. First, the participants chose what to record, then the production-company selects which recordings to include in the TV-show, and finally, the material is being subject to interpretations.

The autoethnographic notes are made by the co-author (AI). The notes were written down shortly after the participation in AIW, to remember the experience but was not intended to be involved in scientific studies, which increases the credibility of the material (42).

The triangulation and the three different methods and sources of empirical material involved are chosen as it allows for a broad and thorough insights into the participants' motives and experiences in relation to their participation in AIW. Triangulation involving different methods and empirical material was also chosen to avoid possible adverse implications of a researcher analyzing own autoethnographic data.

The analysis is informed and inspired by a hermeneutic approach (43, 44) aiming to interpretate and form a deeper understanding of the participants motives, experiences, and values focusing on both the individual parts and the entire material. The hermeneutic approach also includes a special emphasis on throughout the study to critically question own conjectures and preconceptions. This in combination with the triangulation of methods seems highly relevant according to the research questions to ensure the study's validity and reliability.

To follow a relevant structure and process in the analytical work and to facilitate the hermeneutic interpretation the empirical material is interrogated using the 6-phased thematic analysis (45, 46): (1) familiarizing with data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) producing the paper. The analysis focuses on and reflects the research questions, while being open to the possibility of unforeseen themes emerging.

The empirical material was inductively coded by the researchers (47) with the two qualitative interviews initially coded and given priority, as they were expected to provide the most comprehensive empirical material with the greatest depth. In the next step the two other sources of empirical material were brought into the analysis to qualify the findings. In the analyzing process we aimed at identifying themes but also trying to assess the importance of the different themes and the participants'

TABLE 1 Overview of the empirical material.

Form	Qualitative interviews		Transcripts		Autoethnographic notes	
Season	Season 3		Season 1 and 2		Season 2	
Year	2019		2017–2018		2018	
Info of the participants	Name	Gender	Name	Gender	Name	Gender
	Respondent (R1)	Female	Participant (P1)	Male	Auto-ethnographer (AI)	Female
			Participant (P2)	Male		
			Participant (P3)	Male		
	Respondent (R2)	Male	Participant (P4)	Male		
			Participant (P5)	Male		
			Participant (P6)	Male		
			Participant (P7)	Male		

priorities in relation to the themes. Coding and themes identified were discussed in several rounds and verified in a final discussion by the two researchers with reference to the entire empirical material and with a critical perspective to own presumptions and conjectures. In addition to this the findings were peer reviewed by presenting and discussing them with two international colleagues (35). The accuracy of quotes and interpretations of participants' responses were verified by sending each respondent (R1 & R2) a draft copy of the paper for their review and approval (48).

## 4. Ethics

The transcripts of the selected seasons from the TV-show provides no ethical considerations. Regarding the qualitative interviews, these are anonymized, and the researchers have informed consent from the respondents.

The study and its data-management procedures were ethically approved by Legal Services, SDU, RIO (approval number 11.413). All data is managed in accordance with the GDPR regulations and are stored on a secure server at University of Southern Denmark.

The researchers represent no conflicts of interest in relation to the study.

## 5. Results

The analysis points to a variety of motives and important experiences linked to the participants' participation in the TV-show AIW, which overall seem to reflect ideas and values related to the solo experience. The participants are generally motivated by the challenges of being alone in the wilderness and they value the possibility of personal development as well as the close relation to nature. Through the thematic analysis three rather broad and recurring themes emerged from the data: (1) challenge and personal development; (2) nature and simple life in the outdoors; and (3) competition and winning. The themes reflect the participants' overall motives for participation and their important experiences from the time spent alone in the wilderness.

### 5.1. Challenge and personal development

The first theme, "challenge and personal development", seems to be the most important motive for the participants. Challenges both physically and mentally are generally understood as positive and as a very important part of the experience. Facing challenges can be linked to the participants' wish to test their capacities and thus meet expectations from themselves and others. The general understanding among the participants is that meeting challenges lead to personal development. A better understanding of oneself and one's own mental and physical capacity and boundaries is seen as the core of personal development. The participants

generally recognize their participation as an individual and, to some extent, a selfish act.

The participation in AIW represents a series of very concrete physical and mental challenges to the participants. The physical challenges include having the skills to manage the situation, such as make fire, build a shelter, and provide food to survive in the wilderness. Perhaps even more important is the mental challenge of being alone, having to deal with solitude and one's own thoughts, missing friends and family and coping with hunger and fear in an uncertain and extreme wilderness situation. The uncertainty combined with the real consequences of failing is an important part of the experience of challenges:

*"Out here, everything becomes a little more extreme, because the consequences of succeeding and failing are a lot greater than usual." (P1).*

Most of the participants see their participation as a kind of test, where they get the opportunity to seek and find their own physical and mental boundaries. The understanding is that facing challenges can tell them if their capabilities, skills, and mental strength are in line with their own self-understanding and self-image:

*"It was also a kind of study into myself and my own skills. A study into what you contain as a human being, what one really can and cannot do, but especially what you can do that you don't think, you can do. So, the thing about testing boundaries was also a rather important factor in wanting to participate." (R2).*

The participants generally understand themselves as rather skilled outdoor persons and have high expectations to their own capabilities. Quite a few of them emphasize that their expectations to themselves and their understandings of their own competencies are important parts of their motives for participation:

*"The most important thing for me is to get out there and see, if I can still do all the things, I once could." (P2).*

*"But in general, being allowed to challenge myself to that extent, because I was naturally born with the ability to be very structured and systematic, so I spend a heck of a lot of time planning things when I need something and am therefore rarely pressured." (R1).*

The experience of being physically and mentally challenged is closely linked to a notion of personal development, and the participants obviously have an expectation that experiencing challenges will lead to personal development. This is a very crucial element in their motives for participation and an important experience after the TV-show mentioned by most of the participants:

*"... the challenge I want to overcome the most and become good at is to be familiar with my own mind. For me, this is what it is all about—it is the fight against myself." (P3).*

Personal development is understood as a process, where the challenging situations help the participants experience and push their own physical and mental boundaries, which help them to get a better understanding of themselves:

*"I have signed up, because I like the challenge of being myself and the challenge of being 'man vs. wild', right? (...) that you try yourself out, you test your limits: what can I really do? And you push those limits and it's an enormously positive experience, that you think, I can only do this and then you go a little further..." (P3).*

The personal development is closely linked to the participants' reflections on themselves, on their skills and physical and mental capabilities, their relations to others and their life in general. The personal development, however, seems predominantly related to the mental perspectives of the challenges, meaning understanding, expanding, or accepting one's own mental capacities and limits. For some of the participants these reflections are very positive and important:

*"I don't think that I as a person [am] a different human being than before my participation, but I am a much more conscious human being. Aware of my strengths and weaknesses and what I want with them and how I want to use myself as a tool, so in that way it has definitely changed me..." (R1).*

The participants generally are aware that their participation in AIW is a rather individualistic project. Their motives for participation are centered around themselves, and they seem to be open and reflective about this and to accept the selfishness of the project as well as the possible consequences for their families:

*"There is one dominant part of it, it is a personal challenge being allowed to do such an extreme and wild thing and a little bit selfish, to go out all alone and then have to manage yourself, and then the rest of the world and Denmark and your children too (...) they have to fend for themselves." (R1).*

*"It is very much a dream come true. That I can run around and play Rambo for myself out there in nature, but... it is an enormously selfish act to leave one's family in order to realize myself. It's incredibly selfish." (P5)*

The participants, however, also value nature and simple life in the outdoors, and this experience seems to grow more important to the participants as time goes.

## 5.2. Nature and simple life in the outdoors

Being in nature and living a simple life in the outdoors is important to the participants, as it affects them emotionally, mentally and makes them experience peace. Some of the participants are, due to the time in solitude in the wilderness,

inspired to more existential reflections on their childhood and their daily life.

The participants enjoy a simple life in the outdoors and the basic and simple tasks necessary to live and thrive, such as making fire and building a shelter:

*"It is important to have peace in nature and in your soul when you are out there, in order to be able to plan and execute your things in the best possible way, so that you get the shelter, so that you get the food you need and so that you enjoy being there because that's what it's really about." (P4).*

*"I really wanted to test my own limits and find out what it would be like to be alone for so long. (...) As well as trying to create a life and an everyday life in the middle of nowhere all alone. (...) And then I think it was very interesting that I had to manage by myself living in and by nature." (A1).*

The participants value the experiences of just being in nature, and nature and landscape seems to affect their emotions in different ways. Primarily nature and landscape help them experience humility and respect, but it also affects them mentally and makes them experience joy and peace. They experience nature and landscape as both beautiful and very powerful, leaving them with a feeling of being a small and fragile part of nature:

*"Nature and the overwhelming landscape, certainly help creating this atmosphere. This huge lake, the huge mountains, and those vast expanses. You just sit there and acknowledge that you are tiny, and you are here at the mercy of nature, and you only get what nature thinks you deserve, in some way. There is no giving at the doors and there are no shortcuts." (R2).*

Being in nature for a long time affects their level of stress and their mental health, and some of the participants mention that they use nature this way in their daily life:

*"Nature can offer something that (...) indoors cannot. It gives another kind of peace of mind for me, (...) a better foundation for reflecting (...) and being able to sit and look out at the weather, on the water, in the fire, you can suddenly do that for many hours and then still think you are doing something." (R1).*

Some of the participants, while being alone in the wilderness, seem to experience a particular connection to the place, which makes them think of their childhood where they had a special relation to nature. These experiences lead to more existentialistic reflections pointing to a more existentialist cohesion with nature and landscape:

*"For me, nature means a place I belong to." (P5),*

*"Nature has been my sanctuary since I was young. I started running out into nature, when I needed to be alone, and it has given me a sense of security in nature..." (P1).*

The experiences alone in the wilderness make the participants reflect on simple life in nature as a contrast to their daily life both according to social relations, time, and materiality. Basic life alone in nature with plenty of time and only few material things seem to bring forth rather deep reflections on their daily life and life values. The participants appreciate the simple life and emphasize the time open for reflections, the calmness and the value of basic outdoor activities giving new perspectives to their daily life and their life values:

*"I think it evokes some thoughts in us about true values, and it's a bit back to basic, it's like, away with the phone, now let's see each other, and you can live simpler, you can appreciate some things by being primitive. We do not need to have two boats or two cars or a holiday home in each part of the country." (R2).*

*So, I didn't for a second miss all the communication options we have today. Purely materialistically, I felt I had everything I needed!" (A1).*

The reflections on a simpler life with less focus on materialism are positive and valuable and some of the participants mention that they want these experiences and reflections to continue after their stay in the wilderness. Due to their solo time, some of the participants want to make radical changes in their daily life, and the experiences and reflections give basis for both self-criticism and to a kind of criticism to modern society and culture:

*"And that situation taught me a lot of things, partly in relation to thinking carefully and also thinking ahead [about environmental matters]." (R1).*

*"I am fascinated by the faith that our ancestors had here in the north and the approach they had to living in and with nature. (...) This basic idea of taking things back to a simpler level, I sure can take that with me." (P6).*

The reflections on simple life in the outdoors as contrast to daily modern life and the reflections on life values, seem to be most prominent as part of the participants' reflections after they have returned home.

### 5.3. Competition and winning

Competition is a central part of the TV concept AIW, and the participant who manages to stay alone in the wilderness for the longest time wins the show. In AIW the winner does not win a lot of money, as in the original US-version of the TV-show where there is a prize of half a million US dollars. Instead, the winner gains fame and recognition, which involves becoming a

known person and maybe being able to exploit the fame commercially.

Most of the participants clearly express that the competition is important to them, and that they are well prepared, dedicated and that they believe they will win the TV-show:

*"I really think I can win this. I have gone into it with a very positive attitude, and I feel I have control of my gear and I have control of myself. And I would almost go so far as to say I win." (P7).*

*"I am a competitive person. I wanted to ... yes participate in this competition and I really wanted to win it, I really did." (A1)*

Most of the participants mention the element of competition as a very important part of their motivation to apply for AIW, and they generally have high expectations to their performance and chances to win. It seems, however, that the element of competition becomes less important over time, while other values, such as challenge, nature, and simple life, come significantly more into focus:

*"I experienced that I got up every day and was really happy (...) And one of the best things was that I think almost from the second, I was alone, it just did not matter with the competition. I didn't have the urge I had, the three days we were at bootcamp, to win, it just disappeared. I still wanted to stay there for a long time, but it was not to win, it was no longer the criterion for success. And ... it was just insanely liberating ... and well, it was just nice to feel like that." (A1).*

*"So when I left, both the goal of winning and knowledge, learning and experience were important, but if I had to say what is most important, I think, I have to honestly admit, it was probably winning, which weighed the most, but quite quickly, I don't know how long it takes (...) then it starts to be the other parts that (...) start to weigh more." (R1).*

## 6. Discussion

Results show three main themes important to the participants' motives and experiences from their participation in AIW: (1) Challenge and personal development, (2) Nature and simple life in the outdoors, and (3) Competition and winning. Challenge and personal development seem to be an overall important motive and represent valuable experiences to the participants. Nature and simple life in the outdoors is highlighted by most of the participants to be the most important experience especially after their participation. Competition and winning seems to be an important motive prior to the participation, but more participants experience a change over time towards a greater focus on nature and simple life in the outdoors. The themes can be related to the literature and understandings of solo experiences and seem to reflect different trends and values found



in outdoor education and recreation. Especially adventure and the Nordic tradition of friluftsliv seem to be prominent features that can be identified in the TV-show.

In the discussion the three main themes from the results will be discussed in relation to solo experience, different traditions in outdoor education and recreation and to theories on late modernity.

## 6.1. AIW as a solo experience

The participants are alone in the wilderness for a longer period and participation in AIW obviously is a kind of solo experience. In this way it seems to reflect the fascination and power related to being alone in the wilderness as it is found in the literature on solo experiences. The participation is voluntary, and it includes an appreciation of the untouched and unspoiled landscape as a value of a simple life in nature (6, 7). It also seems obvious that participating in AIW in different ways is linked to an understanding that participation can lead to personal development (7). In literature the personal development is often connected with a notion of character building by coping with difficult physical or technical challenges and daring to cross personal and mental boundaries (14–18). In AIW, however, it seems that the personal development is predominantly associated with the mental challenge of being alone for a longer period.

There are obvious differences between the solo experience as it is presented in literature and the TV-show AIW. The biggest difference might be the entire setup and organization of AIW which is media driven and includes a production team and broadcast to an unknown number of viewers. The show obviously does not have an explicit educational or therapeutic purpose, but rather serves a commercial purpose that lies outside the participants. This means that the participants knowingly are in a situation where they on one hand are alone and on the other hand will become publicly available to a larger audience.

AIW can be understood as a new way of thinking and practicing the solo experience, which is not pedagogic or therapeutic motivated, but where technology and media use and appearance is essential (2). In this situation the participants may have other motives and values for participation which point in different directions in relation to well-known concepts or cultures of outdoor activities.

## 6.2. AIW and different traditions, trends, and cultures

The participants motives, values, and experiences from their participation in the TV-show and their solo experience point in different directions and can be related to different traditions, trends, and cultures in outdoor education and recreation.

A solo experience is challenging in many ways and challenge and personal development are crucial parts of the motives and experiences important to the participants in AIW. The participants in AIW are generally motivated by the risks, the

uncertainty, and the challenges they need to face while being alone in the wilderness. They also have expectations that their participation might have an impact according to personal development and that it will affect their everyday life in a positive way. This points to adventure as a concept (14–18), and it can be argued that AIW reproduces central ideas and values from adventure focusing on risk, uncertainty, challenge, and personal development. The participants are highly motivated by these values, and they see their participation as an individualistic project which have certain costs for their family and others. The expectations to the effects or significance of the personal development can be discussed (19–21) not least in relation to the long-term effects and durability of possible changes. Within the framework of this study, it is not possible to say whether the participation has led to personal development and in any way has changed the lives of the participants.

The participants are, while being alone in the wilderness, living a rather simple life in the outdoors and they generally value nature, landscape, and the basic tasks. The simple life in nature, the relation to nature and the reflections on life values are important to the participants and seem to reflect values of simple life in nature pointing to the Nordic tradition of friluftsliv (19, 23, 24) as it is lived and passed on in the Nordic countries.

This appreciation of nature and the simple life in the outdoors may seem like a paradox with reference to the entire set-up and staging of the TV-show. It could thus be argued that, due to mass media, commercialization and the element of competition, the proponents of friluftsliv, philosophers such as Nansen, Naess, and Faarlund [see e.g., (7, 22, 49)], would not approve of AIW and they would most likely not see it as a reflection of friluftsliv and simple life in nature. In that perspective it may seem paradoxical purposefully and voluntarily to seek the value of simple life in nature by participating in an international reality TV-show—instead of just going out and live a simple life in nature without cameras, production-team, audience, and competition. The appreciation of nature and the simple life in the outdoors is understood as a central motive and value related to participation in AIW but in a cultural perspective this obviously presents a paradox.

The element of competition represents a perspective to AIW that in many ways seem different from the concepts of adventure and friluftsliv. Extreme sports are often described and defined by a number of characteristics, e.g., the wilderness setting, the extreme conditions, and the element of competition (33, 50, 51). Due to these characteristics, obviously being central parts of AIW, it is possible to understand AIW in the light of extreme sports reproducing central elements that in a sociological perspective define extreme sports: the unfamiliar environment, the concrete risks, the uncertainty, and in particular the competition (33, 50).

Extreme sports, e.g., whitewater kayaking, extreme skiing, or Base-jumping, however, are in literature often described and related to experiences of speed, action and more thrilling and sensational experiences and challenges (33, 50, 51). This is very different and far from the participants experiences in AIW where the atmosphere and energy predominantly are characterized by calmness, routines and by a different relationship to time.

Competition and the values related to extreme sports seems to become less important to the participants during their time in the wilderness and afterwards. The obvious attraction and possibility of winning the competition seems to fade and be replaced by other values related to nature, the process and just being in nature. A possible explanation might be that AIW does not involve all the central characteristics of extreme sports, and especially lacks the experiences of speed, action, thrill, and sensation and perhaps even more important that throughout the process other values stand out more clearly and become valuable.

Aiming at understanding the participants motives and values and especially the process of their stay in the wilderness and the changes that emerge an interesting reflection seems relevant. Before their participation many of the participants are highly attracted to and motivated by the competition and the possibility to win the show as well as the prospect of personal development that can affect their identity and future everyday life. However, as they are alone in the wilderness and after the show when they reflect on their participation, they seem to value the basic life and just being in nature. The difference and the development can be understood as a movement from motives predominantly related to a personal outcome towards motives and values predominantly related to the experience or process of just being in nature which can be related to *friluftsliv* and simple life in the outdoors (19, 23, 24).

### 6.3. AIW and late modernity

Giddens perspectives on late modernity have been used intending to understand and explain motives and values in adventure and extreme sports in a sociological and cultural perspective (18, 27, 32, 33). It thus seems relevant to discuss the TV-show AIW and the participant's values and experiences in relation to these theories.

Giddens characterized late modern societies by their dynamic and rapidly changing character as well as by an overall element of globalization (30, 31). The TV-show *Alone*, as an American concept, has been exported to many countries which points to globalization as a central element reflecting late modernity. The element of competition related to and understood in the light of extreme sports (33, 50, 51) can be seen as another example of the reproduction of global modern values, placing emphasis on individuality and progress.

The prominent element of challenge and personal development in AIW represents possibilities for the participants to be tested in extreme situations, and thus achieve an expected personal development. Important issues in AIW thus are the participants' process and their efforts and challenges to revise, create and maintain their own identity and lifestyle, which can be understood as a focus on reflexivity and self-identity (31). The participants in AIW experience that their participation is an individual project and responsibility which offers them a possible way through challenge and personal development to create self-identity. The participants' motives for participation focusing on

adventure and challenge thus points to AIW as a cultural phenomenon reflecting features and values from late modernity.

Not all findings, however, can be understood or explained in the light of the theory of late modernity. Nature and simple life in the outdoors points in another direction and makes it a bit more complex. Simple life in nature, related to the Nordic concept of *friluftsliv* (8, 19, 22, 23) reflects ideas and values on nature, time, simplicity, social relations, and a relation to place and landscape that to some point contrast theories and understandings of late modernity. The values point to a more traditional society where the process, tradition, and craftsmanship are central cultural values. The participants obviously appreciate the basic values that contrast with their daily cultural and modern life. Simple life in nature including deep reflections on daily life and life values can thus be seen as a contrast, or maybe even an element of criticism to modern society. These reflections are not prominent parts of the participant's motives for participation rather a product of being alone in nature for a longer period. The participants' reflections on life values, however, can be linked to an understanding of self-identity and reflexivity leading to possible changes in lifestyle. It can be argued that these reflections are necessary in late modern society (30, 31).

AIW can be understood as a complex cultural phenomenon that reflects values and complexities from late modernity with a focus on globalization, reflexivity and self-identity often related to an understanding of adventure and extreme sports (18, 27, 32, 33). At the same time AIW presents radically different ideas and values, which point to a more traditional view on history, culture, and society. These ideas and values seem to represent a potential criticism to everyday life and modern society as it is found in the Nordic concept of *friluftsliv* (8, 19, 22, 23).

## 7. Conclusions and implications

The participants in AIW voluntarily chose to participate in the production of a reality TV-show that for a period radically changes their lives. We initially asked: *What motives and values are important to the participants in the TV-show (AIW) and how can the show be understood as a cultural phenomenon?*

Participating in the TV-show AIW can be understood as a modern version of a solo experience staged as a mediated reality TV-show. The thematic analysis highlights three themes: (1) challenge and personal development; (2) nature and simple life in the outdoors, and (3) competition and winning. Challenge and personal development seem to be the most important motive for the participants prior to their participation in AIW. Nature and simple life in the outdoors is important to many of the participants especially as a valuable experience after their participation. The competition and possible chance of winning is an important motive to many of the participants prior to their participation but seems to become less important as the participant's lives in solitude unfold.

AIW can be understood as an extreme popular cultural medialized and global phenomenon that relates to different

trends and traditions in society, and which produces and reflects central ideas and values in modern society today. AIW on one hand reflects and presents values related to an understanding of adventure focusing on challenge and self-development, and on the other hand reflects values on nature and simple life in the outdoors, pointing to the Nordic tradition of *friluftsliv*.

Overall AIW can be seen as a cultural phenomenon that points to and can be explained by theories of late modernity (30, 31). AIW reflects the radical changes in social life in modern society with a special perspective to globalization, reflexivity, and self-identity. At the same time values related to nature and simple life in the outdoors are being produced and reflected. These values seem to contrast theories and understandings of late modernity pointing to a more basic lifestyle, and they can be understood as a potential criticism to everyday life and society. The TV-show AIW thus can be understood as a complex modern medialized cultural phenomenon that points to values in late modernity but also holds motives and values that points to other ways of living and other lifestyles.

The study on AIW presents new knowledge about the participants and the TV-show, which serves more purposes. The study presents new empirically based knowledge on the different motives, values and experiences of people participating in a popular Danish reality TV-show. It presents new theoretically based knowledge on how these motives, values and experiences can be understood as part of outdoor education and recreation and as a cultural phenomenon in late modern society.

The study can be seen as a way to apply a critical cultural perspective to everyday cultural phenomena such as TV-shows and outdoor activities and thus serve as an example of how cultural analysis and sociological theories can be used to understand the deeper complexities of everyday phenomena, and how these may produce and represent different motives, ideas, and values. This kind of knowledge is often under-prioritized but may be highly relevant both in an educational, sociological, and public health context.

The three prominent themes point in different directions and seem to reproduce rather different motives and values. AIW, as an example of a global and medialized reality TV-show, attracts a big audience and may impact people's perceptions and attitudes towards nature. Reality TV-shows like AIW, by virtue of their power of fascination and identification, have an impact on people's understanding of e.g., media and nature, which are often based on taken-for-granted understandings and expectations. The study, however, does not give answers to how these ideas and values are transformed to an audience and how this may affect them.

The reality TV concept Alone is a rather new cultural phenomenon and despite its global distribution and immense popularity, very little has been investigated and documented in terms of its meaning or significance to people and society. Due to the power of media and the great popularity of the TV-show,

it has a huge potential to influence others (1, 4). The reach and fascination of modern media and the element of identification point to the impact of the TV-show AIW to be strong promoting cultural values in society which calls for an increased research interest in modern cultural phenomena such as reality TV-shows with a focus on meaning and significance, and with the use of different designs and methods.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Ethics statement

The transcripts of the selected seasons from the TV-show provides no ethical considerations. Regarding the qualitative interviews, these are anonymized, and the researchers have informed consent from the respondents. The study and its data-management procedures were ethically approved by Legal Services, SDU, RIO (approval number 11.413). All data is managed in accordance with the GDPR regulations and are stored on a secure server on University of Southern Denmark.

## Author contributions

Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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