



Challenging the Stereotypical Representations of Sport Tourism Pursuits for Athletes Living with Physical Disabilities

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Abstract:

The sport industry is growing exponentially worldwide and making significant contributions towards engaging people across varied cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds. It is well documented in the literature that sports tourism offers an array of benefits for athletes. However, athletes living with physical disabilities experience more challenges during sports tourism pursuits than their able-bodied counterparts. These challenges include unsuitable training and competition facilities, inaccessible lodging facilities, inaccessible transportation services, as well as negative perceptions about persons living with physical disabilities.

Aim: The aim of this study is to challenge the stereotypical representations of athletes living with physical disabilities by showing how they, even in the context of marginalisation, assert agency and continue to thrive in their respective sports codes. This study explores the various structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges that athletes living with physical disabilities face in their sport tourism pursuits and how they - despite all - creatively reshape these spaces and not succumb to being passive victims of institutionalised discrimination, as often projected in dominant discourse.

Methodology: This study followed an interpretivist approach using a qualitative research methodology design to gather rich data on the lived experiences of athletes living with physical disabilities. Snowball sampling was used, and data was collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured online interviews. Data saturation was reached after 10 interviews with athletes from various sports codes. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes from the data obtained.

Key findings: The findings of this study revealed that society at large is not educated sufficiently on the physical challenges that athletes face on a daily basis given the sports sector. It is important that more is done by sporting institutions and the government to educate society on changing their behavior towards athletes with disabilities in order to be more inclusive as a sports nation.

Keywords: Sport tourism, Athletes, Physical disability, Inclusivity, Accessibility.