



**The Potential Role of Sports Tourism in Supporting Local
Economies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**
By
Essam Albuhlul

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of Master of Tourism and Events

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences

Flinders University

March 2022

Abstract

With approximately 16 million visitors (pre-COVID-19), Saudi Arabia is the second most popular Middle Eastern tourist destination. Tourists choosing to visit Saudi Arabia typically do so to engage in religious pilgrimages, although there has been an increase in non-religious leisure travel. Due to recent growth in international tourist arrivals as a result of relaxed travel visa restrictions, Saudi Arabia now seeks to build a post-oil economy around the leisure industry. Tourism is a significant human activity, although many countries must now directly compete to attract international tourists, including the Middle East. To attract more diverse international tourist cohorts, new forms of tourism are now being developed to broaden appeal, and this has been witnessed in Saudi Arabia also. The Kingdom is blessed with abundant historical attractions amongst a range of cultural destinations, that include food experiences and festivals. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimates that travel and tourism brought in \$65.2 billion in revenue for Saudi Arabia in 2018 alone and the national government anticipates that through new marketing strategies and tourism diversification, arrivals will grow further. In particular, ‘Sports tourism’ has been identified as an opportunity to grow international tourism in the country.

The combination of sports and tourism is not a new concept, however, there was limited interest to develop it in Saudi Arabia before 2016. Many major international sports events have existed for several decades and have triggered the movement of tourists across the world, with good examples including the Olympics, the FIFA World Cup, and the Super Bowl. A developing trend is that sports tourism is growing in countries that have never traditionally been hosts of sporting destinations. New destinations, such as Saudi Arabia, are now realising the societal and economic impacts of sports tourism. The UN’s World Tourism Organization’s data pre-pandemic revealed that sports tourism registers nearly 12 to 15 million tourists annually, representing a sizeable proportion of the world tourism industry, with a revenue of nearly US \$ 800 billion (Alowain, 2022). Saudi Arabia appears to have begun a new journey in sports tourism by making it a priority in its national tourism Strategy: The Saudi Vision 2030. The focus will be on increasing the number of local sporting events that will also be distributed across the country’s provinces. Various organisations and authorities that reside with the Saudi National Government Organizations will now need to facilitate participant and spectator sports events, upgrade infrastructure, and promote a sporting culture in the new market, among other grassroots initiatives. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the views of Saudi tourism stakeholders towards the development of sports tourism and to provide insights into how it can be built effectively to attract greater volumes of tourists over the next decade.

The key findings reveal that sports tourism development was deemed to be a positive opportunity in Saudi Arabia from both economic and social perspectives. Economically, it was argued that it could help diversify the tourism sector away from religious tourism and create jobs. It was also

suggested that sports tourism could help raise awareness of the rich cultural diversity Saudi Arabia has to offer, that could in turn help grow tourism further. Socially, participants believed that tourism could help shift negative perceptions of the country and promote cultural exchange as host communities come into contact with international tourists. Other positive social impacts included the sense of 'inclusivity' sports tourism could promote, greater participation in healthy activities, and the building of pride amongst communities that offer sports activities or events.

However, a number of negative economic or social concerns were also raised. Here, participants suggested that many Saudis could be concerned about the costs of developing and hosting sports tourism, including issues surrounding both infrastructure and tourism-trained employee limitations. Critically, it was also added that sports tourism, especially if structured around western sports, could lead to cultural erosion and the rejection of a form of tourism that many Saudis remain unaware of. Thus, it is anticipated that this study will be of value to a range of tourism stakeholders in Saudi Arabia - including government authorities - that are involved in tourism development or sports tourism development more specifically.

Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of it has been published in this or any educational institution or submitted for publication. The paper does not infringe on anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and any quotations, ideas, and materials borrowed from other people are fully acknowledged in accordance with standard referencing practices and the list of references provided.

May 22, 2022

Essam Albuhlul

Acknowledgements

Without the help and support of so many individuals in my life, I would not have been able to finish my dissertation. First and foremost, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the Saudi Arabian Government (SACM) for providing me with a fantastic chance to study abroad at Flinders University and for their unwavering support during my time in Australia. This experience assisted me in learning a new language, appreciating various cultures, overcoming the hardships of living in a different nation, and gaining a better perspective of the world. Also, I'd like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Gareth Butler, for his unwavering support of my Masters studies and research, as well as his patience, drive, excitement, and vast knowledge. His advice was invaluable during the research and writing of my thesis. Dr. Marion Weck, Dr. Gerti Szili, and the whole Flinders Tourism team deserve special thanks for their help and encouragement throughout my Masters studies at Flinders University. I want to express my gratitude to the South Saudia community for their willingness to participate in this study and assist me in conducting the interviews. Last but not least, I want to express my gratitude to my parents for their unending love, care, and spiritual support throughout my life. I'd also want to express my gratitude to my siblings for their support and encouragement during my Masters programme.

Contents

Abstract	2
Declaration of Originality	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	8
1.1 Thesis Introduction	8
1.2 The Impacts of COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia and its Re-emerging Potential.....	8
1.3 Contemporary Tourism in Saudi Arabia	11
1.4 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives	14
1.5 Study Structure.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 What is Sports Tourism?	16
2.3 The Growing Importance of Sports Attractions and Events for Tourism	18
2.4 Who is the Sports Tourist?	20
2.5 The Impacts of Hosting Sports Tourism	22
2.6 The Challenges of Developing Tourism in Saudi Arabia	24
Chapter 3: Methodology	27
3.1 Introduction	27
3.2 Research Methods and Rationale	27
3.3 Data Collection	29
3.4 Study Participants	30
3.5 Ethical Considerations	32
3.6 Data Analysis	32
Chapter 4: Findings	34
4.1 Introduction	34
4.2 Impacts of COVID-19 on Tourism in Saudi Arabia	35
4.3 Perceived Positive Impacts of Developing Sports Tourism	36
4.3.1 Economic	36
4.3.2 Social.....	38
4.4 Perceived Negative Impacts of Developing Sports Tourism	39
4.4.1 Economic	39
4.4.2 Social.....	41

Chapter 5: Conclusions 43
5.1 Key Observations 43
5.2 Benefits of the Research and Recommendations 44
5.3 Research Limitations 45
References 46

List of tables

Table 1: Categories of Sports Tourism

Table 2: An overview of the differences between qualitative vs quantitative approaches

Table 3: The sample selection of the interviewees

Table 4. Summary of key findings

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Thesis Introduction

There is a new trend of countries bidding to host major sport events or become a sports hub in an attempt to diversify and grow tourism economies (Ishac, 2020). Examples include investments in recreational sports facilities, investing in foreign sports clubs to raise awareness of international destinations, elite sport development, talent supporting schools, and bids to host major world sporting events. Being known for hosting sporting events with ample infrastructure is an opportunity to develop prestige and showcase the economic strength of a nation while also providing a platform to build positive relationships between nations (Herbold, Thees & Philipp, 2020). Countries or teams that participate in major global sporting events may also support their nation's soft power as their citizens experience pride or a greater sense of belonging (Al Thani, 2021). The benefits of hosting sports tourism include the idea that they may trigger economic or social change. An influx of tourists for sporting events may also increase the influence and power of the host country in the international community, as well as demonstrating a country's capacity and capability to manage and successfully implement major events (Ishac, 2020). Saudi Arabia has the potential to be such a host since the country is economically and cultural consistent with neighbors like the UAE and Qatar who will soon be hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022. Saudi Arabia has been working hard to diversify its economy away from oil (Al-Mohammad & Butler, 2021). Until recently, Saudi Arabia has been exclusively open to business travelers, religious pilgrims, and expatriate employees, yet it has now created initiatives such as medical tourism to improve and promote other forms of tourism besides religious pilgrimage (Khan & Alam, 2014). Therefore, the country understands the significance of tourism as a pathway to socio-economic development and this is why in November 2017 the Kingdom announced new international tourist visas for 2018 (Medabesh & Khan, 2019). The visa allows visitors multiple entry into the Kingdom and can stay within for 90 days when conducting tourism related activities and Umrah, and is valid for a year. In 2016, the Government also formed the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH), a body that has to oversee the development, promotion, and organisation of all amenities to support tourism. In particular, sports tourism, alongside festivals and heritage tourism, were highlighted as important opportunities to grow international arrivals in the country (Al-Mohammad & Butler, 2021). However, its leaders need to develop policies and provide supportive measures that sustain improvements, foster innovation, and build new infrastructures in sports tourism. After all, sports tourism has the potential to benefit many different industries, including local economies that do not directly offer goods or services to sports tourism (Burch et al., 2020).

1.2 The Impacts of COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia and its Re-emerging Potential

Saudi Arabia has the potential and capacity to become the Middle East's leading sports-tourist destination, as revealed by several successful sporting events held pre-COVID-19. However, the emerge of the pandemic in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, was not expected to bring the whole world to a standstill. COVID-19 is highly contagious and the measures enacted to mitigate it led to a social, political, and economic crisis in Saudi Arabia amongst many other nations. Some sports, cultural, religious, and political events such as Olympic Games, Umrah, Hajj, exhibitions,

and summits on the international scene were canceled for an indefinite time. On March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the virus a pandemic as there were over one million infection and nearly 75,000 deaths around the world in the space of just a few weeks (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). The majority of the measures that most countries implemented, including Saudi Arabia, was to lockdown movements across cities, the country's borders, and to introduce the cessation of movement to minimize the spread of the pandemic. For the first time in over 80 years, on February 27, 2020, Saudi Arabia had to prohibit any form of mass association including Hajj and Umrah which are religious forms of tourism held annually (Alam, 2021). Such measures heavily impacted on tourism, which is an important social and economic activity in the country. Tourism in Saudi Arabia was performing exceptionally well prior to the pandemic, especially due to recent advertising campaigns designed to promote the country's most popular attractions like Al-Ula and the festivals held there (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). For example, by the end of 2020, which was a time impacted by Covid-19, airline generated revenue declined by about US\$7.2bn, which is a 35% drop from the revenues collected in 2019 (Alharbi, 2021). Before this, Saudi Arabia had already began drawing up a long-term strategy for tourism and the development of infrastructure that facilitates convenient public transit for visitors. According to the Kingdom's Vision 2030, promoting tourism was a primary objective. However, the Kingdom had to postpone several development ambitions because of COVID-19.

The impact of COVID-19 on the global tourism industry was immense and billions of dollars were lost, including in relation to productivity. The World Tourism Organization estimated that the tourism sector was to experience a loss of US\$300-450 billion in the year 2020 due to a decline of between 290 -440 million international tourists visits (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). The onset of 2020 also saw the loss of over 50 million jobs in the tourism sector and a further 75 million were at risk worldwide (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). Nobody expected that the pandemic would be ravaging the country for more than one and a half years. The halt in activities did cause great disasters affecting economic, social, and cultural values, considering there were high infection and death rates. The threats of COVID-19 were partially neutralized through vaccination and proper health practices, and in 2022 most countries began to open their local and international borders for free movement and revival of the economies. It is in the month of March 2022 that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia lifted all COVID-19 related travel restrictions and opened up the economy to visitors and those willing to go outside the country. The policy of lifting restrictions brought hope to the tourism sector, especially sports tourism (as large-scale events were amongst the most directly affected activities), despite slow initial growth in terms of tourists, challenges with staff recruitment, and delays to tourism amenities or infrastructure projects.

Prior to COVID-19, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has shown great potential for development of sports tourism as it has successfully hosted some international sporting events. The nation has held international tournaments ranging from tennis, chess, boxing, car racing, wrestling, horse racing, football, and golf. Indeed, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also spent over US\$1.5 billion hosting high profile international sporting events, including the Saudi Cup, which is the world's wealthiest horse-racing event which in itself is estimated to cost around US\$60 million to host (Goyal and Bhandari, 2021). The amount the country now invests in sport is perhaps a bid to showcase its capacity and reputation to host international events. However, this investment also reveals its intent to diversify the economy after many decades of overdependence on the oil sector (Goyal and Bhandari, 2021; Waheed, Sarwar & Dignah, 2020)). The successes

of past international sporting events on Saudi Arabia's soil such as the 2021 Formula 1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix and Formula E Diriyah E-Prix in 2018 are evidence of the potential the Kingdom has and opens the door to more hosting opportunities. For example, in May 2022, The Global Association of International Sports Federation (GAISF) announced Saudi Arabia has won the bid to host the 2023 World Combat Games in Riyadh which will feature 15 different sports (International Olympics Committee, 2022). Additionally, the Kingdom will also host the 7th Asian Indoor Martial Arts Games in 2025 and the 2034 Asian Games (International Olympics Committee, 2022). Saudi Arabia's tenacity towards hosting sports and its willing capacity to support different events enhances both its reputation as a host and its ability to attract tourists from different international regions. This approach aligns with the country's Vision 2030 of developing a vibrant community with a diversified economy. In addition, hosting major sporting events requires the country to have amenities that will help accommodate the influx of sport tourists and participants. By developing mega projects across Saudi Arabia, the country's tourist industry has been able to highlight or showcase the country's best tourism assets, including its rich heritage.

Numerous large-scale leisure projects are now under construction on Saudi Arabia's western coast, which is being hailed by many as the country's new recreational hotspot due to its outstanding biodiversity. The Amaala, often known as the "Middle East Riviera," is one of these projects and is estimated to create more than 22,000 jobs and 2,500 luxury hotel rooms when it is completed in 2028 (Trew, 2018). Other mega projects include Neon, a future sustainable metropolis; the Qiddiyah Project, an entertainment project; and the Red Sea Project, which will have 90 islands for visitors. Additionally, Saudi Arabia is investing in initiatives that promote the country's culture and history in these regions (Trew, 2018). Therefore, despite the coronavirus pandemic and competition from other tourism sectors, Saudi Arabia remains on track to achieve its Vision 2030 targets in the tourism and hospitality industry. People will be able to work in these fields as a result of the key projects and substantial government expenditure.

Finally, whilst many economies throughout the globe rely heavily on tourism, it must be added that many jobs are created by tourists, infrastructure is improved, and a spirit of cultural interaction is created between foreigners and locals (Al-otaibi, 2020). Saudi Arabia now has the opportunity to foster similar outcomes through its emerging international tourism economy. Tourism generates a considerable amount of employment opportunities in a wide range of locations that support the recruitment of workers in others sectors including agriculture, communications, health, and education (Al-otaibi, 2020). Many people go on vacation to learn about the history, customs, and cuisine of the country they will be visiting helping people develop new knowledge about Saudi Arabian culture. Positive interactions and encounters between visitors and the local population are fostered as a result of tourism (Ishac, 2020). Usually, foreigners attend exhibitions, seminars, and other events, yet visitors from other countries also contribute to the country's cultural variety and richness. There are several benefits for both tourists and the local population when they visit a new place. Tourism provides a platform for the

development of innovative goods and services that would otherwise not be viable for the local population (Alowain, 2022). In addition, locals get the advantages of tourism in their backyard. Governments that gain a significant portion of their income from tourism make significant investments in the country's infrastructure and the development of local eateries, shopping malls, and retailers all benefit greatly from this too. Thus, as tourists become an important source of revenue for the government, the government then needs to provide secure and sophisticated amenities. These amenities include new roadways, parks, public spaces, airports, and maybe even better schools and hospitals are all possible outcomes. Infrastructure that is both safe and cutting-edge facilitates the free movement of goods and services. In addition, residents have the chance to improve their economic situation and educational standing. In summary, tourists are the focus of the Kingdom's 2030 Vision, which now calls for a major investment in the tourism industry. The Human Capital Development Agency at the Ministry of Tourism has also recently launched a strategy for graduates, job seekers, tourism industry workers, entrepreneurs, and business owners to understand the guidelines to obtaining a tourism license, the most popular tourist attractions in each of the Kingdom's regions, and the numerous qualifying programmes offered by the agency. In short, there is now substantial opportunity to grow tourism as COVID-19 restrictions across the globe further ease.

1.3 Contemporary Tourism in Saudi Arabia

Globally, Tourism serves as a basis for long-term success in both established and growing nations. Around 334 million jobs, or 10.6% of all employment, is related tourism and the industry is valued at USD 9.2 trillion, or 10.4% of global GDP (WTTC., 2019). In recent years, tourism development has gained worldwide recognition as a driver for economic growth, agricultural development, energy development, and poverty reduction. Tourism enables individuals from all walks of life to learn and grasp the country's cultural ideas, which they can subsequently pass on to others throughout the world. Visitors are also provided with a chance to describe the country's beauty and current arts. Tourism has helped to disseminate knowledge of other cultures and languages far beyond the country's boundaries. The tourism industry has a direct influence on the economy of the country since it fosters economic innovation, creates jobs, and contributes to the country's GDP.

In Saudi Arabia, 9.5% of GDP and 11.2% of total employment came from travel and tourism (WTTC 2019) before the pandemic emerged. As the Kingdom is home to an abundance of geographies and landforms, stunning vistas, and long beaches, it has worked to develop tourism and increase investment by attracting visitors and tourists from outside the Kingdom, in accordance with the goals of its National Tourism Strategy and 2030 Vision, which were established by the Kingdom's Ministry of Tourism. To support that aim, the Kingdom attempted to improve religious tourism, as stated in the Kingdom's Vision 2030: 'Attendance of pilgrims and

Umrah pilgrims is essential to fulfilling the role God has given us, and the demands of tourists. Religious tourism is one of the oldest and well-established forms of tourism in Saudi Arabia, and involves visiting to preach Islam, visit religious sites, and perform charitable work' (SCTH, 2016) Muslims repeatedly visit Mecca to perform Umrah and Hajj, which is a basic obligatory responsibility and major pillar of the Islamic faith (Al-Otaibi, 2020) and the religious sites attract great revenue to the Kingdom on an annual basis. Indeed, religious tourism accounts for the largest portion of revenue accrued from overall tourism activities to Saudi Arabia (Triki, 2019). The number of religious tourists is expected to increase especially with the ongoing project to expand the two holy mosques, the Grand Mosque and the Prophet's Mosque, so that more pilgrims can be accommodated. Umrah and Hajj events are included in the Kingdom's 2030 Vision since it is a considerable source of income to the economy. Numerous approaches to improving Hajj-related activities, archaeological tourism, VFR (visiting friends and family), business, and medical travel are all anticipated to benefit from easing the visa requirements for unique kinds of visas in the near future Predicted growth of pilgrims from 3 million to 6 million by 2020 is supported by current government activities in the two holy cities, including as plans to build the two main holy mosques (Sherbini et al., 2016).

Over the past decade the country has been receiving over 8 million Islamic pilgrims annually but the numbers have been increasing and Vision 2030 aims to reach 30 million per year by 2030 (Sherbini et al., 2016). The government is constantly looking for ways to satisfy the visitors in their pilgrimage experience. The local economy of Makkah benefits by more than US\$ 1.6 billion annually from providing transport, accommodation, and food services for the pilgrimage experience (Sherbini et al., 2016). Vision 2030 states that Saudi Arabia values culture and recreation as an essential part of well-being. The goal is to promote regional, provincial, non-profit and commercial sector initiatives to organise cultural events. In order to realise this goal, the city must provide high-end entertainment experiences, introduce new attractions, and organise world-class events and festivals, among other things. For Saudi Arabia, building UNESCO-recognized historic landmarks is a certain way to meet all of these goals.

With the goal of setting standards that meet the highest international tourist expectations, Saudi Vision 2030 aspires to streamline the visa application process and revitalise Saudi Arabia's cultural landmarks. The government has diversified its form of Visas and modes of application in order to differentiate religious tourists and those on business or for 'government visit' (which requires one to have a sponsor or host residing in the Kingdom) from conventional leisure tourists. Saudi Arabia has allowed those on government visits or business visa to perform Umrah during their visit, however the government system does not register them as Umrah performers. Furthermore, the Kingdom's new tourism infrastructure will encourage visitors to change their religious visas into non-religious tourist visas and they may be free to explore other non-religious attractions. Improving Hajj-related activities, archaeological tourism, VFR (visiting friends and family),

business, and medical travel are all anticipated to benefit from easing the visa requirements. Entering the Kingdom via one of four different visa classes were granted an additional six months of stay in 2014 thanks to a new policy supported by SCTNH and other NGOs. All visa holders, regardless of the purpose of their travel, are allowed to extend their stay and visit other provinces, including Makkah and Madinah, if they have a pilgrimage visa. Such legislation is expected to have a positive socioeconomic and long-term impact on local communities because the Kingdom hosts over 500 festivals and celebrations each year, as well as dozens of business and sporting events, that can attraction approximately 10.1 million foreign visitors (SCTH, 2020).

However, as it currently stands, tourism infrastructure in Saudi Arabia is not developed, to sustain international tourists from non-Muslim countries. For example, whilst Halal tourism is not a new concept, Saudi Arabia is a Muslim majority country and considering its position as a pillar to the faith and pilgrimage, it continues to apply stringent sharia laws, which include adhering to Islamic teachings and ethical codes (Yan et al., 2017). Halal practice has given acceptable teachings under Islamic law that guides people on the modes of dressing, behavior, conduct, and diet. Muslims and non-Muslims have to respect the travel destinations and the practices within and have to consider what is 'lawful' in that context. In Saudi Arabia, most resorts are Islamic - meaning they are alcohol-free, have conservative dress codes, offer prayer facilities, and it is also likely that gender segregation is expected in some areas (Yan et al., 2017). The core of halal tourism is to offer good servicing practice as aligned to the sharia laws. Halal tourism preserves the Islamic culture and values while enhancing ethics in hospitality. However, there is now a need for greater cultural awareness in the hospitality and tourism industry due to the growing diversity of international tourists. In response, the government, through the Saudi Commission of Tourism and National Heritage, has put in place a program known as 'Development of Skills in Dealing with Tourists' to provide training for locals. The tourists too understand some of the requirements and practice in the Kingdom as there are multiple avenues even through the government websites and agencies that facilitate tourism to share expectations and Saudi rules or regulations. Nonetheless, tourism stakeholders involved need to consider the potential benefits of hosting Muslims and non-Muslim tourists. This means that greater tolerance and openness is required and that conventional forms of tourism – like religious tourism or halal tourism – cannot be the sole focus of the country if it wishes to attract international tourists from other parts of the world.

Even while Saudi Arabia's government maintains a firm position on Islam and Sharia law, the nation is gradually opening up to visitors and Saudi Arabia has come a long way over the last decade. Ten years ago the monarchy was reluctant to let Western tourists into the country (Medabesh & Khan, 2019). As a result of the government's worries regarding international visitors and the potential offence they may bring to the conservative local community, they banned foreign tourists from the country. There was also little motivation to encourage tourism because of the Kingdom's enormous oil riches which were supplying sufficient income. The Kingdom has known for more than three decades that it has to broaden its export base, develop petrochemicals, and encourage the creation

of a wide variety of industrial activities targeted at the local market and has made progress toward this goal. As the industry was perceived as more socially desirable and productive than other services, modernization was framed in terms of industrial development rather than service development. . In addition, many Saudis consider working in tourism to be an unethical and even demeaning experience (Sherbini et al., 2016). Yet, more recently, the Kingdom and the monarchy have realised that Saudi Arabia has a lot of promise as a tourist destination. The future of Saudi Arabian tourists seems bright. In a recent piece on the subject, it was stated "we are getting more visitors from the Kingdom than any other Middle Eastern nation ... the Kingdom is prepared to continue investing in tourism, given the extraordinary increase it has seen in the last 10 years' (Sherbini et al., 2016). Aside from improving Saudi Arabia's image, there are some key benefits of promoting tourism in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's tourist industry will benefit greatly if foreign currency gains are reinvested in the economy. If the Saudi Vision 2030 is successful, international tourist arrivals are expected to grow rapidly and it is now essential that new studies, like this one, explore the different ways in which tourism may impact on the country and how the host population perceives this growth. This study chooses sports tourism because of its identification in the Vision 2030 (See SCTH, 2016) as an area of opportunity and because there is no research that has specifically explored how people view sports tourism in the context of Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government intends to boost the contribution of the sector to GDP by promoting widespread participation in sport, as well as diversifying the economy . From US\$2.4 billion in 2016 to a projected \$6.7 billion in 2019, sports have had a significant impact on the economy (Waheed, Sarwar & Dignah, 2020). Event organisers, sports facility suppliers, and sports service providers like gyms in Saudi Arabia stand to gain substantially from this expansion. There is still a lot of space for growth in terms of GDP, FDI, and employment, as well as indirect benefits such as more tourism and a better image for the nation.

1.4 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

Research Question

What are the perceptions of Saudi tourism stakeholders towards the development of sports tourism to support local economies in Saudi Arabia?

Research Aim

The economic value of developing sports tourism experiences has gained increasing attention in academic literature. However, it has not been explored in the context of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The benefits of further developing this form of tourism and its potential role in diversifying the Saudi Arabian tourism economy, will be evaluated in this study by asking tourism stakeholders to share their opinions on its potential and the opportunities it may present.

Research Objectives

To determine how sports tourism can be used as a mechanism for regional economic growth and diversification:

- 1) To understand key tourism stakeholders' perceptions of sport tourism development in KSA
- 2) To identify opportunities for the further development of sports tourism in KSA
- 3) To identify impediments to the further development of sports tourism in KSA
- 4) To provide recommendations on how sports tourism may be best implemented in KSA

1.5 Study Structure

After the Introduction Chapter, Chapter 2 provides an overview of sports tourism and the benefits it may offer via a study of existing literature. Chapter 3 shares the research methodology and explains how study participants were selected. Further information about interviews, data collection, and how the study was carried out are included. Chapter 4 explores the key findings and outcomes from this study. This thesis concludes with Chapter 5 which distills most important observations, identifies opportunities for future research and raises awareness of the study's limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates and summarises sports tourism literature, including previous research. It starts with a general overview of sports tourism, including its definition and categories. It also addresses the categories of sports tourists and explains who they are and what drives them to participate in particular forms of sports tourism. The chapter includes an overview of the effects and impacts of sports tourism on host countries, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of hosting sports tourism events or attractions. As a result, this chapter discusses aspects of certain sports tourism research as well as gaps in current research.

2.2 What is Sports Tourism?

Fundamentally, sport-related tourism has grown in popularity in recent years as both an academic subject of study and a popular tourism offering. As previously discussed, disparities in the concept of sport tourism are eminent as well as some of the challenges that researchers have experienced in developing a unified definition. Via a brief glance back in history, Day and Vamplew (2015) reveal that people have been involved in sport-related travel for centuries. However, it is difficult to find a specific definition for sports tourism in the current literature. The debate has centered on the concepts of passive and active engagement in sports-related travel, with passive referring to watching sport and active referring to participating in it (Bjeljac, Curcic & Ivolga, 2017). Sport tourism is also problematic to define as it includes multiple perspectives and can entail either travelling away from home to *participate* in a sport activity for enjoyment or competition or travelling to *observe* sport at the grassroots or elite level (Tasci, Hahm & Terry (2018); Gibson, Attle, & Yiannakis, 1997). Indeed, sport tourism is claimed to include any sports activities in which the major objective of travel is to participate in or watch sport (Turco et al., 2002). Kurtzman (2005) described sports tourism as "journeys taken for recreational (noncommercial) purposes to participate in" or alternatively to "observe sports activities that occur outside of one's typical location and may or may not have a competitive objective". For the purpose of consistency, this study frames sports tourism using the aforementioned ideas of either travelling to participate or watch.

Research by Kurtzman and Zauhar (1997) categorised sports tourism into five major groups, as indicated in Table 1, which illustrates the sports tourism categories with examples from the available literature. As can be observed, it reveals the breadth and diversity of what may reside under the category of sports tourism. Sport tourism attractions are tourist locations or activities that offer visitors things to see and do that are related to natural (parks, mountains, animals) or man-made places (museums, stadiums, stores). Cutting-edge sports facilities, sport museums and halls of fame dedicated to the sporting heritage and sporting heroes are also considered sports tourism attractions. Sport tourism resorts are deemed to be integrated resort complexes that sell

themselves primarily as sports or health destinations (Kurtzman and Zauhar, 1997). These holiday resorts frequently offer high-quality amenities and services to sports tourists. Amenity and destination spas, golf and tennis resorts, water and winter sport resorts, and nature retreats with a focus on outdoor adventure and discovery are all examples of sport tourism resorts (Kurtzman and Zauhar, 1997). In general, these resorts are fitted with high quality sports equipment and facilities, and they provide tourists with a variety of activity options and educational programmes conducted by teachers or trainers with extensive experience. However, these resorts range from 'high level' international standards that focus on particular and highly developed talents, to camping services that focus on leisure athletic activities, once again demonstrating the variability in sports tourism forms and definitions.

Any boat-related vacation that emphasises sports or athletic activities as a main marketing strategy fall under the sport tourism cruise category (Dowling and Weeden, 2017). Many modern ships are designed to look like hotels or resorts and provide unique sporting features. They frequently use prominent sports tourists as a marketing technique (Dowling and Weeden, 2017) and cruise ships especially often organise special transportation to provide visitors with possibilities for golf, tennis, snorkeling, water skiing, and other sports to support the needs of sport tourists. They may additionally include aquatic sports in unique and diverse ocean settings, including snorkeling or SCUBA diving. In addition, there may also be Cruise-and-Drive programmes, in which tourists use private vehicles to travel to desired sports sites, or private yacht chartering that sail directly to chosen sports destinations (Dowling and Weeden, 2017). This category also covers the use of boats for recreational purposes (for example, leisure and competitive sailing, and jet skiing).

Sports tours are a growing form of sports tourism. Depending on access, location, and the nature of the activity, these trips may be self-guided or organised. For example, many ski vacation packages include airline tickets, lodging, local transportation, and ski lift tickets, but no guides or other amenities (Huijbens, 2015). On the other hand, some sports tour companies not only provide flights, accommodation and tickets but offer highly specialised or personalised experiences that include post-game receptions with players and coaches and involve the use of guides at every step of the holiday experience (Kurtzman and Zauhar, 1997). Finally, sports that attract a significant number of tourists as participants or spectators fall into the category of sport tourism events. Each sporting event has a different distribution of visitor categories: some people are only interested in watching (for example, major international sporting events) while others directly participate (for example, marathons, cycling events or even conferences).

Table 1: Sports tourism categories

Type	Examples
Sport Attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sporting halls of fame • Sporting heritage sites • Theme/adventure parks based around sports
Sports Tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golfing holidays • Mountain climbing/skiing tours • Team sport tours (primarily as a participant) • Guided cycling or walking tours • Adventure/wilderness trekking and expeditions
Sports Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International, national or local sporting events • Marathons • Team/individual sport competitions (primarily as a spectator) • Sporting festivals/congresses/conferences • Schools/ Varsity sports
Sports Resorts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fishing and hunting lodges • Spas and health resorts • Sports academies • Training camps and clinics • Camping based around sporting activities
Sports Cruises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational diving • Boating and sailing (including racing) • Sporting ‘celebrity’ cruises

Kurtzman and Zauhar (1997)

2.3 The Growing Importance of Sports Attractions and Events for Tourism

Sports-themed attractions have been positioned as important opportunities to develop sports tourism in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabian Government, 2022) and this section now explores the different ways in which sports attractions can be used to attract tourists. Halls of Fame have been recognised as a successful means of safeguarding sporting cultural heritage as well as one of the most popular and well-known forms of tourism (Godfrey, 2012). They exist in many countries and symbolise a range of sporting experiences or achievements. Halls of Fame, which are now popular tourist destinations, were not originally intended for sport tourism, but as their fame and popularity grew, they became monuments for sports *and* tourism (Ramshaw, Gammon and Tobar, 2019). It is perhaps not surprising that sport is strongly incorporated in many tourism attractions given its importance as an international social phenomenon and in recent years, the number of museums of this type has increased dramatically. Interest in museums or halls of fame

specialising in the preservation and presentation of sporting heritage has grown and these attractions can now be widely observed in a range of different cities (Moore, 2022; Ramshaw, Gammon and Tobar, 2019). However, the origins of the present concept of tourism halls or sports museums can be traced back only a few years (Moore, 2022). Nonetheless, there should be a differentiation and explanation between the terms ‘museum’ and ‘hall of fame’. The ultimate goal of a sports hall of fame is to honour athletes who have excelled in their field (Ramshaw, Gammon and Tobar, 2019). The term ‘fame’ is crucial because it recognises only those who have been deemed renowned enough to qualify. The procedures and regulations for achieving such accreditation are virtually as diverse as the institutions themselves, but originally only elite athletes of remarkable and demonstrated talent were admitted (Moore, 2022). The United States was both an innovator and a pioneer in the "hall of fame" idea in the modern world. This admiration emphasises the individualism inherent in American society, as well as the overt desire to recognise and reward personal achievement of ‘the American dream’. The name was most likely coined in 1901, when the Great American Hall of Fame was founded in New York City, and since then, the term has been given to a wide range of sports-themed attractions (Kendall, 2006). Sports museums on the other hand are designed to share illustrious histories rather than individual achievements. Indeed, a museum's mission is often to preserve history of some kind. Its collection includes artefacts, records, and relics from ordinary individuals as well as the famous (or even the infamous). As a result, a "sports museum" will display an athletic exhibit only for historical purposes. The preservation of sports history for public exhibition can be traced back to ancient times, as contributors, collectors, and viewers of sports-related items have existed since the beginning of sport. Sport has been written about and depicted in art media such as paintings. Over the past few decades, the growth and diversity of sports museums has continued and some are now hybrids between museum and hall of fame. Perhaps the most prominent example of a sports hall of fame/museum hybrid is the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in New York. The attraction is considered to be one of the state’s most popular sporting attractions, especially as it represents the first institution dedicated to "the great American game” (Ramshaw, Gammon and Tobar, 2019). Since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, the attraction traces not only the history of baseball but honours inductees to the hall of fame. Moreover, it is an important vehicle for broader American cultural heritage, as more recent exhibits on the history of women in sport, as well as Latino and African Americans baseballers may be found alongside a huge collection of artefacts. Other examples include the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum (1956), the Hall of Champions in San Diego (1961), the Professional Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio (1963), and the Amateur Trap-Shooting Hall of Fame and Museum in Vandalia, Ohio (1969). The significant expansion of sports halls of fame and museums developed in the 1950s and 1960s means that many are now major attractions in their respective cities. Expanding this discussion beyond the US, the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Museum is a further example (Godfrey, 2012). In 1977, the Wimbledon Sports Museum opened on the grounds of the Championships to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the event. A guided tour of the grounds is available, which includes an up-close look at courts, as well as thousands of objects from the previous three

centuries are on display in the museum, documenting the growth of tennis dress, equipment, and trophies. Finally, the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland is an excellent example of how major international sporting events and cultural heritage may be simultaneously showcased through sport museums and similar attractions (Chevalley, 2021). The Olympic Museum not only shares modern sporting events and artefacts but reveals the origins of the games via the ancient history of Greece. Moreover, it reveals that a sports museum or attraction based around a specific sport or culture does not have to be based in specific geographic location. This is an important point to remember when considering that Saudi Arabia seeks to build a sports tourism economy despite having a limited history or connection to many Western sports.

Alongside sport-themed attractions, sports events have been framed as important opportunities to grow tourism in Saudi Arabia. According to Kurtman and Zauhar (2003) sport tourism events are defined as those sporting activities that attract a big number of spectators and produce considerable and varied flows of visitors (Higham, 2005). Large-scale events, such as the Super Bowl, Wimbledon, and the Olympics, are among the most common types of sporting events to be classified as sport tourism events, whilst medium scale events typically include those at the national or regional level. Ottevanger (2007) found a third kind of event: 'local events'. Higham's (1999) notion of the 'small-scale event' is strongly associated with this category also. A participant-led event is one in which participants outnumber spectators on an annual basis and which is hence referred to as a 'small event'. Events that are staged for the purpose of enhancing community pride, boosting spending in the host economy and providing entertainment for local citizens are also examples of sports tourism events. Therefore, it is important to analyse the possible repercussions of a tourist sports event beyond economic metrics and instead explore its influence on the quality of life of people (Fredline, 2000). Indeed, research on the economic advantages of holding an event has taken precedence over studies on the environmental and social repercussions on any location in which an event is held. In response, Fredline (2006), suggests that 'any impacts which potentially have an impact on the quality of life for locals' now require further study in tourism research, especially those that 'effect changes in the collective and individual value systems, behaviour patterns, and community structure' in destinations that host sports tourism.

2.4 Who is the Sports Tourist?

So far, this literature review has provided insights into sports tourism and the particular growth of sports-themed attractions. However, it is important to also establish who or what a sports tourist is. A sports tourist, according to this definition, can be either an active participant or a passive observer. Sport's "physical" aspect, however, acts as a "polarizer" for sports tourist definitions suggests Higham (2018). However, Higham (2018) adds, 'in simple terms, a sports tourist is someone who participates in sport tourism activities'. This definition remains a problem in some

cases though as spectators are very different to active participants and because it may exclude others such as employees or volunteers that are active in the processes of sports tourism but are not considered conventional tourists (Melnick, 1993). The segmentation approach is used by a number of sports tourism researchers in attempt to create tourist typologies, clusters, groups, or segments (Formica & Uysal, 1998; Frochot & Morrison, 2000). It also considers demographics, geographical location, psychographic characteristics and behavioural variables in order to divide a vast market into smaller, easier-to-manage divisions (Dolnicar, 2008; Tsotsou, 2006). However, due to the eclectic nature of what is considered sports tourism and the criteria used to distil them, various studies have produced different groups or sports tourist segments. For example, based on sociodemographic and travel behaviour variables such as age, earnings, and job experience, Dolnicar and Fluker (2003) divided sports tourists into six groups. However, more recently, Funk and Giovani (2009) and Slak Valek et al. (2014) used a larger sports tourist samples and used a broader range of sociodemographic characteristics including level of education as well as their motives and experience levels of the sports they watched or participated in to explain sports tourists' destination choices (domestic or international), accommodation, and spending habits. Researchers have also sought to classify sports tourists based on a number of other characteristics, including repeat trips, and the extra non-sports activities they pursue (e.g., Lyu & Lee, 2013; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2012). More specifically, in a study by Siomkos, Vasiliadis and Lathiras (2006), winter sports tourists were divided by the behaviours that influence skiers and snowboarders' destination choices and purchasing approaches. According to Kambele, Li, and Zhou (2015), sports tourists search for information on other non-sports related activities as part of their decision-making process. Both Humphreys and Weed (2014) and Kulczycki and Halpenny (2014) looked into their decision-making processes, and found that whilst they may be primarily driven by a desire to participate or watch sport they also want to do a diverse range of other activities. Similarly, according to Gibson (2004), the interests of sports tourists and non-sports tourists are not mutually exclusive. Gibson (2004) observed that participation in a variety of cultural, recreational, sports, and retail activities was common among Canadian tourists.

Therefore, sports tourists do more than just attend an event or, according to Kulczycki and Halpenny (2014), as it is likely they would engage other tourism activities in the region they are visiting. Whilst this is a positive outcome for destinations that seek to build diverse tourism economies that offer a range of different features and attractions it also reveals the complexity of trying to rigidly define the sports tourist. Either way, according to most studies irrespective of which criteria was applied, the majority of sports tourists were men, who were older (over 35), more educated, and had higher income levels than the general public (Kah & Lee, 2016; Rundio et al., 2014). When considering motivations, it is argued that sports tourists typically want to experience authentic encounters, build a sense of camaraderie, and seek further integration into their chosen sport of interest regardless as to whether they are active participants or spectators (Kurtzman and Zauhar, 2005).

Despite the fact that there have been a number of studies focused on sports tourism in order to give destinations and event organizers a better understanding of this sector, there is still some lack of awareness (see Filo et al., 2013). There are currently few studies in the literature that compare sports tourists to non-sports visitors. One of the exceptions is the research conducted by Slak Valek, Mihali, and Bednarik (2005) who compared the two groups, however they found no significant differences in terms of demographics or other motivations or travel behaviours. Whilst it is clear that it will remain exceptionally difficult to frame the sports tourist, it is clear that more work must be done to explore who the sports tourist is.

2.5 The Impacts of Hosting Sports Tourism

It is important to not only understand who the sports tourist is but how their movements impact on destinations. As such, many articles have been written about the effects of hosting sports tourism. Research by Green et al., (2003) suggests that impacts of hosting sports tourism do not fall under the typical paradigm of economic, social, cultural, or environmental impacts like they do in other studies that focus on particular forms of tourism. As a result, it has been suggested that a framework that examines gross impacts is not always suitable for sport tourism, and instead as some authors have stated (e.g. Chalip, 2006; 2014; Beesley and Chalip, 2011; Weed, 2014), a more effective strategy would be to focus on 'leverage' rather than impacts. The study of leverage, unlike impact assessments, is strategic and tactical in nature (Chalip, 2004). Here, the goal is to design strategies and analytical tools that can be used before, during and after sports tourism development to explore if positive outcomes were achieved. As a result, leveraging entails a considerably more proactive strategy to capitalising on possibilities, as opposed to impact research, which merely assesses outcomes (Chalip, 2004, p. 227). According to Weed (2008), a leveraging approach is critical in developing an Olympic tourism strategy for example. He looked at how techniques to leverage Olympic tourism may be created in the years preceding up to and after the Games, using Chalip's (2004) broad model of event leveraging as well as during the Games themselves. Weed (2008) went on to say that leverage can be just as crucial for reducing negative consequences as it is for increasing advantages. Chalip's (2006; 2014) discussions of leverage have included leveraging social components in addition to economic implications. Green (2001) examined the interaction between event consumers (whether participants or spectators) and the subculture or identity formation associated with an event by focusing on social leverage. Green (2001) also explored the significance of subculture in transferring consuming ideals and the manner in which this might be used to promote events. Green et al. (2003) highlights the essential relationship between behavioural and effects research by focusing on how actions can be harnessed to create beneficial consequences. Furthermore, this leveraging of behaviours is perhaps analogous to the packaging or commodification of adventure discussed by Beedie (2003).

From a different vantage point, Kane and Zink (2004), and Varley (2006), highlight how the perspectives of tourism stakeholders involved can affect whether an approach is viewed positively (e.g. providers attempting to maximise profit) or negatively (e.g. participants attempting to maximise enjoyment). The social impacts of sports tourism, on the other hand, are often framed primarily from the perspective of local communities (Balduck, Maes, and Buelens, 2011; Fredline, 2005; Jamieson, 2014). Indeed, Fredline (2005) identified the distinctions between models which look at host communities as a whole and focus on changes in attitudes over time, and intrinsic models, which look at the reasons for different attitudes toward sports tourism development within host communities. Fredline (2005) found there should be a greater focus on building holistic models that can provide an overall assessment of sports tourism development, which can then be used to help make judgments regarding the most appropriate forms of sports tourism development for specific destinations and host communities in particular. This supports the notion made by Weed, Stephens and Bull (2011) that leveraging approaches should focus not just on maximising benefits but also on reducing negative consequences. As a result, Chalip's (2006; 2014) recommendations for social leveraging of events can be used to benefit the vast majority of people while simultaneously ensuring that a small group of individuals is not negatively impacted (Weed, 2010). For example, Briedenhann's (2011) analysis of the 2010 Soccer World Cup in South Africa also focused on the impacts of sports tourism on host communities and found that benefits were perceived to benefit the minority rather than the majority. Their study revealed that inhabitants from several South African cities felt that whilst the World Cup benefitted the country as a whole, they were concerned that such benefits, whether social, cultural, or economic, would be limited to those who were already financially comfortable.

As previously stated, not all of the effects of event sports tourism are caused by large -scale events. Gibson, Kaplanidou and Kang (2012), as well as Higham and Hinch (2002), suggest that developing a strategy focused on small-scale events can maximise positive and minimise negative impacts, whereas Wilson (2006) demonstrated that even very small-scale locally focused swimming events can generate significant economic benefits, with more than £80,000 generated over eight days in the UK. However, according to Wilson (2006, p. 57), such expenditure levels are only stimulated if secondary expenditure opportunities are available, or if the events are properly exploited for economic benefit. Gibson et al. (2003) looked at the potential for US college sports to assist local communities as an example of the influence of small-scale events. The authors employed a rigorous examination of sports tourist behaviours to determine the nature of impacts, similar to Costa and Chalip's (2005) research of hang gliding in a Portuguese town. The study by Gibson et al. (2003) is particularly fascinating because the sports tourists who are spectators are home team fans who have travelled an average of 142 kilometres to witness the event. Furthermore, the event was viewed as an important component of the experience, confirming the need to widen the research focus beyond a simple assessment of event attendance, as Fairley also urged (2003). In terms of impact, the fact that the sports tourism experience is more complex than

merely attending the event may suggest that more significant advantages are on the way for the local community, especially as fans of the home team frequently have a strong sense of place affinity for the location (Smith and Stewart, 2007).

2.6 The Challenges of Developing Tourism in Saudi Arabia

There are still numerous hurdles for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia if it wishes to develop tourism on an international scale - even it is preparing to become a new Middle Eastern tourism powerhouse. International visitors' perceptions of safety, human rights, equitable treatment, and even a strict legal system need to be changed before the Kingdom can earn their trust (Almutairi, 2018). The issue of safety in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East more broadly is a major challenge as political unrest in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen may disrupt travel and affect destination image. In addition, many of the Kingdom's assets, such as its rich cultural legacy and the biodiversity of the Red Sea, are underappreciated outside the country. Even if the government spends a lot of money promoting the Kingdom, it will still take time for people to alter their unfavourable impressions.

There are two types of economic difficulties to contend with in Saudi Arabia - those relating to the tourist businesses and those related to other economic sectors (Ishac, 2020). Competition with other GCC countries for the same markets (shopping tourism, desert adventure tourism, MICE tourism, etc.), the emergence of tourism destinations for GCC residents (Indonesia, Egypt, Malaysia, Turkey), labour shortages, the dominance of religious tourism (Hajj and Umrah), and scarce opportunities for tourism training, are some of the tourism-related challenges that persist (Sherbini et al., 2016). Tourism development in Saudi Arabia may additionally be hindered by the country's general economic situation. For example, when the price of oil fluctuates, the country's reliance on oil exports may put it at danger. Using oil as a political tool might lead to instability in economic policy. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's neighbours have opted to respond to its pursuit of international tourism development in their own way. Competitively, the UAE announced several measures to prevent Saudi Arabia from overtaking its position as a major destination by adopting new ways to attract international investment. Saudi Arabia's tourism industry will likely pose a serious challenge to the tourism economies of its surrounding nations, such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, thanks to its development initiatives and decision to issue non-religious tourist visas. Since the 1990s, Abu Dhabi and Doha have channeled their investments into sports in an effort to diversify their economies from oil, improve their reputation, develop their tourism brand and image, and strive for prestige. For example, Qatar will host the 2022 Formula One Grand Prix and the 2022 FIFA World Cup, of which both are major international sporting events watched worldwide. Thus, Saudi Arabia is now stepping into a well-established regional sports tourism sector and without the knowledge or experience of how to host major events of this scale.

Tourism infrastructure – or the absence of it in some regions – is also an important issue that needs to be addressed. Domestic Saudi tourists typically drive their own cars because of the cheap cost of oil and the low cost of automobile ownership. However, the international tourist sector, on the other hand, relies heavily on public transport systems. Connecting transport hubs (airport/seaport/bus station/train station) to city centres and other cities with regular, visitor-friendly transportation alternatives will be essential for efficient and safe travel. It is the responsibility of local governments and municipalities to improve the quality of tourist services and the standards of tourism-related businesses in Saudi Arabia (Ekiz, Öter, and Stephenson, 2017). Various sorts of tourism need varied designs for petrol stations, retail markets, automobile parking spaces, and other tourist-related enterprises. Environmentally friendly and accessible tourist facilities are essential also. Thus, as the country's tourist industry grows, new infrastructure will have to be built to support it. The success of the tourist business is also dependent on the quality of the workforce. Customer happiness is strongly linked to service quality, which in turn is heavily influenced by the quality of the workers employed. Saudi Arabia is too reliant on employees from other countries (Ekiz, Öter, and Stephenson, 2017). Nonetheless, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed Ben Salman, Saudi Arabia is following in the footsteps of its Middle Eastern neighbours in competitiveness, growth and development. Under his leadership, and in combination with the goals of the Vision 2030, foreign investors and expatriate professionals are now choosing Saudi Arabia to find better jobs, new investment opportunities, and higher wages because of the oversupply of hotels in the UAE and Dubai. As the concept of hosting international events is relatively new in Saudi Arabia, the government must now invest heavily to support long term tourism growth and economic sustainability (Goyal and Bhandari, 2021). It takes time to build human capital, infrastructure, and mentality necessary for responsible tourism, ecotourism, and other visitor- and nature-friendly tourism initiatives. Many tourist groups will be badly impacted by a lack of public transportation. Non-Muslim tourists should have visitor-friendly regulations too, meaning there must be precise, timely, and reliable data and research to make smart judgments about the future of Saudi tourism. The above challenges are a significant barriers to growth.

For starters, the government needs to educate tourism stakeholders about the benefits of collaboration and investment in non-religious tourism like sports tourism. Through sporting events, economic opportunities may include broadcasting revenues, enticing advertisers, revenues from consumer services such as membership programs, sponsorship, tickets sales, and economic inputs from private companies (Goyal. and Bhandari, 2021). Additionally, data monetization is a new commodity for sports organization as they use the information to influence attendance, predict outcomes, monitor sporting events, and play out what if scenarios. Sporting events therefore provide different avenues in which local entities may benefit but these opportunities need to be made clear to both tourism businesses and the broader Saudi population. Another important concern is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a negative influence on tourism throughout the globe. The coronavirus may have impacted the ability of Vision 2030 to stay on track. Travelers visiting Saudi Arabia have been forced to avoid the country because of airline

Cancellations, border restrictions, and social lockdowns brought on by the coronavirus. As a result, many researchers had reduced their short- and medium-term forecasts for Saudi Arabian tourism.

Nonetheless, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia seems poised to take on these challenges and move ahead with its Vision 2030. The visa requirements for entering Saudi Arabia have remained, until recently, rather onerous. Despite recent changes it is tough to get a tourist visa for this country. Visas may be expedited for business, Hajj, Umrah, and visiting friends and relatives (VFR). On the other hand, the EU and many other nations are working to develop innovative methods to make obtaining a visa easier for travelers (Ekiz, Öter, and Stephenson, 2017). By increasing visas to specific nations and focusing on social change, it has acknowledged some of the persistent issues relating to negative destination images about the country. Over the past five years, Saudi Arabia has made significant development in the hospitality and tourist sectors, far exceeding the targets of Vision 2030. Increased worldwide employment prospects in these fields and more career variety for Saudis are two of the many benefits of this dynamic expansion. Indeed, tourists are expected to play a major role in Saudi Arabia's economy and employment possibilities in the years to come.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology of the study is described and justified. First, the research plan is outlined in further detail, including the study strategy, data collection methods and sample selection, as well as the research methodology, data analysis technique, ethical issues that needed to be considered, and research limitations. Sport tourism in Saudi Arabia is the subject of this dissertation's applied study due to the observation that no such research has been undertaken in Saudi Arabia. The goal of this research methodology is to answer the questions posed in the study and research technique simply refers to the process of doing research. A systematic approach to data acquisition and analysis is outlined in the research methodology. This is a crucial step in determining the best course of action for the research. Using the right research methods may help determine whether or not a study's findings are legitimate and reliable in their entirety. This research methodology primarily addresses two questions: how data were collected and how they were evaluated to produce the results. An inductive technique was used to examine how sports tourism contributes to the growth of the Saudi economy. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with tourism stakeholders and this process will now be explained in further detail.

3.2 Research Methods and Rationale

A qualitative investigation was undertaken in order to meet the research question, aims, and objectives of the thesis (see Chapter 1). Textual analysis, interviews, and ethnography, which contains numerous conversations and interviews, are all significant components of qualitative research (Peterson, 2019), despite the notion that its implications are neither quantifiable or quantitative as outlined in Table 2. In addition to its essential distinction from a research study, its key benefit is that it provides a full description and analysis of the study's subject matter without limiting the scope of the inquiry or the types of participant replies (Collis and Hussey 2003). The particular goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of how tourism stakeholders perceive the emergence of a new form of tourism. Quantitative methods were considered but because of the extensive monitoring and data collection that goes along with this procedure, it was considered unfeasible due to time limitations and also practicality issues. Instead, qualitative research methods were selected because they can explore personal thoughts and opinions more effectively. However, it is important to remember that a limitation with this approach involves small samples that may not always reflect the broader range of views and options amongst a population cohort. Nonetheless, as this study focuses on tourism stakeholders and not the wider Saudi public, qualitative methods were deemed appropriate as it was critical their views, insights and experiences as tourism leaders or employees were captured.

Table 2. An overview of the differences between qualitative vs quantitative approaches

Qualitative research	Quantitative Research
The goal is to provide an in-depth, comprehensive answer.	In order to have a better understanding of what's going on, statistical models are used to classify, count, and categorise various attributes.
A researcher may just have a vague idea of what they are looking for.	The investigator has a good grasp of the situation. He or she should have a clear idea of what he or she wants in advance.
This is highly suggested in the early stages of study.	It is strongly recommended in the last stages of study.
The design changes over time as the study progresses.	Before any data is gathered, all aspects of the research are properly prepared.
The research instrument is the researcher.	Research relies on surveys and instruments to get numerical data.
Words, pictures, and even physical things may be used to store and retrieve data.	Numbers and statistics are used to convey data.
the significance of each person's unique point of view on the importance of events has been amply proven via participant observation, in-depth interviews, and other methods.	Surveys, questionnaires, and other methods are used to gather data that will be used to make accurate assessments and analyses of the topics being studied.
Qualitative data is more expensive, time-consuming, and less generalizable than quantitative data.	It is preferable to use quantitative data since it allows you to test your ideas. However, contextual information may be ignored.
Researchers are prone to being completely engrossed in their field of study.	It is common for the researcher to be removed from the topic area in order to remain unbiased.

This study is considered a sociological study as it structured around and influenced by human phenomena. Students who are new to these subjects typically discover the reciprocal link between theory and research when they examine the connections between theory and research in inductive

and deductive research methodologies and this study attempts to achieve the same (Azungah, 2018). There is a lot of overlap between inductive and deductive research methods, yet they are still quite distinct from one another (Azungah, 2018). Researchers that use inductive approaches to inform their research begin by gathering data that is relevant to the key question that is being answered (Woo, O'Boyle and Spector, 2017). After a significant data has been gathered, the researcher will take a step back and look at their findings from different perspectives. At this point, the researcher is looking for emerging patterns and themes in the data (Woo, O'Boyle and Spector, 2017). As a result, they shift from the particular to the general, or from facts to theory. Therefore, to achieve the study's aims objectives, an inductive research method was utilised. An inductive method was selected since it takes into account social and geographical context and is also acceptable for small samples that provide qualitative data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Moreover, this approach allows flexibility, supports the generation of new ideas and concepts in new or under-researched settings or contexts (Cronin 2004).

3.3 Data Collection

This study relied on semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative material. The researcher viewed this as the only realistic option to acquire reliable data on the study theme in Saudi Arabia. When reflecting on the information provided in Table 2, the method's advantages far exceeded its disadvantages in the context of Saudi Arabia and in relation to the subject matter (which can be diverse). The questions used in the interviews were largely conventional ones to help the interviewees share knowledge on the subject matter and so that people felt comfortable with the nature of inquiry (it is not common for many stakeholders in Saudi Arabia to be interviewed) (Cronin 2004). Indeed, it is possible to build multiple relationships with new people using the interview method, which is characterised by gathering information from the individual and asking questions in a variety of ways to present the data in an elaborate manner. The interview method can also help the researcher learn more about people and topics of interest (Tang 2012 p.3). In order to gather information, interviewees are asked a list of pre-determined questions, to which participants reply with their own opinions and experiences. This is a conventional method of data collection to acquire information from a predetermined set of participants. Questions will take a variety of forms depending on the scope of the study and the data needed (Siraj-Blatchford, 2020).

It must be acknowledged that there are some flaws with this strategy are that it takes a lot of time and money to do a somewhat lengthy interview, and the interviewer must be skilled (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). Investigators must be well-versed in the necessary subject matter and possess a wide range of soft skills, including intelligence, sensitivity, composure, and agility. Interview preparation, scheduling, conducting and evaluating are not as simple as they seem: there's the time and work involved in completing everything to the highest possible standard. Semi-structured interviews can need going through a large number of pages of notes and transcripts, which might

take many hours (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). However, in summary, semi-structured interviews are good for learning about a group's diverse perspectives by asking probing, open-ended questions and because they can be used to ask respondents about issues that they might be reluctant to discuss openly in a focus group (Queirós, Faria and Almeida, 2017). Indeed, conducting one-on-one interviews with key programme managers, staff and frontline service providers can be a highly informative and is often utilised because people are more likely to share personal views or concerns when approached as individuals, including those not considered by the researcher themselves (Gunduz, Lokman, and Hatemi 2005). The following research questions were introduced:

Question 1: How did you feel tourism was performing in Saudi Arabia before COVID-19?

Question 2: When do you anticipate tourism will return to 'normal' in Saudi Arabia?

Question 3: How important do you feel sports tourism will be in the future of Saudi Arabia's tourism industry?

Question 4: What do you feel are/will be the benefits of further developing sports tourism in Saudi Arabia?

Question 5: What do you feel are/will be the challenges of further developing sports tourism in Saudi Arabia?

Question 6: What sports (or sporting events) do you feel would be most effective in developing the sports tourism industry in Arabia?

Question 7: What are your views on the hosting of Western sports for the purposes of tourism in Saudi Arabia?

(Appendix A has a more thorough version of the interview instructions.)

3.4 Study Participants

Appropriate study participants for this research project included stakeholders involved in tourism in some capacity (see White, 2004). These stakeholders included business owners, managers, employees, and students studying tourism. After an ethics application was completed, potential study participants were contacted using social media posts during June and July of 2021. Once they volunteered to be involved in the study, consent to participate in the study was then confirmed. The researcher got in touch with volunteer directly and urged them to participate in the study by sharing the purpose and value of the study. Interviews were undertaken during June and July of 2021 and typically lasted 30 minutes each. Due to COVID-19 the interviews were conducted both in person and over the phone through video conversations. With permission of the participants and

for the sake of future research and analysis, the interview data was recorded. A breakdown of the participants can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The sample selection of the interviewees

Stakeholder category	% representation
Tourism students	38
Tourism academics	19
Tourism employees	19
Tourism business owners/managers	12
Other tourism sectors	12

3.5 Ethical Considerations

After Identifying participants who included business owners, managers, employees, and students studying tourism they were randomly contacted and informed about the research using social media posts during June and July of 2021. A text message or a phone call was used by all participants to confirm their participation in the research, as was previously mentioned. The interviewees gave their consent either verbally or by email/text message. In order to acquire their agreement, participants were reassured that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they may opt out at any time for any reason. The study's goals were explained to participants, and they were reassured that their responses would be kept private and used purely for academic reasons. The researcher aimed to create and maintain a calming environment and also reaffirmed participants' right with to withdraw during the start of each interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

After the interview phase was completed, the interviews were transcribed from Arabic into English. The interviews were then subjected to content analysis in order to better understand the information acquired. The data acquired was categorised into topics and sub-themes so that it may be simply compared to other studies. A major benefit of content analysis is that it simplifies and streamlines information while providing quantifiable outcomes (Kuckartz, 2019). Content analysis may also help to arrange qualitative data so that it meets the goals of the research. The most significant feature of the content is it contributes to social interaction and provides information with historical values that can be referred to for a long period of time, as well as statistical analyses in the form of symbols distributed between relationships and specific groups (Kuckartz, 2019). Content analysis can be subject to human

error because of the potential for researchers to misunderstand the data acquired, resulting in incorrect and erroneous

results (Kuckartz, 2019). However, to limit the likelihood of this happening, the research contacted his supervisor to review and discuss the key emergent themes found to build consistency.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings from this study reveal a number of important observations. An overview of the key findings observed are shared via Table 4. As can be seen, sports tourism impacts were largely framed from economic or social vantage points and were typically broken down into either positive or negative categories. As a consequence, this study reveals Saudi Arabia's tourism paradox that include several potential benefits though growth but participant concerns that are produced by the country's conservative cultural and socioeconomic setting. However, before these themes are explored, context on the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism in Saudi Arabia is provided as this study was conducted in the midst of the pandemic and may have influenced some participant viewpoints.

Table 4. Summary of key findings

Type of impact	Summary
Positive Economic	Sport tourism makes destinations more appealing and raises awareness
Positive Economic	Hosting sports tourism could help reduce unemployment levels
Positive Social	Sport tourism could showcase Saudi Arabia and change international perceptions of the country
Positive Social	Sports tourism will attract international tourists that help local Saudi gain new cultural insights through contact
Positive Social	Hosting major global events instills a sense of pride amongst host communities
Positive Social	Sports tourism may be a more progressive form of tourism that supports gender inclusivity
Positive Social	Sports tourism may increase public participation in sport and recreation that leads to health benefits

Negative Economic	Limited infrastructure to support sport tourism and tourism in general
Negative Economic	Some concerns about costs of hosting sports events, especially as this capital could be invested elsewhere
Negative Social	There is limited awareness of international sports in Saudi Arabia and a weak 'sports culture'
Negative Social	Concerns raised about sports tourism (primarily that based around Western sports) could lead to cultural changes that are not consistent with traditional views and beliefs

4.2 Impacts of COVID-19 on Tourism in Saudi Arabia

The government was unable to anticipate how the COVID-19 outbreak would influence Saudi Arabian tourism. The pandemic spread from China to many of the country's primary inbound markets, including the Middle East and various European countries suggesting that the 2030 goals may need to be revised. According to the latest data, the core goals of contributing 3.8% to national GDP and creating 615,000 direct jobs in the tourist sector by 2030 are now unlikely to be achieved. In response, a SAR 9 billion (USD 2.4 billion) package was announced by the Saudi Arabian government on April 3, 2020 to support COVID-19-affected tourism enterprises. The effect of the pandemic on the travel and tourist business has been especially severe for both major and small firms across the country and job growth has stagnated. The support package was primarily designed to mitigate the effect of Coronavirus on private sector economic activities, particularly employment redundancies. Lockdown restrictions were exceptionally tight in the country and both Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Tourism and various other government agencies took drastic steps to improve public safety by limiting the spread of COVID-19:

- For the most coronavirus-affected nations, Saudi health rules would prohibited citizens from obtaining tourist visas in Saudi Arabia.
- All international-focused conferences, exhibits, or events were cancelled
- A 14-day quarantine at home was required for visitors returning from outside the Kingdom.
- Saudi Arabia banned all international flights in and out of the country
- Domestic travel also restricted to intrastate movements only

COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on domestic movements were gradually lifted on May 28, 2020 by the government although all international and Umrah flights remained cancelled. However, estimates suggest that between 60-80% of the Saudi tourism industry was impacted by COVID-19 in 2020. Several government organisations in Saudi Arabia have now implemented tourism-specific initiatives to further ease international travel restrictions, develop new health standards for safe travel, and aid in market diversification, among other things. Efforts are also being made to rehabilitate tourist destinations, encourage innovation and investment, and rethink what the Saudi tourism industry may look like after the pandemic. These steps are critical, but more must be done if the tourist industry is to be completely revived and enterprises restored to health. Tourist attractions and government services are intertwined in Saudi Arabia and further focus should now be placed on the most vulnerable and sensitive regions at this time.

4.3 Perceived Positive Impacts of Developing Sports Tourism

4.3.1 *Economic*

It was proposed by Balaguer and Cantavella-Jordá (2002) that increasing tourism activities leads to economic development (the "tourism-led growth hypothesis"). According to the widely accepted export-led growth hypothesis (ELGH), economic development may be bolstered by both developing domestic human capital and technological capabilities, as well as boosting foreign currency earnings. It is argued that integrating sports activities into a destination can also lead to major economic gains (Hinch and Higham, 2001). Many participants in this study agreed with this sentiment and also suggested that it could represent an important opportunity to grow both domestic tourism and attract tourists from the Middle East, echoing the views of Kester and Carvao (2004). Based on the views of study participants, it was suggested that sports tourism could produce two key benefits from an economic perspective. First, sports tourism in Saudi Arabia could play an important role in making the country a more attractive destination as hosting events could raise international awareness. For example, P1 stated that by organizing major international sports events, it could be an effective way to raise the profile of the country to a wide international audience and demonstrate that it had the capacity to be an important and progressive destination. This observation mirrored that of Glasson and Godfrey (1995) who noted that sports events could be used to shift perception of place.

Organising sports events it a good way to raise awareness about what Saudi Arabia represents and what we have to offer as destination. (P4)

Because Saudi Arabia has transformed into an ambitious country, Western sports events will demonstrate to other countries that we have the capacity to host such events ... Saudi Arabia now wants Western tourism, which had not previously been recognised as a source

of revenue for the country ... I think sports tourism will a critical component in bolstering our tourism industry and furthering the Kingdom's long-term goals. (P7)

Second, it was argued that sports tourism could produce important economic benefits and reduce the country's unemployment rate that could in turn improve the quality of life for the local people. The following participants' views were consistent with this perspective:

The Saudi economy and the Saudi citizen's productivity will benefit through hosting sporting events and they have a significant role to play in reviving a wide range of industries. Because so many members of the population in the Kingdom are sports fans, the promotion and support of sports tourism, such as the staging of major international sporting events, is an important step ... When a country hosts major sporting events like the Olympics or an international competition, such as the World Cup, there is ample evidence that the country benefits economically ... One such benefit is the growth of the country's infrastructure, as well as the influx of tourists who come to watch the event... this will help the country grow as a tourist destination and promote the Saudi Vision. (P11)

Sports tourism in Saudi Arabia has various advantages, including boosting its international reputation, drawing in new investors, and creating jobs for Saudi youth and women in this industry. (P7)

In short, many believed that as the sports tourism industry grows in Saudi Arabia, the country will become a more popular tourism destination. A large proportion of Saudi Arabia's population is under 35, and they are becoming more interested in sports, as seen by their increased attendance at sporting events and by their increased engagement in them. Participants believed that people throughout the globe could be drawn in by the country's emerging sports culture, as well as its history, customs and traditions. They also believe that it could improves the country's image and foster trust between different cultures. These positive were shared by P13:

There is no question that sports tourism has numerous advantages, including the interchange of cultures between peoples ... By attracting international sporting events, Saudi citizens will be able to engage, communicate, and learn about a variety of other cultures, which will aid in the development of the Saudi community's thinking and communication abilities ... Unemployment will be reduced, in addition to helping the local economy and offering additional work possibilities for Saudi citizens.

Whilst sports tourism was seen to be an important pathway to economic growth through tourism, both P8 and P9 suggested that religious tourism should not be overlooked as it remains the main pillar of Saudi tourism and that it is a more reliable form of tourism due to religious expectations to perform the Hajj. Moreover, although both agreed that it offered considerable potential they did raise concerns about the compatibility of trying to attract both religious and sports tourists. These themes will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.3.2 Social

Research shows that sport tourism may be utilised to address a variety of social issues and that it may also support a range of positive social outcomes (Emery, 2002). Strategic economic objectives like urban regeneration may also be achieved by cities using sport tourism, in particular mega-events. This approach has led to the use of the term "sport-led regeneration of a host community" and refers to the process of using sports to help a community's economy, society, health, and environment (Wise & Harris, 2017). Sports tourism can involve many different tourism products and services ranging from passive events that are primarily based around viewing sport to outdoor or adventure tourism activities like mountain climbing or skiing. Regardless as to how sport tourism was framed by study participants, many were optimistic about the social benefits sport tourism could create. Indeed, it was argued that it could be an important vehicle in developing a form of tourism that was inclusive and may also promote wide health benefits:

A growing number of people are realising the importance of sports tourism ... sports tourism can be for people of all ages and all genders. By building sports tourism destinations we will get access to better facilities and public spaces and services ... which is good for health and wellbeing of local people. (P11)

The health impacts of hosting sports could be substantial and it may also push members of community to participate in sports after they attend. (P5)

Building upon the idea of inclusivity, P5 believed that sports activities could promote the exchange of values and foster social ties between Saudi hosts and international tourists.

The economic advantages of Saudi Arabia's tourism growth are obvious ... they show that a rise in the number of visitors means more money for us. Sports tourism can achieve the same I think ... but, in addition, Saudi society will also benefit from a cultural interaction between individuals from other nations, particularly those with political or economic difficulties. Also, people from different countries and cultures will be able to exchange ideas and experiences with us, which will have a direct influence on how they see us and we see them. (P5)

The idea of using sport tourism to build cross-cultural relationships was an important one to some participants. This notion was underpinned by their observations that certain sports that were formerly considered taboo were becoming more widely acceptable in society and this was now providing the tourism industry with new ways to connect with international audiences. Whilst they acknowledged there were still several obstacles to overcome amongst certain sections of the population that were still largely opposed, it was found that sports tourism could open new doors and change perceptions about how Saudi Arabia was seen by the outside world. They identified sports tourism as an important way to provide positive tourist experiences by engaging in sports that were of mutual interest between local and international tourists. They also believed that it could be an effective way to gently introduce Western tourists to Saudi culture. Indeed, P2, P3, and P4 all mentioned that sports tourism could help international tourists familiarise themselves with Saudi Arabia's tourist regions, that then would lead them to experience its rich heritage and change their perceptions of the country. Finally, from an alternative perspective, P13 discussed the pride hosting sports events could build amongst communities:

When you host a sporting event it feel like you're part of something bigger than yourself. While some in the host community think that sport tourism is mainly about boosting local businesses, we must remember that it can highlight our culture and showcase our home towns.

In summary, participants were highly positive about the different ways in which sports tourism could produce both economic and social benefits. However, a range of potential issues and challenges were also identified that will now be discussed in further depth.

4.4 Perceived Negative Impacts of Developing Sports Tourism

4.4.1 *Economic*

As a result of the growing trend of coupling tourism and sports, Saudi Arabia faces a number of obstacles when it comes to developing the industry according to a number of participants. These issues include a lack of investment in tourist infrastructure, limited staff numbers that were specialized in tourism or hospitality, and also concerns that capital invested in developing sports tourism would be better spent in other sectors. In terms of infrastructure it was argued that there are not enough enough hotels and resorts for international tourists:

It takes a lot of work and time to host a Western sporting event... but our infrastructure requires major work. ... Saudi Arabia's public transit infrastructure is abysmal, yet they want to host Western sports to support the struggling economy ... until the infrastructure is ready this approach will be a terrible idea. (P6)

Hosting sporting events and competitions, like as the Spanish Super Football League, the World Automobile Rally and WWE bouts throughout the world, is what the Kingdom has promised us in the previous years. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's candidacy to host the 2027 Asian Cup Finals was also formally handed up by the Saudi delegation. Poor infrastructure, lack of investment, and a lack of contracts with multinational corporations are three of the most pressing issues confronting the Kingdom's sports tourism industry. As a result of a new worldwide trend, tourism and sports are now being linked in an effort to benefit both parties. (P15)

Others added that sports facilities were also insufficient to build a viable sports tourism economy at the present time:

There aren't enough sporting facilities in Saudi Arabia to host a wide range of events and activities. There is only football stadium that meets the required standards. ... It's also worth noting that Saudi Arabia has only just began to organise sports federations, and that these federations are still in the early stages of development. Things are not ready yet. (P5)

Saudi Arabia's tourism and events infrastructure is still being developed, and thus the country is faced with a number of challenges in this regard. Moreover, there are just a few places where tourists may arrive into the country and there remains shortage of transportation, accommodation, and other facilities needed to accommodate tourists from other countries. At the time of writing, Saudi Arabia, has made several steps to support domestic tourism, ranging from new airports to road networks. Thus, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Tourism is working to overcome all obstacles, including upgrades to public transportation and the provision of more regional flights, however, progress has been impeded by the emergence of COVID-19.

From a different angle, employment concerns were based around the notion that there was dearth of training programmes for professionals in the tourism industry and thus a shortage competent staff. Fears therefore emerged that the Saudi tourism industry would not meet the professional standards and expectations overseas tourists would expect and therefore the country's tourism brand could be severely affected. Prior to the introduction of new international tourist visas, Saudi tourism business were only expected to support religious and business tourism and therefore they are not fully equipped with the skills – and language capabilities – to manage a far more diverse array of international tourists that visit for leisure. Of course, tourism often fosters the development of new infrastructure and the recruitment of new human resources,

but this typically occurs in destinations where tourism has long been established (Lemmetynen & Go, 2009). On a different note, it was also suggested that hosting sporting events would be economically unviable:

There are a number of obstacles to building sports tourism ... these include high operating and maintenance costs and the need to secure other financial support ... We need new hotels, furnished apartments, tourist resorts, and gaming and entertainment cities and this will create a surge in costs that will eventually fall on the shoulders of the public. (P12)

Building upon this point, it was raised by some participants that tourism could drive up costs for energy, food and other resources required by local populations. Although only rarely mentioned, it was added that marketing of Saudi Arabian domestic tourism, and the absence of activities, events, and entertainment programmes were also problematic issues that were required to be addressed if sports tourism were to be successfully implemented.

4.4.2 Social

Cultural differences and the potential opposition to the adoption of western sports or traditions were raised as social concerns by some participants. In general, it was argued that Saudi society as a whole does not share a strong desire for sports, either from the perspective of viewing or participant and that the Saudi society has 'a poor sports culture'. In addition it was suggested that country's highly conservative political and religious culture was a further issue, especially if sports tourism were to be developed in a way that encouraged female participation as either spectators or participants:

Women's sports such as beach volleyball and swimming may not be sustainable if they are brought in from outside Saudi society, and the dress used in these games is not fit for Saudi society's culture. Involvement in or participation in costly activities, such as golf, which is not popular in Saudi society in the first place, are also available. That is why it is impossible for sports that do not appeal to Saudi society to have any positive impact on the Saudi economy or to attract Saudi sports enthusiasts. (P5)

Indeed, a common theme to emerge was based around whether sports tourism was compatible with the Islamic faith. Interviewees were split on whether or not sport tourism degrades local culture, but there was no doubt that it framed positively from an economic perspective as it provided temporary employment opportunities, increased turnover in local businesses, aided in the construction and upkeep of public facilities, and improved living standards for residents who took part in commodities.

Participants were convinced that Saudi would be hospitable towards international tourists but they were not convinced that western sports would be deemed acceptable by Saudi society more

holistically. Before new forms of sports tourism may flourish in Saudi Arabia, among them the society's reluctance to accept foreign tourists or the presence of some (unwelcome) sports that threaten Saudi Arabia's cultural identities. It is critical that local values should be considered when developing sports tourism and that any future development must be harmony with society and cultural traditions (also recommended by the General Commission on Tourism and Antiquities, 2008). In Saudi Arabia, 'society is built in conformity with the precepts of Islamic law, which directly and indirectly impact leisure and travel' (Zamani-Farhani and Henderson 2010p. 1). This perspective also extends to the experiences of international visitors who may be unfamiliar with the Islamic culture of Saudi Arabia, and subsequently may not fully understand behavioural etiquette in the country when they engage in tourism. Thus, whilst it was suggested that sports tourism could change international visitor perceptions and also raise awareness of the country's rich cultural heritage, it must be developed organically and not be disruptive to more established forms of business or religious tourism. If this approach is not undertaken, it was argued that tourism may not be socially or cultural sustainable, even if it were an economic success.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 Key Observations

The findings from this study reveal that sports tourism development may present both positive and negative economic and social impacts. Observations from participant interviews acknowledge that sports tourism development was deemed to be a positive opportunity in Saudi Arabia from both economic and social perspectives. Economically, sports tourism was seen to be an important opportunity to diversify Saudi Arabia's tourism economy which remains firmly focused on religious tourism and also business tourism. Whilst both sectors have proven to be successful, it is now critical that country explores new opportunities to attract international tourists that seek leisure in the form of culture, heritage, and sports especially if the country seeks to move away from an economy that remains heavily reliant on oil. Sports tourism (and sports events in particular) was also highlighted as potential catalyst to attract tourists to the country who may then become more aware of the different activities on offer. Many participants believed that international tourists stay away from the country because they do not understand what it has to offer but suggested that hosting sports events could open several doors.

From a social perspective, participants shared a range of potential positive outcomes. These also included shifting perceptions of both the country and its culture. It was argued that sports tourism could increase interacts between local Saudi communities and international tourist that then support an exchange of values and beliefs. The interactions were deemed to be critical if Saudis wanted to share their culture in accurate way. Other positive social outcomes included the inclusivity sports tourism could promote, especially with regards to domestic females. Due to cultural conservatism, many forms of tourism still prohibit their involvement but it was posited that sports tourism could help reduce these barriers and change perceptions. Interestingly, it was also highlighted that despite the absence of a strong sports culture in Saudi Arabia, sports tourism could play a major in changing local attitudes towards participation that could in turn support health benefits.

However, a number of negative economic or social concerns were also raised. From an economic perspective, the costs of developing and hosting sports tourism raised concerns and some argued that it would be better to invest money elsewhere – especially as COVID-19 had impeded tourism growth dramatically in 2020-21. Other raised concerns about the country's ability to host major sporting events due to infrastructure limitations and the shortage of tourism-trained workers. The latter issue was exacerbated by the fact that many Saudis cannot speak English to a high standard and most current tourism industry employees only have awareness of business or religious tourism. It was also stated that sports tourism, especially if it were to be structured around western sports,

could lead to cultural erosion. The speed of change and the types of activity introduced could lead to local opposition it was suggested by some participants.

5.2 Benefits of the Research and Recommendations

Findings from this study support the Saudi government's long-term economic development strategy of investing in the tourism industry and reveal that there is an appetite to build sports tourism in the country. It is becoming more important to consider the economic effect of incoming tourism. As the fourth biggest export industry in the world, tourism has overtaken petroleum. Sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup, are an example of this, and are popular with both the local and international communities. In addition, such events generate cash for the country's economy by giving hotels, airlines, and other suppliers of domestic and international transportation the opportunity to conduct business. Like export, inbound tourism offers a range of ways to improve the economy. However, the findings underscore the need for the Saudi government to create more reliable tourist development strategies and initiatives in order to maximise the economic benefits of tourism. Due to its narrow focus on religious tourism, Saudi Arabia has limited infrastructure in many regions and a shortage of skilled workers in the tourism industry. Therefore, government policies should be implemented that encourage the development of human capital in order to meet the country's needs for growth in this sector. To address some of the negative impressions about tourism, notably the freedom and safety of female tourists, Saudi Arabia could also use sports tourism to reveal a more progressive society and one that is inclusive towards tourists of all international backgrounds and genders.

It is anticipated that the outcomes of this research may assist Saudi tourism policymakers and planners in the tourist sector. It is important that they heed the advice of participants in this study, not only so that economic gains may be achieved but so that cultural and social concerns are mitigated. It was recommended by the General Commission on Tourism and Antiquities in 2008 that local values-based tourism be created in conformity with society and cultural customs, Government authorities and tourism planners may benefit from this study's results, which may be used to help improve the quality of life for residents while simultaneously safeguarding Saudi values. Tourism may improve the quality-of-life of local people not only in terms of economic opportunities, including jobs, but social opportunities to improve physical health by encouraging Saudis to engage in sports or pursue more active forms. Its economic growth may also support the preservation of cultural artefacts, including the promotion of a country's culture and history is made easier with the help of tourism. In summary, Saudi Arabia has the ability to play a key role in the global tourism economy – but it must build new forms of tourism organically and in ways that meet the demands of local people.

5.3 Research Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the research, mainly because it was exploratory in nature and because the impacts of COVID-19 severely restricted participant recruitment. In preparing the original research aims and objectives it was clear that some were too broad, especially as sports tourism can be defined in many ways. If the study were to be undertaken again, or expanded upon, a key modification would be to create clear distinctions between participatory sports tourism and spectator sports tourism. As mentioned in the literature review, despite much debate on the need of standard definitions and vocabulary in the area, there is no consensus on the meaning of words used for events. Defining terminology used to describe events is essential since different dimensions and kinds of events may have a wide variety of effects

With regard to data collection methods, the author required more time as COVID-19 quickly impeded recruitment strategies, particularly as some businesses closed. Therefore, the size of the research sample is an obvious limitation and a bigger sample size might have yielded a more comprehensive set of findings. Gender representation was also an issue, but this was largely due to the cultural conditions of the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia which often see few female participants. Future studies must also consider the critical need for confidentiality when interviewing key stakeholders in Saudi Arabia, therefore online (anonymous) surveys could have produced alternative observations and more detailed viewpoints that may not always be acquired if the interviewee is known.

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