



Reframing mass participation events as active leisure: Implications for tourism and leisure research

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the term ‘active leisure events’ to ameliorate fragmentation of research concerned with ‘mass-participation’ events primarily aimed at non-elite participants. This literature is characterised by semantically diverse terminology despite such events sharing a range of unifying characteristics centring around an ethos of being open to all; fundamentally encouraging participation in physical activity; embodied, self-propelled mobility; use of re-ordered space; and providing a meeting place for nuanced social worlds. Despite their commonalities, active leisure events may also exhibit considerable inter-event variability. This paper presents an integrative review of existing literature, augmented by practice examples, to support more coherent theoretical and applied research efforts in this space. Based on this integrative review, the ‘active leisure events framework’ is proposed as a conceptual reference point to facilitate coherent and informed discourse, allowing tourism and leisure researchers and practitioners to clearly identify key characteristics of the events they engage with.

1. Introduction

Sport events catering for ‘the masses,’ or non-elite participants, are a contemporary, diverse, and growing leisure and tourism phenomenon (Sato, Jordan, & Funk, 2014). Existing research suggests that participation in events such as on- and off-road running and cycling events, triathlons, duathlons, aquathons, open water swims and various permutations of obstacle and adventure races is stimulated by wide-ranging motives (Rundio, Heere, & Newland, 2014; Willem, De Rycke, & Theeboom, 2017). However, an important commonality among non-elite participants is that financial remuneration is not one such motive (Stebbins, 2007). These events are disruptors of traditional models of sport participation and are catalysts for entrepreneurialism within the sport tourism and event management sectors (Lamont & Kennelly, 2019). Exponential growth in demand for opportunities to participate in high-profile, open-entry events such as big-city marathons exemplifies the contemporary significance of such events (Preston, 2017; Snyder & Middlebrook, 2019). Similarly, growing registration numbers in smaller participatory events such as *parkrun*, a free, weekly, volunteer-led, 5 km running event hosted in thousands of locations globally (Hindley, 2020), suggests a notable shift towards more flexible modes of participation in

organised physical activity. This shift is arguably driven by changes in social structures under late modernity (Bauman, 1997, 2004) such as erosion of traditional work patterns, evolving gender relations, and identity construction geared around consumptive practices (Atkinson, 2008; Bridel, 2015; Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012).

However, as we shall demonstrate in this paper, the literature addressing mass-participation events primarily aimed at the non-elite is highly fragmented. Semantically variable terminology abounds, despite such events sharing considerable structural and functional similarities which unite them as a distinct category of events not coherently recognised in dominant mega/hallmark/major/local/community event typologies (e.g., Allen, O’Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2011; Getz, 2013). Scholars have referred to such events utilising terminology including, though not limited to, mass participation events (e.g., Bauman, Murphy, & Lane, 2009; Stevinson, Wiltshire, & Hickson, 2015); non-elite sports events (Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010); participatory sport events (e.g., Kennelly, 2017; Lamont & Jenkins, 2013); and small-scale sports events (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). Compounding complexity within this body of literature, such events have been examined from diverse disciplinary perspectives including sport management, public health, psychology, tourism and leisure studies, albeit

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lacking a unifying conceptual reference point.

We contend that the growing body of literature on mass-participation events is at risk of perpetuating a trajectory of fragmented knowledge. We argue that this literature shares characteristics similar to those lamented by Weed (2005) in the related field of sport tourism over 15 years ago. Weed argued that despite a critical mass of well-executed and technically sound studies, the overarching body of sport tourism literature was fragmented and researchers were continuing to contribute studies which 'add little to the body of knowledge and do little to shape future research directions' (p. 231). Weed argued that fragmentation of the sport tourism literature was largely attributable to a lack of critical debate around conceptualisation of sport tourism, a shortcoming Weed viewed as fundamental in all research fields, as conceptual debate 'can underpin the development of a coherent programme of research and consequent body of knowledge in the area' (pp. 231–232).

We contend there are affinities between the current state of the body of knowledge on mass-participation events and the sport tourism literature of the early 2000s. The now considerable quantum of research indicates that such events are a legitimate and impactful focus of multidisciplinary scholarly enquiry. Yet, in the absence of critical discussion surrounding the structural and functional characteristics of such events to provide a unifying conceptual reference point, fragmentation and parallel streams of research will likely continue, thereby constraining a coherent body of knowledge from which to develop synergistic theoretical and applied understandings of such events. Therefore, our central aim in this paper is to propose the *active leisure events framework* as a contribution towards ameliorating fragmentation in this literature. In doing so, we highlight synergies and contradictions permeating the existing literature. We seek to highlight strengths and limitations of existing definitions and conceptualisations which tend to myopically embed such events within the realm of sport, and we propose that the active leisure events framework be adopted as a more inclusive conceptual foundation.

This paper is structured according to three areas of focus. After first explaining our approach to reviewing and critiquing the relevant literature, we lay out a case for 'active leisure' as a foundational concept to supersede the dominant conceptual lens of 'sport' that has been typically applied to the study of mass-participation events. We then move on to distil five unifying characteristics underpinning our proposed active leisure events framework. The final section of this paper presents the active leisure events framework, and in doing so, identifies and discusses ten dimensions of inter-event variability. The paper concludes by discussing the utility of the framework and identifying its role in future research endeavours.

2. Method

The nature of our overarching research aim calls for an approach to reviewing the relevant literature that enables critique and synthesis of scholarly discourse surrounding mass-participation events. Whilst acknowledging the proliferation of systematic literature reviews (e.g., Hiebl, 2021), their emphasis on quantification was deemed unsuitable for fulfilling our research aim. Rather, the *integrative literature review* method was adopted. The integrative literature review method is defined by Torraco (2005) as, 'a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated' (p. 356). The aforementioned fragmentation of the literature relating to mass-participation events underpins the need for an integrative approach to reviewing this body of knowledge, as this method 'allows the author to reconstruct, conceptually, the topic for a clear understanding of it and to assess how well the topic is represented in the literature' (Torraco, 2005, p. 362).

Methodologically, integrative literature reviews do not emphasise systematic searching of the literature as is associated with systematic

literature reviews (Snyder, 2019). Nevertheless, our focus was on identifying a comprehensive corpus of relevant peer-reviewed English language publications relating to mass-participation events. Only publications primarily concerned with examining participation in events by non-elite or amateur participants were included in our integrative review. Research reporting on professional sport, or spectators attending professional sport events were beyond the scope of this integrative review. Combinations of search terms including 'mass participation sport events,' 'participatory sport events,' 'community sport events,' 'non-elite sport events,' 'small-scale sport events,' 'sport tourism events,' and 'charity sport events,' were entered into key scholarly databases such as Google Scholar and EBSCO. Appropriate search term suffixes such as 'sports' and 'sporting' were also deployed. Reference lists of retrieved journal articles were scanned for other relevant publications. This process identified 78 relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2006 and 2020. The papers were grounded in a range of academic disciplines including tourism and hospitality management; leisure studies; public health; sport, sports marketing and sports medicine; consumer behaviour; health; psychology; sociology; event management; and education and training.

Integrative literature reviews embrace a qualitative approach to critiquing the relevant literature (Snyder, 2019). A critical perspective is crucial to producing a rigorous integrative literature review, with the focus being on identifying 'aspects of a phenomenon that are missing, incomplete, or poorly represented in the literature, as well as inconsistencies among published perspectives on the topic' (Torraco, 2005, p. 362). Accordingly, the full text articles were read in detail, with text relating to definitional and conceptual aspects of mass participation events identified and deconstructed. As such, the framework presented in this paper is the result of an iterative, critical synthesis of the published research captured in our literature search. In accordance with the application of qualitative analysis conventions in integrative literature reviews (Snyder, 2019), our active leisure events framework was derived through an inductive process achieved through a series of robust discussions within the research team. Our active leisure events framework is therefore filtered through the research team's collective worldviews as experienced researchers in the fields of tourism, leisure, event, and sport management, and as with any inductively-derived theorisation, it is contestable and open to further debate and refinement.

3. Active leisure as a foundational concept

Scholars examining mass-participation events primarily catering for non-elite participants, consciously or unconsciously, tend to ground their work within the conceptual realm of sport (e.g., Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010; Filo & Coghlan, 2016; Sato, Jordan, & Funk, 2015). Table 1 illustrates the diverse terminology within this literature whilst highlighting the dominant conceptual lens of sport. In the ensuing sub-sections, we challenge scholars' gravitation towards sport as a foundational concept for researching such events. In doing so, we outline a case for *active leisure* as a foundational concept that is more accommodating of the diverse and evolving supply and demand characteristics of mass-participation events primarily catering for non-elite participants.

Hereafter, we refer to the range of events summarised in Table 1 collectively as 'active leisure events.' In the next section we establish active leisure as a conceptual foundation and identify the unifying characteristics of active leisure events.

3.1. Sport as a subset of leisure

Although sport and leisure studies are sometimes treated as distinct disciplinary contexts, sport is widely regarded as a *subset* of leisure (Hinch, Jackson, Hudson, & Walker, 2005; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1974). Accordingly, sport is just one of many activities, including tourism and the arts, that may fall under the broader guise of leisure (Lynch & Veal,

Table 1
Semantically-variable terminology applied to active leisure events.

Adventure recreation events	Lynch and Dibben (2016)
Cause-related/non-cause-related events	Rundio et al. (2014)
Charity sport events	Daigo and Filo (2020); Filo and Coghlan (2016); Filo et al. (2009)
Endurance sport events	Woolf, Heere, and Walker (2013)
Leisure events	McCarville (2007)
Mass cycle tourism events	Fullagar and Pavlidis (2012)
Mass participation events	Bauman et al. (2009); Early and Corcoran (2013); Stevinson et al. (2015); Wicker, Hallmann, & Zhang (2012)
Mass community events	Bauman et al. (2009); Bowles, Rissel, and Bauman (2006); Cleland et al. (2019)
Mass participation, free-to-view events	Davies, Coleman, and Ramchandani (2010)
Mass participation running events	Herrick (2015)
Mass participation sport(ing) events	Funk, Jordan, Ridinger, and Kaplanidou (2011); Saayman and Saayman (2012); Sato et al. (2015); Sato, Yoshida, Wakayoshi, and Shonk (2017); Schulenkorf et al. (2019); Stevinson and Hickson (2013); Willem et al. (2017)
Mass recreation events	Fullagar and Pavlidis (2012)
Mass running events	Wiltshire et al. (2018)
Mass sporting and physical activity events	Koronios et al. (2018); Murphy, Lane, and Bauman (2015)
Mass start events	Berridge (2014)
Non-elite sports events	Coleman and Ramchandani (2010)
Non-elite mass participation events	Coleman and Ramchandani (2010)
Non-elite mass participation sporting events	Crofts et al. (2012)
Non-mega sport events	Taks, Chalip, and Green (2015)
Participatory sport(s) events	Kennelly (2017); Kennelly et al. (2018); Lamont and Jenkins (2013); Woolf et al. (2013)
Participatory sport tourism events	Hinch and Holt (2017)
Small-scale sport tourism events	Gibson et al. (2012)
Small-scale sports events	Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010)
Small-scale community sporting events	Schulenkorf et al. (2019)
Smaller-scale events	Saayman and Saayman (2012)
Sub-elite sports events	Higham and Hinch (2018)

2006). Whilst there are disparate conceptualisations of leisure, commonalities centre around behaviour, residual time, frame of mind, freedom of choice, and the nature of activities that may be couched within this space (Lynch & Veal, 2006). Leisure is further said to encompass a range of autonomously chosen activities during discretionary time, once daily commitments and obligations have been fulfilled (Purrinton & Hickerson, 2013). Leisure is primarily engaged in to fulfil personal needs such as 'reflection, self-enrichment, relaxation or pleasure' (Kraus, 2001, p. 38). Leisure activities embody unique qualities such as facilitating the pursuit of personal goals and desires, allowing individuals to express feelings and indulge fantasies; learning new skills; creating enjoyable pastimes; and reinvigorating people to carry on their obligatory life commitments (Roberts, 2006). Indeed, literature examining the motives of active leisure event participants has widely identified notions of goal setting and achievement, self-fulfilment, and personal growth as common drivers of participation (e.g., Herrick, 2015; Rundio et al., 2014; Sato et al., 2015).

Leisure may be experienced as a mindset, with emotive responses spanning a sense of freedom, feeling in control, and pleasure (Bull, Hoose, & Weed, 2003). Leisure is therefore a broader intrinsic phenomenon *inclusive of sport*, and a concept capable of expanding thinking beyond notions of competitiveness, organised, rigid time-slots, and rule-based play permeating traditional definitions of sport (Bull et al., 2003). As we shall elucidate in the ensuing sub-section, traditional conceptualisations of sport are limited in accommodating some of the more expressive, flexible, and intrinsically-enjoyable characteristics evident

in active leisure event participation. We contend that the notion of free choice inherent in conceptualisations of leisure is especially useful for framing active leisure events. Leisure conceptually recognises individuals' personal agency in selecting events on the basis that they are compatible with one's broader life commitments (Hulteen et al., 2017), a notion contrasting against structured, inflexible fixtures associated with traditional models of sport participation (Hajkowicz, Cook, Wilhelmseeder, & Boughen, 2013). Further, notions of free choice broadens thinking beyond traditional sport participation, thus encouraging analysis of how autonomous event selection and participation shapes day-to-day leisure practices as individuals go about preparing for upcoming events through self-directed and group-based physical training (Herrick, 2015; Koronios, Psiloutsikou, & Kriemadis, 2018).

Also fundamental to our thesis is the distinction between active and passive modes of leisure. Beaton, Funk, and Alexandris (2009) contend that 'Participation in physically active leisure is ... conceptually distinct from other more passive leisure activities' (p. 178). These authors highlight a distinction between passive modes of leisure such as watching television, reading, or theatre-going, which do not necessitate physical exertion, contrasted against 'physically active leisure.' Beaton and Funk (2008) fuse leisure and physical activity to conceptualise active leisure as freely chosen engagement in bodily movement at an intensity sufficient to substantially raise one's acute cardiorespiratory response, through which the individual reaps subjective psychological health benefits. Beaton and Funk (2008) therefore define active leisure as activities 'which inherently require moderately intense physical exertion, and are perceived by the individual as relatively freely chosen as well as either beneficial or enjoyable' (p. 55). Having reviewed a range of fundamental characteristics of leisure and active leisure, we now move on to outline limitations of 'sport' as a conceptual foundation for the study of active leisure events.

3.2. Sport as a problematic conceptual foundation

Definitions of sport are contested, although there are identifiable commonalities. McPherson, Curtis, and Loy (1989) define sport as 'structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest-based, ludic physical activity' (p. 15) which is 'oriented towards skill and victory' (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1979, p. 65). A broader definition is proffered by the Council of Europe (1992): 'all forms of physical activity, which through casual or organised participation, aimed at improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships, or obtaining results in competition at all levels' (p. 1), acknowledging that sport may occur outside formal structures and may be driven by motives beyond interpersonal competition. This broad definition is advocated by Weed (2005) who contends that sport encompasses individuals, either solo or as part of a team in 'some form of activity, be it formal or informal, competitive or recreational, or actively (competitors) or passively (spectators) participated in' (p. 233). Loy (1968) emphasises that rules for sporting competitions are in place to facilitate fair play, and to ensure participants are matched evenly in terms of size, skill and experience. For Lynch and Veal (2006), sport requires some coordination between participants, can be staged in challenging and extreme settings and often necessitates involvement of supporting parties such as spectators, referees, coaches, umpires and volunteer staff.

Although sport has been advocated as a means of breaking down structural cultural, socio-economic and racial inequalities (Lynch & Veal, 2006), conflicting critical discourse frames sport participation as conspicuous consumption, yielding enhanced social status and privilege for participants, thus (re)producing structural inequalities to accessing physical activity participation opportunities (Lagaert & Roose, 2016). Moreover, the institution of sport is implicated in socially constructed connotations of the toned athletic body from which non-conformist bodies are associated with laziness and lack of bodily discipline (Chase, 2008; Throsby, 2015). Consequently, sporting realms can be objectionable for those who perceive their bodies as 'out of place'

(Ridinger, Funk, Jordan, & Kaplanidou, 2012), with sport events emphasising elite competition potentially making 'less experienced, non-elite runners feel inadequate or excluded if they are participating for fun' (Cleland, Nash, Sharman, & Claflin, 2019, p. 2).

We contend that sport as a conceptual foundation constrains thinking around events that are designed for predominately non-elite participants. Dominant conceptualisations of sport privileging interpersonal competition are juxtaposed against literature reporting diverse event participants' motives around personal challenge, self-realisation, and self-fulfilment (e.g., Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012; Hindley, 2020). Sport as a conceptual lens arguably constrains demand-side analysis of event participants' motives. We propose that active leisure as a conceptual lens encourages broader thinking around why people participate in such events, as this concept recognises the wide-ranging, subjective benefits individuals experience through leisure participation (Beaton & Funk, 2008). Active leisure is conceptually more accommodating of a spectrum of participation motives than sport. The expressive and self-fulfilment elements of leisure (Bull et al., 2003) inherently recognise that for some, simply completing a physical challenge may be intrinsically fulfilling (e.g., Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012), whilst for others, engaging in interpersonal competition may constitute a self-expressive act of athletic identity (e.g., Shipway, Holloway, & Jones, 2013). Therefore, active leisure acknowledges motives spanning non-competitive, personal challenge motives through to highly competitive participants. Our proposal is not to dismiss the conceptual tenets of sport. Rather, we seek to broaden thinking and analysis by embracing the concept of active leisure, remaining mindful that sport is a sub-set of leisure, and thereby stretching the conceptual boundaries that sport has imposed on this field of research hitherto.

From a supply perspective, organisers of active leisure events are increasingly emphasising participation over interpersonal competition, reflected in event designs and promotional discourse (Berridge, 2014; Daigo & Filo, 2020). These practices also contrast against dominant conceptualisations of sport which privilege interpersonal competition. Beaton and Funk (2008) highlight that active leisure conceptually recognises individuals' personal autonomy and subjective perceptions of the benefits sought from activities freely participated in (Beaton & Funk, 2008). Therefore, active leisure is conceptually more accommodating of supply-side discourse encouraging participation in physical activity, among people with a wide range of abilities and experience, as opposed to adhering to a sport lens' constraining prescription of interpersonal competition as an event's primary purpose. Adopting an active leisure perspective may also encourage event organisers to consider a broader range of participant motives in strategically designing event experiences. Doing so may lead to diversification of revenue sources due to broadening participation options, such as offering shorter, less demanding events.

There is existing support within the literature for grounding research examining non-elite event participants within active leisure. Numerous researchers in this space have deployed the concept of leisure (e.g., Early & Corcoran, 2013; Lynch & Dibben, 2016; Rundio et al., 2014), and some have specifically distinguished active leisure events from passive modes of leisure by positioning them as forms of 'physically active leisure' (Sato et al., 2015, p. 348). For example, McCarville (2007) describes Ironman triathlon events as 'leisure events intended to test the limits of their participants' (p. 160), while Ridinger et al. (2012) contend that marathons are increasingly seen 'as a legitimate option for leisure based physical activity' (p. 156).

In sum, we contend that reframing participation-based events primarily catering for non-elite participants through the concept of active leisure (Beaton & Funk, 2008) broadens scope for thinking and empirical analysis around event participation beyond organised, competitive, rule-based structures commonly associated with sport (e.g., Loy, 1968; McPherson et al., 1989). Active leisure is conceptually more accommodating of event participants who may not identify with notions of sport, competitiveness, and/or athleticism, therefore encouraging a

critical perspective in examining the social inclusiveness of events. Our proposed active leisure event framework fosters thinking around participation in physical activity to be framed as freely sought, subjective choices intended to fulfil an individual's needs, considering their broader life circumstances (Kraus, 2001). Active leisure has the added advantage of conceptually de-emphasising elitist conceptions associated with sport, and may be beneficial from both a scholarly and practitioner perspective.

4. Unifying characteristics of active leisure events

Having made a case for active leisure as a foundational concept, we now turn attention to presenting five unifying characteristics underpinning our proposed active leisure events framework. We contend that active leisure events exhibit a web of common characteristics differentiating them from other forms of events recognised within the event management literature (e.g., Allen et al., 2011; Getz, 2013), thus warranting scholarly attention aimed at understanding their conceptual nuances and associated impacts. Our framework identifies five unifying characteristics of active leisure events, of which the tenets of each are elaborated upon below. Active leisure events: 1) embrace an ethos of being *open to all*; 2) *fundamentally encourage participation*, whereas competition is a higher-order motive, and 3) embrace *embodied, self-propelled mobility*; 4) make use of *re-ordered space*; and 5) provide a meeting place for *nuanced social worlds*. Active leisure events fundamentally exhibit all five aforementioned unifying characteristics. Therefore, events or forms of sport participation (i.e., playing golf, or tennis) devoid of one or more of these characteristics fall outside the proposed active leisure events framework.

4.1. Open to all

A fundamental characteristic of active leisure events is an overarching ethos of being open to all, reflected within discourse around 'mass' participation (e.g., Bauman et al., 2009; Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010; Crofts, Schofield, & Dickson, 2012). Active leisure events primarily cater to amateur or non-elite participants. Whilst interpretations of amateur or non-elite status are contestable (Stebbins, 2014), a central premise is that amateur or non-elite athletes contrast against professional athletes who rely upon prizemoney and/or corporate sponsorship payments as remuneration. As we shall discuss later, active leisure events can vary in the ways that they accommodate amateur and professional participants. However, a central premise of our framework is that active leisure events are, in principle, open to all participants who willingly accept to tender any prescribed registration costs and commit themselves to meeting the requirements of particular events in terms of requisite fitness, skill, equipment and/or social support. For example, Lamont and Kennelly (2019) critique sporting hyperchallenges, events 'which require amateur athletes to push the boundaries of human strength and endurance ... eclipsing traditional event formats for endurance sports' (p. 68), such as ultramarathons. Although hyperchallenges require exceptional levels of commitment to develop the requisite endurance merely to complete such events, they remain fundamentally open to anyone who is willing to commit themselves.

4.2. Fundamentally encourage participation

In many Western states, traditional, organised, team-based models of participation in competitive sport are being increasingly eschewed in favour of less-structured, bespoke active leisure. One prominent Australian sport participation research report noted:

People are increasingly opting to go for a run with the headphones and a music player rather than committing to regular organised or structured sport. For such people the notion of winning is changing.

They are more concerned with beating a personal time or fitness target than beating a competitor. Their sport is tailored to meet personal needs and health is a major driver (Hajkowicz et al., 2013, p. 6)

Similarly, Higham and Hinch (2018) point out that active leisure events 'involve many participants who train, compete and measure their performance against themselves rather than against other competitors' (p. 50). Indeed, for newcomers to active leisure events in particular, participation in itself may be the dominant motive rather than competition. In this sense, active leisure events provide social structures through which participants who do not harbour competitive aspirations may engage in a physically active event against a backdrop of sociality, camaraderie and fun (Bauman et al., 2009; Early & Corcoran, 2013; Hindley, 2020).

Nonetheless, active leisure events do measure participants' performances by timing their completion of the prescribed course, with results published containing age, gender and overall placings which can facilitate 'personal and social comparative feedback and self-monitoring' (Cleland et al., 2019, p. 2). For example, *parkrun* provides participants with a time for their 5 km run, as well as feedback on relative placings and attendance milestones to incentivise participation and performance (Stevinson et al., 2015). In this sense, *parkrun* is framed first and foremost as an accessible opportunity for practicing healthy behaviours, whilst concurrently offering a space for those who seek a competitive outlet (Wiltshire, Fullagar, & Stevenson, 2018). These examples exemplify how notions of individualised goal setting and achievement along with 'personal bests, and measurements of fitness' (Sheehan, 2006, p. 251) permeate a diverse discourse of participants' personal agendas for participation in active leisure events (Sato et al., 2015). They also help underpin our position that active leisure events fundamentally encourage participation, whereas interpersonal competition may or may not be overtly promoted. We further contend that interpersonal competition will be a higher-order motive which is not shared by all participants in active leisure events, a position supported by numerous scholars active in this field (Hindley, 2020; Lynch & Dibben, 2016; Sheehan, 2006).

4.3. Embodied, self-propelled mobility

Literature addressing active leisure events emphasises that active leisure participants exert 'moderate to high levels of energy' (Crofts et al., 2012, p. 149), or engage in 'some form of physical exertion' (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2011, p. 492). The bodily practices of participants in active leisure events fundamentally constitute intertwined self-propelled mobility and physical exertion in which participants navigate through dispersed, linear spaces (both terrestrial and virtual, as we shall discuss later) to complete prescribed, point-to-point courses. Such notions of self-propelled mobility distinguish participation in active leisure events from modes of 'automobility' achieved through vehicles powered by exogenous energy sources (Sheller & Urry, 2000).

As such, participation in active leisure events is embodied, with participants' experiences marked by complex kinaesthetic, visceral, and cognitive subjectivities (Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012; Wiltshire et al., 2018). That is, participants' experiences are shaped through the ways in which they engage with the material environments their events take place within, through their bodies (Hockey & Collinson, 2007). Participants' self-propulsion produces bodily costs by way of marked cardio-respiratory and cognitive responses to the movement of their bodies through space (Larsen, 2014). The embodied nature of participation in active leisure events evokes complex, wide-ranging sensory feedback, some of which may be physically uncomfortable, in some cases physically distressing (McCarville, 2007; Rupprecht & Matkin, 2012). Further, strategic tourism objectives often associated with active leisure events can lead to event start lists comprising high proportions of visitors, which has given rise to analysis of embodying 'destination spaces'

through sport tourism (e.g., Gibson, Kaplanidou, & Kang, 2012; Hinch & Holt, 2017; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010).

4.4. Re-ordered space

Active leisure events differ from sport participation or sport events conducted in traditional sport spaces such as stadia. Notwithstanding the recent emergence of virtual event spaces, which we shall address later, active leisure events take place almost exclusively in re-ordered settings and may be exposed to the natural elements (e.g., Lynch & Dibben, 2016). The widespread use of re-ordered public space also facilitates participants' embodied, self-propelled mobility. In this sense, ordinary public spaces such as parks, walking and cycling paths, roads and waterways may be re-ordered through symbolic embellishment (e.g., with sponsors' logos, flags and race markers) and access limitations (e.g., through the placement of fencing, barricades) to create event spaces (Palmer, 2010).

Event spaces may span considerable distances. For example, the *Race Across America* bicycle race covers 4800 km on public roads. This notion of re-ordered public space to accommodate self-propelled mobility is reflected in Fullagar and Pavlidis' (2012) description of cycle touring events:

A cycle tour event does not have a 'facility' where the event is staged; rather it uses spaces usually determined for other purposes, roads and fields. These spaces are transformed from mundane, everyday infrastructure, to safe spaces of enjoyment (p. 158).

Active leisure events tend to make use of existing infrastructure within host communities (Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010; Saayman & Saayman, 2012). This sets the low financial burden of active leisure events in contrast with often high costs of specialised infrastructure associated, for example, with sports mega events (e.g., Müller, 2015).

4.5. Nuanced social worlds

Unruh (1980) defines social worlds as 'amorphous and diffuse constellations of actors, organisations, events, and practices which have coalesced into spheres of interest and involvement for participants' (p. 277). Relatedly, there is now a substantial body of literature examining active leisure events as liminal spaces where members of social worlds bound by particular leisure interests gather to celebrate collective values and identities (e.g., Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010; Fullagar & Pavlidis, 2012; Hindley, 2020; Lamont & Fairley, 2018). This literature frames the socially constructed atmosphere of such events as marked by a social backdrop of camaraderie, *communitas*, and mystique.

The coalescence of amateur participants, their entourage, and other spectators often generates a communal backdrop positively reinforcing the actions of participants as they traverse event spaces. Kennelly, Lamont, Hillman, and Moyle (2019) argue that amateur participants' 'non-participating entourage' (such as family and friends) 'may contribute to the success of events through co-construction of event atmosphere and provision of logistical and/or intangible support to participants' (p. 14), and by extension, co-creation of an event's festive atmosphere.

Similarly, Ridinger et al. (2012) allude to an emerging festive, interactive atmosphere at running events, arguing that carnivalesque atmospheres have eroded the previously dominant 'seriousness' discourse. By broadening appeal from a narrow audience of serious runners, Ridinger et al. show how running events have been democratised and are now more appealing to those who may previously have perceived running a marathon as beyond their capabilities. Hindley (2020) contends that the appeal in contemporary active leisure events lies in 'moving away from serious competition and toward sociality, camaraderie, and experience' (p. 86), highlighting enriching social experiences which may be realised. Relatedly, Buning and Walker (2016)

allude to 'non-traditional events' (p. 47) in describing active leisure events featuring a novelty factor such as obstacle races like *Tough Mudder* or *Color Run*, in which participants are sprayed with coloured powder as they complete the course, all with the aim of fostering fun and frivolity alongside friends.

Thus far we have contextualised active leisure events as a distinct phenomenon within the event management lexicon. They are a social phenomenon bound together by an ethos of being open to all. They constitute liminal spaces in which participants engage in embodied, self-propelled mobility on an individual basis to navigate courses constructed in re-ordered space against the backdrop of nuanced social worlds comprising individuals sharing a penchant for particular active leisure practices. However, within these unifying characteristics, it is important to encapsulate dimensions of diversity and variability across active leisure events. The following section therefore discusses ten dimensions of potential variation within active leisure events, to facilitate semantic transparency and ultimately strengthen validity of the events discourse.

5. Variability among active leisure events

Our proposed framework accommodates the increasing diversity of active leisure events by acknowledging widespread scope for inter-event variability. As depicted in Table 2, sources of variation between active leisure events may be grouped around the following interrelated themes: (i) event physicality; (ii) event duration and frequency; (iii) degree of requisite preparation; (iv) the role of interpersonal competition; (v) event setting; (vi) an event's perceived level of 'prestige'; (vii) inclusivity; (viii) diversity of event stakeholders and degree to which events connect to broader stakeholder goals; (ix) event purpose and administrative structures; and (x) net event impacts. Variability within these dimensions may be represented utilising a continuum or categories, as specified within Table 2. The ten dimensions of inter-event variability are elaborated upon below and practice contexts are drawn upon to provide illustrative examples.

5.1. Event physicality

Active leisure events vary considerably in the degree of physical challenge offered to participants. The degree of physicality may be influenced by combinations of variables including terrain, distance, duration, prevailing climatic conditions, course configuration and 'seriousness' of an event (Stebbins, 2007). To illustrate such variance, many *parkrun* events are conducted on relatively flat terrain and participants are encouraged to complete the course at a pace appropriate to their ability, which may include walking. *parkrun* events are also conducted during morning timeslots, hence climatic conditions are usually relatively cool. *Parkrun* starkly contrasts against long-distance events such as the Marathon des Sables, a six-day ultra-marathon covering approximately 250kms of the Moroccan desert. The Marathon des Sables is regarded among the running community as the realm of serious runners who are prepared to flirt with the possibility of death under oppressive desert heat (Lisle, 2016).

Leisure researchers have long recognised that individual participants may be heterogeneous in their commitment to and skills relating to core leisure activities. In the 1970s Hobson Bryan floated the concept of 'recreation specialisation,' a continuum of specialisation in an activity marked by levels of commitment, interest, skills, and equipment (Bryan, 1977). In the same decade, Robert Stebbins proposed 'serious leisure', similarly describing how individuals can find the systematic pursuit of a core activity so fulfilling that they 'launch themselves on a (leisure) career centred on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience' (Stebbins, 2007, p. 5). Recreation specialisation and serious leisure have been used to examine nuances in leisure participation, including active leisure events, to explain why events that are marketed as 'open to all' may, in reality, require

participants to be quite serious and/or specialised to cope with the physical demands of the event (Lamont & Jenkins, 2013; McCarville, 2007).

5.2. Duration and frequency

Active leisure events vary in temporal duration, or the timeframe in which competitors may be expected to complete a course. Event durations may vary considerably, and may be the deciding factor that attracts specific groups of participants (Buning & Walker, 2016). These durations range from a *parkrun* event which may be completed in a matter of minutes, to the Sydney Marathon (<http://www.sydneyrunningfestival.com.au>) which may take hours, to the Coast to Coast multi-sport race which crosses New Zealand (243kms). The Coast to Coast requires participants to complete physically demanding stages on foot (running), a road bicycle, and in a kayak (<https://www.coasttocoast.co.nz/>) and may take competitors one or more days to complete. Beyond an event's duration, the frequency with which an event occurs varies considerably. For example, *parkrun* events are typically held weekly, whilst the Sydney Marathon and Coast to Coast are annual events. Less common are one-off events, such as the Nike Women's half marathon, held in Homebush, Sydney in 2016 (<https://www.nike.com/events-registration/event?id=31393>).

5.3. Degree of requisite preparation

We contend that the degree of physicality and the specialised knowledge, skills and equipment required, combined with the duration of an event shapes the level of preparation a prospective participant must endure. That is, longer, more complex and arduous events require adherence to rigorous training programs leading up to an event to develop the physical capabilities necessary to meet the challenge (Cleland et al., 2019; Rupprecht & Matkin, 2012). Beyond developing requisite physical fitness for an event, some active leisure events inherently require participants to develop specialised skills in order to cope with particular settings such as alpine areas, water-based, or wilderness environments requiring proficiency in navigation (Lynch & Dibben, 2016). In this sense, more arduous events are likely to attract participants who have honed their skills in the activity at hand, and are thus highly progressed along the recreation specialisation continuum, 'to specialized interest and high involvement' (Bryan, 1977, p. 18). For example, Lamont and Jenkins (2013) observed high levels of behavioural, cognitive, and affective orientation towards cycling among participants in the Audax Alpine Classic in Australia. This event requires participants to cycle up to 250kms through hot, mountainous terrain, leading the authors to conclude, 'Participants in these longer rides would likely have completed months, possibly years, of specific training to develop the physical capacity needed to undertake this challenge' (pp. 402–403).

5.4. Role of interpersonal competition

A related variable associated with active leisure events is the role of interpersonal competition. Most researchers have characterised active leisure events as promoting 'participation and engagement rather than the significance of the sports outcome' (Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010, p. 25), as discussed previously. However, practice contexts suggest that active leisure events may encompass varying degrees of competition for some participants. This is aptly illustrated by the iconic City2Surf race in Sydney, Australia, a 14 km road running event that commences in Sydney's CBD and finishes at Bondi Beach. The event attracts over 80,000 participants, with the start divided into groups based on participants' expected finish times. 'Seeded' and other fast contestants start up to 40 min before the infamous 'back of the pack' (<https://city2surf.com.au/start-details>). Those starting in the initial wave include elite athletes who may be vying for prize money, as well as talented amateurs

Table 2
Typological framework for active leisure events.

Active Leisure Events

Organised events focused on fostering participation in active leisure

ALE Unifying Characteristics

Open to all - open to all, primarily catering to unremunerated, non-elite, individual participants

Fundamentally encourage participation – events fundamentally encourage participation whilst simultaneously providing opportunities for interpersonal competition among those who seek it

Embodied, self-propelled mobility – event participation is characterised by self-propelled mobility which produces marked cardiorespiratory and cognitive responses to participants' embodiment of surrounding material environments

Re-ordered space – events take place within ordinary spaces such as roads, parks, waterways, or indoor spaces that have been physically and symbolically reordered into bespoke event spaces

Nuanced social worlds – events provide liminal spaces for the coalescence of social worlds brought together by shared interests in particular modes of active leisure

Inter-event variability – spectra

Event physicality

Elementary challenge _____ Arduous

Short duration _____ Long duration

Not serious _____ Serious

Duration and frequency

Short _____ Long

One off _____ Repeated

Degree of requisite preparation

No requisite preparation _____ Significant preparation

Self-supported _____ Support team

No requisite skill _____ Extremely skilled

Role of interpersonal competition

Participation _____ Competition

Small field _____ Large field

Local _____ International

Event setting

Natural environment _____ Built environment

Rural setting _____ Metropolitan setting

Spectator co-creation _____ Absence of spectators

Elementary theming _____ Sophisticated theming

Level of prestige

Insignificant _____ Significant

No qualification _____ Qualification only

Low challenge _____ High challenge

Large field of participants _____ Small field of participants

Embellished _____ Not embellished (e.g., sponsors/branding)

Inclusivity

Low entry costs _____ High entry costs

Physically inclusive _____ Physically exclusive

Socially inclusive _____ Socially exclusive

Diversity of stakeholders

Non-involvement _____ Involvement

Inter-event variability – categories

Entry categories e.g. novice, time qualified, elite

Minimum age requirements

Entry by qualification only

Requires specialised equipment

Requires support crew

Weekly

Series

Annual

Biennial and less frequent

One-off

Presence of unique environmental challenges i.e., extreme heat

Simultaneous elite and non-elite participation

Seeded start

Timed

Prizes and finisher rewards

Rankings based on age group and gender

Qualification for future events

Course certified by official organisation

Physical space

Synchronous virtual space

Asynchronous virtual space

Entertainment/atmosphere at event

Amenities for supporters/entourage

Open course (i.e., shared space with public)

Closed course (i.e., exclusive to participants)

Unique sites/terrain

Standard event format

Novelty features

Intrastate travel required

Interstate travel required

International travel required

Free to enter

Entry fee payable (differential pricing structure)

Impairment categories offered

Local government/policy makers involvement

State government/policy makers involvement

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

Non-promotion	Promotion	<input type="checkbox"/> Federal government/policy makers involvement
Non-sponsored	Sponsored	<input type="checkbox"/> Sport governing body/bodies
Non-collaborative	Collaborative	<input type="checkbox"/> Sporting group/club involvement
		<input type="checkbox"/> Destination marketing organisation involvement
		<input type="checkbox"/> Local business involvement
		<input type="checkbox"/> Host community involvement
		<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsors
		<input type="checkbox"/> Charitable organisations
		<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitation of spectators
		<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion of participants' entourage
		<input type="checkbox"/> Promotion of participation in physical activity
		<input type="checkbox"/> Community cohesiveness
		<input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising (cause-related)
		<input type="checkbox"/> Level of competition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Tourism stimulation
		<input type="checkbox"/> Destination marketing
<i>Event purpose and administrative structures</i>		
Not for profit	For profit	
Volunteer event organisers	Professional event organisers	
Volunteer event workforce	Paid event workforce	
<i>Net event impacts</i>		
Detrimental environmental	Beneficial environmental	
Detrimental social	Beneficial social	
Detrimental economic	Beneficial economic	

who have entered the City2Surf for competitive reasons. In contrast, the 'back of the pack' group, who are last to start, more closely match the fundamental participatory ethos of active leisure events (Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010) and often draw media attention for their creative costumes and irreverent attitudes towards 'racing' the event.

This example is reflective of the broader reality that many active leisure events accommodate a spectrum of participants ranging from those who simply wish to participate through to those who are there to compete (Buning & Gibson, 2015; Crofts et al., 2012). Authors such as Du, Jordan, and Funk (2015) have noted the connection between an individual's performance during an event and post-event satisfaction with the overall experience suggesting that many participants have pre-determined time-goals. Event organisers could assist with the achievement of these goals by providing training plans, nutrition advice and pace runners during the event. Although event organisers can, through discourse, attempt to influence the intensity of competition within an event, we argue that the degree of competition within an event is ultimately a function of how participants interact with one-another to co-create an event's competitive narrative. In this way, active leisure events fundamentally encourage participation, but also cater for a range of interpretations of competition.

5.5. Event setting

The settings in which active leisure events may occur are a further source of variation. Events may occur in metropolitan settings against a backdrop of built environments (e.g., inner-city marathons), whilst other events may occur in rural settings within natural environments, such as adventure races including components which take place in wilderness settings (Kennelly, 2017; Lynch & Dibben, 2016). There are also events that may be held indoors such as the TRIX3 triathlon series (<https://www.trix3.com.au>) or obstacle course races such as Ninja Parc (<https://www.ninjaparc.com.au>). The settings of active leisure events may also vary in the degree that they are embellished or themed. More financially-endowed events can go to considerable effort in constructing elaborate event spaces which may be augmented by the visual presence of corporate sponsors, media, VIPs and political figures (Herrick, 2015), whereas the backdrops of smaller community-based events may be considerably less elaborate (Wiltshire & Stevinson, 2018).

Also pertinent to active leisure event settings is the recent emergence of virtual events. Advancements in connectivity between fitness devices and the Internet have paved the way for virtual events, particularly indoor cycling and running, making use of 'smart' indoor stationary bicycles and treadmills in which participants may compete in synchronous, real-time races through virtual settings utilising an avatar (Rivers, 2020). As the COVID-19 pandemic took hold throughout 2020, widespread cancellation of 'in-person' active leisure events led some event management organisations to pivot towards organising online events as a substitute, most likely to keep their customer bases engaged. The Ironman VR triathlon series (<https://www.ironmanvirtualclub.com/>) exemplifies such practices. This series encouraged triathletes from around the world to upload swimming, cycling and running data from their digital fitness recording devices in order to participate in asynchronous 'races' across prescribed distances and timeframes.

5.6. Level of prestige

Active leisure events may be perceived by those seriously engaged in endurance sport social worlds as differing based on 'prestige' (Kim, Liu, & Love, 2015). An event's level of prestige may be (re)produced through its historical significance, level of challenge, exclusivity or high entry level requirements (e.g., the need to qualify to participate, small field of participants, high cost), or other distinguishing features (e.g., access to unique terrain or geographical contexts). For example, the Ironman World Championship held annually in Hawaii, is widely considered the most prestigious event within the global triathlon social world (Bridel,

2015). Referred to simply as 'Kona,' after the host location, this event is iconic because of its history dating to 1978, the challenging course (3.8 km swim, 180 km cycle, 42.2 km run through lava fields with high temperatures and strong winds), and because it is a drawcard for the best amateur and professional triathletes from around the world each year. The Ironman World Championship's prestige is in part guarded through a highly-challenging qualification system whereby most entrants must qualify at a precursor Ironman-branded event (Stiefel, Knechtle, Rüst, & Rosemann, 2013). Kona has historically been televised by a major American broadcaster which has aided in growing the event's reputation and perceived prestige globally. However, it is stories of heroic feats that have played out on the lava fields such as American Julie Moss's infamous 1982 crawl to the finish line, which have perpetuated the event's myth, and by extension the event's prestigious status within the triathlon social world.

Whilst the prestige of an event is inherently subjective and contested among members of particular social worlds, prestige is acknowledged in the sport tourism literature as a dimension of the event travel career (ETC) trajectory proposed by Getz (2007) and subsequently elaborated upon by other researchers (Buning & Gibson, 2016; Getz & McConnell, 2011; Lamont, Kennelly, & Wilson, 2012). An ETC is an ongoing pattern of travel to events linked with an individual's preferred leisure activity. Serious amateur athletes pursuing an ETC may seek new and progressively challenging travel and event experiences, such as travel to overseas and/or more prestigious active leisure events, possibly extending to an evolution in individual event preferences which may manifest by way of challenge, novelty, and/or prestige (Buning & Gibson, 2016). However, it is acknowledged that amateur athletes may continue to participate in local and regional events out of convenience or due to time and financial constraints, perhaps in concurrence with pursuing an ETC seeking increasingly prestigious event and travel options, as personal resources allow.

5.7. Inclusivity

Active leisure events are widely marketed and conceptualised as accessible and inclusive 'non-competitive' (Berridge, 2014, p. 76) 'open-entry events' (Crofts et al., 2012, p. 149). Practice contexts however, suggest that active leisure events vary substantially in terms of the intensity of physical exertion required, and the level of skill acquisition and specialisation participants require. Despite being espoused as inclusive, participation in any given event is often contingent upon an individual's physical capacity, resources (including both time and financial) and competencies to meet the challenge at hand. Some active leisure events cater for diverse physical capacities. For example, *parkrun* accommodates participants who can run 5kms in under 15 min, through to those who take over 1 h to walk the distance, perhaps pushing a pram, walking a dog, or accompanied by small children (Wiltshire et al., 2018). Weekly *parkrun* newsletters abound with stories of the transformative journeys of participants of all shapes, sizes, speeds, ages, and health status by virtue of *parkrun*'s inclusive culture (Cleland et al., 2019; Stevinson & Hickson, 2013). *parkrun* is also free, enhancing its accessibility to people from diverse socio-economic circumstances. Many events also cater for participants with physical impairments with specialised categories of entry, distinct starting times and on-course assistance available.

In contrast, the physical challenges and requisite competencies of an event like the Coast to Coast multi-sport race which crosses New Zealand arguably place additional demands on participants. The organisers place no restrictions on who can register, yet participation in the Coast to Coast may inherently be affected by structural constraints (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991), such as access to specialised equipment, training locations, coaching, and the time and finances necessary to cover event preparation and competition. Solo registration for this event alone can cost upward of NZD\$960. Hence some active leisure events which are marketed as open to anyone present more hurdles to

participation than others due to relatively high levels of inherent physicality, challenge, and/or skill and specialised equipment required.

5.8. Diversity of stakeholders

A further point of variation between active leisure events is the diversity of their stakeholders, and the degree to which each event connects with broader stakeholder goals, needs or expectations. Active leisure events have been positioned as vehicles that may serve the goals of a range of stakeholders, including host community businesses, the tourism industry and destination marketers, health policy-makers, charities, sponsors, and/or local residents (Filo et al., 2011; Gibson et al., 2012; Hinch & Holt, 2017). However, there may be variation in the extent to which event organisers rely on and/or engage with such stakeholders. For example, many active leisure events engage extensively with (and are reliant on) sponsors (Batty, Cuskelly, & Toohey, 2016), while such events may vary in their engagement with charity causes (Filo et al., 2011; Palmer & Dwyer, 2020) or the tourism industry (Kennelly, 2017). In a study examining sport event organisers' perspectives on potential connections between their events and tourism and destination marketing outcomes, Kennelly (2017) found that most event organisers were more focused on producing positive experiences for participants as opposed to realising tourism-related results and servicing the goals of tourism stakeholders. Consequently, some organisers were reluctant to engage with tourism agencies, hence muting the tourism leveraging potential of their events. In the growing body of work on event leveraging, researchers (e.g., Chalip & Heere, 2014; Kennelly, 2017; Schulenkorf, Giannoulakis, & Blom, 2019) acknowledge that sport event organisers may necessarily be more focused on the immediate tasks of event organisation, and may resist being co-opted into delivering on broader goals, although there may be instances where active leisure events naturally lend themselves to assisting in achieving host community/public economic or social development goals. Given recognition within the literature that active leisure events can be effective drivers of sport tourism (i.e., Gibson et al., 2012; Higham & Hinch, 2018; Hinch & Holt, 2017), this finding opens up avenues for tourism researchers to consider ways in which tourism and active leisure event organisers may be encouraged to build and foster collaborative partnerships. Following on from the varying engagement between events and their stakeholders, active leisure events also vary based on the underlying purpose of the event and, relatedly, the administrative structure of the organising entity (Kennelly, 2017; Lamont & Kennelly, 2019; Newland & Kellett, 2012).

5.9. Event purpose and administrative structures

The administrative structures of organisations delivering active leisure events are diverse and may span both profit-seeking and not-for-profit organisations such as small businesses, sports clubs, charities, and non-event-related companies (Kennelly, 2017). Smaller active leisure events may be organised by volunteer committees for whom the core purpose is to raise money for community causes or charities. For example, the Coniston 14 is an annual road running event hosted in England's Lake District (<http://www.coniston14.co.uk/>). Established in 1982, this annual event is organised by a small volunteer committee of Coniston residents who donate all profits to local causes and charities. In contrast, other active leisure events are organised by commercial, profit-oriented companies. For example, the Ironman Group operates around 235 endurance events annually in over 55 countries (Ironman, 2021), exemplifying a large, sophisticated event management organisation focused on delivering events for-profit. The annual Gold Coast Marathon in Australia provides an example of an active leisure event owned by a government entity (Events Management Queensland, 2021). The stated aim of the Gold Coast Marathon is to showcase the Gold Coast and drive economic impact through tourism and trade (Events Management Queensland, 2021), highlighting the potential synergies between active

leisure events and tourism. The event's design and promotion is heavily influenced by tourism objectives and prior to COVID-19 the marathon weekend attracted around 60,000 participants, of whom 46,000 were visitors (with 7000 travelling from overseas to compete) (Events Management Queensland, 2019).

While the diversity of active leisure event organisational structures and their concomitant impacts on host communities have not been extensively examined, previous research has examined cause-related active leisure events. Filo, Funk, and O'Brien (2009) note how active leisure events have become an integral fundraising mechanism for charitable organisations. Events conducted to benefit charitable causes can foster a sense of community among participants (Daigo & Filo, 2020) and can be profoundly meaningful experiences for participants. The presence of a benefitting charity can enhance an individual's attraction to the event and intention to participate in the future (Filo et al., 2009). In a sociological account of sport-based charity events, Palmer and Dwyer (2020) propose the term 'fitness philanthropy' to describe how active leisure events have become 'philanthropic solutions' to a range of social/health problems and a means via which individuals can demonstrate civic engagement and 'good' citizenship. Active leisure events designed to benefit charities may attract individuals who identify with a charity or cause more so than the sport, and hence may vary in the composition of their participant field compared to non-cause related events (Rundio et al., 2014).

5.10. Net event impacts

A final source of variability are the impacts generated by active leisure events. These impacts range from tourism generation, to public health and social outcomes. Nature-based and regional settings in particular may lend themselves to ALEs and may provide an attractive opportunity for regional areas to achieve positive engagement in the visitor economy while exposing often socio-economically disadvantaged communities to the benefits and of active leisure and physical activity.

Such events tend to promulgate an overarching goal of engaging people in physical activity (Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010; Early & Corcoran, 2013), thus fostering positive public health impacts. However, the benefits of active leisure events can extend far beyond encouraging more people to participate in physical activity for health reasons. Potential social impacts include fostering engagement between family, friends, and the wider community (e.g., Bauman et al., 2009; Crofts et al., 2012; Grunseit, Richards, & Merom, 2018). Herrick (2015) adds that active leisure events may contribute to broader community benefits such as urban renewal, destination image enhancement, attraction of financial investment, and raising funds for charity. Indeed, 'cause-related sports events' may evoke nuanced social impacts by requiring participants to solicit donations as part of participating in an event, which may contribute to broader social good (e.g., Filo et al., 2011; Rundio et al., 2014).

Researchers have also noted the potential for active leisure events to generate economic benefits for hosting locations through direct tourism expenditure and destination image (Coleman & Ramchandani, 2010; Gibson et al., 2012; Hinch & Holt, 2017). Hence, active leisure events feature strongly in the growing corpus of sport tourism research with researchers examining the potential of such 'small-scale' events to contribute to sustainable tourism development, overcoming seasonality and place marketing where cultural or other forms of attractions are absent (Gibson et al., 2012, p. 160; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010).

Past research tends to position active leisure events in an overwhelmingly positive light, with few researchers acknowledging potential negative impacts (Lamont & Kennelly, 2019). In addition, the net impacts of an event may vary considerably based on the size and scale of the event and the extent to which event design lends itself to the production of broader social and economic benefits. There are opportunities for future research to adopt a more critical approach when examining the overall net impacts of active leisure events.

6. Limitations

Many of the studies featured in this integrative literature review have focused on Western events contexts only. Similarly, only English-language publications were included in this review. We also acknowledge that some events associated with leisure activities such as yoga festivals or bird watching competitions do not satisfy all of the unifying characteristics of active leisure events and therefore are not included within the framework proposed in Table 2.

7. Conclusions and future research

We first highlighted the proliferation of semantically-variable terminology referring to a range of events themed around active leisure and catering for a broad spectrum of participation. Informed by an integrative review of the related literature we subsequently proposed the *active leisure events framework* as a contribution towards ameliorating fragmentation in this rapidly expanding body of literature. In doing so, we highlighted limitations of the dominant conceptual lens of 'sport' through which active leisure events have historically been examined. In contrast, we argued that active leisure is a more inclusive foundational concept that is more accommodating of a broad range of participation motives that do not necessarily privilege interpersonal competition. Further, we highlighted the capacity of active leisure to conceptually liberate thinking around events to include analysis of participants and event contexts that do not necessarily conform to or identify with hegemonic connotations of sport, competitiveness or athleticism. We also emphasised the potential for active leisure to dilute notions of elitism that can accompany conceptions of sport.

Although the active leisure events framework is intended to exert a simplifying influence on mass-participation events discourse, our review has equally shone light on the complexities inherent in conceptualising active leisure events. From a critical review of the literature we deduced that active leisure events exhibit five unifying characteristics: (i) being open to all; (ii) fundamentally encouraging participation; (iii) involving embodied, self-propelled mobility; (iv) making use of re-ordered space; and (v) acting as meeting places for nuanced social worlds. Beyond these unifying characteristics, we identified ten dimensions through which active leisure events may vary. These included variations in physicality, duration and frequency, requisite preparation, role of interpersonal competition, event setting, prestige, inclusivity, stakeholder diversity, purpose and administrative structures, and event impacts.

Moving forward, we propose the active leisure events framework as a unifying conceptual reference point. Researchers may find utility in this framework as a means of more effectively articulating the nature of events they seek to engage with by plotting such events within the categorical and continuous dimensions of inter-event variability. Relatedly, the framework provides a useful means for comparing and contrasting between different styles of active leisure events. This approach has promoted the advancement of theoretical and conceptual understanding of active leisure events, particularly those which contribute significantly to tourism destinations. Moreover, the framework may be drawn upon to inform future research possibilities. First and foremost, the active leisure event framework's robustness might be examined through a Delphi study of experts, both scholars and practitioners, in the events field. Other future research might explore how event settings and event physicality shape event participants' day-to-day leisure practices in preparing for events. The socially constructed prestige surrounding particular active leisure events gives rise to questions around how discursive practices within social worlds construct and perpetuate an event's level of prestige. The literature addressing constraints to participation in active leisure events poses myriad questions, including what characteristics of active leisure events (re)produce structural constraints to participation, and relatedly, how do prospective participants perceive and address such constraints?

Other research possibilities stemming from the active leisure events

framework might include an exploration of the role various stakeholders (e.g., tourism organisations, political actors, corporate sponsors, sport governing bodies) play in shaping the design of events, and/or the business practices of active leisure event management organisations. In particular, there is substantial scope for greater understanding of active leisure events in the context of tourism, with Gibson, Lamont, Kennelly, and Buning (2018) noting “a need for new directions in considering the relationship between events and active sport tourism” (p. 86). The framework may also be utilised by event managers in critically reviewing their own event offerings and target markets. Finally, although analysis of the longer-term implications of COVID-19 on the events sector was beyond the scope of this paper, even before COVID-19 forced many event management organisations to take their events online, ‘virtual events’ were already emerging (Holden, Shipway, & Lamont, 2019). Thus, we advocate virtual active leisure events as fertile ground for future research.

In summary, the active leisure events framework presented in this paper provides a unifying conceptual reference point to facilitate more specifically targeted and refined discussion around the contributions of these events to participants, organisers and associated stakeholders. The framework facilitates improved semantic and conceptual transparency and thus serves to strengthen future discourse and research on active leisure events.

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