

## SPORT TOURISM AS A DRIVER OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT: COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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**Citation:** Ordinana-Bellver, D., González-García, R.J., Pérez-Campos, C., & Crespo-Hervás, J. (2026). Sport tourism as a driver of sustainable rural development: Community perceptions and strategic implications. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 64(1), 198–205. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.64117-1668>

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**Abstract:** Sport tourism has emerged as a strategic tool for revitalizing rural economies, particularly in island territories where dependence on conventional tourism creates challenges of seasonality and economic concentration. Understanding how residents perceive its impacts is essential to assess community support and ensure long-term sustainability. This study aimed to analyze residents' perceptions of the economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts of sport tourism in rural municipalities of Gran Canaria (Spain), offering insights into how these perceptions influence their willingness to support further tourism development. A structured questionnaire, adapted from previously validated scales, was administered to 110 residents across 12 rural municipalities. The instrument measured perceived impacts (economic, sociocultural, and environmental) and community support, using five-point Likert-type items. In addition to descriptive analyses, psychometric validation was conducted through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Finally, a structural equation model (SEM) was developed with JASP to test the predictive relationships between perceived impacts and residents' support for sport tourism. Findings revealed that economic impacts, such as job creation, local business growth, and commercial revitalization, were positively and significantly associated with community support. In contrast, sociocultural and environmental impacts were not statistically significant predictors. This pattern may be explained by the region's long-standing exposure to tourism, which has normalized social and ecological changes and reduced their salience in residents' perceptions. These results reinforce Social Exchange Theory, indicating that residents are more likely to support tourism initiatives when they perceive tangible economic benefits. The study highlights the need for participatory planning processes and regulatory frameworks that include community voices and safeguard natural resources. Strengthening inclusivity and sustainability in sport tourism policies can help maximize local benefits for rural island regions while reducing potential long-term risks.

**Keywords:** sport tourism, resident perceptions, rural development, sustainable tourism, community participation

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sport tourism has become a key strategy for revitalizing rural economies, contributing significantly to the diversification of local productive structures (Raso & Cherubini, 2024). By combining travel with participation in sports or attendance at related events, this form of tourism effectively attracts visitors seeking active, nature-based experiences. Its importance is particularly evident in island contexts, where economies are highly dependent on traditional tourism and face persistent challenges such as seasonality and geographic concentration of demand (Rossini et al., 2025; Wanyonyi et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2025). In this setting, natural landscapes and rural environments represent strategic assets for sport tourism development (Camocini et al., 2022), supporting a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits, enhancing regional balance, and promoting social cohesion in less developed areas.

On a broader scale, sport tourism is internationally recognized as a tool for revitalizing rural communities, reducing poverty, and generating employment and income opportunities (Chen et al., 2025). In countries with extensive rural or peripheral regions, sport-based tourism initiatives have shown potential to foster sustainable development by engaging local populations in both planning and economic activities (González-García et al., 2022).

The growing appeal of sport tourism also reflects shifts in tourist preferences, with travelers increasingly seeking active, health-oriented, and culturally immersive experiences in rural landscapes, such as hiking, mountain biking, water sports, and adventure racing (Hofmann et al., 2025). This trend is fueled by the global emphasis on healthy lifestyles and a rising interest in local and cultural consumption during travel (Wan et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2023). In addition, digital tools and smart tourism technologies play a growing role in shaping tourist satisfaction and destination

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images (Czyz & Javed, 2025). For rural communities, local sport can serve as a valuable asset and a competitive advantage in their positioning as tourism destinations (Hritz & Cecil, 2019). However, many communities still underestimate the potential of local sport tourism, and academic research has only recently begun to explore the role of community identity and engagement in this context (Herbold et al., 2020). This underscores the need for more strategic, inclusive planning that integrates local sporting identity and promotes active resident participation in tourism development (Yin et al., 2025). In this regard, sport tourism represents a promising opportunity for rural development, but one that requires deliberate, participatory management to fully realize its long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits.

The development of sport tourism generates a wide range of socioeconomic impacts on host communities, with both positive and negative effects (Sarkar et al., 2024). On the economic side, numerous studies highlight significant benefits related to hosting sporting events and attracting active tourists (Moradi et al., 2025; Raso & Cherubini, 2023). Among the most frequently cited advantages are job creation, increased tourist arrivals, and the stimulation of local trade and entrepreneurship (Rossini et al., 2025; Sardi et al., 2025). These dynamics contribute to revitalizing local economies, benefiting businesses such as accommodation, food services, transportation, and sports equipment rentals, and often support urban renewal and infrastructure upgrades, enhancing the overall image and attractiveness of the destination (Tomino et al., 2020). For instance, organizing sporting events has been shown to modernize facilities and infrastructure—such as trails, roads, and sports venues—benefiting both residents and visitors (Sardi et al., 2025).

Consequently, sport tourism is often associated with improvements in residents' quality of life (You et al., 2024), providing not only jobs but also supplemental income and stimulating investment in public services and infrastructure (González-García et al., 2022). Hritz & Cecil (2019) found that residents perceive sport tourism as a positive force for community well-being, contributing to local development and opportunity. As such, sporting activities are frequently seen as drivers of socioeconomic progress in host regions (Parra-Camacho et al., 2012). Nonetheless, some negative economic impacts must be considered. Increased tourist demand may raise the cost of living in host communities (Woo et al., 2018), while economic dependency on seasonal events can lead to temporary jobs and labor instability outside peak periods (Preuss, 2007). Additional challenges include public expenditure on event organization, overcrowding, and even short-term spikes in crime or public safety concerns (Parra-Camacho et al., 2023). These issues highlight the need for careful planning to ensure that communities maximize benefits while mitigating risks (Getz, 2008).

From a sociocultural perspective, sport tourism can positively influence social dynamics and residents' attitudes. Hosting events often fosters community pride and cohesion (Fredline et al., 2005), while media exposure and successful event execution can enhance local identity and collective self-esteem (Li et al., 2024). Recent studies also highlight how outdoor sports contribute to reinforcing cultural landscapes and local identity through participatory approaches (Camocini et al., 2025). Additionally, tourism-related infrastructure (e.g., trails, bike lanes, sports facilities) often becomes part of the local recreational offer, encouraging active lifestyles and expanding leisure options (Taks et al., 2014). Other benefits include cultural exchange, appreciation of local heritage, and a stronger sense of openness to the outside world. However, not all sociocultural effects are perceived positively. Tourist influxes may cause overcrowding, traffic congestion, and disruptions to daily life (Fredline et al., 2005). Some residents may feel that local customs and values are being diluted by outside influences (Salazar, 2011), although this sensitivity tends to decrease in destinations with a long tourism tradition (González-García et al., 2022). Further concerns include increased perceptions of insecurity, infrastructure wear due to overuse, and occasional conflicts arising from cultural differences or inappropriate behavior (Mason, 2016).

In rural areas with fragile ecosystems, the uncontrolled growth of sport tourism can result in environmental degradation, including trail erosion, waste accumulation, and disturbance to wildlife (Higham, 1999). While some authors argue that sport tourism can raise environmental awareness, it may also lead to pollution and littering if not properly managed (Buckley, 2012). More recent evidence emphasizes that sustainable management strategies and green awareness campaigns are essential to prevent long-term ecological risks (Gkarane et al., 2025; You, 2024).

Even small-scale events can generate nuisances, such as noise, waste, and infrastructure wear—despite their potential benefits for host destinations (Hritz & Cecil, 2019). Therefore, sustainability strategies are essential, including waste management plans, visitor limits, and environmental education campaigns, to ensure that sport tourism develops responsibly and preserves natural resources for future generations (Buckley, 2012).

Residents' perceptions are a critical determinant of the sustainability and success of sport tourism, especially in rural contexts (Herman et al., 2024). Modern tourism planning increasingly recognizes the host community as a key stakeholder, making its attitudes central to destination design and governance (Idrees et al., 2021). Recent studies stress that local participation and awareness play an important role in shaping support, highlighting the need to integrate residents' voices systematically into tourism planning (Eduardo & Padilla, 2025). Understanding how residents perceive tourism impacts helps anticipate support or resistance to initiatives such as sport events or active tourism promotion in natural settings. The Social Exchange Theory provides a useful framework for this analysis, suggesting that residents evaluate tourism based on the perceived balance between benefits and costs (Pedauga et al., 2022).

When they perceive improvements in quality of life and benefits for the broader community, support increases. Conversely, perceptions of negative impacts can lead to apathy, opposition, or withdrawal of support.

Empirical studies support this relationship. For instance, Boonsiritomachai & Phonthanukitithaworn (2019) showed that perceptions of economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts directly influence residents' willingness to support sport tourism. Similarly, in Spain, González-García et al. (2022) found that positive evaluations of tourism's effects on the economy, culture, and environment correlate with greater community support. In Gran Canaria, residents who perceive tangible benefits from active sport tourism display proactive attitudes, with perceived quality of

life and community attachment acting as mediating factors (author's own publications). Another key factor shaping favorable perceptions is community participation in tourism planning. When residents are actively involved—through consultations, shared decision-making, or event organization—this strengthens social cohesion and builds trust in tourism outcomes (Wanyonyi et al., 2021). Research has also demonstrated that direct engagement enhances well-being and subjective quality of life in rural communities exposed to sport tourism (Chen et al., 2025).

Research in rural China found that direct engagement not only enhances well-being but also promotes more positive perceptions of tourism impacts. Projects with early and inclusive involvement are more likely to gain social legitimacy and long-term viability, while exclusion and lack of transparency can lead to mistrust, misinformation, and perceptions of elite capture of benefits. In this light, public administrators and tourism policymakers must adopt strategies that continuously monitor community perceptions. Regular assessments of local attitudes help to adjust planning and avoid potential conflict (Nunkoo & Rambkissoon, 2012). For instance, if environmental concerns emerge, responses might include preventive actions, awareness campaigns, or targeted regulation (Hasrama et al., 2025).

Similarly, low levels of engagement can be addressed through volunteer programs, resident incentives, or participatory governance models (Eduardo & Padilla, 2025). Integrating community voices in strategic planning not only increases public support but also contributes to the overall sustainability of tourism (González-García et al., 2022; Idrees et al., 2021). Ultimately, the success of sport tourism in rural areas will depend on balancing economic goals with the social, cultural, and environmental needs of local populations. When residents perceive that sport tourism enhances their environment, strengthens community bonds, and generates real development opportunities, they become active allies in its growth (Taks, 2013). Such civic engagement is essential to building a model of sport tourism that is sustainable, inclusive, and equitable.

However, much of the existing literature remains urban-centric, with limited focus on rural or island territories (Hinch & Higham, 2011). This gap has hindered a deeper understanding of sport tourism in contexts with distinct socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural features. The present study aims to address this gap by analyzing rural residents' perceptions of the economic, sociocultural, and environmental impacts of sport tourism in Gran Canaria, offering context-specific insights into the conditions that foster social acceptance and sustainable development.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Procedure

A convenience sampling method was employed, in line with previous studies in the field (Oshimi & Harada, 2018; Prayag et al., 2013; Parra-Camacho et al., 2020). This strategy was selected for several reasons. First, there was no suitable sampling frame available, aside from the official resident registry, which made it difficult to determine the exact number of the rural population in Gran Canaria (Spain). Second, convenience sampling offers economic and time-related advantages. However, as noted by Kim et al. (2006), selection bias is one of the main limitations of this type of sampling. Despite this, a proportional sample was obtained based on municipality of residence as a key sociodemographic variable.

### Participants

A total of 110 valid questionnaires were collected from residents across 12 rural municipalities of Gran Canaria. The surveys were conducted between May and June 2021. The scope of the research is limited to the information described in the preceding sections. The mean age of participants was 43.73 years ( $SD = 13.16$ ), with ages ranging from 18 to 73 years. The sample was composed of 55.46% men and 44.54% women.

### Instruments

For data collection, a previously validated questionnaire was used to assess the socioeconomic impact of the event. A 17-item instrument, adapted from previous studies (Djaballah et al., 2015; Parra et al., 2016b; Ntloko & Swart, 2008; Taks, 2013), was employed alongside a five-item scale measuring support for sport tourism, adapted from Karadakis (2012). The items assessed residents' perceived environmental ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ), sociocultural ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ), and economic ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) impacts, as well as their support for the development of sport tourism in the community ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

All responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire also included sociodemographic variables.

### Data Analysis

For statistical analysis, JASP software (2021), version 0.16.1, was used to perform descriptive analyses and to develop a structural equation model (SEM). First, the psychometric properties of the social impact scale were evaluated through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The analysis applying the Maximum Likelihood (ML) extraction method and Oblimin Direct oblique rotation (Lloret-Segura et al., 2014). To determine the number of factors, the Optimal Implementation of Parallel Analysis was employed (Timmerman & Lorenzo-Seva, 2011). Sample adequacy was verified using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Subsequently, a CFA was performed using the Robust Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLR) method, correcting for the lack of multivariate normality with the Satorra-Bentler  $\chi^2$  statistic (Chou et al., 1991). Model fit was assessed using several indicators: robust chi-square (S-B  $\chi^2$ ),  $\chi^2/df$  ratio (with acceptable values  $< 5$ ; Byrne, 2009), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Incremental Fit Index (IFI), with values above 0.90 indicating good fit (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was also examined, with values below 0.08 considered acceptable (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). To evaluate scale reliability, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR),

and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were calculated for each factor (Hair et al., 2006). Convergent validity was assessed based on the significance of factor loadings and their corresponding t-values.

Discriminant validity was tested using Fornell & Larcker's (1981) criterion, which requires that the square root of a factor's AVE exceeds its correlations with any other factor.

Additionally, inter-factor correlations were expected to be below 0.85 (Kline, 2005). Finally, a structural model of causal relationships was developed to examine the relationship between perceived impacts and support for sport tourism development. The model was evaluated using  $R^2$  coefficients, standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), and their statistical significance (t-values). Model fit was assessed using the same indices applied in the CFA.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

As shown in Table 1, the descriptive results of the scale indicate a positive perception of the economic impact of sport tourism, suggesting that residents recognize its benefits in terms of job creation and commercial revitalization. In contrast, the sociocultural impact is perceived less favorably, with responses indicating a lower identification of positive effects within the community. Environmental impact is perceived moderately, with noticeable variability among respondents—possibly linked to differences in environmental awareness and the degree of regulation of tourism activities. Finally, support for sport tourism is high, reflecting a clear willingness among residents to endorse its development.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of perceptions of the impact of sports tourism

	Mean	SD	Asymmetry	Kurtosis
IE1	4.04	0.94	-0.62	-0.29
IE2	3.88	0.94	-0.58	-0.14
IE	4.18	0.90	-0.91	0.37
IE4	3.79	0.91	-0.53	0.27
Total	3.98	0.72		
ISC10	1.67	1.00	1.55	1.75
ISC11	1.93	1.11	1.05	0.19
ISC2	2.40	1.22	0.59	-0.56
ISC16	2.83	1.15	0.20	-0.68
Total	2.21	0.87		
IA17	2.27	1.18	0.61	-0.57
IA18	2.30	1.12	0.38	-0.93
IA19	3.48	1.39	-0.41	-1.14
IA20	2.78	1.30	0.09	-1.07
Total	2.71	0.98		
A21	3.92	0.98	-0.73	0.14
A22	4.10	0.93	-1.18	1.75
A23	4.31	0.83	-1.22	1.58
A24	4.09	0.92	-1.04	1.08
A26	4.35	0.80	-1.28	2.01
Total	4.15	0.70		

SD= Standard Deviation.

The structural equation model demonstrated acceptable goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2(df) = 174.371(113)$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.54$ ; RMSEA (CI) = .070 (.049–.090); CFI = .922; NNFI = .906; IFI = .924). As shown in Table 2, the results indicate a strong relationship between the indicators and their respective constructs, with high Z-values and p-values below 0.001 in all cases, suggesting high reliability in the parameter estimates.

Table 2. Structural Model Results: Estimates, Standard Errors, and Confidence Intervals

		Estimate	SE	z	p	95%CI	
						Lower	Upper
APO1	A21	0.50	0.06	8.00	<.001	0.38	0.62
	A22	0.47	0.06	7.71	<.001	0.35	0.59
	A23	0.44	0.05	8.35	<.001	0.34	0.55
	A24	0.44	0.06	7.16	<.001	0.32	0.56
	A26	0.33	0.07	5.04	<.001	0.20	0.46
IC1	IE1	0.75	0.08	9.52	<.001	0.59	0.90
	IE2	0.69	0.09	7.89	<.001	0.52	0.86
	IE3	0.61	0.10	6.02	<.001	0.41	0.81
	IE4	0.48	0.10	4.77	<.001	0.28	0.68
IMA1	IA17	0.99	0.09	11.56	<.001	0.82	1.15
	IA18	1.02	0.06	15.90	<.001	0.89	1.14
	IA19	0.61	0.13	4.79	<.001	0.36	0.86

	IA20	0.84	0.10	8.52	< .001	0.65	1.03
ISC1	ISC10	0.82	0.09	9.51	< .001	0.65	0.99
	ISC11	0.93	0.10	8.90	< .001	0.73	1.14
	ISC12	0.74	0.09	7.92	< .001	0.56	0.93
	ISC16	0.63	0.11	5.54	< .001	0.41	0.85

Regarding the regression coefficients, only perceived economic impacts were found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.95$ ;  $p < .001$ ;  $z = 3.54$ ;  $CI = 0.42$ – $1.47$ ). In contrast, perceptions of sociocultural impacts ( $\beta = -0.37$ ;  $p = .094$ ;  $z = -1.67$ ;  $CI = -0.81$  to  $0.06$ ) and environmental impacts ( $\beta = -0.03$ ;  $p = .90$ ;  $z = -0.12$ ;  $CI = -0.43$  to  $0.38$ ) associated with sport tourism were not significant predictors of support for its development among residents in rural municipalities. Overall, the model explained 53% of the variance.

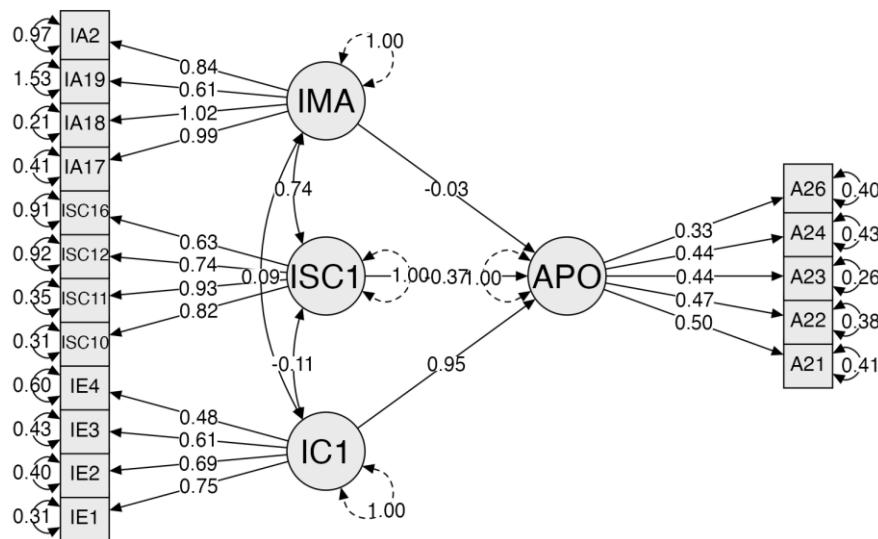


Figure 1. Model of causal relationships between the impacts perceived by residents regarding support for the development of sports tourism  
 Note: IMA= Environmental impact; ISC1=Sociocultural impact; IC1 = Economic Impact; APO= Support.  $\chi^2$  = chi square; gl = degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/ gl \leq 5.00$ ); RMSEA = Mean Square Approximation Error ( $\leq 0.080$ ); CI=RMSEA Confidence Interval; CFI = Comparative Adjustment Index; NNFI = Non-Regulated Adjustment Index; IFI= Incremental Adjustment Index. CFI, NNFI, IFI ( $\geq .90$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Sport tourism in rural areas has become an increasingly popular form of travel, offering visitors the opportunity to engage with nature through active and immersive experiences. The findings of this study align with previous research highlighting the prominent role of economic benefits in shaping residents' acceptance of sport tourism. Studies by Hritz & Cecil (2019) and González-García et al. (2022) emphasize that job creation and the revitalization of local commerce are key drivers of positive resident perceptions. In Gran Canaria, where the economy is highly dependent on tourism, it is not surprising that residents prioritize these economic outcomes over other dimensions. More recent evidence also confirms that economic benefits remain the strongest predictor of community support, particularly in small- and medium-scale events that stimulate local economies (Rossini et al., 2025; Sardi et al., 2025).

Beyond visitor engagement, sport tourism in rural settings can have a significant impact on local communities and regional development (Mason, 2020). It generates employment opportunities through the construction, maintenance, and operation of sport-related infrastructure such as mountain biking trails, golf courses, and hiking routes.

In addition, the demand for support services—including accommodation, dining, and sports equipment—stimulates business growth and job creation across the local economy (Hritz & Cecil, 2019).

Moreover, sport tourism contributes to economic diversification. In many rural regions that traditionally rely on agriculture or forestry, it offers an alternative source of income, enhancing resilience against global market fluctuations (Wise & Kohe, 2018). In the case of Gran Canaria, where mass tourism has long dominated the economic landscape, sport tourism provides a valuable opportunity to broaden the tourism offer and reduce dependence on sun-and-beach tourism. Sport tourism can also enhance quality of life for residents. Facilities developed for visitors are often accessible to the community, increasing recreational opportunities and promoting healthier, more active lifestyles. Furthermore, the influx of sport tourists can elevate interest in local natural and cultural heritage, encouraging efforts toward conservation and environmental stewardship (Sarkar et al., 2024). Nevertheless, where community involvement in planning and development is limited, the perceived benefits may be diminished (Getz & Page, 2020).

At the same time, sport tourism presents challenges that must be carefully managed. It is essential to ensure that activities are safe and environmentally sustainable, and that increased tourist flows do not cause ecological degradation. Equally important is ensuring that the economic benefits are distributed equitably, rather than being concentrated in a small number of businesses or individuals. In this regard, destinations such as Gran Canaria would benefit from participatory governance mechanisms and clear environmental regulations to foster sustainable and inclusive

growth. Finally, residents' perceptions of sport tourism are influenced by their level of involvement, participation, and the perceived benefits they receive (Gibson & Farley, 2022). While sport tourism is generally viewed positively across social, cultural, environmental, and economic dimensions, leading to increased support for its development (González-García et al., 2022), some residents may also perceive negative impacts on quality of life, well-being, or community identity (Getz & Page, 2020). These perceptual differences are often shaped by the history of tourism in each territory and the extent to which local communities are engaged in decision-making and management processes.

Residents' perceptions of sport tourism can vary depending on the degree of involvement, participation, and benefits they derive from it (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2022). In general, sport tourism is perceived positively in terms of its social, cultural, environmental, and economic impacts, which often translates into stronger support for the sector's development (Hasrama et al., 2025). However, negative repercussions may also be perceived in areas such as quality of life, well-being, or community identity (Getz & Page, 2020). These differences in perception can often be explained by how communities have experienced the evolution of tourism in their territories, and the extent to which they feel involved in decision-making and sector management. The results of this study indicate that residents generally hold a positive view of the impacts associated with sport tourism (Higham, 2021). In contrast, the lack of significance in sociocultural and environmental impacts diverges from previous studies that have identified greater sensitivity among local populations to these factors (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2022; Sarkar et al., 2024).

This discrepancy may be explained by a lower perception of sociocultural threats in regions with an already well-established tourism identity. In the case of Gran Canaria, where tourism has long been a major economic driver, residents may be more accustomed to the presence of tourists and therefore less likely to perceive negative impacts on their local culture. Regarding environmental impacts, previous research has shown that sport tourism can contribute to both conservation and environmental degradation, depending on the management strategies implemented (Wise, 2018; Higham & Hinch, 2019). The absence of a significant relationship in this study suggests that residents in Gran Canaria do not perceive an immediate environmental threat, possibly due to existing regulations or a lack of awareness regarding cumulative impacts. However, other studies have indicated that a lack of perceived negative impacts does not necessarily imply the absence of environmental harm but may rather reflect limited local awareness about the long-term effects of tourism on fragile ecosystems (Mason, 2020).

Moreover, when compared to other studies conducted in similar contexts, some research has shown that residents' perceptions of sport tourism vary depending on the level of infrastructure development and the degree of community involvement in planning processes (Getz & Page, 2020). In communities where residents have been actively engaged in tourism management, there tends to be a greater appreciation of sociocultural impacts. This suggests that, in the case of Gran Canaria, it may be beneficial to implement more inclusive community participation strategies to enhance residents' perception of non-economic impacts. Ultimately, comparison with other studies highlights the complexity of sport tourism perception in rural and island settings, underscoring the need for adaptive management approaches that are sensitive to the specific characteristics of the local context. As a well-established destination, Gran Canaria presents a scenario in which the stability of the tourism sector may contribute to a relative indifference toward sociocultural and environmental impacts, unlike emerging destinations where communities may be more reactive to change.

In the context of rural island populations, sport tourism has the potential to serve as a key catalyst for sustainable development. Given that these regions often rely heavily on conventional tourism, diversifying toward sport tourism can help reduce seasonality and attract visitors year-round. Furthermore, it is crucial that policy frameworks promote the inclusion of residents in both the planning and the distribution of benefits from sport tourism, encouraging training and employment initiatives that strengthen local engagement and ownership. Another key aspect is the protection of the natural environment, as island ecosystems are often fragile and highly susceptible to the pressures of uncontrolled tourism. In this regard, it is advisable to establish clear regulations for the use of natural areas, including controlled access and the promotion of environmental awareness among tourists and sport event organizers.

This study presents several limitations that should be considered. First, the sample was limited exclusively to residents of Gran Canaria, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other islands or regions with different socioeconomic characteristics. Second, the perception-based methodology may be influenced by subjective factors and individual biases, potentially affecting the external validity of the results.

Future research could benefit from the use of mixed-method approaches, combining surveys with objective data on the economic and environmental impacts of sport tourism. In addition, it would be advisable to conduct longitudinal studies to assess how perceptions evolve over time and how they relate to changes in tourism management policies.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined residents' perceptions of sport tourism in Gran Canaria, identifying the key factors that influence their support. The findings confirm that economic impact is the strongest predictor of support, reinforcing the importance of job creation and local economic stimulation in shaping positive attitudes toward tourism in rural areas.

In contrast, the limited influence of sociocultural and environmental impacts suggests that these dimensions may be less salient in regions with a long-standing tourism presence, where residents may be accustomed to visitors or feel excluded from tourism-related decision-making. Nonetheless, sociocultural and environmental factors play a vital role in the socioeconomic sustainability of rural destinations.

Strengthening these dimensions through inclusive governance and participatory planning may foster broader community support and promote more equitable and sustainable sport tourism development in island contexts.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, D.O.B. and R.J.G.G.; methodology, D.O.B. and J.C.H.; software, D.O.B.; validation, D.O.B., J.C.H. and C.P.C.; formal analysis, D.O.B. and R.J.G.G.; investigation, D.O.B. and J.C.H.; data curation, C.P.C. and D.O.B.; writing—original draft preparation, D.O.B.; writing—review and editing, R.J.G.G., C.P.C. and J.C.H.; visualization, C.P.C. and J.C.H.; supervision, R.J.G.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** Not applicable.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study may be obtained on request from the corresponding author.

**Acknowledgements:** The research undertaken was made possible by the equal scientific involvement of all the authors concerned.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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