

## CONCEPTUALIZING TRIATHLON SPORT EVENT TRAVELERS' BEHAVIOR

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*This paper analyzes the relationships between self-congruity, functional congruity, satisfaction, sport event involvement and behavioral intentions of triathlon sport travellers. The moderating effect of different training experiences is assessed in allowing these relations. 885 data were collected among triathletes participating to international triathlon competitions. A theoretical model has been developed and tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The majority of hypotheses are empirically confirmed. Regarding the moderation hypothesis, a multi-group SEM has been estimated (considering high-intensity and low-intensity sport training as moderators). Some differences between the two groups are highlighted, remarking the need to develop differential marketing strategies in active sport tourism.*

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**Keywords:** *sport tourism; triathlon; self-congruity; functional congruity*

### INTRODUCTION

Sport tourism is defined as “leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical

activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities” (Gibson, 1998). Sport tourism is a relatively recent, growing phenomenon (Higham & Hinch, 2009). Its high profitability has created a dynamic industry, characterized by a multifaceted offering and an increasingly growing competition. The increasing economic relevance of the phenomenon has triggered the interest of management research, who has devoted increasing efforts to investigate sport tourism (e.g., Bosnjak et al, 2016). However, despite this growing interest, existing research yet appears limited. In particular, sport tourism research has mostly considered passive sport tourists (Trail & James, 2001): in this sense, dynamics related to active sport tourists have received negligible attention.

However, the increasing willingness of people to participate in such kind of activities, and the consequent relevant economic impact of such tourism activities recently pushed academics to focus more on this research area (e.g., Bosnjak et al, 2016). Extant contributions have suggested how the field is quite complex. For example, some (e.g., Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010) have suggested how, active sport tourists differ in terms of consumption types: non event- and event-related consumption. The former are only leisure-based tourists, while the latter associate event participation to their travel behavior. In terms of consumer motivation, research suggests how motivations of active sport tourists are extremely multifaceted and heterogeneous (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2003): in this sense, sport travelers might be motivated both by the desire to compete in a sport event; at the same time, tourism-related motivations (e.g., escape, destination attributes) are not negligible, and are likely to drive selection of events as well. Such multifaceted nature of consumer decision making process poses important challenges, both for sport and tourism marketers, and for scholars. This paper contributes to this debate by developing and testing a model to explore active sport tourists’ determinants of satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Triathlon events are prominent in the sport tourism industry (Shipway & Fyall, 2012). An overwhelming demand has triggered the growth of several international events around the globe, usually located in touristic areas (e.g., Lake Garda in Italy, Hawaii).

The model proposed in this paper is based on two pillars. On the one hand, it considers the impact of consumer congruity evaluations on consumer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Both the self-image congruity with the event, and the functional congruity with the functional attributes of the hosting destination are considered. On the other hand, involvement represents the second pillar of the proposed model. The involvement construct is central in social sciences (Krugman, 1966). Particularly, the involvement construct appears as particularly relevant in



fields like organization, consumer, and leisure research. As suggested by Beaton et al (2011), these fields are strongly pertinent for sport management, and tourism management research. In tourism research, involvement is a well-known and well-researched construct (Yeh, 2013); oppositely, few contributions in sport management research have addressed involvement (e.g., Brown et al, 2016), as well as in sport tourism (both active and passive). Contribution of the present paper can be considered as twofold: on the one hand, further exploration of the role of congruity evaluations for active sport tourists is provided. On the other hand, the study enriches literature on involvement in sport tourism management research. Finally, this paper provides a dynamic perspective on the proposed relationships, following the suggestion that consumer evaluations might change, over time, according to different consumer backgrounds in terms of consumption episodes (Dagger et al, 2007). In this specific case, the moderating effect of different sport training backgrounds on all the proposed relationships is investigated.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **Self-congruity**

Self-congruity is referred to the perceived match between a consumer (in this case, the tourist) self-concept and the perceived image of a certain product/service (Kressman et al., 2006). Perceived congruence tends to lead to the actual purchase (Mannetti, Pierro, & Livi, 2004). In this sense, consumers tend to purchase those products/services that are perceived as close to their self-concept. Reflecting the multiple role that people are likely to held in society (Rosenberg, 1979), the self-concept is commonly considered to have multiple dimensions: actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social actual and ideal self-concept. Note that, ideal and actual self-concept have been mostly studied in literature. (e.g., Beerli et al, 2007). In line with much of previous research, the present paper only examines the ideal and actual dimensions of self-concept. This choice can be also justified by another point, raised in past contributions: that is, the more “individual” dimensions of self-concept (i.e., actual and ideal self-concept) can strongly influence social-related dimensions. Actual self reflects how a person sees him or herself; conversely, ideal self concerns the way a person would like to see him or herself. Social self-concept (i.e., actual social and ideal social) refers instead to how a person presents him or herself to others (Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008).

Accordingly, on the one hand, actual self-congruity is reached as individuals consistently behave according to their real (actual) self-image: in other words, their actual behaviors reflect how they actually think they are. On the other hand, ideal self-congruity refers mainly to self-

enhancement (Nella & Christou, 2014; Hung & Petrick, 2011), reflecting the efforts put in place by people, to become as close as possible to the person they would like to be. Grounded in social psychology, the concept of self-congruence has been highly relevant for marketing research, since a long time (e.g., Levy, 1959). The relevance of self-congruence in consumer decision-making process is directly linked to the widely-known assumption that, consumers purchase goods and services not just basing on functional, utilitarian evaluations, but also (and most importantly) due to symbolic meanings products carry (e.g., Lee & Hyman, 2008). Levy (1959) effectively summarized the prominent role of consumer evaluations of symbols (i.e., symbolic meanings) embedded in products, with respect to their personal self-concept: “a symbol is appropriate (and the product will be used and enjoyed) when it joins with, meshes with, adds to, or reinforces the way the consumer thinks about himself”.

In other words, consumer evaluation of products/services passes through the personal evaluation of the extent to which such products/services can maintain, reinforce, and enhance their own self-concept. Self-congruity has been widely applied in marketing research (Hosany & Martin, 2012; Chatzigeorgiou, 2017), proving its relevance in a variety of contexts. Specifically, in the case of tourism, the study by Chon (1992) was among the first to introduce the self-congruity theory in a touristic context. The study suggested how, self-congruity in terms of consumer self-image and destination image was a key determinant of consumer satisfaction. Sirgy et al (2008) provided a comprehensive theoretical model of the impact of self-congruity on destination choice. Other studies (e.g., Ahn, Ekinici, & Li, 2013) confirmed this relevant impact of self-congruity in the case of destination choice. Regarding event image in sports, research has mainly concentrated in specific areas, such as the role of sponsors in defining, first, an event intended self-image, and, in turn, self-image congruity of people attending sporting events.

Only few research studies dedicated their attention to identifying effects of self-congruity with perceived event image tout court (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010). This can be justified by the generalized, past tendency of the industry regarding sport events, which were mainly conceived as marketing tools to enhance other, related offerings (Brown et al, 2016). However, another limitation of existing research is that, such studies focusing on self-congruity are usually concentrated on sport event spectators, or passive individuals in general. As far as it is known, active sport tourism has seen few applications of self-congruity theory. For example, Bosnjak et al (2016) suggested that self-congruity in active sport tourism might not only be referred to destination image, or to the event image, rather to the sport activity itself. Consumer importance of the matching between consumer self-image and the -usually stereotypical- image of a product/service is well established (e.g., Ahn et al, 2013). The

impacts of self-congruity on many, key consumer behavior outcomes (such attitudes, preference development, loyalty, satisfaction) are quite established as well in marketing and tourism research (Ahn et al, 2013).

This leads to the definition of the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Self Congruity has a direct effect on satisfaction.

### **Functional congruity**

Congruity in consumer evaluations also regards utilitarian features of a product/service. Functional congruity is defined as “the match between consumers’ ideal expectations of utilitarian brand features and their perceptions of how the product is perceived along the same features” (Kressmann, 2006). Albeit some studies have juxtaposed self- congruity and functional congruity (e.g., Mannetti et al, 2004), many others have considered jointly self-congruity and functional congruity, exploring also the interdependencies between them, in the effort of proposing more comprehensive models of product/brand choice (e.g., Choi & Reid, 2016). Regarding tourism, functional congruence generally refers to consumer evaluations of performance attributes of a destination (i.e., atmospherics, destination services, economic convenience), with respect to their aspirational level of performance attributes (Ahn et al, 2013). Evaluations related to these attributes strongly influence tourist behavior (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2017).

Despite functional congruity is considered as a relevant construct in tourism research, as far as it is known, the construct has never been related to active sport tourists. In this paper, functional congruity has been operationalized regarding the functional attributes of an event hosting destination. As in the case of self-congruity, functional congruity is believed to have direct effects on post-purchase outcomes, such as satisfaction (Chon & Olsen, 1991). Sirgy et al (2008) theoretically illustrated the role of functional congruity in predicting tourist behavior. Utilitarian attributes of a destination are aimed to fulfil tourist basic needs such as convenience, security, relaxation, and accessibility (Ahn et al, 2013). Consequently, it is likely that a higher functional congruity exerts a beneficial effect on satisfaction.

This leads to the definition of another research hypothesis:

**H2:** Functional Congruity has a direct effect on Satisfaction

## Satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction is a key concept in tourism research and practice (Chen and Tsai, 2007). This concept can be considered as broad and holistic, referring to the post-purchase stage of consumption (i.e., of a holiday, Fornell, 1992). Due to its holistic nature, some studies suggest the adoption of a single, global measure of satisfaction (e.g., Baloglu, Pekcan, Chen, & Santos, 2004; Revilla Hernández et al., 2016). Behavioral intentions can be conceived as the outcome of consumer mental processing, converting motivation into actual, future behavior (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Fotiadis & Williams, 2018). Tourism research generally refers to behavioral intentions as revisit, or recommend intentions (Baloglu et al, 2004). Sport marketing and tourism literature widely agree in stating that a positive relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions exists (e.g., Prayag & Grivel, 2014).

This leads to the formulation of:

**H3:** Satisfaction directly influences behavioral intentions.

## Involvement in sports

Involvement is an indicator of the psychological connections (Funk et al, 2004), of the perceived personal relevance (Kyle & Chick, 2002), and of the individual commitment towards a certain activity, experience, or location (Gross & Brown, 2008). Service/brand loyalty and product involvement appear to be positively related (Pritchard et al, 1999). As noted by Chen and Tsai (2008), involvement towards a certain object of interest (i.e., product, service, or location), is an important determinant of consumers' behaviors and evaluations. In tourism, studies on activity involvement appear highly significant in understanding tourists' behavior (T. H. Lee & Chang, 2012; Priporas, Vassiliadis, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2018). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that, increased tourists' activity involvement tends to influence consumer sensitivity to activity attributes, to influence perception of activity importance, commitment, and destination loyalty intentions (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007).

Consequently, involvement is a widely-used construct in leisure and tourism literature. Havitz & Dimanche (1997) define involvement as “an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest toward a recreational activity or a product”. In the case of sport consumers, learning and involvement appear to be related to some extent. Zhang, Smith, Pease, & Maher (1996) point out that knowledge about a certain sport event can

predict attendance to the sport event itself. However, in contrast with the wider attention the construct has received in other fields, like leisure research (e.g., Sato, Jordan, & Funk, 2016); in sport tourism, involvement is an underexplored topic (Beaton et al, 2011). However, despite its limited application, involvement appears a key construct in identifying the major drivers of consumption, and attitude formation in sports. In their literature review, Beaton et al (2011) suggested that “sport involvement is present when individuals evaluate their participation in a sport activity as a central component of their life and provides both hedonic and symbolic value” (p. 128). The existence of cognitive and affective dimensions in involvement (Shank & Beasley, 1998) have been also emphasized in literature. The present study adopts such multidimensional view of the construct. Emotions have been found to affect consumers’ information processing (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999).

Satisfaction has been defined as an emotional response based on a holistic view of a phenomenon (Christou, 2002; Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000). In the context of recreational settings, it has been suggested how, individuals showing more involvement in an activity are more likely to stay loyal (e.g., Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Higher involvement has been showed to be an important predictor of higher participation to sport events, and of higher spending on event-related products (Beaton et al, 2011). In examining (passive) sport tourists’ behavior, Brown et al (2016) pointed out the positive, direct impact in terms of satisfaction of tourists’ degree of sport involvement. In a nutshell, the level of involvement that a consumer exhibit with respect to a certain object of interest works as an important determinant of consumer evaluations and behaviors (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Scholars suggest that, the level of consumer involvement might change according to consumer attitudes and perceptions, especially with respect to service quality, perceived value, and satisfaction (Lai & Chen, 2011). The above considerations lead to the following hypotheses:

**H4:** Satisfaction has a positive, direct effect on Sport Event Involvement

**H5:** Sport Event Involvement has a positive, direct effect on Behavioral Intention

Self-congruity evaluations deal with product/service symbolic meanings. A positive consumer evaluation in terms of self-congruity leads to a stronger consumer involvement with the product, service, or brand (Bosnjak & Rudolph, 2008). Moreover, such relevant reinforcement in

terms of consumer involvement creates the necessary motivation for the consumer to proceed with the next step in congruence evaluation, that is, evaluating functional attributes and devoting time and resources to such evaluation. Hence:

**H6:** Self-congruity has a direct effect on sport event involvement.

Functional and utilitarian evaluations are likely to impact too on emotional reactions of consumers. For example, Park et al (2006) suggest that people are likely to develop attachments with those offerings satisfying their needs. From this point of view, it should be recalled that, in the case of destinations, performance attributes (i.e., the object of consumer functional evaluations) are mostly related to the satisfaction of those fundamental needs of tourists, such as security, convenience, relaxation, and so forth. Congruity research suggests that consumers attribute to products and brands specific personalities. Brand personality has been repeatedly indicated by research as a potential key source of brand equity (Bodet & Chanavat, 2010).

The importance of brand personality has been also confirmed in the case of tourist destinations (Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), and for sport consumption contexts (Alexandris, 2016). By bringing attribution theory to congruity research, one could argue that, satisfaction will be a function of the attributes of certain products/services/brands. The higher the consumer perceived matching (both in functional and in self-image terms), the higher satisfaction is likely to be. Several studies argue how, if service levels match with consumer expectations, this will also have an impact on involvement (Lai & Chen, 2011). Thereby:

**H7:** Functional congruity has a direct effect on sport event involvement

### **The moderating effect of training background**

Some scholars (e.g., Dagger et al, 2007; Ma et al., 2017) suggested that, longer-term and novice customers assess services differently. Longer-term consumers can count on a larger amount of relevant information regarding the purchase (i.e., they have gone through it many times). In the case of longer-term consumers, credence qualities are more relevant in their service evaluations (Dagger et al, 2007). Oppositely, novice consumers explore more the actual qualities of the services in doing their evaluations (i.e., they are likely to be in a novel, quite unexplored context). Different

levels of consumer experience impact on consumer evaluations of products and services, in different ways. For example, Dagger & O'Brien (2010) explained how, the higher consumer experience, the more consumers are enabled to acquire relevant information to fully evaluate their experience. In this sense, thereby, even the major drivers of consumer satisfaction and/or loyalty might vary according to different levels of experience (Mittal & Katrichis, 2000). This suggestion is particularly relevant both for scholars and service providers: it highlights the need to capture the actual drivers of loyalty and satisfaction, that might vary according to different groups of consumers, identified according to different levels of product/service experience. This in turn suggests the need for companies and service providers to pay attention to these varying needs, that might be vital to define differential strategies to acquire new consumers, and retain existing ones (Mittal & Katrichis, 2000; Fotiadis, 2018). Mittal & Kamakura (2001) suggested that, the relationship between service attributes, satisfaction, and customer loyalty is likely to be dynamic, and to vary according to different consumption stages.

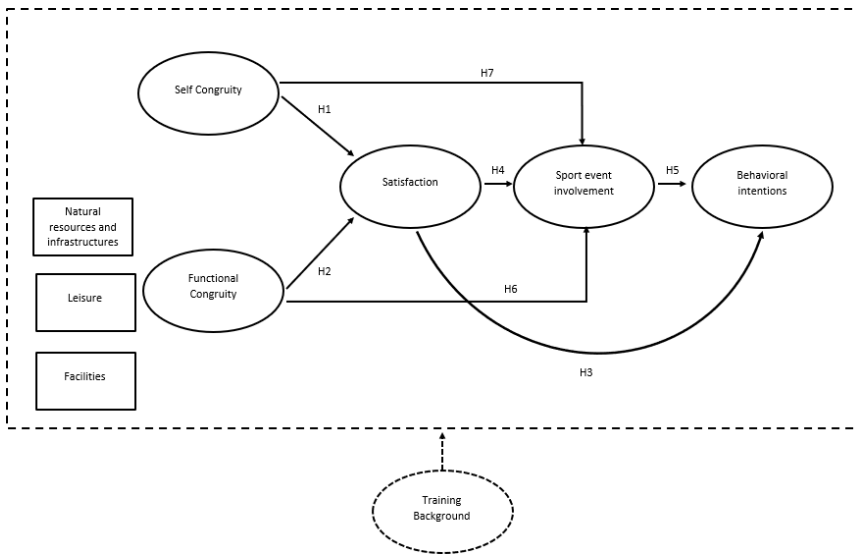
Moreover, Dagger & O'Brien (2010) showed that the major determinants of consumer loyalty in the case of experienced and novel consumers might be different: in this sense, satisfaction was a prominent driver of loyalty only in the case of new customers. Mittal & Kamakura (2001) noted that specific service attributes impact differently on consumer satisfaction, according to the level of consumer experience. In their study of healthcare services, Dagger et al (2007) found that service quality significantly impacted on behavioral intentions only in the case of novice customers. Active sport tourism entails a direct participation to sport activities.

The sport activity plays a central role in the touristic experience: participants are strongly involved in the proposed activities, also from a technical point of view. Given that, and following the discussion above, in the specific context of active sport tourism, consumer/tourist experience might be referred to the sport activity. The knowledge accumulated by tourists might lead to different evaluations (i.e., more or less detailed, or making more or less difficult evaluating the events' attributes). Funk et al (2007) noted that, in any case, prior involvement in the sport activity proposed by a certain event is a significant predictor of the participation to the event. From the discussion above, the following hypothesis derives:

**H8:** Training experience of active sport tourists moderates all the relationships presented above.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model developed according to hypotheses 1 to 8.

**Figure 1.** Theoretical model



## METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

### Methodology

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Table 1) supported convergent validity of the measures, with all factor loadings exceeding the 0.6 threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Composite reliability (CR, Table 2) and average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the 0.7 and 0.5 thresholds, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Data were collected in four international triathlon sport events (Triathlon Sprint Revine Lago; Rimini Challenge, Italy; Triathlon Internazionale Bardolino, Italy; IRONMAN Klagenfurt, Austria) through questionnaires administered to attending athletes between May and June

2015. 885 valid responses were collected. Construct measurements were based on previous research.

**Table 1.** Items, means, SD, EFA loadings, Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha

Construct	Factor and items	Source	Loading	CR	Alpha
<b>Self congruity</b>	<b>Real perception</b>	<b>Adapted from Sirgy and Su, (2000)</b>		<b>0.90</b>	<b>0.90</b>
	The image of the typical triathlon visitor is the type of person I am		.83		
	The image of the typical triathlon visitor is similar to me		.89		
	How I like to see myself		.81		
	Similar to the image others have about me		.81		
	Consistent with how I think others would see me	.74			
	<b>Ideal perception</b>	<b>Adapted from Sirgy and Su, 2000</b>		<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.92</b>
	The image of the typical triathlon visitor reflects the person I want to be		.80		
	The image of the typical triathlon visitor is similar to people I admire		.93		
	The image of the typical triathlon visitor		.90		

is similar to the image I would like to perceive about me	
The image of the typical triathlon visitor is similar to the image I would like others have about me	.84

<b>Functional congruity</b>	<b>Natural resource &amp; infrastructure</b>		<b>0.77</b>	<b>0.75</b>
	I appreciate the view of the landscape	<b>Adapted from Gossling, 2003</b>	.92	
	I appreciate the infrastructure		.83	
	I appreciate the nature of the landscape		.65	
	<b>Leisure</b>		<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.88</b>
	I appreciate the nightlife	<b>Adapted from Gössling (2003)</b>	.84	
	I appreciate the relaxing & atmospheres		.93	
	I appreciate the entertainment		.91	
	<b>Facilities &amp; comfort</b>		<b>0.79</b>	<b>0.77</b>
	I appreciate the general level	<b>Adapted from</b>	.81	

	of service and cleanness	<b>Gossling, 2003</b>	.91	
	I appreciate the destination accessibility			
	I appreciate the variety and quality of accommodation		.76	
<b>Personal involvement</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>		<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>
	I'm satisfied with my experience at this event	<b>Adopted from Oliver 1980</b>	.87	
	My experience here meets my expectations		.97	
	I'm satisfied with my choice		.94	
	<b>Sport event involvement</b>		<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.87</b>
	For me it's important to take part in this event here	<b>Adapted from Dimanche, Havitz, &amp; Howard (1991); Gursoy &amp; Gavcar (2003)</b>	.77	

	This is an interesting place for the event		.79
	Being here and taking part in this event is like receiving a gift		.91
	I'm satisfied of being involved in the different activities that take place here		.77
	<b>Behavioral intentions</b>		<b>0.90 0.90</b>
	I think I'll return in next 12 months	<b>Adapted from Mason &amp; Nassivera (2013)</b>	.89
	I will recommend this place to others		.86
	I will come back in this place in the future		.93

**Table 2.** CFA: standardized factor loadings, AVE and correlations

Factor Loadings	RP	IP	SC	NR&I	LEI	F&C	SAT	SEI	BI
	.73	.80	.83	.84	.76	.69	.89	.77	.80
	.86	.88	.84	.73	.90	.91	.92	.85	.89

	.88	.92		.59	.88	.61	.93	.78	.91
	.78	.83						.76	
	.77								
Correlations									
RP (first level factor)	<b>.81</b>								
IP (first level factor)	.70***	<b>.86</b>							
SC (second level factor)			<b>.84</b>						
NR&I			.13***	<b>.73</b>					
LEI			.13***	.22***	<b>.85</b>				
F&C			.13***	.32***	.18***	<b>.75</b>			
SAT			.35***	.36***	.09**	.12***	<b>.91</b>		
SEI			.44***	.35***	.13***	.16***	.69***	<b>.81</b>	
BI			.00	.32***	.15***	.24***	.42***	.47***	<b>.87</b>

Note 1: Square root of AVE on diagonal

Note 2: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $.01 < p < .05$ ; \*  $.05 < p < .10$

## Results

Regarding the measurement part of the specification process, a first step defines the number of factors at play. Starting from Self-Congruity, two factors emerge clearly from EFA, respectively related to the real (5 items) and ideal (4 items) self-perception; CFA shows that these two factors can be used as latent indicators of an overall second-level factor for Self-Congruity, including both real and ideal items. As for the functional congruity construct, EFA shows the presence of 3 distinct factors (Natural Resource & Infrastructure, Leisure, and Facilities & Comfort), each measured by 3 items; in this case the overall CFA model does not allow to incorporate them in a unique second-level factor. Thus, together with Self Congruity, Natural Resource & Infrastructure, Leisure and Facilities & Comfort will be considered as different exogenous antecedents of the endogenous variables of interest: Satisfaction (4 items), Sport Event Involvement (4 items) and Behavioral Intentions (3 items). The structural model presented in Figure 1 is a recursive one, in which all exogenous variables have an effect on Satisfaction (H1 and H2) and on Sport Event Involvement (H6 and H7), which also depends on Satisfaction itself (H4).

Finally, Behavioral Intentions depend on Satisfaction (H3) and Sport Event Involvement (H5), which therefore act as mediators of the effects of the exogenous variables on behaviors. The estimation results are in the first column of Table 3. The model shows a discrete level of all fit measures, allowing to interpret the results to test hypotheses. The data confirms all hypotheses, with the only exception of some specific effects from functional congruity factors: while Natural Resource & Infrastructure has a significant effect both on Satisfaction and Sport Event Involvement, all effects of Leisure and Facilities & Comfort are not significant. Finally, the use of modification indexes shows that some originally neglected direct effects on Behavioral Intentions (Natural Resource & Infrastructure and Facilities & Comfort) are indeed significant. Thus, the mediation hypothesis is only partially verified in our context. The last two columns of Table 3 show the estimates of a multigroup SEM aimed at testing the moderation hypothesis of training intensity. There are two, significantly different parameters, both regarding the direct effects on Behavioral Intentions: the effect of Satisfaction is only significant for High Intensity Training backgrounds triathletes, while the effect of Facilities & Comfort is only present for Low Intensity Training ones.

**Table 3.** Estimates of the structural model with and without moderation

	NO moderation			Moderation					
	Whole sample			High Intensity			Low Intensity		
	Est.	S.e.	Sig.	Est.	S.e.	Sig.	Est.	S.e.	Sig.
Satisfaction									
Natural resources	.277	.039	***	.277	.039	***	"		
Leisure	-.017	.031		-.017	.031		"		
Facilities & comfort	-.029	.042		-.030	.042		"		
Self-congruity	.331	.047	***	.334	.047	***	"		
Sport event involvement									
Satisfaction	.553	.042	***	.552	.042	***	"		
Natural resources	.099	.030	***	.099	.030	***	"		
Self-congruity	.237	.042	***	.228	.043	***	"		
Behavioral Intentions									

Sport event involvement	.385	.076	***	.401	.075	***	"
Satisfaction	.282	.070	***	.415	.075	***	- .083 .021
Natural resources	.131	.047	**	.158	.048	***	"
Facilities & comfort	.114	.056	**	-.089	.078		.257 .072 ***
<hr/>							
Fit indexes							
Chi square (dof)	1788	(694)		1759	(692)		"
RMSEA	.068			.067			"
CFI	.917			.919			"
TLI	.909			.911			"
SRMR	.072			.066			"

Note 1: " same values as High Intensity

Note 2: \*\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $.01 < p < .05$ ; \*  $.05 < p < .10$

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Self-congruity appears to be a quite strong antecedent of satisfaction and involvement. This is in line with results of extant research (Kressman et al., 2006). The effect of self-congruity and of (some) components of functional congruity evaluations remarks the importance of developing synergies between the event-related components, and destination related components. Sport events' perceived image appears to be a determinant component for active sport tourists. However, destinations are likely to have a relevant, complementary role. The centrality of the sport experience in the touristic experience is confirmed by the significant impact of sport event involvement on ultimate behavioral intentions. Of particular interest,

both for consumer researchers and sport and tourism marketers is to deepen the relationship destination-event in sport tourism. From this point of view, results of this study suggest a careful management of the structure and the value proposition of the combined sport-touristic offering. The point is raised looking at the different significances of the single functional attributes related to the event. Note how, for example, attributes related to facilities and comfort, and leisure-related characteristics are not significant

at all with respect to tourist satisfaction, while other factors, like available natural resources and infrastructures turn out to be significant.

In some sense, these results confirm suggestions of Bosnjak et al (2016), suggesting a high relevance of the sport activity itself, over and above the different contents of the offering. In other words, active sport tourists might pay high attention to the evaluation of technical characteristics of the event, related, for example, to the possibility of performing the sport activity without difficulties, and obtaining all the necessary technical support. This should not suggest that destination is irrelevant at all in determining ultimate evaluations of consumers: infrastructure and natural resources appear as significantly influencing consumer satisfaction and involvement. This confirms previous research, suggesting an interdependence between sport-related and tourism-related elements. Such interdependence might be particularly relevant for disciplines entailing a strong interaction with the surrounding territory, like triathlon.

The introduction of the moderating effect of training background provides some additional insights. The majority of the relationships and their interpretations are mostly confirmed. Note that, the “Facilities & Comfort” functional attribute is only significant for low-intensity training athletes. In addition, the effect of satisfaction is only significant -highly significant- for high-intensity athletes. Active sport tourists appear strongly committed to their respective disciplines. Particularly, as the sport discipline absorbs a significant amount of resources in individual’s lives (i.e., denoted by a high-intensity training), the sport event per se is highly valued by individuals. In this sense, they are strongly driven, in their future intentions, by the experienced level of satisfaction. Highly-trained active sport tourists (i.e., experienced) are likely to be closer to an athlete, rather than to a tourist. Through their relevant experience, they have developed such an expertise and a technical competence, so that they are likely to technically evaluate sport events to which they participate (or have participated in the past). Technical aspects are likely to be strongly relevant for them (see the relevance of the attribute Natural Resources & Infrastructures: they are functional to the triathlon competition). Such evaluative ability is very likely to be a stringent selection criterion among the different, available events. The destination is thus incorporated into a wider system of offering, which is more complex to manage than a traditional touristic offering system. Low intensity athletes (i.e., less experienced customers) tend to show more moderate tendencies. For them, only the facility/comfort component is significant, suggesting that these individuals value more the leisure side of the experience.

Sport and tourism amalgamate there under the leisure domain, leading to a less extreme consumer, which is likely to seek a challenging, involving

experience, without giving to it totalizing meanings. The discussion above provides a relevant suggestion for sport tourism marketing, remarking the need to carefully screen demand, and to consider needs of a multifaced clientele. Marketers must be aware of the need to develop differential strategies, and, more in general, of the need to create events that must interact, complement surrounding environment, not being just means of touristic promotion. They should create themselves value for the customer. Results provided are of interest both for tourism and sport research, and suggest the need to further explore such contexts, which pose at the edge between sport consumer behavior and tourism consumer behavior. There is an increasing need to explore the interrelations between motivations, different event attributes, and consumer preferences. Some limitations of the study can be identified. The model could be further extended by adding other moderating variables, such as travel motivation, lifestyles, or psychographics. Second, the study is limited to European events. Another limitation concerns the cross-sectional nature of data; further research efforts might explore the proposed relationships over time.

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