

# *The International Hospitality and Tourism Student Journal*

## Sports Tourism in Limerick City (Ireland): an assessment of its impact in tourism terms.

Leah Woods, Majella Golden & Dr Noëlle O'Connor\*

*Limerick Institute of Technology, Ireland.*

\* Corresponding author. Tel: +353 (0)61 490166E-mail: noelle.oconnor@lit.ie

---

### Abstract

The study has examined this by exploring an extensive range of literature relevant to the topic's history and in the case of Limerick city, influential recent events like the Special Olympics 2010. It has explored the topic of sports tourism and its impact by interviewing key stakeholders and identifying whether they utilise sports tourism to gain maximum exposure of Limerick city and the Shannon Region to tourists of all multitudes. The paper has considered whether tourists and local residents associate sport as having a positive impact on a county in terms of media and advertising. This was demonstrated by focusing on two key groups- tourists and locals using surveys designed by the researchers. The data in the research process was obtained from tourists, local residents, key stakeholders within the Shannon Region using semi-structured interviews, surveys and from relevant literature in terms of both a global and a national level perspective. The literature and data was analysed by comparing different opinions and from research that has previously been investigated. Based on the findings from the research methods employed by the writer, it is anticipated that the aims and objectives of the study will be met in showing the reader that it is evident that sports tourism has always existed and played a vital role in terms of its impact on the economy of a locality, that it continues to do so today and will likely long continue into the future.

*Keywords:* Sport tourism; Limerick city; positive impact

© 2012 International Hospitality Research Centre. All rights reserved.

---

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this research study is to examine the background to the title of the study "Sports Tourism in Limerick City, an assessment of its impact in tourism terms". By examining sports tourism in Limerick and by discovering the impact the researchers' key case study "The Special Olympics 2010" had on the region, the researchers hopes to, by analysis of literature, financial findings and research methods determine the impact on Limerick in terms of the local economy, future events and media coverage. This can be achieved by examining sports tourism and where it originated and the history that lies behind the sports tourism concept, looking at sports tourism in Ireland and how it has developed since its early establishment in the era of the Tailteann Games, examining sports tourism in the Shannon Region, with specific emphasis on Limerick City and to determine whether sports tourism has and is playing a role in developing Limerick as a sporting capital. Finally, the author would like to look at the key case study of the Special Olympics in 2010 and to examine the impact this event had on Limerick.

The literature review will look at the following elements: A historical view of Sports Tourism, a view of Sports Tourism in Ireland, Sports Tourism in the Shannon Region specifically Limerick, Shannon Development's interest in Sport, Limerick as European City of Sport, the Special Olympic Games Ireland that were hosted in Limerick in 2010 and its effects on the region financially and the expansion of sports tourism within Limerick in recent times and where the city is headed in the future.

### 2. Literature review

#### *2.1.1. A Historical View of Sports Tourism*

The concept of sports related tourism has become more prominent in the last few years globally, both as an academic field of study and as an increasingly popular tourism product. Currently Sports Tourism is more popular than in its early days of establishment in 600BC. Sports tourism can be dated back to 632BC to King Luaghaidh who to honour his foster

mother Queen Tailte decided to host the Tailteann Games. The Tailteann Games were where famous athletes from Irish history met to participate in friendly competition. The games began on August 1st and ran for one week, they were attended by Kings, Chieftains and nobles from all over. In 1169, a significant date in Irish history, the last traditional Tailteann Games were held under the rule of Rory O'Connor the final High King of Ireland, as unfortunately, the Normans invaded Ireland that year and this was the last of the games until 1924-1932. 776 BC saw the birth of another prominent example of sports tourism, the Greek Olympic Games. The Greek Olympic Games were held in Honour of the Greek Gods. Hercules, son of Greek God Zeus established the games. The touring part of the games was a critical element and this is where the focus on the tourism aspect crossed paths with the Olympic sport. "The games at Olympia may have attracted as many as 40,000 people from all parts of Greece." (Weed, M, Bull, C, 2009). The Olympic Games were abolished by the Roman Emperor Theodosius in 393AD and weren't seen again for fifteen hundred years. The rise of the Olympics occurred in the early 1800's. 1896 saw fewer than five hundred athletes representing thirteen nations in comparison to The Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 that saw eleven thousand and twenty eight athletes representing two hundred and four countries. This comparison shows the development in sports tourism globally. Examining the historical facts shows that Sports Tourism is not a new phenomenon and that old attributes may in turn influence current activity within the world of sport known today.

### 2.1.2. Sport tourism- a global perspective

With its remarkable growth the World Tourism Organization (WTO) recognises the emergence of sports tourism as a continuously growing market. Over the last ten to fifteen years the emphasis on elite sports has grown at a remarkable rate. Sports Tourism continues to receive increasing attention and in recent years has been viewed as an economic development strategy (Crompton, 1999). Globally, heads of state are realising the effect one side of tourism can have on a whole economy. Public and private stakeholders are interested in adding the brand element of sport to their destination portfolio thus further adding to the overall appearance of their destination, as well as a means of enhancing their local economies (Daniels, 2006). In 2001 there was a global shift towards the acceptance of the concept of sports tourism when the World Tourism Organisation and the International Olympic committee hosted a major international conference on sport and tourism (Hinch, T and Higham J, 2004). Recent trends show that the spirit and love of sports tourism is very much alive. A major event that united fans of sport globally was hosted by New Zealand the Rugby World Cup 2011. This event shows how one sporting event can impact massively on the national economy and the local economies. While sports tourism has had a remarkable effect on economies, smaller economies and communities can miss out on recognisable opportunities, because of the issue of size, locality, infrastructure and

popularity. Major events like World Cups, Super Bowls, Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup events need efficient site options; this is why suitable areas are quickly narrowed globally. (Daniels, 2006 as cited in Gratton et al 2005). The bidding for the 2012 Olympic Games was a tense time for London in 2005. They won the bid after much speculation and a few unfortunate mistakes within the bidding process. Figure 1 shows the overall figures for the bidding process in 2005.

2012 Summer Olympic Bidding Results					
City	NOC	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
London	Great Britain	22	27	39	54
Paris	France	21	25	33	50
Madrid	Spain	20	32	31	-
New York City	United States	19	16	-	-
Moscow	Russia	15	-	-	-

Figure 1: Olympic Bidding

A major drive to carry out improvements to buildings, sports facilities and infrastructure has taken place since the announcement of London hosting the 2012 Olympics. A few examples include the building of the Olympic Park, the expansion of London's over-ground East line and the introduction of the Javelin speed line. The hope for Ireland and other surrounding European countries is that the Olympics will produce a knock on effect in that spectators travelling to the Games may avail of the opportunity to travel to nearby countries, thus bringing in much needed tourist spend. Ireland qualified for many Olympic events for 2012 including boxing, cycling and athletics. Northern Ireland has been chosen to host the pre-training of the Chinese artistic gymnastics in their sports grounds in Lisburn. It was officially announced in December of 2011, that Dublin will be part of the relay of the Olympic Torch on the 6th of June 2012. Speaking on the news of this Chairman of the London 2012 organising committee, Lord Sebastian Coe, said they were delighted to bring the torch to Dublin.

## 2.2. Contexts

### 2.2.1. Ireland's Sporting History

The Irish Free State's answer to the Olympic Games was the Tailteann Games 1924-1932. The arrival of mass sporting events in Ireland was for most an unusual occurrence in the early 20th Century. "For the first time, sport could be brought to a nationwide or international audience through the mass media". The Tailteann Games were intended as a mass sports tourism attraction. The Games were intended to be a revival of Irish sporting history that was crushed by the Normans in 1169. Sport was an important aspect of Irish Nationalism. This was evidenced with the foundation of the GAA on November 1st 1884 by Michael Cusack. The GAA, initially known as the Gaelic Athletic Association for the preservation and cultivation of national pastimes, was established due to Mr Cusack's realisation of a need for rules and regulations, due to a game being disrupted several times between Metropolitans and

Killiomar in Co. Galway, as a result of neither team playing the same way. The GAA was at first seen to be merely a nationalist political organisation as it implemented a ban on any games perceived as foreign. But this perception changed over time, with teams and local committees forming annually, as stated by Diarmuid Ferriter “GAA was one of the most successful and original mass movements and that its importance has not yet been fully recognised” (Ferriter, 2004, p 101-105).

Rugby originally seen as a foreign sport first became prominent in 1854 when introduced at Dublin University. The introduction of rugby being played in Ireland rose in popularity and became prominent in colleges and rugby clubs nationwide. The first international rugby match was played in February 1875 versus England, with twenty players per team in comparison to today's fifteen players per team. In 1879 two unions joined forces to establish the Irish Rugby Football Union, and this amalgamation represented a huge change with a “foreign” game officially being governed and played in Ireland. In 1885 there were officially twenty-six rugby clubs throughout Leinster, Ulster and Munster, Connacht came on board in 1886. There are currently two hundred and five rugby clubs in Ireland showing the clear increase in the passion and freedom of sport. The GAA and the Irish Rugby Football Union were two major organisations within Irish sporting history, yet a few more memorable events mapped the way for future sporting tourism to follow. In 1903 the Gordon Bennett Cup Motor Car Race was held in Ireland as the stretches of road were long enough, unlike Britain. This Cup saw the establishment of further sporting events to come as it was a success and mapped the way for other motor racing spectator events between British and Irish competitors. Basketball is often thought of as a sport borrowed from America, but what is not widely known was that it was actually introduced in the 1920's to Ireland, by Sergeant Major Doogan into Irish army camps as a form of exercise for boxers. The Tour de France annual cycling endurance test, mapped the way for Ireland to be recognised as a country of sporting greats in 1987 when cyclist Stephen Roche won the 74th competition. Mr Roche was the first and only Irish man to date to win the Tour de France.

### *2.2.2. Sports Tourism in Ireland- a recent perspective*

What can be said about Ireland and its sports, the variety is colossal and captivating. The appetite of the fan base in sporting activities shows the determination of the nation to succeed in sport. This success can and has showcased the island of Ireland as a successful tourism product. Mr Martin Cullen, the former Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism said during an interview for Irish sports.ie that: The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport was first created in 1959. The Department has progressed when others have been downsized and have had budgets cut, this validates the importance of sport to Ireland's economy. In 2009 the “Sports Tourism Initiative” was set up, to encourage major sporting events with the potential of bringing a progressive number of overseas and domestic tourists to Ireland. As a

result of this initiative, Failte Ireland have supported many events including the Solheim Cup 2011 which was held in September and proved to be very successful, the Irish Open golf tournament, The Volvo Ocean Races and the tour of Ireland International Cycling Race, along with many more successful sporting events. A report carried out in 2010 by Failte Ireland showed the many activities that overseas visitors took part in while visiting Ireland. Just over one million tourists in 2010 visiting Ireland took part in a sporting activity, with two hundred and forty five thousand people saying that the reason they chose Ireland was to go Hill Walking, which clearly shows that participating in sporting activities as well as attending sporting events is very important to overseas and domestic visitors.

Ireland unfortunately has never been chosen to host the FIFA World Cup or the Rugby World Cup. Events of this stature would increase the economy and the level of overseas visitors dramatically. Huge international events like these have never been or have rarely been hosted in a country of Ireland's size, as it is believed to be too difficult to accommodate the high level of tourists that would swarm to these events as well as the staging of the actual event also. In 2003 Ireland held the biggest event that the country had ever hosted. This event was the Special Olympics and marked the first occasion for the Special Olympic Games to be held outside of the United States. “This was a huge honour to be bestowed on Ireland as a nation. Although Ireland lacked the same level of infrastructure and facilities as that of the U.S.A., the organisational members pulled together to make the 2003 Special Olympics arguably the most memorable of all time. The host town system for the Special Olympics played a vital role in the inclusion of many local towns, which gave a boost to the local economies. It also provided an opportunity for visiting athletes, their families and the hosts town people to mix at social and sporting events, “the Olympics aided the local towns through the host town system”. The host town system saw Irish families taking in athletes and caring for them. This host town system had a knock on effect for many years to follow, resulting in tourists or families and friends of the athletes continuing to visit and return to where the athlete had stayed. An estimated seventy five thousand spectators were out in force the night of the opening ceremony in Croke Park. This event created remarkable publicity for Ireland as a sporting event country.

### *2.2.3. Sports Tourism in the Shannon Region*

The Shannon Region is made up of Limerick, Clare, South Offaly and North Tipperary. Shannon Development, formerly known as the Shannon Free Airport Development Company was first established in 1959, Shannon Development was set up as regional company dedicated to developing and promoting the Shannon Region of Ireland. Plans were put in place to make Shannon a location for tourists and for industrial work. The Shannon Region today holds a celebrated title of being a region strongly involved in events through sport. The recent hosting of the World Corporate Games, Heineken Cup rugby matches and many

GAA games lead significantly to the Shannon Region's growth within the last decade in terms of Sports Tourism. In March of this year, at the annual briefing of the Shannon Regions tourism industry Dr. Pat Daly, Marketing and Tourism Manager for Shannon Development, spoke of the region's success regarding tourism "Tourism is one of the key economic drivers in the Shannon Region economy employing over 25,000 people in 1,000 companies and attracting over 1.7 million visitors annually.

#### 2.2.4. Shannon Developments interest in Sport

Sports tourism is worth more than €60 million to the region annually. Sports tourism is a joint enterprise in the region between Shannon Development and the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau. This initiative targets mass participation sports as well as large scale attractor events. In 2010 thanks to this collaboration of organisations, their activities resulted in 7 new sports events taking place within the region, worth €4.7 million. The Sports Conference and Bureau are a non-profit organisation whose main aim is to showcase the Shannon Region as the ideal venue for meetings, conferences, athlete training venues and a variety of sporting events. Speaking at a recent conference Eoghan Prendergast, Shannon Development's Limerick Development Division Manager, said: "Sport is a key strength for Limerick at national and international level and has been one of a number of key development drivers through which progress in tourism, enterprise, investment and regeneration has been secured. We are delighted to hold the Conference in the City as Limerick's reign as European City of Sport 2011 draws to a close." The events held in 2010 to name a few include the Strongman Champions League, the Great Limerick Run, E-Tape Hibernia, the Australian Rules Series and the Special Olympics Ireland Games.

#### 2.2.5. Limerick "European City of Sport 2011"

2010 was a great sporting year for Limerick, leading the way for the bid of the European City of Sport for 2011 by Shannon Development. Sport can and is used to differentiate one city from another, in the case of Limerick this is what was achieved. In July 2010, delegates from Milan arrived in Limerick to be given the tour of the city's sporting facilities, by Shannon Development's Chief Executive, Dr Vincent Cunnane. The European Capital Cities of Sport Association was founded in 2001, with Madrid in Spain becoming the first "City of Sport". Limerick's nomination was a huge honour and recognition of achievement from an international viewpoint, especially the fact that the title was the first of its kind to be seen within the country of Ireland. The President of the International Olympic Committee Dr Jacques Rogge describes sports as "Sport, like music, is something universal, something that is understood all around the world, regardless of social, ethnic or religious differences. Not only sport is universal, but also its values." Figure 2 illustrates the seven European Cities of Sport for 2011.



Figure 2: Seven nominated Cities of Sport

In a report by Shannon Development surrounding the launch of Limerick and its reign as European City of Sport for 2011, it announced that already, because of this accolade, €5 million in revenue towards new sports events within the county had been secured. According to Dr Vincent Cunnane Chief Executive of Shannon Development "Sport is a major economic driver for Limerick as evidenced by the success of the Heineken and Magners league games, the Compromise Rules games and the 2010 Special Olympic Ireland Games". The exhilarating fact that the 2012 Olympic Games is taking place in London, has spurred Shannon Development to market Limerick as the ideal destination for sports events and conferences. "The Company see this not just as a one year opportunity but over the coming years, working with our partners Limerick City and County Councils, we plan to use the status of European City of Sport to create a lasting legacy for the people of Limerick," said Dr. Cunnane."

The people and sporting heroes of the region show the true meaning of sport which is dedication and passion. Limerick winning the title of European City of Sport was well deserved. Looking back at November 2009 when the "Sports Ambassador Scheme" was launched shows the strong underlying commitment and role people are willing to play in order to achieve the best possible results. Speaking about the role of the Sports Ambassador, Karen Brosnahan, Business Development Manager for the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau said, "A sports ambassador is someone who is willing, with our help, to bid for a national or international sporting event. We are looking for people involved in sports of all kinds from sailing, surfing, swimming to cycling, golf, badminton, walking, this list is endless, who know of upcoming national and overseas events in their sport to get in touch with us." Many well-known sporting legends got involved to help in pursuit of the bigger picture, which later resulted in Limerick, becoming "European City of Sport". A few of the names who were involved were Keith Wood, Packie Bonner and Peter Clohessy. Shannon Development issued a report titled "Limerick European City of Sport 2011" to the Department of Tourism and Sport in November 2010. This report outlined the following strategic objectives that fell perfectly in place with the title of European City of Sport being awarded.

The objectives were as follows:

- Attract more visitors and sports events
- Create a positive lasting legacy on a number of fronts

- Create major new sporting products for the city
- Employ sport as a key tool for regeneration and social inclusion
- Improve the city's external image
- Secure more conferences
- Support on-going investment in sport and related infrastructure
- Maintain the "Limerick-city of sport" brand into the future

The collaboration of evidence and statements is a view from the authors perspective, in order to effectively demonstrate the importance of sports tourism within the Shannon region, where sports tourism originated from globally, domestically and how one major sporting event like the Special Olympic Games Ireland can greatly benefit a city during the actual event but also continue to benefit the city and its environs in its aftermath.

#### 2.2.6. 2010 Special Olympics Ireland Games- Limerick

Limerick was the ideal applicant city to host the Special Olympic Games in 2010, being the country's third largest city with a population of over 90,000 residents and a city with a prominent reputation for sports events. It had a sufficient infrastructure to support the influx of athletes and their supporters, medical and media personnel. It had a transport system which was more than adequate to deal with the travel requirements of all concerned, with Shannon airport being within close proximity and a road system which has rapidly improved within the past few years. It also had a central railway and bus station, which was invaluable for those arriving in the city. It had a large number of beds in a variety of accommodation settings, which coped exceedingly well with the visitors. Limerick wasn't just a city of sport in the eyes of the visitors, it had many areas of historical interest that benefited from an increase in visitor numbers on the days of the Games. The Special Olympics encouraged visitors to expand their experience of the counties in close proximity to Limerick. Galway, Cork, Clare all received floods of visitors also. The main hub for the Olympic Games was the University of Limerick Campus, which catered for over 10,000 during the five days of the games. The Campus is famously used by the Munster Rugby team and the Irish Rugby team for training camps so the link for the athletes with some of their heroes was a great occasion.

#### 2.2.7. Economic Impact of 2010 Special Olympic Games Ireland on Limerick

Special Olympics Ireland and Shannon Development commissioned a study by Focus Consulting to discover the impact that the Games had on Limerick financially. The consulting firm went about this by conducting seven stakeholder surveys. The following were the surveys undertaken:

- Coaches and Delegates Survey

- Family and Supporter survey
- Limerick City Hotel Occupancy Survey
- Local Business Survey
- Local Community Survey across Limerick City
- Sponsors Survey
- Volunteers Survey

Focus Consulting conducted these surveys and along with all the financial data relating to the Games 2010, the overall economic impact that was outlined was as follows: Bed nights in total for the ten nights of the games were twenty four thousand for Limerick and the Region. This figure was excluding five thousand seven hundred bed nights for families that stayed with friends and family in the area. Nine thousand families and supporters travelled to the region, with many of them as shown already staying for some of the nights in the region. Thirty five thousand four hundred and eighty two meals were prepared for athletes, coaches and volunteers over the days of the events. The average expenditure per attendee was €390. Accommodation accounted for 30% of expenditure among attendees and food accounted for 23% of attendees' expenditure. 71% of attendees who spent at least one night in Limerick used local hotels and guesthouses. 50% of family and supporters of the athletes stayed for three nights or more in Limerick. The average hotel occupancy between the Wednesday and Sunday of the Games was 94%. Focus Consulting established that the overall cost of the Special Olympic Games Ireland in 2010, was €2.871 million. The total economic impact on the local economy was €9.95 million and the direct expenditure of employees was €4.285 million, overall the total media value earned for Limerick was €1.395 million.

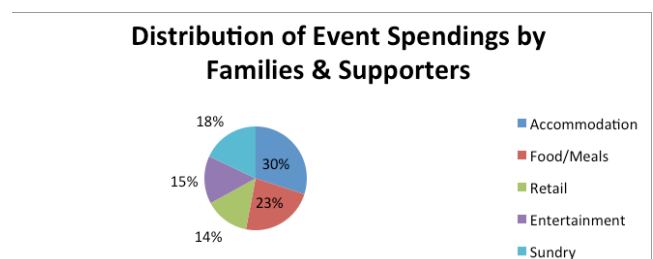


Figure 3: Distribution of even spending by families and supporters

#### 2.2.8. Limerick- the city of sport

The above statement was one of speculation at the time, a statement by a firm who were able to weigh the pros and cons in 2010. The statement turned out to be justified. The renovation of Thomand Park Stadium has been a tremendous boost for Limerick's local economy, as well as promoting its image as a sporting destination internationally. Since the stadium was re launched in 2008, it has contributed over €132 million to the local economy. The stadium holds many key sports events like the Heineken Cup and the Magners league matches, now known as the Rabo-Direct League, as already mentioned by the author. These events continue to showcase Limerick as a successful sports

destination. Limerick has long enjoyed a reputation as a City with a long and honourable sporting tradition. Thomond Park stands as a historic place of prominence since 1978 when Munster took on the All Blacks and defeated them.

A play was written by John Breen called "Alone it Stands", which shows the importance of rugby to the city and how a historic victory over thirty years ago is still held close to the hearts of rugby fans. "Alone It Stands" tells the story of the historic rugby match at Thomond Park between the 1978 Munster team and the esteemed, larger-than-life international New Zealand All Blacks." This play was recognised nationally and internationally and once again promoted the importance of Thomond Park and rugby to the people of Munster and further afield.

A major legal precedent was set in 2010 when a ruling by Limerick City District court established the importance of rugby to the people of Limerick. The pubs of Limerick, for the first time ever, were allowed to open their doors on Good Friday April 2nd 2010. This ruling by the court was due to Munster v Leinster playing in Thomond Park on that day. This ruling shows the prestige that goes hand in hand with sport in Limerick, Judge Tom O'Donnell said "Having considered all the submissions, I am satisfied that the match has all the vestiges and attributes of a special event". The Strand Hotel Limerick, located seven minutes walking distance from Thomond Park Stadium, is just one of the local hotels that plays a vital role on match days just like many pubs and restaurants in the city. The Strand hotel has carved a niche role in hosting pre-match lunches and after match dinners and drinks for guests and visitors, and some team players are familiar faces to the hotel also. In recent times, Limerick has received the accolade of winning a bid to be one of the venues for the Rugby League World Cup 2013, Thomond Park will host the event.

Rugby League Ireland's Gordon Matthews spoke of the announcement: "This is something that we have been working for now for over a year. We are looking at an October date for this game and it will be an exciting time to be part of Rugby League. There were a total of 34 bids for the games and we are so lucky to have secured this marquee event for Limerick and of course for Ireland. The work done by Shannon Development and the Sports bureau cannot be underestimated". More than half a million people are expected to watch the 28 matches live over a six-week period in the autumn of 2013 with a further 20 million viewers from 120 countries tuning in around the world. This is great publicity for Limerick worldwide. Limericks colleges are also fierce rivals in terms of sport. Many sporting legends have emerged from Limerick Institute of Technology, located 2 minutes from Thomond Park Stadium. Limerick Institute of Technology and Thomond Park announced the beginning of their new partnership in November 2011. The partnership will enhance collaboration between the iconic rugby stadium and the college. This partnership sees more opportunities for students to get involved in events, sports and business. John Cantwell CEO of Thomond Park said the agreement represented a "positive commitment from both organisations

to work together to develop new and mutually beneficial initiatives".

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Approach

Research is known to be an art of methodical investigation and is a critical aspect in the process of discovering the opinions and facts of the subjects in question. Creswell defines research as "the process of making claims and then refining or abandoning some for other claims more strongly warranted. Most qualitative research, for example starts with the test of a theory". A key element needed by the researchers is that of an open mind. The process of research can be tedious and the researchers must be accepting of the challenges and issues that can arise. Below Figure 4 illustrates the process that is involved in research as outlined by (Hemmington, 1998).

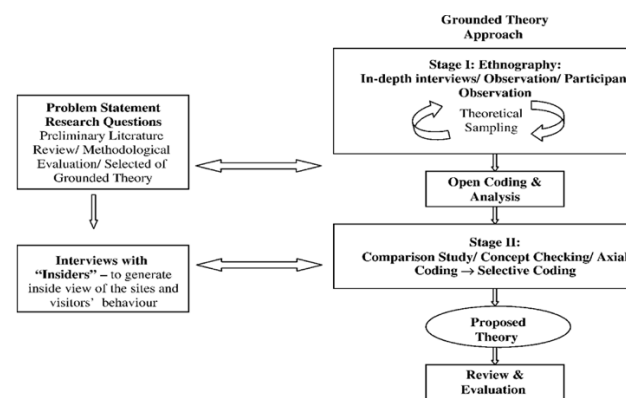


Figure 4: The Research Process

The researchers after much consideration decided that a deductive research approach was the most effective option, to investigate the research objectives. The deductive method can be a research source to seek information outside of the norm; this is why the researchers opted for this method. Bryman et al, 2003 states how "deductive research can sometimes produce unexpected findings", this statement shows how the researchers was feeling in choosing their method of research. A deductive method begins with a general theory evaluation. In the case of this study, the general theory is Sports Tourism and this is eventually broken down to specific data that suits the subject being assessed. In order for the research aim to be addressed sufficiently, the researchers adopted a pooled approach of surveys and interviews with relevant stakeholders. The researchers felt that a mixed variation of both primary and secondary research would be best suited to examine the overall research aims and objectives which are discussed further on. Methodological triangulation is the most appropriate means of accessing useful data, (Cohen and Manion, 2000) refer to triangulation as "an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint." A mixture of qualitative

and quantitative research was used; they took the form of surveys and interviews with key tourism informants within Limerick.

### 3.2. *Secondary data*

In order to enhance the knowledge and to research all the relevant aspects of the chosen subject effectively, the researchers used a large quantity of secondary data. This data included journal articles, statistics from Shannon Development on the data from the Special Olympics, newspaper articles, books and financial findings from sports events. The use of the Internet provided the researchers with a large amount of information, some of which was useful in the context of this research. Shannon Development's website proved to be very informative, the articles on sports tourism in the Shannon Region were very helpful and enlightening for the researchers. Various websites launched in recent times concerning Limerick data specifically also proved to be very helpful. These included *limerick.ie*, *ilovelimerick.ie* and *limerickcity.ie*. During a phone conversation, to organise interviews, Shannon Development staff were generous in helping the researchers by providing an "Economic and Event impact Assessment" report regarding all the financial information on the Special Olympics 2010 carried out by Focus Consulting. This booklet gave the researchers a greater understanding of how one event can influence the way for many more to come.

### 3.3. *Primary data*

The instruments that were used to meet the aims and objectives of this research were primarily two specially designed surveys. These surveys were designed to target Limerick residents and tourists, local and international, in order to gain insight into their views of Limerick and Sport. The surveys were useful to ascertain if the chosen topic was of interest to locals and tourists. The researchers also carried out three semi structured interviews; these interviews took place with three major stakeholders involved in various areas within the Limericks tourism and marketing sector.

Surveys: are they Positive or Negative?

Surveys are very useful in gathering large amounts of information from a very varied group of people. The aim of the survey was to target specific questions in line with the research aims and objectives of the researchers. According to McNabb, 2008 "Surveys can be used to gather information about large numbers of respondents (populations) and from small groups (samples)". Surveys differ from interviews as the information gathered can be generalised rather than just the opinion of an individual. Surveys are known to have many advantages, but one of the main advantages for the researchers was the fact that they can be custom designed to reflect the researchers' stated aims and objectives.

Pilot/Final Survey for Shannon Region Residents

Surveys may be viewed as being more suitable for gathering information when compared to semi structured interviews. However the researchers carried out a pilot survey

with surveys in a designated area of the city in order to test their structure and relevance. This influenced the researchers' decision to re-draft the survey for the Limerick residents. The pilot survey for Limerick residents was carried out on the first week of January 2012. The researchers delivered the surveys to the first fifteen residents in one of the housing estates in the Castletroy area of the city, along with an explanation of their purpose and how their opinions would influence the final draft of the survey. The strategy that was used for the surveys took the form of a probability sampling technique. The residents were chosen by means of random selection. They represented a cross-section of the whole focus population for this study. The population being studied in this case study comes from the Shannon Region, with the main focus on Limerick residents. The sample size of residents that participated in the survey was fifty. Although they are preliminary figures, the Census for Limerick for 2011 stands at 191,306 persons. Therefore the sample group carried out by the researchers represents .0260% of the population. As the sampling technique used by the researchers was a probability sampling technique, the researchers used the same technique to assist them in choosing where within the County they would carry out the fifty surveys. The researchers eventually chose five random housing estates within close proximity to each other. The use of cross-sectional surveys is a more common method as it has been proven to be a quicker and more reliable method, (Babbie, 1990) states that "Cross-sectional surveys are used to gather information on a population at a single point in time." Babbie's (1990) statement outlines how the researchers' method is being used to target a section of a population for information related to their chosen topic.

#### Pilot/Final Survey for Tourists Visiting Limerick

A survey was carried out on the week ending January 8th 2012. The survey was conducted outside the entrance to King John's Castle. The researchers felt that this location was the best area to try to target potential tourists, as King John's Castle is one of the prominent attractions within the city. The researchers targeted fifteen tourists in the pilot stage of the survey. The tourists were asked to look at the survey and the researchers explained what its purpose was and how this, along with the pilot resident survey, was essential in completing the final drafts. The tourists were asked to comment on the layout, wording, effectiveness of the questions and their clarity and to leave any comments that they may have. The researchers, after evaluating the pilot surveys, decided from reading the comments from tourists left it remain unchanged. The final draft of the survey was eventually sampled on a group of fifty tourists at the same location. The annual tourism figures from Failte Ireland for 2010 show that Limerick had 300,000 visitors in 2010. This figure was a slight drop on the visitor numbers from the previous year. This is not surprising due to the current recession. The visitor numbers illustrate the minority within the tourism area that the researchers sampled. As the tourism figures are at such a high rate in comparison to the

population of Limerick, the researchers felt that taking on the method of a non-probability sampling technique would be more effective. The researchers were concerned about the time-frame chosen for the survey, as the sampling period occurred within the tourism off-peak season. A Match Saturday was deemed to be the most effective day to carry out the process. The researchers chose Saturday the 14th of January as Thomond Park were hosting the Heineken Cup rugby match between Munster and Castres. This match brought an influx of international and domestic visitors to the city and as King John's Castle was the perfect walking point through the city (and also one of the routes to Thomond Park) it seemed an ideal location to carry out the survey.

#### Semi-Structured Interviews an Advantage

The interviews took place using a semi structured approach, which can be used to gather less structured information from the key figures under questioning during the interviews. (Glynis Cousin, 2009) refers to semi structured interviews as "allows the researchers to develop in depth accounts of experiences and perceptions with individuals. By collecting and transcribing interview talk, the researchers can produce rich empirical data about the lives and perspectives of individuals". Semi-Structured interviews take on a more relaxed form of interview style in comparison to structured interviews. Structured interviews have to be read word for word by the interviewer, also as a rule, consistency in terms of facial expression and posture must be adhered to. For these reasons the researchers decided that a semi-structured interview style was more relevant to the research study. Semi structured interviews, like structured interviews, follow a core set of interview questions also, but the difference is that semi structured interviews leave some room for exploring topics that may arise from questioning, but might not have been on the original core list of questions. The researchers had prepared a set of core questions to ask the interviewees, but also kept in mind that some questions may lead onto spur of the moment questioning resulting from their answers. This did happen in the case of the interview with Dr. Pat Daly. The Dictaphone recording was important, especially for the tracking of questions that weren't initially on the researchers' core list. Three semi-structured interviews took place within the month of January 2012.

#### Interview with Dr. Pat Daly

The key informant was Dr. Pat Daly, who is the Tourism Marketing Director for Shannon Development. The researchers interviewed him on January 13th 2012. The aim of the interview was to see how Dr Daly, as an employee of a company directly involved in marketing tourism in the Shannon Region, perceived the value of sport throughout the region, vis-à-vis the economy of the region, the influence of sport within the promotion of Limerick as a tourist hub and what, if any, were the influences on the industry as a result of

the Special Olympics in 2010. The interview was recorded using a Dictaphone.

#### Interview with Karen Brosnahan

The second interview took place with Karen Brosnahan, also on the 13th of January. She is an employee of Shannon Development, assigned as Business Development Manager for the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau. She was of particular interest to the researchers because of her involvement with the Conference and Sport Bureau. This bureau is involved in ensuring the Shannon Region is recognised as destination of excellence for meetings, conferences, exhibitions, incentive travel, elite athlete training and sporting events on an international and domestic level. As Karen is involved in such a growing area it provided the researchers with much needed knowledge to achieve the aims and objectives of the research study.

#### Interview with Mary O' Dwyer

The final interview took place on January 16th 2012. This interview was held with the current manager of King John's Castle Nicholas Street, Limerick City. Ms O'Dwyer has been an employee of the Castle for the last 19 years so the researchers felt her perspective would be very useful as she has a direct interface with tourists. Interviewing the Castle's Manager seemed appropriate, as the castle is one of the larger and most visited attractions within the city. The researchers felt that Ms O'Dwyer could share her opinion on how the Castle's daily visitor numbers increase or otherwise on days of sporting events within the city, and if these events in her opinion are positive or negative for business to the castle. Just like the other two interviews, this interview was recorded and transcribed.

## 4. Data analysis result

### 4.1. Results of Surveys administered to Limerick residents

The survey using the surveys was carried out in 4 different housing estates within close proximity to each other, in the suburban Castletroy area of Limerick city. The four estates were chosen on the basis of the diverse range of social status and age. The four estates were Milford Grange, Briarfield, Monaleen Heights and Kilmurry. The process of surveying the participants involved calling door to door within the specific areas and asking for the time of the willing participants. The Following questions and charts illustrate the answers that were given by the residents.

It is evident from Figure 5 that 38 % of Limerick residents who took part in the survey were between the ages of 25-40. 26% of participants were between the ages of 40-65 and 24% represent the number of residents in the youngest age bracket from 18-25. The category of participants above the age of 65 is represented by the "Other" figure of 12%. In the areas chosen the age group of 25-45 was the higher. This did



not surprise the researchers because of the mix of resident's in the estate i.e. family homes and mature students were among the participants in the survey. The time the survey was carried out may also have influenced the data, as it was the evening time and a younger mix of people, such as students at the local University or workers in the surrounding businesses may not have returned home.

Question 1: What age group are you in?

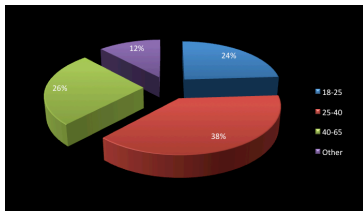


Figure 5: Age Groups

Question 2: Are you male or female?

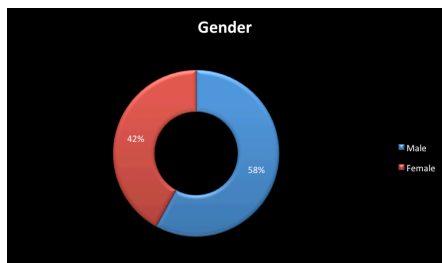


Figure 6: Male or Female

Figure 6 illustrates the overall gender result from the surveys that were handed out within Castletroy. The chart illustrates that 29 out of 50 participants were male and 21 out of 50 residents were female, resulting in a total of 58% male and 42% female. It was apparent to the researchers, from the first estate within Castletroy that it was mostly male residents answering the doors and of course they had a very strong interest in relation to sport within the city. Luckily the other three estates surveyed, resulted in a better gender mix but interestingly, the females also showed a passion for sports.

Figure 7 examines the number of participants currently in any form of employment whether it may be part-time, full time or seasonal. The researchers felt that this question was a key area to focus on as lack of expenditure has an impact on locals taking part in sports events within the city and region. 62% of participants are currently employed and 38% of participants are currently unemployed. The figure of 38% unemployed is high considering this survey focused in on just a mere 50 participants. The current recession has had an impact on all spending levels, and this has been very evident with the decrease in ticket sales for Magners League Rugby in Limerick for 2011.

Question 3: Are you currently employed?

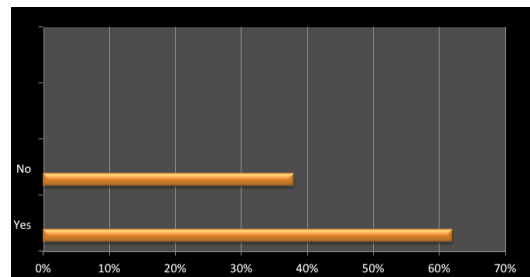


Figure 7: Employed?

Question 4: How often would you attend a sporting event within the region?

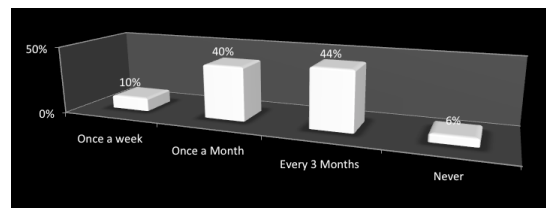


Figure 8: Attending events

Figure 8 illustrates a bar chart displaying how many times participants from Limerick attend any sporting events within the Shannon Region. The analysis of the results showed the researchers that 10% of the 50 people surveyed attend a sporting event at least once a week, 40% of residents surveyed attend an event at least once a month, 44% of participants attend an event at least every three months and a mere 6% never attend any events within the region. These figures demonstrate to the reader how important sports are to the Limerick residents, and this links back to the researcher's objective of examining Sports Tourism within Limerick. These figures provide the reader with primary information regarding the resident's opinions of Sports Tourism within Limerick and how important it is to its residents.

Question 5: Do you feel sports events help to publicise the county in a positive way?

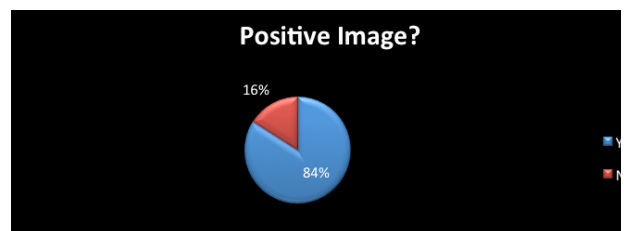


Figure 9: Counties positive image

Figure 9 pie chart segments the breakdown of how the 50 participants felt about sports events within the region and whether the events portray a positive image for the county. 16% felt that sports events don't help to publicise the county in a positive manner, whereas the majority of those surveyed said yes, and stood at 84% of the overall percentage. This

high figure of 84% demonstrates how effective sports events can be in the minds of onlookers and how these events impact positively on a county like Limerick. The researchers also felt that the 16% who had a negative response should provide fuel for the various stake-holders to adopt a proactive approach to change this negative view. The researchers in the next question queried what events were the positive ones in the minds of the residents.

Question 6: Please list three events that you feel have given Limerick a positive sporting image?

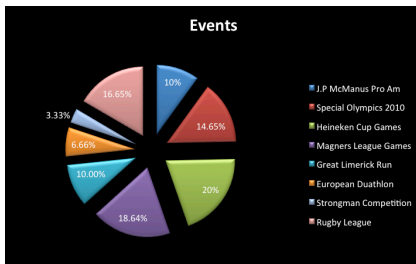


Figure 10: Positive events

Figure 10 illustrates to the reader how 150 answers were analysed by the researchers. 20% of the answers highlighted Heineken Cup Rugby matches as the most popular event, in close running 18.64% mentioned Magners League Games showing how rugby is a key event in Limerick City. 16.65% highlighted the Rugby League matches as positive events, this being a valuable testament to the announcement of the 2013 Rugby League World Cup partially being played in Thomand Park, Limerick. 14.65% illustrates that residents listed 1 out of their 3 answers as the Special Olympics that took place around the region in 2010. This event will hopefully live on in resident's minds considering it was so successful for the Region and as the researchers highlighted in the Literature Review previously, this event alone created €9.95 million for the local economy in 2010. The JP McManus Pro Am and the Great Limerick run were two events that both stand at 10% of the overall figure. 6.66% symbolises the European Duathlon and 3.3% of the answers were for the Strongman Competition that took place in Limerick Racecourse, this event once again establishes the diverse range of sports events now taking place in Limerick.

Figure 11 illustrates that 56% of participants felt that Limerick has a negative media image, with 44% of people stating that Limerick doesn't have a negative media image. Below are some of the statements by residents who felt that Limerick has a negative media image:

- Feuding families.
- Limerick globally is known as stab city due to crimes.
- Negative focus on certain areas.
- Negative TV programmes- Prime Time
- Only negative issues are highly publicised.
- Portrayed as a crime capital by reporters.
- Shooting, stabbings, innocent victims being murdered.
- The media forgets Limerick has a beautiful side to it too.

- Too many bad incidents focused on.

Question 7: Do you feel Limerick has a negative media image?

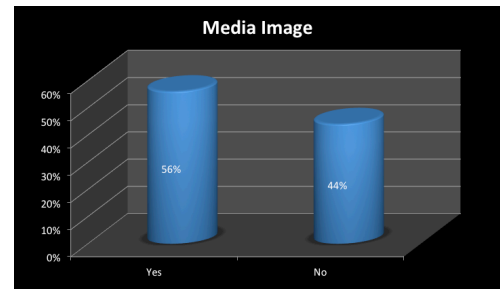


Figure 11: Media image

Question 8: Do you feel sports events are too expensive in the region?

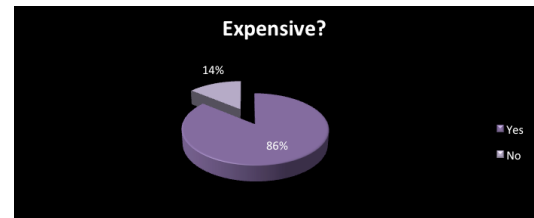


Figure 12: Expensive events.

Figure 12 displays a chart representing how the majority of Limerick residents who took part in this survey felt that sports events are too expensive in the region. 86% of the participants said that they felt sports events were too expensive, with a drastically lower percentage of 14% saying that in their opinion, events within the region were not too expensive. With such a high percentage of residents feeling events are too expensive, particularly during the current recession, sporting companies should re-think ticket prices and should encourage fans to attend events they can afford, rather than being left with half empty stadiums, which does nothing for the morale of either players or fans.

Question 9: Did you attend the Special Olympics in 2010 for any part?

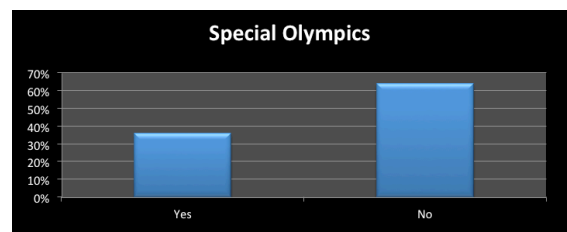


Figure 13: Special Olympics attendance

Figure 13 illustrates the attendance for the Special Olympics by the Limerick residents surveyed by the researchers. 36% of residents surveyed attended at least one

of the Special Olympics events held in Limerick in 2010. 64% of the residents surveyed did not attend any event at all during the ten days they were run. The Special Olympics and its success provided every organisation involved with evidence of how successful events of this stature can be. This event worked to bring locals, competitors, competitor's families and volunteers together. The research conducted by "Focus Consulting" as examined in the Literature review by the researchers showed how there were 9,000 families and supporters in the region during the hosting of The Special Olympic Games. While the researchers was somewhat surprised by the 64% who did not attend any event during the Games, the result was not unexpected due the nature of the profile of the residents in the estates surveyed and the high unemployment rate.

Question 10: Do you feel that Limerick's sporting facilities are adequate?

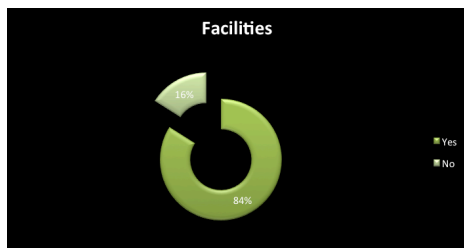


Figure 14: *Sporting Facilities*

Limerick has a very good reputation for sporting facilities and this is demonstrated by the majority of resident's positive responses, with 84% positive as shown in figure 4.10. The residents who felt Limerick's sporting facilities weren't at an appropriate standard ranked at 16%. In terms of facilities, the University of Limerick Campus alone caters for a wide range of sports including Munster and Ireland Rugby training, swimming events, in the 50 Metre Olympic standard swimming pool, basketball courts and much more. The city has the newly re-vamped Thomand Park stadium which plays host to rugby games, international soccer games and is now being developed as a concert venue. In addition, there is the Limerick Gaelic Grounds, host of many a sizzling hurling and football matches, as well as the campus of Limerick Institute of Technology and Mary Immaculate College. The city is one that is steeped in sporting colours and loyalties, with facilities that are constantly being updated and modernised to those of the highest standards.

The question of Limerick being an established area for sports tourism relates specifically to the Figure 12, 76% of participants agreed with the statement, while 24% disagreed. Residents realising the potential of sport and the positive image it can portray for a county enables organisations to gain support from locals and local council bodies. The announcement of Limerick as European City of Sport for 2011 encouraged a more positive media view.

Question 11: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement in relation to Limerick?

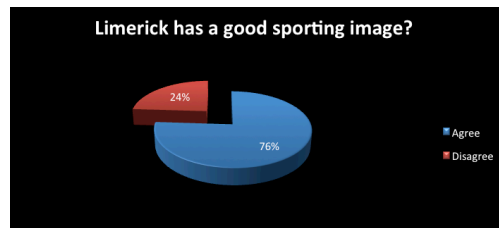


Figure 15: *A good sporting image*

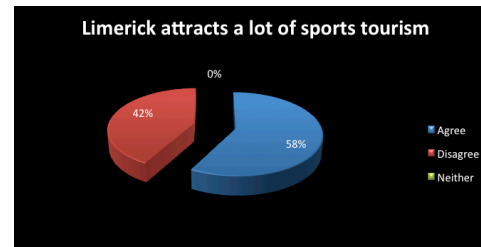


Figure 16: *Sports tourism in Limerick*

Figure 16 illustrates that 58% of participants feel that Limerick attracts a lot of sports tourism, with 42% responding in the negative. Sports Tourism alone is worth more than €60 million to the Shannon Region. The announcement that Thomand Park will host part of the Rugby League World Cup in Limerick in 2013 demonstrates the development in Sports Tourism terms and illustrates how many tourists will travel to the county as spectators.

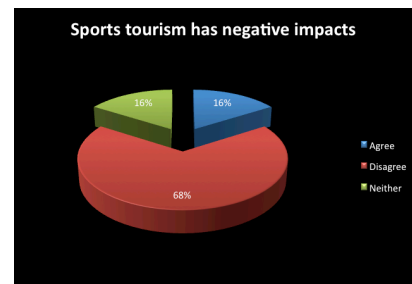


Figure 17: *Sports tourism has negative impacts?*

68% of participants disagreed with the statement obviously feeling that sports tourism has a positive effect on cities and towns. 16% both agreed with the statement and felt that they neither agreed with it nor disagreed with it. With such a high regard for the positive aspects of sports tourism, it is evident once again that survey sample are all for the future development of Sports Tourism within Limerick and further afield.

A staggering 92% of participants felt that sports and nutrition education in Limerick schools doesn't receive enough attention, with only 8% of respondents believing that sports and nutrition information within the education system in Limerick is a good standard. People in Limerick are more interested in fitness and health nowadays. This is evidenced by the emergence of a large number of fitness centres and gyms in the city despite the recession. Beefit is the newest

gym which has just recently been opened and with the long-established JJBs showing no signs of a decrease in business in Limerick. This proves to the researchers the important result that the local interest in sport has achieved.

Question 12: Do you feel the educate system incorporates enough sports and nutrition information within Limerick schools?

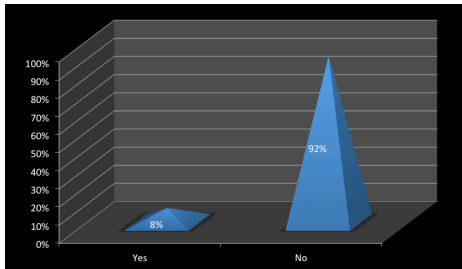


Figure 18: Sports education in schools

4.2. Results from Survey administered to Tourists outside King John's Castle

The survey for tourists was carried out on the 7th and 14th of January outside King John's Castle with 50 surveys being distributed. These dates were chosen specifically as Thomand Park was hosting a Rabo-Direct League game between Munster V Benetton Treviso on the 7th of January and a Heineken Cup Rugby match between Munster V Castres Olympique on the 14th of January. These dates were chosen specifically by the researchers in order to tie in with the research topic and objectives.

Question 1: Where are you visiting from?

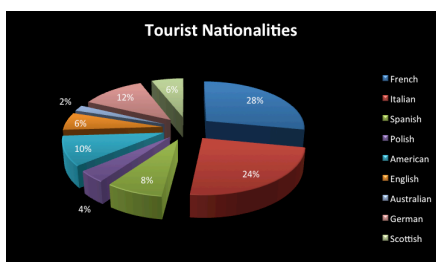


Figure 19: Tourist Nationalities

The above chart illustrates the 9 different nationalities of the survey's respondents. The researchers surveyed a total of 50 tourists. The results showed that 28% were French tourists and were in Limerick presumably as their team was playing, demonstrating to the researchers that spectator sports and team loyalty is expanding. 24% were Italian tourists also in Limerick as a result of their rugby club playing in Thomand Park stadium. A varied range of visitors was then noted, of which 12% were Germans, 10% American tourists, 8% Spanish students, 6% Scottish tourists, 4% Polish Tourists and 2% Australian. It can be clearly seen that the majority of respondents were in town for the match.

Question 2: What age group are you in?

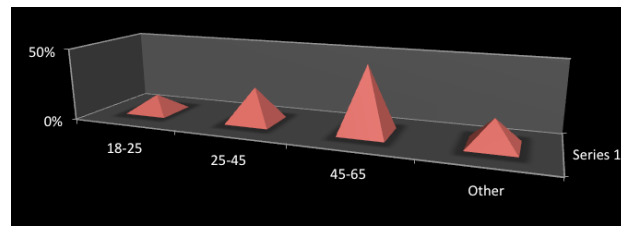


Figure 20: Age Groups

Figure 20 demonstrates to the reader the varied ranges of the ages of participants that took part in the survey. 12% of those tourists surveyed were between the ages of 18-25 years old. 24% of those surveyed were between the ages of 25-45, however the majority of the tourists were in the age brackets were of 45-65 at 46%. The other category represented all tourists over the age of 65 and was 18% of the overall figure. 64% of those surveyed were above the age of 45, which the researchers would have expected, due to financial stability and either retirement or early retirement.

Question 3: Are you male or female?

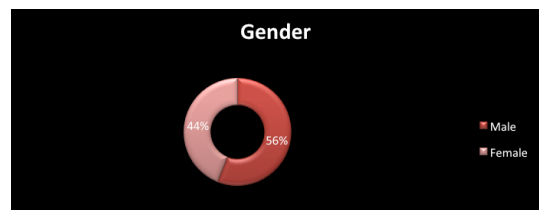


Figure 21: Gender of tourists

Figure 21 shows that 28 out of 50 tourists who took the survey were male and that 22 of the 50 were Female. This shows that 56% of the overall figures were males and females at 44%. These figures are similar to that of the Limerick resident's genders, demonstrating an even mix of those surveyed.

Question 4: Did you come to Limerick for Business or Leisure?

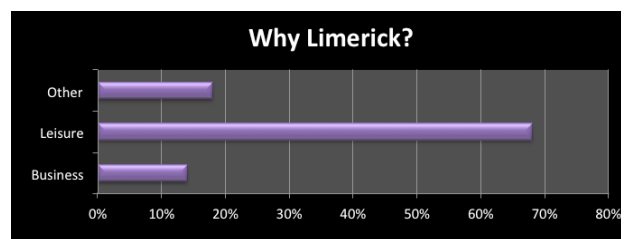


Figure 22: Why Limerick?

Figure 22 establishes the three different categories the tourists had the option of answering in regards to why they were in Limerick. 14% of tourists said they were in Limerick on "Business", 68% of tourists said their reason for being in

Limerick was leisure related and 18% of tourists said they were in Limerick for other reasons. 68% visiting as leisure tourists is a positive sign for the city, whether this leisure reason was sports tourism or tourism it still has a positive impact.

Question 5: If you ticked "other" for question 4, please state why you are visiting Limerick?

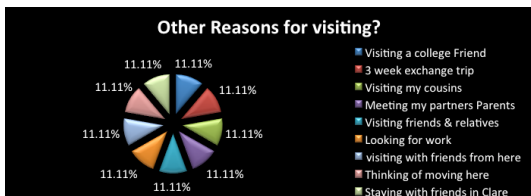


Figure 23: Visiting reasons

It is evident from Figure 23 that the Pie Chart illustrates the reasons given by the 9 individual tourists as to why they were visiting Limerick for reasons other than business and leisure.

Question 6: Will you attend a sporting event while staying in the Shannon Region?

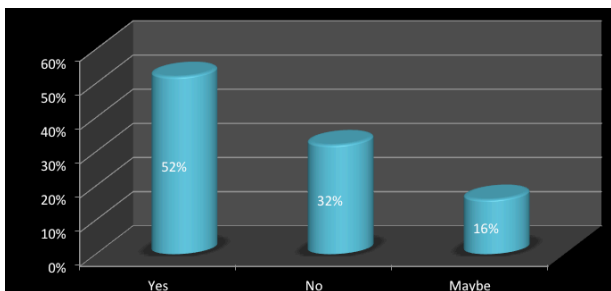


Figure 24: Event attendance

The above chart illustrates how the tourists surveyed answered whether they would be attending a sporting event while in the Shannon Region. It is positive to see that 52% of the participants said they would be attending an event while visiting the region, 32% said no they wouldn't be, hopefully allowing for other businesses to avail of their custom and a positive figure of 16% said they would maybe go to a sporting event while here.

Question 7: How did you hear about Limerick?

Figure 25 segments how each tourist has heard about Limerick. 52% of 50 people surveyed heard about Limerick through sports. 24% of participants heard about Limerick through friends and family, 10% of respondents heard about Limerick through TV and 14% of tourists ticked other for this question. It is very positive in relation to looking at Sports Tourism in Limerick that 52% of respondents surveyed have previously heard of Limerick through sport. This demonstrates to the researchers, the value of sports tourism to a county.

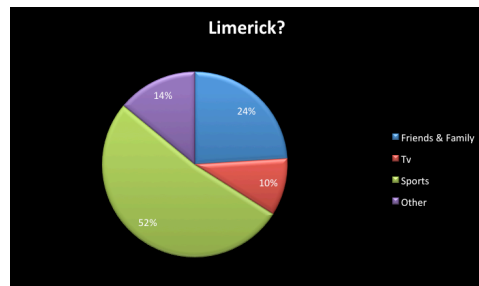


Figure 25: How did you hear about Limerick?

Question 8: if you heard about Limerick through sports in what context was the city advertised within your country?

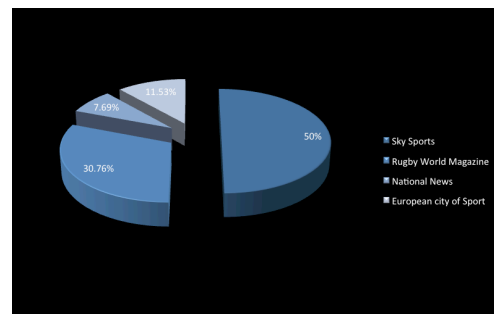


Figure 26: Sports abroad

Figure 26 demonstrates how participants of the survey heard about Limerick through sports and in what context Limerick was mentioned. 50% of the 26 people who heard about Limerick through sports became aware of the county thanks to Sky Sports. 30.76% were familiar with Limerick from reading a sporting magazine called Rugby World, 11.53% became aware of Limerick as a result of the title of European City of Sport and 7.69% had heard about Limerick through their own national news in regards to sports. The 50% figure is a clear sign that advertising on channels like Sky Sports provides a most efficient and effective way to reach and increase a global audience.

How would you rate the friendliness of the locals on a scale of 1-10?

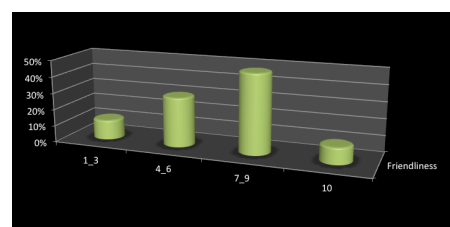


Figure 27: Friendliness

It is clear from the above chart that Limerick's friendliness level was rated at a high standard with 48% of those surveyed ranking the friendliness between 7-9. The next group of respondents at 30% of those surveyed said Limerick had a

friendliness level between 4-6. 10% of the 50 tourists gave Limerick 10 out of 10 for friendliness and the lowest was 12% ranking Limerick at 1-3.

Question 10: Would you consider returning again to Limerick for a holiday?

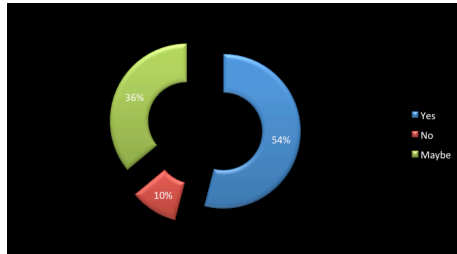


Figure 28: Return to Limerick?

It is evident from figure 22 that 10% of those surveyed said they wouldn't return to Limerick on holidays again. 54% ticked yes to returning, this figure shows that they had a positive experience and 36% of 50 tourists said maybe, so they would at least consider Limerick as a holiday or short break destination in the future. The next question illustrates the breakdown of the respondents who said no to return to Limerick and their reasons why. The researchers feel that the 10% who would not return should provide food for thought for the local tourism partnerships.

Question 11: If you ticked "No" for question 10, please state why this is?

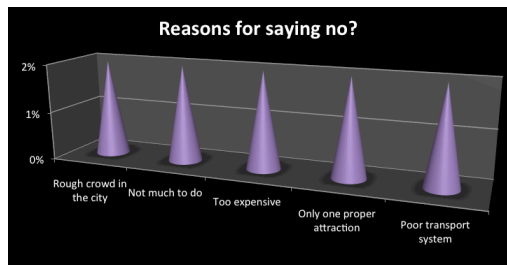


Figure 29: Reasons for saying no?

Figure 29 illustrates an even scale chart with each category representing 2% of the 10% surveyed that said they wouldn't return to Limerick again. Below are the five reasons for their negative answer:

- It is too expensive in Limerick
- The city has a poor transport system.
- There is a rough crowd in the city.
- There is only one proper attraction in the city.
- There isn't a lot to do while in the city.

It is evident from the chart Figure 30 that 64% of tourists that took part in the survey had been to Limerick before to take part in a sports event or to view one. 36% of participants had never been to Limerick. 64% is a very positive figure in relation to sports tourism, this positive

figure ties in with the researchers aims and objectives in examining Sports Tourism within Limerick.

Question 12: Have you been to Limerick before to view or take part in a sporting event?

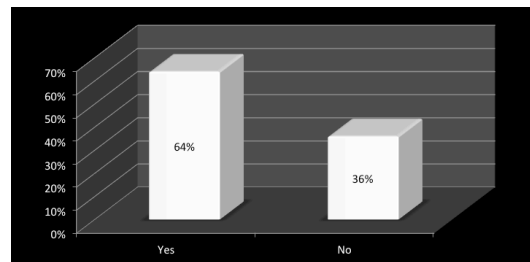


Figure 30: Limerick events before?

#### 4.3. Emerging Issues from Interviews conducted

Interviews were conducted with Dr Pat Daly the Tourism and Marketing Director for Shannon Development, Mary O'Dwyer the current manager at King John's Castle and Karen Brosnahan the Business Development Manager for the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau. Each interviewee was chosen as the researchers felt that each of these three individuals plays a key part within the promotion of tourism and sports within Limerick and the Shannon Region and their insight would help the researchers to gain insight into sports tourism from their points of view. From the three interviews key issues and similar views were recognised. These views and issues are outlined throughout the next section of the chapter and are supported by interviewee's quotes.

##### 4.3.1 Expansion of Sports Tourism

The researchers established that all three informants believe that sports tourism is essential and is growing rapidly, evidenced by Limerick gaining the title of European city of sport for 2011 and on the back of this Thurles in Co. Tipperary has now received city of Sport for the coming year. Karen Brosnahan Business Development Manager for the Shannon Region Conference and Sports Bureau commented that "Sports tourism is at the heart of tourism growth and is the fastest growing sector in the global travel and tourism industry. It is anyone coming to spectate, compete or engage in sporting activities to a destination and we as a region have begun to grasp the importance of sports tourism to our region." The idea that sports tourism is growing rapidly and that the Regions marketing organisations, are using this to their advantage provides an additional impetus to the already successful region to become far more successful in relation to their current market position. This reality of sports tourism's potential links with the researchers' third objective of discovering what Sports Tourism means for Limerick.

The impact of receiving the title of "European city of Sport". Each informant had their own take on how the title has given Limerick a new and positive image. Dr. Pat Daly

during the interview expressed his outlook on the accolade being awarded to the city for 2011. "Again I think it's very positive and underpinned the value of sport for the region, your always looking for that stand out competitive edge all the time. That's what we have, we can stand apart from every other county and other people in the market. Already we've had a lot of enquiries from charity organisers, who do a lot of fundraising events asking can they take part as it is in Limerick. It does benefit in direct terms, it was worth 10 million to the city". The title was very much welcomed, portraying Limerick in a new light to the media. Since the announcement new events have been declared for 2012/2013 leaving the researchers to believe that the organisations involved in these coming events recognised Limerick as a city destined for sporting success, especially when already recognised by the European Commission for Sport. One of these key future events is Thomand Park Stadium being a host venue for the Rugby League World Cup 2013.

#### 4.3.2. *Limericks sporting future*

Each informant had a positive input into where they think Limerick's sports tourism will be in the next 5 years. Dr Pat Daly's view was insightful as it described Limerick as it is, "Hopefully Limerick will become the city of choice for sporting events in the country. Its quite a compact city if you look at it, it's a couple of square miles of a block, its ideal for road racing and cycling and can be managed to close streets without effecting the general business population too much. I think it's our job to join the dots and make the future happen. City of sport was a great start, it built on what was already happening." Limerick's sports tourism has expanded rapidly in recent years due to a tremendous effort from many tourism and marketing bodies. This growth started on a minute scale, just like the Greek Olympic Games in 776 BC as stated in section 2.1 of the Literature review.

#### 4.3.3. *The impact of the recession*

One key issue that is discussed on a daily basis is the affect the recession is having on business in most areas throughout Ireland. One of the informants Karen Brosnahan had some positive light to shed on a grim time "Our business has increased in the Shannon Region in the areas of sport tourism over the last three years, following a concerted effort on the part of tourism bodies in the region to target this growing and emerging market of sports tourism."

### 5. Discussion of Primary and Secondary Research

The aim of compiling and analysing all of the data collected from the surveys and interviews is to contribute towards answering the research objectives. The first and second objectives were to define what sports tourism is and to evaluate sports tourism in Ireland and both of these objectives were widely researched within the literature review. In addition to this research, the key comments from the three key informants, giving their input into their view of sports

tourism were very informative. The main focus of Sports tourism and its position in Limerick was linked with the literature review and the Data analysis by the following two objectives; they were the researchers' final two objectives, three and four. The third objective was to investigate and evaluate sports tourism in Limerick. It is evident from the data analysed by the researchers that sports tourism is an emerging market and is expanding rapidly. During the literature review, it was evident from financial research carried out by Focus Consulting that one key sports event, the Special Olympics 2010, was worth "the total local economic impact of the Special Olympic Games 2010 was worth €9.95million". One of the key informants Pat Daly stated "take one Heineken Cup Rugby match, it is worth €7-10 million to the local economy". From the researchers secondary information a few sites evolving from Limericks success that to date have been very influential to the Limerick locals and beyond this are "[www.alllimerickrugbyrelated.ie](http://www.alllimerickrugbyrelated.ie)", "[www.discoverlimerick.ie](http://www.discoverlimerick.ie)", "[www.ilovelimerick.ie](http://www.ilovelimerick.ie)" and "[www.limerick.ie](http://www.limerick.ie)". Question 4 of the survey administered to Limerick residents asked "How often would you attend a sporting event within the region?" 94% of those surveyed attend sporting events between once a week to every three months. This shows the passion and interest in sports in Limerick. The fourth objective was to discover the impact the Special Olympics had on Limerick. The Conference and Sports Bureau commented on Limerick saying "Limerick has risen from the ashes to become a thriving, energetic and dynamic city". This remark refers perfectly to question 6 in the Limerick resident's survey that was administered, where respondents were asked to "List three events that you feel have given Limerick a positive sporting image?" The Special Olympics in 2010 was listed on numerous occasions by respondents.

### 5. Conclusion and recommendations

As stated earlier, the aim of this research study is to examine the impact of "Sports Tourism in Limerick City, Capital of the Shannon Region: an assessment of its impact in tourism terms". In line with the four stated objectives, the researchers initially examined the concept of Sports tourism from its humble beginnings with the Greek Olympic Games and the Tailteann Games, far back as 632 BC, through to the modern day Olympic Games, to Sports Tourism globally, in Ireland as a whole and in particular in the Shannon region, with emphasis on Limerick city. The researchers examined the effect of Sports Tourism on a city's growth by interviewing key representatives within the industry in the Shannon Region. This paper, through analysing people's views, investigated whether a snapshot of local residents of Limerick City felt that Limerick has a poor media image and whether sport plays an active role in the region in helping to achieve a more positive media profile. The researchers was glad to see that while 56% of residents surveyed felt that Limerick has a negative media image, 84% of those residents surveyed felt that sport can play a positive role in changing

how the City is portrayed. It was evident from the interviews that each stakeholder found sporting events to be of great benefit to the city and the region. From research and reviewing all the relevant literature, it is evident that Sports Tourism in the Shannon Region is used to promote other aspects of tourism, in that a tourist who visits a city to watch a sporting event may then also avail of the attractions as a result of travelling to the destination. Sports Tourism is worth more than €60 million annually to the region, this figure highlights the importance of sustaining and developing the Shannon Region as a key location for sporting events on an international level.

It is clear from the findings that many international tourists have been influenced by sport in relation to visiting Limerick. 52% of international tourists surveyed had heard about Limerick through Sporting events and promotion. 64% of those surveyed had previously visited Limerick to take part in or view a sporting event. This evidence showed the researchers how the impact of sports tourism has helped with the expansion of the Shannon Region to date. The paper identified that sports tourism is now being included in economic development strategies due to its rapid expansion in the last decade. This development is clear when one considers the occasions when Thomond Park hosts Heineken Cup games in Limerick city and the range of both national and international tourists that arrive in the City, with the consequent spend in the local hotels, pubs and restaurants. There was a mammoth amount of work and effort put into securing Limerick's nomination for "European City of Sport for 2011" and this showed that a collective approach by the local agencies paid off on that occasion. It is vital for the stakeholders in the region to work together rather than compete against each other in order to maximise success that can be achieved for the region's sports tourism sector. Mary O'Dwyer, Manager of King John's Castle remarked that while the title of European City of Sport and the aftermath of the Special Olympics 2010 were great for the city, the Castle did not benefit as much as one would have expected, "I can only speak for the city, it's been positive and the supporters with many different events were happy with the city, the pubs, the nightlife and the people. But again this venue doesn't get the benefit of all these activities going on." (Mary O'Dwyer).

In concluding this research paper it was evident that while there have been major strides forward in developing sports tourism as a viable marketing tool for the Shannon region, it was clear to the researchers that there is still scope to further enhance this concept. More research into Sports Tourism could benefit the Country overall. Ireland has never held an event the size of a FIFA World Cup or the Rugby World Cup. Feasibility studies could be undertaken well in advance of any major event, so see if Ireland could bid for any such event. The researchers has commented on some of the economic studies which have been carried out in relation to the Heineken Cup matches, the Special Olympics and the Great Limerick Run as well many others. It might be worth considering undertaking an evaluation of all the major sporting events scheduled during 2012 at the end of the year. This should then be compared to a similar previous year and

the results examined. These results could then provide opportunities for the further development of Sports Tourism within the Region. Sports promotions and events should be resourcefully advertised along with the region's attractions. For example Shannon Heritage could promote a large discount off some of its attractions when one buys a ticket for any sporting event in the region. This could greatly increase potential visitor numbers. The advertising wouldn't cost much and the attractions would benefit greatly. In this concluding chapter, the researchers hopes that they have successfully achieved the aim and objectives of the study and has demonstrated the impact of Sports Tourism as set out in the title of the paper, "Sports Tourism in Limerick City, Capital of the Shannon Region: an assessment of its impact in tourism terms". From the research conducted it is clear that there is room for further improvement and these recommendations are outlined in section 5.2. The research study will finish by referring to where one of the great sports tourism events began in 776 BC, "The games at Olympia may have attracted as many as 40,000 people from all parts of Greece." (Weed and Bull, 2009). It is clearly evident that sports tourism has always been with us and that as long as people's love affair with all things sporting continues, there will be always be a place for its followers and for even better and more innovative approaches in the very lucrative business of Sports Tourism.

## References

- Babbie, E (1990) Survey Research Methods Wadsworth Publishing, United States
- Bryman, A, and Bell, E (2003) Business Research Methods Canada, Oxford University Press
- Cohen, L, Manion L and Morrison, K (2007) Research Methods in Education New York, Routledge Publishers
- Cooper, R and Schinder, S (2005) Business Research Berkshire, McGraw-Hill Education
- Cousin, G (2009) Researching learning in higher education New York, Routledge Publishers.
- Creswell, J (2003) Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and mixed method approaches United Kingdom, Sage Publications Inc
- Ferriter, D (2004) The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000 Great Britain, Profile Books Ltd
- Hinch T, and Higham James (2004) Sport Tourism Development Canada, Channel View Publications
- Hudson, S (2007) Sport and Adventure Tourism USA, Hawthorn Hospitality Press
- Higham, J and Hinch, T (2009) Sport and Tourism, Globalization, Mobility and Identity Oxford, UK, Elsevier Ltd.
- Ritchie, B and Adair, D (2004) Sport Tourism Interrelationships, Impacts and Issues Canada, Channel View Publications.
- McNabb, D (2008) Research Methods in Public Administration and non profit Management New York, M.E. Shape Inc
- Weed, M and Bull, C (2009) Sports Tourism Participants, Policy and Providers Oxford, UK, Elsevier Ltd
- Brochures:  
Limerick European City of Sport 2011, Submission to the Department of Tourism and Sport- November 2010  
By Shannon Development  
2010 Special Olympics Ireland Games- Limerick, Economic and Event Impact Assessment  
Carried out by Focus Consultin
- Journals:  
Central Place Theory and Sport Tourism Impacts, Volume 34, No.2 Pages 332-347 By Margaret J Daniels  
Sport and Tourism: A Critical Analysis of Research Pages 45-76, 1998 By Heather J Gibson.