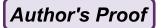
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Abstract	headlines at p the Winter O events as the candidate city plans to attract develop a resessport in whice agent of touri The paper will and identifying tourism product is set are excepted are its development	ourism and its importance to the Russian Federation are very much in the eadlines at present. Considering the huge investment made in facilities for the Winter Olympics, the building of new sports facilities for such megal vents as the Football World Cup, and the status of St Petersburg as a randidate city for the 2028 Olympics, it is clear that Russia has long term tans to attract visitors to their sporting events. The purpose of this paper is to evelop a research agenda to explore the potential of artistic gymnastics, a port in which the Russian Federation has excelled for many years, as an agent of tourism development. The paper will take a case study approach, considering the nature of fandom and identifying features of artistic gymnastics as cultural heritage and sports purism product. The national and international environment within which it set are examined, prior to the development of a research agenda. A retailed review of literature on the historic, current and emerging trends in tussian artistic gymnastics; the place of artistic gymnastics in tourism evelopment and sports tourism in Russia will be carried out.	
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Keywords (separated by '-')	Sports tourisn form	n - Artistic gymnastics - Russian Federation - Sport as a cultural	



Russian Artistic Gymnastics as a Sports **Tourism Product: Some Observations** and a Research Agenda

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Elizabeth Booth, Jithendran Kokkranikal, and Olga Burukina

Abstract Tourism and its importance to the Russian Federation are very much in 5 the headlines at present. Considering the huge investment made in facilities for the 6 Winter Olympics, the building of new sports facilities for such mega events as the 7 Football World Cup, and the status of St Petersburg as a candidate city for the 2028 8 Olympics, it is clear that Russia has long term plans to attract visitors to their 9 sporting events. The purpose of this paper is to develop a research agenda to explore 10 the potential of artistic gymnastics, a sport in which the Russian Federation has 11 excelled for many years, as an agent of tourism development.

The paper will take a case study approach, considering the nature of fandom and 13 identifying features of artistic gymnastics as cultural heritage and sports tourism 14 product. The national and international environment within which it is set are 15 examined, prior to the development of a research agenda. A detailed review of 16 literature on the historic, current and emerging trends in Russian artistic gymnastics; the place of artistic gymnastics in tourism development and sports tourism in 18 Russia will be carried out.

The paper's findings will include considerations of

- The nature of gymnastics fandom, both in Russia and internationally
- The nature of sports tourism development in the Russian Federation
- The nature of gymnastics as a sport and its competition cycle
- Artistic gymnastics as cultural heritage, and its potential as an autonomous 24 means of promoting Russian national identity
- The relationship between Russia's sometimes fading gymnastics competition 26 results, and its potential to leverage the sport for tourism interest 27
- The potential for tourism product development linked to artistic gymnastics in 28 the Russian Federation. 29

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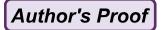
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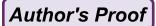
- The paper contributes to the literature on the nature of sports tourism as it relates to artistic gymnastics in the Russian Federation in particular.
- 32 **Keywords** Sports tourism Artistic gymnastics Russian Federation Sport as a cultural form

34 1 Artistic Gymnastics: Some Background

Artistic gymnastics ('gymnastics' in this paper) is one of the oldest Olympic sports. 35 Its international regulatory body, the Federation Internationale de Gymnastique 36 (FIG) was formed in 1881, and gymnastics competitions have been contested at 37 38 every Olympic Games since the first modern Olympics in 1896. The sport is defined on a technical level as one of a group of sports with 'stabilised kinematic structure 39 of complicated coordination actions performed in relatively constant conditions 40 without direct contact with opponents' (Arkayev & Suchilin, 2004: 30), and is 41 distinct from other sports in the wider gymnastics family, e.g. rhythmic gymnastics, 42 trampolining and sports acrobatics. It shares the playful characteristic of all sport in 43 that it can be practiced at non-competitive, recreational and elite levels. This paper 44 will focus on the sport at the highest, elite level, as practiced by gymnasts in the 45 Russian Federation and the former Soviet Union. 46

2 The Relationship Between Sports Tourism and Artistic Gymnastics

Sports tourism is not a new phenomenon. Travel associated with sports has a long 49 history. The ancient Greeks travelled to take part in and watch Olympic Games. In 50 the intervening centuries many cultures had examples of sporting events attracting 51 participants and spectators, e.g. journeys to Shaolin Temple to learn, participate in 52 53 and watch Kung Fu competitions in ancient China are well known. Sport and tourism are closely related and sport is one of the reasons why people travel 54 (Gammon & Robinson, 1997). However, the travel associated with sports and 55 sports as a tourism activity became an important theme within tourism literature 56 only very recently. Sport and tourism were treated as separate areas (Glyptis, 1991; 57 58 Hinch & Higham, 2001) and it was in the late 1980s and 1990s that attempts were made to explain the relationship between sport and tourism. Sports tourists are 59 classified into various typologies based on the level of their involvement, and these 60 range from competitive participation, non-competitive participation in recreational 61 sports, spectating, accidental participation, organised and non-organised sports 62 63 tours, vicarious participation and nostalgic visits to sites and museums associated with sports (Gibson, 1998; Hinch & Higham, 2001; Standeven & De Knop, 1999; 64 Weed, 2009). Gammon and Robinson (1997) make a distinction between two forms 65



of sports tourism based on hard and soft participation, viz. sport tourism and 66 tourism sport. Sport tourism involves sport as primary motivation and tourism 67 sport is where sport is an incidental or secondary part of travel motivation (Gammon & Robinson, 1997).

Sport tourism is basically about holidays involving sporting activity either as a 70 spectator or participant (Weed & Bull, 1998). Gibson (1998) defined sport tourism 71 as 'leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home 72 communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities or to 73 venerate attractions associated with physical activities'. Hinch and Higham (2001) 74 present a three dimensional framework to explore the relationship between sport, 75 space and time. The sport dimension focuses on sport as an attraction and 76 characterises it to have its own rule structure, competition and playful nature. The 77 playful nature of sport consists of notions of uncertainty of outcome and a sanc- 78 tioned display of sporting acts (Hinch & Higham, 2001). Spatial dimension high- 79 lights the themes of location, region and landscape. The temporal dimension 80 considers trip duration, seasonality and patterns of evolution of tourism 81 destinations.

Sport represents a dynamic and increasingly prominent stage for the expression 83 of culture (Hinch & Higham, 2004) and is an integral part of popular culture, Green 84 and Chalip (1998) argue that participants in sport tend to share and celebrate a subculture associated with a particular sport. Commitment to a particular sport, distinguishing symbols and association with particular places are characteristics of 87 sport cultures (Hinch & Higham, 2004). Green and Chalip (1998) state that the 88 subculture of a sport gives its participants a sense of mutual understanding and the 89 opportunity to adopt the attitudes, outlooks and values common to the sport, which 90 become part of their identity. It offers them a common language, a topic of 91 conversation and a basis of camaraderie. Unique cultural traits can be observed in 92 most sporting activities, whether spectator, recreational or competitive. Examples 93 include ritualistic patterns of behaviour of followers of European football clubs with chanting of club anthems during games, tribal affinity towards 'their' club, and 95 the dressing up in the club's colours on match days.

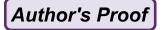
Artistic gymnastics challenges the boundaries of these definitions in that the 97 opportunities for gymnastics followers to attend events are relatively limited. The 98 ritualistic and other behaviours still exist in a virtual context via online communities known as the 'gymternet'. The sport is also rich in cultural associations that could make it an ideal vehicle for conveying national cultural identity and promoting associated tourism motivations, especially within the Russian Federation where the sport has a long history of association with art forms such as ballet and circus.

Russian gymnastics attracts a dedicated following of young fans who amass as an international online community, and whose activities are mostly limited to social media. There is also a niche market of older followers who have a nostalgic interest in what has become known as the 'Golden Years' of the sport, during the Soviet era. The likelihood of either travelling to Russia for sports tourism purposes, or to other destinations to attend competitions, is not currently known.

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Sport events can help form the image and add to the attractiveness of a destination for new markets and first-time visitors (Dimanche, 2003). The importance of destination image and its role on destination awareness and decision making process need not be overemphasised. Sporting events will not only attract new segments of visitor and can be used for branding the destination (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004).

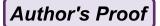
This paper considers sports tourism not only as a form of visitation (primary sports tourism), but also in terms of a sport's ability to raise consciousness of a destination and its cultural identity, hence triggering stages of purchase decision and possibly visitation (secondary sports tourism). It considers sport as a possible inspiration for tourism product development. The definition of tourism that is used in this paper goes beyond personal visitation into the realms of 'digital' tourism where the consumer engages with national culture through the medium of the internet and technology-based experiences.

In view of fan behaviour and the characteristics of the sport both internationally and in Russia, this paper will consider sports tourism definitions taking into account the importance of heritage, and the online behaviour of its followers as a form of digital or online sports tourism.

128 2.1 The Nature of Tourism Visitation Within Artistic 129 Gymnastics

Top level artistic gymnastics has a relatively limited competition calendar, with 130 international, supranational and national competitions taking place annually. The 131 top competitors perform only a handful of times each year, e.g. in 2012 Japanese 132 gymnast Kohei Uchimura appeared once internationally, at the Olympic Games. Competition rosters are often published as late as a week before a competition 134 begins, so fans of particular personalities or teams cannot always be assured that 135 'their' teams or gymnasts will be present at any given competition, making it risky 136 to plan overseas trips. Fans will therefore target competitions on the basis of locality 137 or proximity to their residence, or by profile, choosing for example to attend a 138 World Championships where the majority of the top competitors can usually be 139 expected to attend. 140

In Russia, the opportunities to attend competitions are severely limited. Artistic gymnastics is not a popular sport and international competitions do not feature regularly on the calendar. National championships take place in the town of Penza, and while they often attract national press coverage attendance will be very poor. The 2014 national championships, for example, played to an almost completely empty stadium with parents, gymnasts and coaches making up the majority of the audience. Ticket sales are rarely advertised in advance.



Fan Behaviour, Vicarious Participation and Online Activity

Aficianados of Russian artistic gymnastics are a niche audience, as likely to travel 150 to Stuttgart to spectate their sport as Moscow, despite any national leanings. 151 Opportunities to travel to Russia as a primary sports tourist are limited to those who are intrepid enough to risk travelling to a distant destination without competition tickets on the off chance of gaining entry to one of the national or regional competitions, and to a very small number of overseas students studying sports 155 coaching at Russian universities.

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Perhaps as a result of the lack of spectating opportunities and the wide geo- 157 graphical spread of gymnastics aficianados, this niche community has collected 158 around the internet (the 'gymternet'). These aficianados consume gymnastics voraciously, mulling over the meaning of Russian language sports reports (few of 160 them speak Russian) for every last crumb of information about their team, participating in long chats on social media (some of it in the Russian language), scanning Youtube for roughly shot videos of competition and training routines. Older fans hang around social media sites on the off chance of catching a hair of information 164 about World Champions of the past, following their careers as national coaches and 165 the like. Direct online contact can sometimes be made. The gymnastics coach has become a figure of interest, with 70 and 80 year old Soviet era coaches being tracked down for their opinions on technical, artistic and competition matters.

Most news of the current sport and stars originates in the Russian language press 169 and is disseminated—rapidly—via a network of blogs, secret groups and other 170 social networking sites. Opinion and discussion, in varying forms, takes place all 171 year round on various gymnastics related matters. There is often fierce argument, 172 some of it personal. Not all fans follow nationally delineated affiliations. The 173 creation of imagery and video montages is a favourite activity of many of the 174 younger online fans. Much of this behaviour is currently considered outside the 175 boundaries of pure sports tourism visitation but because of the many unknown 176 quantities of the fan base, and the low level of aspiration and management of the 177 sport in the Russian Federation there is a need to investigate the various levels of 178 involvement in the sport as a form of digital tourism. This digital behaviour might 179 be considered as a form of fandom that precedes actual visitation or that can be part 180 of the development of travel motivation in a wider context. Table 1 attempts to 181 position current assumptions of fan behaviour within a framework of existing sports 182 tourism definitions. Note the emergence of an online, digital sports tourism form. 183 This form of tourism relates to the latent tourism potential of those fans who 184 actively participate in international online sporting activities, but who have yet to 185 translate their online participation into active competition attendance. Online sport- 186 ing activities are thus considered in this paper as a possible precursor to travel 187 behaviour.

While existing definitions focus on the behaviour of tourists and on sports 189 tourism as visitation patterns, the nature of the sport form involved is not currently 190

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 Table 1
 Application of Russian artistic gymnastics to sports tourism definitions

t.2	Event	Target segment	Form of participation	Form of sports tourism
t.3	Domestic competitions, e.g. national championships, Russia Cup	Invited participants	Active competitive participation	Active competitive and participatory
t.4	Podium training at national competitions	International online afficianados	Online streaming	Digital sports tourism
t.5	Tour of national training centre	International online afficianados	Online streaming	Digital sports tourism
t.6	Open days at national training centre	International/domestic afficianados (premium product)	Spectating/ Online	Organised sports tour/Digital sports tourism
t.7	Tours of local gymnasiums	International/domestic afficianados (premium product)	Spectating/ Online	Organised sports tour/Digital sports tourism
t.8	'Meet the Olympic champion' events	International/domestic afficianados (premium product)	Nostalgic visit/Online	Organised sports tour/Digital sports tourism

191 taken into account. The nature of gymnastics and its status within Russian and, 192 formerly, Soviet culture is important to understand before we can really develop a 193 view of how the sport as heritage can be developed for sports tourism.

194 3 Artistic Gymnastics as Russian Heritage

As a form of culture, sport is commodified for a range of reasons, which include their preservation, economic regeneration of destinations and profit generation. Commodification of culture occurs when cultural objects and activities come to 197 be evaluated primarily in terms of their monetary value (Cohen, 1998). It involves 198 turning culture into a commodity, which can be bought and sold (MacLeod, 2006). 200 Tourism is an industry that draws its supply of products by commodifying cultural, built and natural resources. Imaginative commodification facilitates the transition 201 from sport to sport tourism, leading to the popularisation of sporting events and regeneration of destination economies in the process. Marketing of places and 203 tourism destinations involves turning them into attractive commodities for its 204 205 customers. Professional sport is probably the most commercialised activity. It is commonly used to sell a wide range of consumer products, with successful sports-206 men endorsing products ranging from expensive cars to consumer durables. Most 207 sporting events are professionally organised to generate profit by maximising 208 consumer spend. The economic potential of sport is often used as justification for 209 210 investing in sporting infrastructure and mega sporting events.

Sport as a cultural and tourism resource is commercialised by employing place marketing and experience marketing. While place marketing involves

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communicating selective images of places that appeal to and attract target audience, 213 experience marketing involves adding value for customers by providing opportu- 214 nities to participate and engage on physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual 215 levels (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Place marketing 216 could be an effective way to commodify sports that are destination-based, e.g. golf 217 and skiing. Commodification of sport by providing participatory opportunities is 218 commonplace in sport tourism marketing (Harrison-Hill & Chalip, 2005). Given 219 the range of participatory involvement in sport tourism, e.g. active, passive, vicar- 220 ious, nostalgic (Gibson, 1998; Weed, 2009), experience marketing lends itself as a 221 key method to commodify sport. Experiencing of sport is an integral part of its 222 consumption and takes various forms from going through a programme booklet at a 223 football match and paid opportunities to interact with sporting icons both past and 224 present. Chalip (1992) proposed the use of multiple narratives, embedded genres 225 and layered symbols to generate multiple meanings and enhanced audience engage- 226 ment. Event augmentation through add-on activities and clever incorporation of 227 narratives, genres and symbols in the pre- and post-event spectacles and festivals 228 could amplify their experiential impact (Chalip, 2005; Green, 2001). A good 229 example of this is the popularity of post-match parties that follow Indian Premier 230 League cricket matches that are attended by cricket players. As García (2001) 231 states, provision of cultural programmes in the sporting context is yet another 232 way to commodify sporting events and make them appealing to a wider range of 233 market segments. However, selling sport and its culture as a tourism product can 234 have major impacts on the authenticity of the sport and the destination community. 235

As a highly commoditised cultural activity, sport is influenced by the forces of 236 globalisation. Globalisation is the process that leads to an ever-tightening network 237 of connections that cut across national boundaries (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). It is a 238 new way of looking at a global society which is interconnected through a web of 239 political, economic, cultural and social relations. Globalisation was driven by 240 economic, social, political and technological factors and tourism is both a driver 241 and beneficiary of it. Globalisation, however, is considered to displace local culture 242 with the global, leading to cultural homogenisation and cultural imperialism (Mor- 243 ley, 2006). Sport, as a globally popular form of recreational and entertainment 244 activity has emerged as a major part of the globalisation process. For example, 245 football's English, Spanish, Italian and German leagues now have a global follow- 246 ing, which is aided by the developments in communication technologies. World- 247 wide popularity of 20–20 and limited overs cricket matches is another example of 248 sport taking advantage of possibilities offered by globalisation. This has resulted in 249 homogenised sport culture in many sports (e.g. European football) and standardised 250 stadia and sports fields along with global sport stars. Involvement of global media 251 conglomerates and multi-national firms in funding and promoting hallmark sporting 252 events such as Olympics and World Cup Football tournaments is evidence of how 253 sport has become part of commercial globalisation. However, these global firms act 254 in the self-interest of promoting their products through the commodification of 255 sport. Further, globalisation of sport could also result in a trend towards the 256 homogenisation of sports culture. The globalisation of sport has similarities with 257



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tourism. Through the process of globalisation tourism destinations are increasingly connected to their markets resulting in the creation of homogenous identikit destinations. Sport tourism thus is both a beneficiary and victim of globalisation, and the homogenisation of sport and its culture can act as a disincentive to travel for sport (Hinch & Higham, 2004). Retaining authenticity and identity in an era of globalisation will be a major challenge to sport and sport tourism.

The changing nature of gymnastics as a cultural form and its relationship to competition outcomes in the Russian Federation could provide a barrier to the sport's potential to promote national character and identity, especially as a globalised form of the sport is now predominant in competition, with the US women and the Chinese and Japanese men in leadership positions. Examining the forces at work in the changing nature of the sport of gymnastics as a cultural form might help to understand how the sport has developed, and to identify the special features of gymnastics that have a clearly defined link to Russian culture and which can therefore be commodified to the benefit of tourism in the Russian Federation.

Palmer and Sellers (2009), explain that artistic gymnastics as a cultural form possesses several different features which are evident within the sport today:

- 275 Strength
- 276 Fluency of motion
- 277 Influence of a balletic style
- Military heritage

The relative importance of each of these features is constantly changing, and is 279 standardised according to the FIG (International Gymnastics Federation's) Code of 280 Points, which is recognised internationally as the means of judging the sport 281 (Palmer & Sellers, 2009). Changes in competition forces and performance qualities 282 influence the sport as a cultural form. Thus, the sport of gymnastics is constantly 283 changing. As an aesthetic, it is vulnerable to the influence of a variety of values, 284 attitudes and beliefs (Margolis, 1980). Making reference to Newton's (1950) 'Sieve 285 of taste' whereby new cultural approaches are filtered and may become established 286 or rejected over time, Palmer (2003) argues that the relationship between gymnastic 287 rules (the Code of Points), skill (the presentation and execution of exercises) and 288 289 technicality (the purity of technique) results in a perceived aesthetic outcome, characteristic to individual countries. The influence of ballet is considered to have 290 stemmed in particular from the Soviet school of gymnastics and, today, the Russian 291 Federation has inherited the leadership of this artistic legacy. Soviet—today, 292 Russian—women's gymnastics training includes daily training at the ballet barre 293 294 from an early age, bringing an emphasis on whole body choreography to all four of the disciplines on which they will eventually compete at senior level, and a similar 295 level of detail in the men's preparation. Elite international gymnasts can benefit 296 from the attentions of professional classical dance choreographers in composing 297 their floor routines, frequently drawing on Russian traditions of folk dance and 298 299 circus for inspiration (Lisitskaya & Zaglada, 1987).

Russia's approach to the sport reflects more than mere physicality or athleticism, embracing what is known in Russia as 'physical culture', a phenomenon that goes

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beyond mere games to embrace something aesthetic, close to the spiritual. The 302 Soviet ethos of sport ('Sportivnosti') is characterised by Makoveeva (2002: 9) as 303 'an aspiration to overcome the body's limitations', a dream 'of spiritual flight, a 304 release from the flesh', with Kukushin and Andreeva (1983: 13) highlighting its importance to 'all-round human development, which seeks to form personal qualities and facilitate the acquisition of useful skills'. With its emphasis on line, grace and inconceivable flight, and the incredible discipline and work ethic required of its practitioners, gymnastics could be considered to be a pure embodiment of 'Sportivnosti', providing the perfect mirror image of such qualities, with Soviet era press and publicity emphasising the impeccable personal characteristics of its 311 athletes, the prodigious workloads demanded of them, and their frequently superhuman efforts in overcoming the physical effects of injury and exhaustion.

Gymnastics as a sporting form is thus congruent with both the dance and 314 sporting philosophical traditions of Russia. Soviet sporting politics was such that 315 for most of the forty years between 1952 and 1992, the Soviet Union had held the 316 intellectual reins of the sport, strongly influencing the Code, and leaving behind a 317 legacy of an aesthetic tradition which still survives within Russian gymnastics 318 today, but which is inexorably dying out of the sport in general. Today, Russia's 'preoccupation with the beauty and delight of the game' founded during the Thaw era of Cold War politics (Makoveeva, 2002: 22) and evidently somewhat at odds with traditional sporting values embraced by the West, has lost its grip on artistic 322 gymnastics, a sport which now strongly favours the athletic to the artistic.

This shift in cultural form has been accompanied by a corresponding drift in 324 competition results. The Soviet Union still retains its leading position in the medal 325 rankings for the sport between 1896 and 2012 (total of 182 medals to their nearest 326 contender, the USA, who have accumulated 101), and Russia now bears the flag as 327 the leading ex-Soviet nation and since their first Olympic competition in 1996 have 328 accumulated a total of 37 medals, putting them in an all-time position of 11th in the 329 overall medal table. But relatively speaking their performance has waned, weakening the country's identity associations with the sport amongst young followers who cannot remember the Soviet 'golden era'. At the same time, loyal followers of 332 Soviet era gymnastics still retain their fascination for the sport and remain sensitive 333 to the special cultural associations of some of Russia's gymnasts. Recollections of 334 this era of gymnastics evoke a sense of nostalgia for a past time of aesthetic and 335 graceful artistry. Online fans of the sport devour videos of routines during the so called 'Golden Era', in particular the 1970s and 1980s, and there is an unlikely taste 337 for Russian language documentaries even amongst those who do not even speak the language. There is an appetite for news of stars of the past, and a cult of personality 339 surrounding many champions, and legendary coaches.

The emphasis of sports involvement in Russia has gradually changed since 341 Soviet times. The Soviets valued sport for a variety of different purposes including international recognition and prestige (Riordan, 2007) and, following a period of 343 time when sports were considered relatively less important, this emphasis continues 344 today, and is supplemented by an interest in encouraging mega-event tourism to 345 such events as the Winter Olympics, FA World Cup and Universiade. Putin wants 346

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to encourage medal-winning as well, and gymnastics benefits from significant sponsorship from the majority government-owned bank VTB. However, despite the construction of many world class training facilities across Russia, the legacy of the years of poor investment remain: coach retention and training, low participation levels and the poor associations of big-time sport during the Soviet era are all having an effect on standards of competitive performance.

The Level of Development of Sports Tourism in the Russian Federation

The Russian government's attitude and approach to the development of sports tourism in Russia has changed significantly over recent years, as well as its attitude to Russia's present and future. Unfortunately, the Russian Government's strategies are not integrated into a holistic development or tourism strategy in Russia. The Federal Agency of Tourism's *Strategy of Tourism Development in the Russian Federation* for the period 2008–2015 cannot be assessed as such, as it lacks a thorough vision.

Though much has been done in Sochi, under the aegis of the 2014 Winter Olympics, to develop a winter sports tourism destination and sports tourism venues, much less is being invested in the development of sports tourism in Russia today from the viewpoint of tourism support, including information leaflets, venue maps etc. Such publications were not published and distributed in Sochi in 2014. Vladimir Putin's government has invested \$50 billion in the Sochi Winter Olympic Games and in the development of 11 cities where the 2018 World Soccer Cup is to be held, with the logical expectation that medals will be won.

Baikov (2008) has identified a number of constraints hampering the development of inbound tourism in Russia today:

- 1. A lack of favourable information and the absence of advertising materials in foreign markets. The largest world tourist guide, *World Travel Guide*, depicts Russia as 'unfavourable for tourism'—the only country with a negative image of the 200 countries described in the *Guide*.
- The tourist infrastructure is not developed enough. The current availability of
 hotel stock is far below that needed to service demand. Besides hotels, most
 Russian cities lack up-to-date entertainment facilities and there are problems
 with worn-out roads and a lack of comfortable tourist transportation.
- 380 3. The unfavourable visa regime of the Russian Federation involves long and often complicated processes.
- 382 4. Problems with the level of tourism services and prices
- 383 5. Underdeveloped system of credit card payment in the Russian provinces.

Nevertheless, Russia has many strengths as a tourist destination, including its wealth and diversity of natural resources, the hospitality of its warm and open-

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hearted people and its strength in both winter and summer sports. As far as sports 386 tourism is concerned, there is significant potential for Russian athletes to win gold 387 medals in 20 out of 37 Olympic sports. Russia has 52 Olympic reserve colleges, 388 984 Olympic reserve specialised sports schools and 3,831 children's and youngsters' sports schools. Figure skating and artistic gymnastics are two sports that are 390 well supported by the government and where the medal potential is well recognised. 391

5 Method 392

A single, embedded, exploratory case study draws together secondary data from multiple documentary and archival sources in a convergent fashion in an attempt to triangulate (Yin, 2003). Research outcomes can only point in a general direction: all med further research to flesh out the details and to provide more certainty.

The data sources used include press reports from the Russian press and media, in 397 translation, and from the English language specialist sporting press. The online 398 historical archives of the gymnastics press such as Gymn-Forum, and Soviet TV documentaries available via Netfilms, the Russian TV and film archive, have also 400 provided data about the Soviet system. The Russian Gymnastics Federation's 401 website provided some information on the level of development in the sport. 402 Informal online discussions with a former coach of the Soviet Union team, a Soviet 403 Olympic champion, and the CEO of a Russian sports marketing company, have 404 provided some detailed insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the Soviet, 405 Russian and American gymnastics systems. Social media has provided access to a 406 variety of voices, positive and negative, on the Russian and globalised styles of 407 gymnastics, with the author's specialist blog, Rewriting Russian Gymnastics 408 (RRG), and closed, specialist online forums such as The All Around, providing 409 the focal point of an online community of experts and fans who express a multi- 410 plicity of opinion about the state of the sport today. The viewpoint of this research is 411 that of a long-standing gymnastics afficianado who has followed Soviet and 412 Russian gymnastics for the past 40 years. 413

Data sources are triangulated as a test of reliability and to flesh out the different 414 perspectives expressed. Much of the data, including the interviews, have appeared 415 in a prior format on *RRG*. Participant observation of fan behaviour online and at 416 competitions also enabled assumptions to be drawn about the nature of the markets. 417



418 6 A Research Agenda for Russian Gymnastics and Its 419 Potential for Sports Tourism

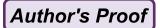
Delineating the nature of what can be investigated at the present time is challenging. There are multiple contexts within which the research can be set—(1) destination tourism to the Russian Federation (2) event tourism to gymnastics competitions (3) online fan behaviour as a form of digital tourism (4) gymnastics as cultural heritage (5) the heritage dimensions of gymnastics as a possible determinant in destination image formation. This paper can only provide an overview of possible research directions, which are given below.

427 6.1 Profiling the Motivations of Gymnastics Tourists

An understanding of the motivations of aficionados of artistic gymnastics is important not just for developing it as a sports tourism product, but also for developing an insight into the factors behind visitation, both virtual and real, to artistic gymnastics 430 events. The niche of gymnastics tourists has not been researched or understood, which is important for developing artistic gymnastics as a tourist product and its 432 marketing. The question of national affiliation and the relationship between cultural 433 participation and an enjoyment of gymnastics as a motivating factor in attending gymnastics competition would be an essential baseline survey. Non-attendance 435 surveys would also be necessary amongst the online 'gymternet' community and amongst attenders at other types of related cultural events e.g. dance festivals, 437 438 circus.

439 6.2 Profiling Online Russian Gymnastics Fans and Their 440 Behaviour

Today's online fans could be tomorrow's tourists. At least they represent a potentially significant target market of gymnastics tourism. An appreciation of these 'digital tourists', along with their motivations and behaviour patterns represent a great opportunity to tap into this market of potential gymnastic tourists. Also, important is to provide the digital tourists with opportunities to experience gymnastics in the virtual world and tap into potential opportunities. Researching the profile of the online fans, their background, motivations, intention to visit real gymnastics events represents an important area of research. A netnographic approach might contribute to the development of an understanding of how fans in Russia and elsewhere behave, with a view to considering how and if their behaviour leads to the development of a destination image and associated travel intentions.



6.3	Understanding the Nature of Gymnastics	
	as a Cultural Form	

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Sports have become a global phenomenon and most of them have their own 454 common language and culture which is shared and understood by followers of 455 different sports. However, sports also remain distinctly local and have their unique 456 identity and fandom, who share it and sometime create new forms of culture and 457 politics. It would be fascinating to research and understand the identity, culture and 458 politics surrounding artistic gymnastics. A major question in this context is, to what 459 extent have changes in the sport influenced its shape as a cultural form and hence its 460 propensity to promote destination image for Russia?

The Commodification of Artistic Gymnastics 6.4

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Sports, like various forms of culture, are commercialised to make them more 463 accessible, ensure their commercial viability and to find resources for their development. Developing sport as a tourism product invariably involves its commodifi- 465 cation. Identifying the barriers to commodification of gymnastics in the Russian 466 Federation for either commercial or tourism purposes from social, economic, 467 cultural and political perspectives is an important area to research, with the aim 468 of considering key product development opportunities for gymnastics tourism to 469 the Russian Federation including but not limited to tours, memberships, and online 470 affiliations.

In view of the ever changing identity of gymnastics, the issue of the authentic 472 representation of the Russian national character may have an influence on how the 473 sport can be marketed as a tourism product. Important too is to examine the impacts 474 of commodification of gymnastics on its aficionados. 475

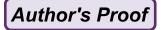
Artistic Gymnastics as an Agent in the Formation of Russian National Identity and Destination Image

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Understanding the processes by which national identity is formed and how artistic 478 gymnastics, along with other cultural forms, can contribute to this formation will be 479 a precursor to considering issues of positioning and branding and in developing 480 models of sport heritage branding. 481

Artistic gymnastics with its artistry and sophistication could be a powerful 482 means for forming an attractive image to both existing and emerging tourist 483 destinations in Russia. The potential of artistic gymnastics to form or modify the 484 image of tourist destination in Russia and the type of images that are likely to be 485 attributed to artistic gymnastics represent an research opportunity that is valuable to 486



the literature on sports and tourism marketing. Allied to this theme is the examination of the current image of tourist destinations in Russia and issues of image gap and the chain of influence in tourism destination image of Russia (Kokkranikal, Cronje, & Butler, 2011).

491 6.6 Issues and Challenges in Sports Tourism Development 492 in Russia

493 Russian tourism is still in its development stage (Butler, 1980). Infrastructure and 494 management resources play a vital role in the development of sport heritage 495 tourism. Issues such as infrastructure development, visitor management, stake-496 holder participation and funding for developing sport heritage tourism within the 497 context of gymnastics are worth studying to understand the dynamics of tourism 498 development in Russia.

499 Russia has a rich heritage of sports and has a tradition of being a sporting super power. With a wide range of tourism resources, which range from a rich cultural 500 heritage to a variety of natural features, Russia has tremendous potential as a tourist 501 destination. However, very limited or no research has been carried out on tourism in 502 general and sports tourism development in particular in Russia. The study on 503 artistic gymnastics provides an opportunity to expand the scope of research into 504 the current state of sports tourism in Russia and challenges it faces. The following themes related to sports tourism development in Russia require more research and 506 deeper understanding: policy environment of sports tourism, organisational require-507 ments and complexities of sports tourism marketing. This list can be expanded to 508 include human resource issues, the role of government and private sector, the role 509 of relationship marketing in sports tourism; strategic issues such quality and innovation, and experiential and behavioural aspects of sports tourism.

512 6.7 Conceptual Issues Surrounding Sports Tourism

- Definitional issues. The current definitional frameworks need some consideration in light of the emergence of the 'digital' sports fan and the relationship online behaviour might have to patterns of visitation.
- Relationship marketing. Where there is a dedicated niche following of a sport it might be worth exploring a relationship marketing approach to the transformation of online behaviour to physical visitation. The potential of sports memberships may be worth investigation.



7 Conclusions 520

Sports tourism in the Russian Federation is currently focussed on the staging of 521 mega events and its associated benefits. This paper considers sports heritage 522 tourism and a variant, online form of sports tourism as a means of encouraging 523 the formation of destination image and providing the pre-requisites for the development of a variety of Russian gymnastics tourism product. At present, tourism is in 525 a development stage in Russia and there is also little understanding of the appeal of 526 gymnastics and its potential as a sports tourism product. The rich cultural associations of Russian gymnastics make it a rich field for the collection of data that may 528 contribute to understandings of sport as a cultural form, its potential for tourism 529 commodification, branding and product development.

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