Chapter 3

The business of lifestyle sport

Ryan J. Gagnon, Garrett A. Stone, Bob Brookover, Barry A. Garst, and Spensir M. Mowery

Introduction

In the United States there has been a noticeable trend away from participation in many traditional, mainstream sports and a corresponding surge in both viewership and participation in alternative sports and leisure pursuits (Active Marketing Group, 2009). Paralleling these changes, there has been an increase in scholarship investigating alternative or lifestyle sports (Booth and Thorpe, 2007; Tomlinson, et al., 2005; Wheaton, 2004). Specifically, as lifestyle sports have gained more attention, questions regarding their structure, governance, and resulting impacts on both individuals and communities have been raised (Wheaton, 2004). In response to this growth, this chapter narrows its focus to the economic impacts and trends associated with lifestyle sports. In many cases, branding lifestyle sports as risky, adventurous, or alternative has positioned them as desirable commodities (Wheaton, 2004) and, therefore, potential commercial competitors to mainstream sports. With that in mind, governing bodies, participants, and the communities they interact with ought to be concerned with the economic impacts of lifestyle sporting events, facilities, and general participation. That said, while traditional or mainstream sporting events are known to contribute in meaningful ways to visitor spending, increases in tax-based revenues, and subsequent job creation, the economic profile and impact of lifestyle sporting events is relatively unknown. In the following sections this chapter: (1) explores the commercial aspects of lifestyle sport; (2) explores the dichotomy presented between lifestyle and mainstream sport; (3) describes competition climbing as a lifestyle sport; and (4) presents the results of an economic analysis of a national competition climbing event.

The business of lifestyle sport?

Non-traditional sports that stand apart from the mainstream, such as paddle boarding, climbing, and BMX, have continued to grow in the United States. Recreation and sport literature refers to these non-traditional sports using
several different designations, including: action (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011), adventure (Breivik, 2010), arriving (Rinehart, 2002), extreme (Donnelly, 2006), informal (Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011) post-modern (Wheaton, 2004), risk (Fletcher, 2008), and whiz (Midol, 1993). Despite these various labels, there is a great deal of parity in how the terms are operationalised and correspondingly how these sports are understood (Wheaton, 2004).

Additionally, lifestyle sports are increasing in visibility and attracting diverse audiences and participants (Wheaton, 2010). This increased publicity has both positive and negative consequences for these sports, their members, and prospective members. Increased awareness of these lifestyle sports may draw in new, diverse participants and revenue streams while at the same time drawing attention to the skill and prowess of lifestyle athletes, eliciting recognition, sponsorships, and legitimacy that many lifestyle athletes are deserving of, but detached from. However, this publicity can create an influx of unwanted, unskilled prospective athletes who may sour the culture or image of the sport, due to poor sport etiquette or contrasting sport values. Public awareness such as this is often media driven and occasionally a result of the coercive adoption of lifestyle sports into the mainstream (Wheaton, 2004). Wheaton (2010: 1061) suggests that in this light, these sports are being ‘co-opt[ed] … by transnational corporations and media organisations’ which has resulted in the deterioration of their counter-cultural label, lifestyle sports. For better or worse, lifestyle athletes are increasingly being portrayed as upstanding, normative individuals in contrast to their historical counterparts who were labelled with the titles of ‘outcast’, ‘bum’, or ‘dirtbag’, language symbolic of the fringe, underground, and unconventional nature of their lifestyles and activities (Wheaton, 2010). While some lifestyle athletes have resisted public attention (e.g. surfers seeking to localise and protect their surf) and others have embraced it (e.g. skateboarders seeking to elicit legitimate, brand-name sponsors), few have attempted to maintain a semblance of control by getting involved in and influencing media portrayals of their sport (Wheaton, 2010). In mainstream media campaigns, the nomenclature ‘extreme’ and ‘alternative’ have prevailed and are used to craft a carefully chosen message aimed at attracting younger participants (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Part of the push or desire for the extreme label is derived from the desire to attract sponsors through intentional branding (Tomlinson et al., 2005). However, the extreme label and the perception of danger it engenders can act as a double-edged sword, discouraging certain types of participation and encouraging others (Tomlinson et al., 2005). These conceptualisations, as well as media coverage of fatalities (e.g. a May 2015 news story titled ‘A dangerous stunt leads to the death of two daredevils’) are evidence of the ‘media fixation on risk’ (Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011: 20) that sometimes casts a dark shadow on lifestyle sports, despite the fact that these sports are relatively safe (Rinehart, 2002). Nevertheless,
media-friendly events (Tomlinson et al., 2005) showcased on prominent sport networks (e.g. BMX on ESPN; see Corte, 2013) or in global arenas (e.g. Olympics, see Thorpe and Wheaton, 2011) have proved to be vital to the growth and improved image of many lifestyle sports.

**Dichotomy between lifestyle and mainstream sport**

A central tenet germane to much of the lifestyle sport research is adherence to a counterculture or anti-mainstream viewpoint (e.g. Booth and Thorpe, 2007; Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004). However, a somewhat false dichotomy exists in both the way lifestyle sport participants view themselves and the way some lifestyle sport research is presented. The work of Donnelly (2006) highlights this issue, drawing attention to the hypocrisy of lifestyle sport organisations that simultaneously reject the types of mainstream, commercial entities that currently sponsor and facilitate their growth. He argues that ‘alternative and mainstream are made to stand at opposite ends of a continuum’ (ibid.: 221) when, in reality ‘the cultural practice in question is defined in part by its rejection of commercialism’ (ibid.: 222) by the very entrepreneurs and businesses benefiting financially from this anti-commercial branding. In other words, the reason many lifestyle sport businesses and organisations are successful is their own marketing of themselves as ‘insiders and anti-business’. This somewhat false paradigm is exemplified by the work of Beal and Wilson (2004), who investigated the relationships between skateboarder identity and media (magazine) consumption. Their research presented how a popular magazine critiqued mainstream culture for misappropriation of skateboarding, while at the same time being owned by a multinational media corporation; thus, the group was calling out others for being mainstream when in fact they themselves were mainstream. In summary, the only authentic difference between the businesses of lifestyle and mainstream sport may be the viewpoint of the person describing it.

While attempting to avoid straying too much from the purpose of this chapter, this illustration of the false lifestyle versus mainstream sport dichotomy highlights a layer of definitional ambiguity in our understanding of lifestyle sport. More specifically, this conceptual haziness raises the questions: ‘Are lifestyle sports really distinct from other mainstream sports?’ and ‘When is a lifestyle sport merely a recreational or leisure pursuit and when is it a sport?’ We can consider these questions one at a time.

Sports, defined at a foundational level, are ‘institutionalised competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by personal enjoyment and external rewards’ (Coakley, 2001: 20). Conversely, elementary definitions characterise recreation as a physical, mental, or social activity that is
freely chosen, intrinsically rewarding (e.g. giving satisfaction, fulfillment, pleasure), and pursued during discretionary time (Hamilton-Smith, 1985; McClean and Hurd, 2015), whereas leisure, a related concept, is described as the authentic and informed pursuit of an activity or state of mind that produces specific instrumental outcomes (Cooper, 1999). These definitions highlight that at a basic level, a single activity such as bouldering, a form of rock climbing with no ropes, typically done below four metres, can be construed as sport (e.g. a competition against others or oneself for time and/or difficulty of route), as recreation (e.g. climbing to spend time with friends), or leisure (e.g. climbing alone to relax from job).

Navigating this ambiguity is especially important from a research standpoint. If lifestyle sport participants are genuinely distinct from their mainstream counterparts, then the methods used to understand them may need to be revisited and revised. For example, a criticism of lifestyle sport is the difficulty associated with tracking participation and growth when compared to more mainstream sports. Tomlinson et al. (2005: 8) state: ‘participation figures are hard to establish, precisely because of the informal and counter-cultural context of the sports’. This begs the question, what is different about understanding the number of snowboarders on a slope during a given season from the number of skiers? If no difference exists, then the methods for measuring participation within the context of lifestyle sports should not differ from those of more mainstream sports. Moreover, if the goal of researching lifestyle sports is to truly serve the users, then the utilisation of more traditional analyses may be all the more prudent. One must speak the language that policy makers understand, rather than attempting to build a niche in cases where it may not be necessary or helpful to do so.

A recent study of outdoor climbing in the Red River Gorge in Kentucky highlights the importance of speaking the language of policy makers. In their economic impact study of Red River Gorge climbers, Maples et al. (2016) spoke about the $2.7 million dollar benefit that outdoor climbers bring to these communities rather than overstating their needs and position as an alternative or countercultural user group. The authors illustrated the point that policy makers are more likely to respond to climbers’ needs when climbers demonstrate the economic value of their sport than when they unleash a barrage of complaints regarding access to facilities and resources. With this analysis in mind, the remainder of this chapter examines the economic benefits of outdoor climbing’s sister sport, indoor competition climbing.

**Competition climbing as lifestyle sport**

Climbing may be one of the original lifestyle sports (Robinson, 2004) and is often blended with mountaineering and hiking. Consequently, climbing consists of multiple sub-sports including: bouldering; top-roping; sport,
traditional, adventure, and big-wall climbing (Donnelly, 2006; Selters, 2012). The sport of climbing is highly differentiated and thus challenging to capture in one salient definition (Breivik, 2010). The work of Gagnon et al. (2016) highlights this differentiation in Table 3.1. Moreover, these dimensions may only capture the outdoor side of the sport. The indoor form of climbing also includes multiple sub-sports, including top-roping, bouldering, sport climbing, and speed climbing (USA Climbing, 2014).

As compared with the outdoor form of climbing, indoor climbing – more specifically indoor competition climbing – has adopted characteristics that are more reflective of mainstream sports such as basketball, football, and baseball. For example, basketball ranges from youth amateur leagues, to year-round clubs, to professional teams. This similarity may be one of the primary reasons for the rapid growth of the sport of indoor competition climbing and the formation of governing bodies to oversee its growth and development, including at a national (USA Climbing) and international (International Federation of Sport Climbing [IFSC] and International Olympic Committee) level. In the United States, USA Climbing (USAC), founded in 1998, serves as the governing body for all competition climbing and is recognised by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the IFSC, and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). USA Climbing serves in this capacity for both youth (19 years old and younger) and adult (20 years old and over) climbers (USA Climbing, 2014) and oversees three sub-sports: bouldering, sport, and speed climbing.

In describing the transference of competition climbing from a leisure pursuit to a lifestyle sport, Gagnon et al. (2016: 4) describe USAC Competitions:

USAC competitions take place at the local, regional, and national levels. Advancement to the next level (e.g., from the regional to the national level) requires a high placement at a competition; typically, the top five competitors in one or more sub-sports advance. These competitors are then invited to participate in higher levels of the sport due to their success in prior competitions both nationally and internationally. For USAC competitors to win an event, they must complete the most difficult climbing problems in the most efficient way possible (e.g., completing a bouldering route in only one try without falling off route) in comparison to their fellow competitors.

Considering the limited evidence regarding competition climbing and the broader economic impacts of lifestyle sport, the purpose of this study was to understand the economic benefits of the sport of indoor competition climbing.
### Table 3.1 Common climbing sub-sport descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport (or sub-sport)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bouldering</td>
<td>A form of climbing (both indoor and outdoor) where the climber does not use ropes or harnesses to protect themselves from a fall. These routes are often no longer than 10 metres. Climbers often use padding to protect themselves in the event of a fall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice climbing</td>
<td>A form of climbing (primarily outdoor, except in the case of simulated ice and holds) where the climber can be top roped, lead climbing, and/or traditional climbing (with the use of ice screws) on ice that may have been formed artificially or naturally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoor speed climbing</td>
<td>A form of climbing (primarily indoors) taking place on a standardised purpose built wall where climbers (top-rope belayed) race each other to the top of the wall with the goal of being the fastest climber.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-pitch climbing</td>
<td>A form of climbing (primarily outdoors, except in the case of simulated environments and situations) where the climbing is more than one length of a typical climbing rope (also known as pitch) (typically 50–70 metres). This style of climbing may include both traditional and sport climbing, and in certain cases multiple days where the climbing party uses portable shelters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-roping</td>
<td>A form of climbing (both indoor and outdoor) where the rope is pre-established from anchors at the top of a climb. One end of the rope is attached to the climber, while the other end goes down to a partner who is attached through a piece of belay equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional climbing</td>
<td>A form of climbing (primarily outdoors), often considered more challenging than sport and top-roped climbing, where the climber pulls the rope behind them as they ascend the wall/pitch and places equipment (typically non-permanent) to protect themselves from a fall. This style of climbing may also incorporate fixed pieces of equipment if a climber’s safety dictates it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport climbing (also known as 'lead climbing')</td>
<td>A form of climbing (both indoor and outdoor) more challenging than top-roped climbing where the climber pulls the rope behind them as they ascend the wall/pitch and protect themselves from a fall by clipping fixed pieces of equipment (often referred to as hangers or bolts).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted from Gagnon et al., 2016.

**Note**
This list does not include aiding, outdoor speed, mixed, soloing, free base climbing, etc. For a further explanation of these and related terms, see Eng, 2010; Gaines and Martin, 2014; Selters, 2012.
Evaluating the economic impact of an indoor competition climbing event

In the summer of 2015, as part of a larger study investigating the growth of competition climbing, a research team from Clemson University, South Carolina, in partnership with USA Climbing conducted an investigation to understand the economic influence of the Youth National Sport and Speed Climbing Championships in the local community. This annual five-day event hosts approximately 600 individual youth climbers aged 8–18. An additional 950 coaches and the family members of climbers also attend, bringing in approximately 1,550 people to the city hosting the event. The 2015 event was hosted in Kennesaw, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. The following sections provide details about the study, including participant recruitment procedures, data analysis approach, and the results of the economic impact findings.

Collecting and analysing economic data

As part of the online registration process for the event, potential respondents received a notification that they would be asked to participate in the study at the on-site event check-in. This notification also included information relating to how the data collected would be used and how their information and identity would be protected as required by the research team’s institutional review board process. Prior to data collection the event director informed the research team that approximately 1,600 persons would be present at the event. As such, to gain a somewhat representative sample, the research team determined that at least 200 respondents would be necessary (12.5 per cent) for later data analysis. During the first six hours of the on-site check-in, volunteers solicited questionnaire responses (See Table 3.2) via direct intercepts with potential respondents who were waiting in line for check-in, as the majority of event participants would arrive during that time period. Persons who lived within 50 miles (local residents) of the event were excluded from analysis because expenditures by local residents are typically not counted in determining economic impact (e.g. staying in personal residence rather than hotel).

The questionnaire (see Table 3.2) solicited information regarding characteristics about the persons attending USA Climbing National Championship events, including: where they travelled from, how they travelled to events, where they stayed, how and where they spent money at events, their travelling party sizes, basic demographic information, and at an aggregate level the economic benefits they bring to a community. This questionnaire is also based on similar small sport event investigations (Brewer and Freeman, 2015).
Table 3.2 Economic benefits questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Please specify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you a member of USA Climbing? (Check one)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years have you been a member? Please specify:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are you affiliated with this event? (Check one)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What division(s) are you or your competitor(s) participating in? (Check all that apply)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What days will you be attending the Youth National SCS Championships? (Check all that apply)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you travel 50 or more miles to attend this event?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the USAC Youth National SCS Championship your primary reason for visiting Atlanta/Kennesaw?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days will you be away from home on this trip?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days will you spend in the Atlanta/Kennesaw area on this trip?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you staying overnight in the Atlanta/Kennesaw area?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of accommodations are you using?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your primary form of transportation to the competition?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Are you a member of USA Climbing? (Check one)
2. How many years have you been a member? Please specify:
3. How are you affiliated with this event? (Check one)
4. Competitor, Coach, Family of competitor, Spectator only, Other, please specify:
5. What division(s) are you or your competitor(s) participating in? (Check all that apply)
6. Youth D, Youth C, Youth B, Youth A, Junior
7. What days will you be attending the Youth National SCS Championships? (Check all that apply)
8. 8 July (Wednesday), 9 July (Thursday), 10 July (Friday)
9. 11 July (Saturday), 12 July (Sunday)
10. Did you travel 50 or more miles to attend this event?
11. Yes, No
12. Is the USAC Youth National SCS Championship your primary reason for visiting Atlanta/Kennesaw?
13. Yes, No
14. How many days will you be away from home on this trip?
15. _____ days
16. How many days will you spend in the Atlanta/Kennesaw area on this trip?
17. _____ days
18. Are you staying overnight in the Atlanta/Kennesaw area?
19. Yes, No
20. What type of accommodations are you using?
21. Hotel, Motel, Timeshare, Condo
22. Friends or relatives, Campground, Rental home, Other, please specify:
23. What was your primary form of transportation to the competition?
24. Personal vehicle, Rental car, Commercial airline, Hotel shuttle
25. Public transportation, Tournament shuttle, Airport shuttle, Other, please specify:
Determining direct, indirect, and induced impact

The growth of lifestyle sports in the United States has highlighted the need to better understand the potential direct, induced, and indirect economic benefits that a lifestyle sport, such as competition climbing, can bring to a community hosting an event. These effects are generally calculated by estimating the total attendance at an event, surveying a sample of those in attendance regarding their spending, and then applying a multiplier to account for the recirculation of spent monies beyond the first round of spending (Matheson, 2009). Direct benefits or total direct spending is the amount in dollars spent over a visitor’s entire stay, including items such as lodging, retail, dining and grocery, and transportation. The secondary effects or induced effects occur when the money is recirculated into the local economy (Mondello and Rishe, 2004). For instance, a waiter at a restaurant may receive a direct benefit from an event’s presence in the form of increased hours (wages) and/or tips. When this waiter uses this additional income (beyond their average income) in the community to purchase groceries or retail items and thus recirculates the dollars, this constitutes an induced effect. Finally, indirect effects result from direct economic activity when a local business purchases extra goods and services from another local business due to increased demand (Matheson, 2009). For example, if due to amplified business from an event, a restaurant purchases additional produce from a local farm, this would be an indirect effect.

To calculate direct, induced, and indirect benefits as a result of an event there are multiple guidelines and frameworks available (Crompton, 2006). For the purposes of this study we utilised processes that are both conservative and easily understood. Direct spending for an event can be calculated using the average spending for a participant after screening the collected data for outliers (for instance, responses two standard deviations beyond the mean). For example, if we were interested in the direct impact on dining services for a particular event we could solicit responses in the form of a questionnaire asking visitors how much they spent (on average per day) on dining over the course of an event. The goal here is to solicit the number of responses necessary to ensure representativeness with the broader population of attendees, ideally at least 10 per cent (Crompton, 1995; Matheson, 2009). For instance, if the average response to average dining was $100.00 per day per respondent over a four-day event, this would total $400.00. We then multiply this $400.00 by the total estimated visitor population of 2,000, leading to a total estimated direct impact of dining services of $800,000.00 on the community. It is also important to note that this explanation is simplistic and may not take into account confounding factors, for instance, locals who may have chosen to not eat out due to crowding from the event.
As induced and indirect effects are secondary from direct effects, they are typically calculated with the utilisation of a multiplier. A multiplier is generally calculated by taking the total direct effect of an event, adding it to the indirect effect, and then dividing this amount by the direct effect (i.e. \( \frac{\text{Direct} + \text{Indirect}}{\text{Direct}} \) (Crompton, 1995). However, this method is problematic in that it tends to produce multipliers at or above 2.3; that is, for every $1 spent in a community for an event, $2.3 are produced in the form of induced and indirect effects, thus indicating a $3.3 total effect per respondent. As highlighted by the work of Crompton (1995) and Mathe-son (2009), these multipliers are germane to much of the economic impact analysis of sport and recreation literature, but they also may be overinflated. As such we have elected to use a much more conservative multiplier for this event (0.5). This choice is somewhat supported by additional inves-
tigations of economic benefits in Georgia which indicated multipliers of 1.1 to 1.5 in similar events (Godfrey, 2016).

**Estimation of the total economic impact attributed to a climbing event**

In this study of indoor competition climbing, the sample consisted of 260 survey respondents, 16.77 per cent of the estimated 1,550 potential respondents. Respondents identified as primarily female \( (n=130, 52.8 \text{ per cent}) \) and white (83.4 per cent), and were generally highly educated, with 76.5 per cent of the sample reporting at least a college level of education. The sample was fairly evenly split between household income levels, but 41.1 per cent of respondents reported income at or above $175,000.00 per year. Respondents reported an average age of 39.48 years (SD=13.36, range 15–65 years). Of the 260 respondents, 229 reported being current members of USA Climbing (USAC), with an average membership length consisting of 4.72 years (SD=3.56). Of survey respondents, 151 were family members of competi-
tors, 55 were coaches, and 49 were competitors.

Data were entered into SPSS 23 software for descriptive analysis. Results indicated an average number of 3.75 persons in each travelling party, with the average respondent being financially responsible for 2.41 persons (the other persons likely being the youth competitors). Respondents specified an average of 4.69 nights away from home for the event thus indicating a total of 3,013 room nights. The results (presented in complete detail in Table 3.3) indicated a total direct effect of $1,444,996.34 (all amounts in US dollars) for the five-day (four-night) event. Utilising the 0.5 multiplier, discussed earlier, indicated total potential indirect and induced effects of $722,499.67.

Tax rates for Georgia were utilised to calculate fiscal impacts for local and state governments. Results of this analysis indicated $51,725.34 in local tax receipts, $26,908.62 in bed (lodging) taxes, and $60,721.32 in
state taxes. Finally, these results indicate a total (induced + direct) impact to the Kennesaw area of $2,146,932.21. Additionally, to provide further context to this chapter and to demonstrate how to appropriately communicate economic findings to relevant stakeholders, an alternative format for presenting the results is given in Figure 3.1.

It is clear from the findings of this study that lifestyle sport can have a powerful economic benefit to a community. The nearly $2.2 million impact of a lifestyle sport event over only five days clearly indicates that lifestyle sports should no longer be considered niche or alternative. This is especially true in light of the fact that the money being spent by lifestyle sport participants is comparable to what is spent by participants in more mainstream events. Clearly, those involved in tourism and event planning should consider the advantages to hosting and marketing the sport and its events in their communities. Moreover, the findings indicate that because lifestyle sports can and do have attractive economic benefit to the communities that host them, they ought to consider abandoning their historically fringe or outsider status and embracing their growing mainstream appeal.

One factor that could explain the substantial economic impact of indoor competition climbing and other lifestyle sports is the fact that these sports traditionally and anecdotally attract a clientele with more discretionary time and income. In other words, as was the case in the USA Climbing study, participants in lifestyle sports are typically wealthy and highly educated, characteristics that predict socio-economic status and subsequently purchasing power and consumer behaviour. Though attracting a broader and more diverse consumer base may be desirable (to both lifestyle sport participants and policy makers) for a number of practical social and economic reasons, the fact remains that lifestyle sport participants likely contribute more per capita to local communities than do traditional sport participants. However, this assumption could be challenged if one narrows the scope of consideration to participants in national and travelling
Figure 3.1 Economic impact of championship climbing events.
Source: Ryan Gagnon, Garrett Stone, Bob Brookover, and Barry Garst.
competitions where income is likely to be a barrier to participation, and therefore participant characteristics are likely to be consistent between traditional and mainstream sports.

It is also worth noting that conservative methods (e.g. a low multiplier level) were intentionally utilised in this study to ensure that the statements made about the economic benefits of lifestyle sport were accurate. Additionally, the research team was in no way affiliated with the organisation sponsoring the data collection and was therefore uninfluenced by pressures or obligations to inflate results. This strategy was employed in response to cautionary statements from Mondello and Rishe (2004: 333) who suggest that ‘generally speaking, economic impact studies are undertaken not necessarily to provide an accurate assessment of the impact, but rather to legitimise positions’, and further echoed by Crompton (2006) who argued that the motives of a study’s sponsor may invariably dictate the study’s outcome. Thus, lifestyle sport organisations, in an effort to be transparent and report accurately to policy makers, should consider recruiting experienced, external auditors to conduct economic assessments of this kind. Again, the goal of this study was to produce a conservative but accurate estimate of the potential economic impact of a lifestyle sport event. Indeed, if some higher, recommended multipliers had been considered, the end result may have approached a nearly $5 million economic impact, thus eclipsing many similar studies of the impacts of traditional or mainstream sport events.

**Concluding thoughts**

Ultimately, policy makers are pragmatic and typically more concerned with (or constrained by) the bottom line of maximising economic gains within their constituency than with supporting niche groups with unique, ambiguous needs. In order for lifestyle sports to remain viable, perhaps they should focus less on differentiation and more on valuation. The present study has demonstrated that so-called lifestyle sports can be as economically beneficial as their mainstream counterparts. This finding should be used as a clarion call to rally policy makers who can provide resources, facilities, and support to these often marginalised or minority groups. Additionally, economic evidence provided in analyses of this kind may counteract negative valuations or stigma associated with many lifestyle sports (e.g. unsafe, counter-culture, deviant) and make those sports more attractive or innocuous in the eyes of policy makers.

Moving forward, it is important to note that approaches for assessing economic impact have been as varied as they are challenging. For example, as indicated by Lee (2001), economic multipliers are often county, state, or region specific and are derived from a number of different models such as IMPLAN (Impact Analysis for Planning), TEIM (Travel Economic Impact
Model), and RIMS (Regional Input-Output Modeling System), each of which produces slightly distinct results. As a starting point, researchers considered multipliers used in studies published by the Atlanta, Georgia Convention and Visitors Bureau. Those multipliers were adjusted downward (more conservative) based on previous studies conducted by the researchers, and their experience.

Matheson (2002) pointed out that economic impact is often overestimated or overstated, hence the use of conservative multipliers in the USA Climbing example. These overestimates fail to account for the reality that there is a limit to the number of visitors/tourists who can inhabit a space or use a service at a given time and that sporting events often draw in one type of tourist at the exclusion of others who would have visited in their place (i.e. displacement). It is also beyond the scope of both lifestyle sport organisations and consulting groups conducting impact assessments to explore the extent to which money spent by tourists remains within or leaks out of the community. With that in mind, all economic impact assessments should be viewed with as much caution as optimism.

Future research in this area should consider the social contexts in which the data are collected and assess the potential for economic leakage in these contexts. Additionally, these studies could explore whether and how economic impact data actually influence policy maker perceptions of lifestyle sports. Likewise, additional studies of economic impact of lifestyle sport should be conducted to either disconfirm or lend support to the findings in the USA Climbing example. The findings in this chapter reflect a starting point for critical discussions and analyses surrounding the commercialisation of lifestyle sport. They also provide an optimistic outlook for the future of these sports as far as economic impacts are concerned.

References


