

## **Sport Mobilities: a framework and agenda for the study of sport in mobilities**

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### **Abstract:**

Sport moves people physically, emotionally, socially (Eichberg and Loland 2010) and movement is central to sport. Yet, engagement with sport in mobilities studies is rare. This paper outlines an agenda for sport mobilities approaches to catalyse greater engagement in the field with the world of sport and to strengthen dialogues with, and mobilities' position within, interdisciplinary sport studies. We first establish the promise of sport mobilities research before tracing existing engagements, and finally offering a framework for future sport mobilities approaches.

**Keywords:** sport; exercise; fitness; physical cultural studies; mobilities; active bodies; human movement

### **1. On your marks: towards sport mobilities**

Sport moves people physically, emotionally, socially (Eichberg and Loland 2010). Sport also involves movement. Yet, engagements between sports studies and mobilities studies are rare and sport is seldom a topic in mobilities research. Sports scholars Newman and Falcous asserted in 2012 that 'the active human body – and particularly as it exists in various sporting contexts – to be conspicuously absent from early deliberations on mobility' (39). They appealed for 'sports studies writers to consider the scope of mobilities approaches and, in turn, for mobilities researchers to consider the oft-overlooked, unique and contingent world of sport as a rich site of enquiry' (2012, 40). Despite growth in mobilities research dealing with the 'active human body' and some sport scholars embracing the mobilities paradigm, the situation remains largely the same today. This paper delineates pluralistic sport mobilities approaches in order to foster greater dialogue between the study of sport and mobilities.

Our argument for sport mobilities centres on sport being a ‘cultural formation that vividly encapsulates [the] core logics of mobilities’ (Newman and Falcous 2012, 39). Movement is foundational and meaningful in sports, such as cycling, rowing, and skiing, where pure mobility defines them. In other sports, it is the skilful movement of objects (often balls) between moving bodies and immobile goals (as in football) or lines (as in tennis) that epitomises and enables them. Sport mobilities can be ‘moored’ within fixed sport infrastructures, such as pitches, courts, indoor arenas, and stadiums, or on streets or parks, and are predicated on and become playable because of the movement of things, people and the meanings associated with them.

Sport mobilities are entangled in mobile networks, ecosystems, contexts and political economies. Under neoliberal globalisation, sporting bodies are both ‘product and producer of capital’ where physical corporeal movements entwine with ‘broader circuits and flows of human bodies, capital, power, and culture’ with the potential to ‘(re)position political, economic and cultural formations’, such as migration, trade and diplomacy (Newman and Falcous, 2012, 39-43). Like Newman and Falcous, we see mobilities approaches offering new ways of ‘understanding and problematising sport’, while ‘analyses of sport can add unique and rich layers of insight to broader understanding of mobilities’ (2012, 52-53).

While neglected in mainstream mobilities research, sport’s potential for mobilities studies is actually acknowledged in foundational texts that illustrate key mobility logics (see Section 2). Cresswell (2006, 3) exemplified the ‘brute facts’ of movement in the ‘mobility captured by high-powered computer hardware and software in sport science labs’, and Sheller and Urry’s (2006, 207) identified ‘sports stars’ as contributing to the sense that ‘[A]ll the world seems to be on the move’.

There are a few extant studies analysing mobilities through sporting contexts and applying mobility theories to examinations of cycling (Soliz 2022; Mutter 2022), snowboarding (Thorpe 2012), hiking (Stanley 2020), rock climbing (Rickly 2016), skateboarding (Platt 2018), motorcycle racing (Pinch and Reimer 2018), running (Cook et al 2016; Edensor et al 2018; Larsen 2022; Lepoša et al 2023; McGahern 2019; Qviström et al 2020), Covid-19’s

impact on exercise (Cochoy 2023; McDuie-Ra 2023), mega-events (Giulianotti et al 2015; Salazar et al 2016), and the meanings and doings of sport in particular environments (Larsen 2019; Latham and Layton 2020), for instance. Yet, sport still only features in this journal sporadically. Likewise, in the *Handbook of Mobilities* (Adey et al 2014), sport is only brought up twice, and exercise only referred to within the context of soldiers' mobilities. The *Handbook of Urban Mobilities* (Lassen et al 2020) only mentions sport seven times and exercise twice.

We can only speculate why sport is largely excluded from mobility research. It may reflect a view that sport (Dear 1988) – as tourism was (Urry 1990) – is considered superficial, insignificant and unnecessary compared with more production-oriented mobilities like commuting, transport, cargo and migration. Moreover, sport may be considered dubious because it is tied up with (neo)liberal ideologies of competition, records, self-improvement, fit bodies, winning, and wellness, which during Covid-19 even resurfaced notions of the inviolable, sovereign and autonomous active-body conspiratorially averse to public health measures that closed gyms and sports venues, and relied on population-wide vaccination programmes. This competitive ethos does not sit easily with mobilities studies' focus on accessibility, social inclusion, 'just mobilities', and public, collective and solidaristic movement. Mobilities scholars may disapprove of professional sports commercialisation, extreme wealth accumulation and elite mobilities in favour of more deserving areas and communities of study.

While acknowledging these reservations, we argue that sport is significant and should not be overlooked. Sport matters to many and ties together disparate mobilities in uneven geographies. A sport lens also moves mobilities studies forward by introducing new themes and perspectives on how bodies, practices and things move and the consequences of such movement.

We are not alone in connecting mobilities and sport. Merriman et al (2016, 1) suggest that studying sporting events can 'reveal the complex movements and forms of embodied mobility entailed in such feats, but rarely do such movements feature in mobility journals'.

They call for thinking ‘*across* the fuzzy boundaries’ separating allied fields, engaging with approaches, methods and debates from sport studies if ‘we want to understand the diverse meanings, embodied practices, subject positions, politics, economic forces, knowledge practices, and representational logics that gather around human and nonhuman movements’ (2016, 1-2, see also Bell and Cook 2021; Qviström et al 2023). So, while mobilities’ engagements with sport have been light and promissory, the potential of dialogue is known but awaits realisation. We rechart this course by examining, evaluating, and proposing ways forward for the study of sport mobilities.

Now is the moment to connect mobility and sport. First, the boundaries between sport, exercise and transportation are somewhat dissolving. The rise of active travel blends physical activity with purposeful mobility and mobility-transport-sport categorisations (Cook et al 2022). Long-distance walking, bicycle commuting and run-commuting incorporate sport elements when it comes to equipment, meanings, bodily sensations, and effort (Bahrami and Rigal 2017; Larsen 2018; Cook 2021, 2023; Bahrami 2021). They are commonly recorded on self-tracking devices too, introducing elements of self-competition and remote social sporting communities or surveillance into personal everyday mobility (Couture 2021). Second, sport and mobility are key sites for public health (Coen et al 2021). Third, sport generates much national and international travel tied up with attending and participating in events and doing sports in their specialised places, which questions their sustainability and ecological impacts (Bell and Cook 2021). Finally, sport and high-carbon mobilities are now closely related. For instance, the car industry sponsors active mobility events such as the Berlin Marathon (BMW) and Tour de France (Škoda). State-owned airlines ‘Emirates, Etihad, and Qatar ... are almost synonymous with some of the biggest [football] clubs in the world’ (Bovenizer, 2023, n.p.), sponsoring dominating European sides and their stadiums, such as Arsenal, Manchester City, Real Madrid (Thani and Heenan, 2017). Similarly backed by oil money and government support, golf’s LIV tour and the Saudi Arabian football league attract players with unprecedented prices and wages. These examples are not purely sport, exercise, migration, economics, politics or transport concerns; hence, they require cross-cutting perspectives and categories.

This paper invites mobilities scholars to take sport seriously, mapping out a vision for sport mobilities approaches. Section 2 discusses definitions, disciplines, and lineages of sport mobilities, considering how it relates to interdisciplinary sports studies. Section 3 proposes a framework for sport mobilities approaches that we hope will catalyse greater work in this area.

## **2. Get set: definitions, disciplines, and lineages of sport mobilities**

### **i) What is sport?**

“Sport” is often defined narrowly as competition-, achievement- or results-oriented (see Borge 2021, for example). Here the goal is to win, set records and improve one’s time or score. Such sport involves professionalism, prowess, seriousness, and institutionalisation, which millions may follow on TV and support. However, this understanding of sport may not account for many peoples’ involvement in local sport associations or why they run, cycle, swim, dance, climb, jump, lift, kick, throw or roll or support a local team. Such an exclusive framing dismisses many practices and meanings of interest to sport mobilities research, including sport as health, play, fun, artful experimentation (Gross 2021) or ‘moral, reflexive, community-oriented, green, spiritual, anarchic and potentially Eros-filled physical cultural practices’ (Atkinson 2010, 112). Each of these framings enrolls and understands the active human body differently.

We approach sport as an umbrella concept of physically similar but semantically overlapping terms, such as sport, exercise, fitness, physical activity, recreation, leisure and wellbeing. As the *Revised European Sports Charter* (Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport of the Council of Europe 2022, 12) states:

“sport” means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels’.

Our sport mobilities approaches question what ‘sport’ is and where it occurs. It is informed by a broad understanding of ‘sport’ which encapsulates competitive and leisurely practices,

organised and self-organised sport, and the diverse bodies of professionals and amateurs. It also includes watching sport in person or on screens, e-sports and playing sports through visual and multi-sensory interfaces. Moreover, it is tied up with the objects, technologies and infrastructures that enable sport mobilities, and all the digital and physical work involved in building and maintaining them.

## **ii) Disciplinary influences**

Our approach to 'sport' is aligned within interdisciplinary sport studies. Sport studies is a loose and mutable interdisciplinary collective of disciplines that focus on sport's societal, cultural, historical, psychological, and physiological implications. To borrow a sporting phrase, the sociology of sport is the MVP (most valuable player) within sport studies (Coakley and Dunning 2000). It examines the social and cultural dimensions of 'what sport is and why it matters' (Giulianotti 2015, 1). Other contributors include anthropology, economics, history, geography, philosophy, politics, psychology, cultural studies, leisure studies, media studies and gender studies, as well as disciplines bridging social and bio-scientific approaches, such as kinesiology, sports coaching and movement studies (Eichberg 2014).

We take influence from a newer player in sport studies: 'physical cultural studies' (Silk et al 2017). Both mobilities and physical cultural studies value disciplinary eclecticism and critical examinations of the cultures, contexts and consequences of diverse active embodiments, understanding them as plural and situated within social, cultural, economic, political, and technological relationships (Silk and Andrews 2011). Silk et al define physical cultural studies' 'research object' as the 'diverse realm of physical culture (including, but not restricted to sport, fitness, exercise, recreation, leisure, wellness, dance, and health-related movement practices)'. The field is 'concerned with a process of theorizing the empirical, in identifying, interpreting, and intervening into ... physical culture-related structures and institutions, spaces and places, discourses and representations, subjectivities and identities, and/or practices and embodiments' (2017, 5). The description could just as well describe the socially embedded and embodied approaches to mobility within this journal, and the situatedness of mobility in 'broader social, economic, political, and technological contexts'

(Silk et al 2017, 5). Further, the attentiveness to power, control, experience, representation and meaning in mobility (such as Cresswell 2006; 2010), align with physical cultural studies' examination of how 'active bodies become organized, disciplined, represented, embodied, and experienced in mobilizing (or corroborating), or at times immobilizing (or resisting), the conjunctural inflections and operations of power within a society' (Silk et al 2017, 5). We hope that sport mobilities can become a key ally in physical cultural studies aims to reinstate and re-value the place of socio-cultural, critical and interpretative analysis in understanding human sporting movements (Andrews 2008; Silk et al 2017).

Despite Kerr and Espiner's (2021, 170) recent verdict that 'the role of human movement' has 'received surprisingly little attention' in sport sociology, sport studies has embraced mobilities (or mobilities-adjacent) approaches more strongly than the reverse. Most prominently, perhaps, mobilities has had methodological influence in sport studies, with an 'emergent trend' towards mobile and moving methods being adopted to explore exercise and physical activity practices (Palmer 2016, 225; Chin et al 2020). Substantively, the three mobilities-informed chapters in the *Handbook of Physical Cultural Studies* exemplify where mobilities thinking is taking hold: mobile bodies (Jones 2017), affective cities (Latham and McCormack 2017), and sport, migration and space (Carter 2017).

With shared interests in moving bodies, phenomenology and non-representational theories (see below), mobilities perspective are beginning to inform sport studies' socio-cultural examinations of active bodies (Pavlidis and Fullagar 2013, Phoenix and Bell 2019). There is potential for sport mobilities research to engage with bio-scientific and positivistic approaches (Jones 2017) in biomechanics, physiology, sport performance or sport coaching in understanding how bodies as biological entities move. This speaks to mobilities' interests in corporeal physical movement and how it entwines with the lived and representational aspects of movement (Cresswell 2006). This could include studies of how sport bodies are produced by coaches/training plans and their prescription of rational, scientific training, clock-timing and repetitive drills (Markula and Pringle 2006; Larsen 2022). Such abstractions turn leisure practices into 'work' (Bale 2011, Mills and Denison 2013, Denison and Mills 2014) that cause onward bodily changes, both intended (like improvement in



performance or bodily capacity) and unintended (such as amenorrhea, a common consequence of intensive daily exercise for people who menstruate - Thorpe 2016).

Similarly, sport studies is attuning to the role of mobility in understanding how sport spaces are experienced in blue and green exercise (Thompson and Wilkie 2021) or the affective atmospheres of sport spaces (Broch 2021, Cai et al 2021, Wilhelm 2020), for example. Movement is also central in the substantial, long established sport studies literature on sport migration (Maguire and Falcous 2011). In particular, sport migration has advanced understandings of how and why people move for sport (rather than during it); the global processes, practices and infrastructures that produce and discipline sportspeople's movements from one part of the world to another (Carter 2017); and the wider issues of 'identity, social and environmental justice, regulatory structures, power struggles and exploitation' (Maguire and Falcous 2011, 274) within which such movements are entangled. There are affinities here too to work on sport globalisation and the supposed worldly interconnectedness and fluidity of sport people, ideas and things (Bale and Maguire 2013).

While mobilities is starting to inform specific pockets and themes within sport studies, we hope to encourage more thinking across different forms/themes of movement. Thorpe's (2012, 2014, 2017) work exemplifies such sport mobilities thinking. Grounded in both sport and mobilities fields, her research interrogates different forms of sport mobilities and their interplay with networks of transnational social, economic, political and cultural processes involved in contemporary action sport and their implications for social formations, lifestyles, imaginaries, identities, and corporeal experiences (see also Spowart 2021).

### **iii) Tracing longer lineages**

We should also recognise earlier relationships between mobilities and the world of sport. This lineage reveals common ground and further intersections between mobilities studies and sport studies that strengthens the foundations for sport mobilities approaches. First, we note Cresswell's (2006) historical examination of mobility in *On the Move* where he examined the codification and rationalisation of ballroom dancers, fearful of inappropriate and racialised moves pathologised as dangerous and out of place. Cresswell also explored

Edward Muybridge's time-motion studies of the gait and movement patterns of racehorses and other multi-species bodies. Studies of bodies-in-motion were crucial for Cresswell's examination of how early visual technologies and scientific practices codified and rationalised bodies to remove superfluous motions, which are now standard techniques in capitalism and professional sport.

There are parallels here with sport sociologist and historian Henning Eichberg, who also established body culture studies. Eichberg (1980) explored the changing representations of horses' bodies in art before and after the Industrial Revolution and how depictions of the 'ideal' form of equestrian movement related to changing conceptualisations of bodies, movement, space and time. This analysis revealed a change from dressage to racing, from depicting spatial and position-oriented artistic equestrianism to stretched-out, temporally-focused and movement-oriented racing equestrianism symbolic of the cultural shift in sport from an interest in performance (artistic, rhythmic, postural, spatial, choreographed) to progress (achievement, temporal, dromological, productive). The parallels between Eichberg and Cresswell's work indicate longer, albeit separate, arcs in analysing active moving bodies in mobilities and sport studies.

Second, John Bale's writings on the geographies of sport (2003) and running (2004) explored, almost in parallel, themes central to the emerging mobilities field around mobility as a practice and metaphor of transgression and resistance. Although space and place took centre stage, movement is ever-present in his writing on sport and its associated places and global flows (e.g. Bale and Maguire 2013). Furthermore, Bale's work with Sang (1996) on Kenyan running almost prefigures the post-colonial and decolonising critique of mobility, ideas further developed with Cronin (2003). Bale's work is an early example of the potential for thinking with sport and movement in dialogue.

Third, literature on physical cultures of exploration and colonialism point to further critical engagement with active moving bodies in the pre-histories of mobility studies. This work demonstrates the lionising of the embodied, active, exertion of virulent masculine explorers walking, climbing, hiking, overlanding, and racing at the expense of different and differently

mobile bodies (Clarsen 2015) – especially female, indigenous and subaltern – whose bodily knowledges and recorded experiences were often excluded from the serious concerns and epistemologies of modern science. In the late 19th Century, the body cultures of exploration gave rise to physical cultures and challenges of endurance, such as mountaineering. These became increasingly sportised and rationalised after the First World War, entwined with nationalist, even fascist, masculine and middle-class ideals of body-management, transformation and habituation (Westaway 2013), and involved in cultivating citizenship (Matless 1998). Such interrogations of active moving bodies in the cultures of exploration are further points of connection between mobilities, physical culture and sport.

Finally, theoretical influences also establish longer histories of overlapping engagement between mobilities and sport around the active moving body. Sport studies embrace of phenomenology resulted in greater appreciation of movement, the body, kinaesthetic perceptions and bodily practices (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2007). Meanwhile, non-representational theories strengthened such interests in mobilities work. This ‘theory of mobile practices’, are ‘based on the leitmotif of movement in its many forms’ (Merriman 2012, 35), within which sport and exercise are categorised as a ‘chief knowledge’ and a ‘key element of the modern experience economies’ (Thrift 2000, 49-50). Non-representational theories focus on physically mobile practices and foreground affective sensations silenced in texts and representations (Larsen 2019). Dance became an often-used exemplar of exploring improvisatory and creative experiences, affective relations (McCormack 2014; Thrift 2008) and the codification and regulation of the body through social and cultural norms (Cresswell 2006). Non-representational theories have influenced mobilities’ approach to moving bodies and garnered attention within sport studies too (Thorpe and Rinehart 2010). In response to these theories, research now commonly embrace lively, sensory, non-representational ethnographies (Sparkes 2017; Vannini 2015), ‘to get to grips with the raw performance of sport; sport as a material, embodied, expressed, and sensed physical act happening in space and time’ (Andrews 2017, 769).

These four examples establish further affinities between mobilities and the world of sport around the active moving body and their environments. While still agreeing with Newman

and Falcoux (2012, 39), we have shown the active human body in sporting contexts to be *conspicuously marginal* from ‘early deliberations on mobility’ rather than ‘conspicuously absent’. This lineage tracing establishes a basis for sport mobilities approaches that we outline now.

### 3. Go: a framework for sport mobilities approaches

Our framework is not complete or exhaustive; but is a generative starting point for sport mobilities approaches. The framework has three nested layers that draws on intersections between mobilities and sport studies (Figure 1):

1. **Forms of sport mobilities:** different forms of sporting movements that provide the substantive focal points.
2. **Thematic analytical lenses:** key organising concepts through which the forms of sport mobilities can be interrogated and theorised.
3. **Sport-mobilities orientations:** underpinning qualities, values and dispositions that imbue sport mobilities research and thinking with common orientations and ethos.

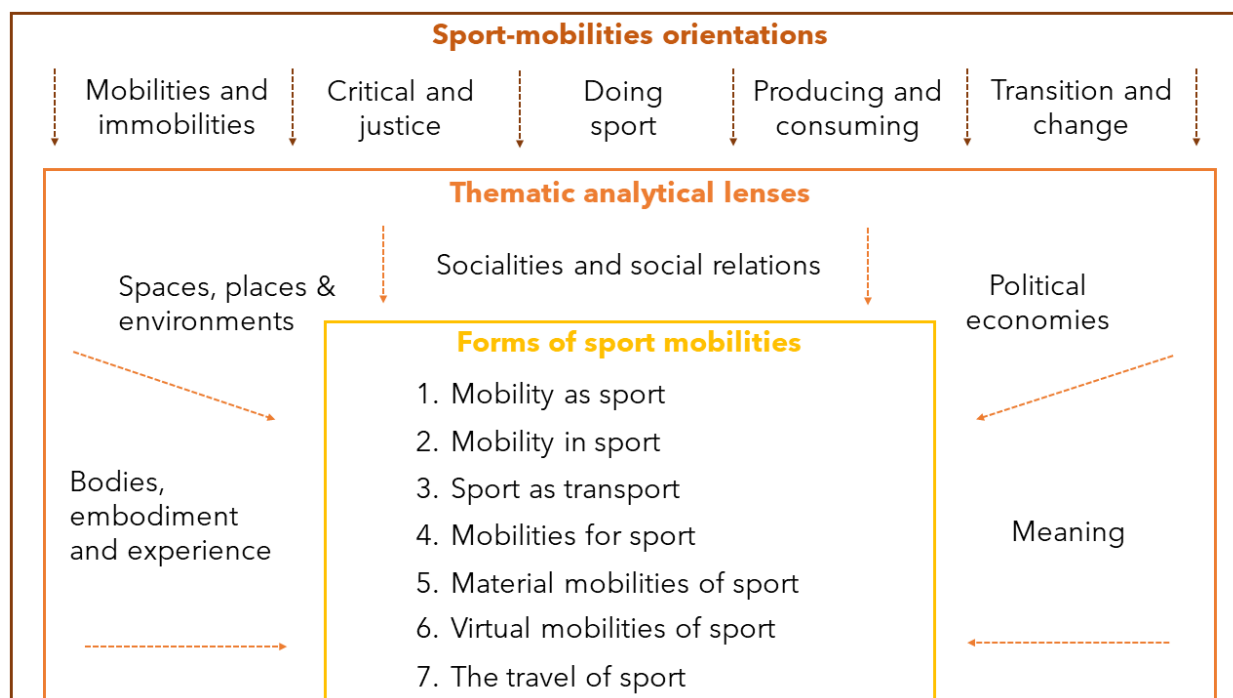


Figure 1. A framework for sport mobilities approaches.

### i) Forms of sport mobilities

We identify seven sporting movements that provide the raw materials and substantive focal points for sport mobilities research.

- **Mobility as sport.** Some sports are defined by movement over some distance and duration of time. Running, swimming, climbing, cycling, driving and sailing are autotelic sport practices: bodily or vehicular movements that have purpose in itself. This form of sport is about the pointless mobilities (Bissell 2013) of loops and laps (Cidell 2016). In competitive events, it concerns overcoming a distance as fast – in as little time – as possible. In other contexts, it might be about appreciating bodily sensations, environments, time with fellow practitioners or using the challenge of distance in pursuit of health, weight loss, or philanthropy (Hitchings and Latham, 2016).
- **Mobility in sport.** Corporeal movement – especially running – is central to most forms of sport. Running is necessary to, say, play football, basketball, and tennis. Here, running is a ‘necessary evil’, a corporeal infrastructure allowing bodies to move with speed, balance and endurance to excel at scoring goals or points. While non-autotelic, it is nonetheless a crucial skill, and the excellent football player will also be a skilful runner. Running, walking, standing, jumping, all energise the world of embodied sport, yet they are little understood or researched in this context.
- **Sport as transport.** Sport can be used to undertake a journey and purposeful commuting or transport can have sporting dimensions. Sport as transport differs from the ‘pointless’ loop and leisure mobilities above, evading easy distinctions between transport research and sport research. It resembles ‘active travel’ (Cook et al 2022) but is more exclusive. ‘Active travel’ becomes ‘sport as transport’ when associated with, and feels like, exercise, training or competition. Some cyclists (Larsen 2018) and runners (Cook 2021) combine sport and commuting – often with a computer on the back (Cook 2023) – for time-efficiency and to make commuting

meaningful. Mobilities scholars insist that travel time is not dead time, yet few have explored how sport infuses travel time with meaning.

- **Mobilities for sport.** Sport is not only about micro-mobilities of bodily or vehicular movement. Bodies are also moved, tied into systems and cultures of access and travel. For instance, sport teams and their fans attend away matches nationally and internationally, people participate in sport events both near and far, and travel daily to access sport facilities. The World Cup in football, The Tour de France and the Olympics attract millions of spectators, often avid amateurs themselves (Hannam 2016; Salazar et al 2016). Mobilities for sport are simultaneously tied to sport migration (Carter 2017), high-carbon privileged lives (Millward 2013), the trafficking and exploitation of cheap athletes, such as from Africa (Esson 2015; Ungruhe 2016), and postcolonial power relations (Besnier 2015). This travel also illustrates how mobilities for sport are absorbed by the vortex of global (sport) tourism riddled with inequalities, injustices and high carbon footprints (Mabon, 2023) and sets the overlaps between sport, travel and migration as important themes for sport mobilities.
- **Material mobilities of sport.** Sport mobilities are bound within a global production chain of material objects and infrastructures that produce, mediate, and commercialise movement in sport. Specific sports require or are associated with assemblages of specialised spaces, footwear, prosthetics, clothing, objects, mobility aids, and infrastructures unique to this particular sport. Even a straightforward practice such as running can involve specialised shoes, clothing, watches and tracking devices (Cook and Larsen 2022) that turn embodied movement into shareable data (Esmonde 2019). However, these material assemblages are also resisted. Some ordinary runners eschew running watches or fancy shoes, and football and tennis can be played with homemade or generic objects on streets, courtyards, gardens and beaches.

These materials mobilise people and sports, but they are also mobile themselves – both as part of gameplay and wider mobility circuits that facilitate sport. Some material sports mobilities can drive enormous carbon and social footprints, relying on the distribution logistics of heavy machinery and parts for bikes or motorcars, or indeed lighter cheap plastics; the import of cheap steel and cement for stadia (both often rely on coal to manufacture and diesel to ship); bricks produced by migrant workers in asphyxiating toxic conditions; sports garments made by cheap and exploited labour in poorly regulated industries; the raw materials derived from extractive neocolonial industries, such as the rubber balata in golf balls from Guyana. All these movements are of interest to sport mobilities.

- **Virtual mobilities of sport.** Sport mobilities and spectatorship can also involve ‘immobile’ bodies, consuming sport on screens in comfy chairs, far away from the stadiums or the streets where the events occur. Self-tracking social networks, e-sports and augmented/virtual reality are the latest participative forms of these virtual mobilities. The number of people watching a game or tournament at a distance in their home or local pub outnumber those Urry (2002) termed corporeally co-present (Weed 2007). The regular live broadcasting of matches and tournaments by private TV stations and digital subscription services coupled with the rise of social media enables distant fandom modes that were impossible decades ago when sport events were far less televised (Conner 2014). While distant fandom is not a new phenomenon, the novelty stems from the fact that it is now possible to be a regular, following one’s favourite team’s every match (Baker 2021). Such ‘virtual mobilities’ make teams and sport stars famous beyond their local context. Fans worldwide cheer in unison when their team scores; and new exorbitant capital (from advertising and television rights) and people flows can be a consequence – consider the rise of sports tourism and fandom mobilities to the Welsh town of Wrexham following the Disney+ series *Welcome to Wrexham*.
- **Travel of sport.** Last, we suggest exploring how sports – as disciplines and practices – move across borders and provide a conduit for other social, political and

cultural movements to flow. Sport is a globalised phenomenon that can travel well. The movements of global sport are geopolitical and tied into forms of colonialism (such as cricket), post-colonialism, nation-building, capitalism, social movements, sport-washing and international relations. These can also result in sport immobilities. Russia's war in Ukraine has seen its athletes barred from competing in the Olympics and several international competitions under the Russian flag, amidst other state-sponsored doping controversies. Other sports fail to travel far, such as American football's limited internationalisation (Wise and Kirby 2020), while others buck traditional diffusion patterns, such as polo's spread from East to West (Parrish 2018). Sport mobilities research can interrogate such flows to explore how sport moves and gains popularity (such as padel tennis recently) and with what impact.

## **ii) Thematic analytical lenses**

We now discuss the thematic analytical lenses through which the forms of sport mobilities can be interrogated. We outline the broad interests of each and provide illustrative questions that exemplify how our framework can advance research into sport mobilities within each theme. These lenses are not tied to particular theories but are proffered openly, encouraging intersecting approaches from mobilities and sport studies.

- **Bodies, embodiment and experience.**

Already a key component of existing sport mobilities research, the approaches advocated in our framework seek to sustain and extend perspectives on bodily movement and corporeal experiences in sport. This lens explores how bodies in sport mobilities are produced and enacted in different environments and with different materials (Breivik 2020). How do sport mobilities include and exclude particular bodies and genders? What is possible for different bodies and different bodily capacities (Kafer 2013) and how are these cutting across new lines of gender identity where transgender bodies have been marginalised and vilified from some sports, and heavily scrutinised and measured in others? Overall, this lens may include new research questions such as how motorsports and sailing are experienced and enacted as autotelic practices by different people and in different



environments. Alternatively, we can ask how running is understood when it is a necessary secondary aspect to a sport? How do cheering and a supportive atmosphere enhancing sport performances? How is the movement of sport bodies tracked and monitored? How are they energised, run out of steam or fall into injury? Such questions sit with the phenomenology of sport studies and sport scientists' focus on the physiological aspects of doing sport, yet the physiological aspects of movement are undeveloped in mobilities research.

- **Spaces, places and environments.**

Sport mobilities can take place in streets, parks, natural environments or in specialised environments such as tracks, pitches and courts that are regulated and mobilised to ensure globally replicability and comparability anywhere (Bale 2003). This lens invites an analytical focus on the co-constitutive entanglement of space, sport, and movement, interrogating how space is produced and encountered in sport mobilities. It also explores how different active bodies fit into these spaces, and the implications for rights to space, belonging and mobile being-in-the-world. Sport mobilities approaches urges the consideration of questions such as: How does rock climbing affects someone's sense of place? In surfing, how is a wave understood and expressed as a space? How are environmental sensibilities generated through elemental engagements with earth, water, fire, air, weather, atmospheres and pollution in sport (Allen-Collinson and Jackman 2022; Larsen 2022)? What are the experiences of running on streets normally used by cars? How are stadiums and arenas designed to foster spectator movement to and within football stadiums? How does exclusion and inclusion underpin access and experience to sport spaces, especially where exercise in some public spaces may risk fear and harassment or in the intimate spaces of sports changing and treatment rooms where bullying, shaming and sexual violence can exist through hierarchies of power and trust (Fasting and Sand 2015)?

- **Socialities and social relations.** This lens explores the connections between sport mobilities and social structures, relationships and change at various scales to ascertain sport's role in societies and social futures. It encourages questions such as: How do sport mobilities affect interactions, relationships and structures at different societal levels? How do sport mobilities develop a sense of self and identity, uniting and differentiating people to create communities, belonging or exclusions (Nunn et al 2022)? What social issues arise from sport mobilities and how can sport mobilise awareness of social issues or provide a conduit for social movements (Dixon et al 2023; Harvey et al 2013)? How are sport mobilities governed, formally or informally, by social institutions and systems? (Krieger and Henning 2020)? How are sport mobilities including and excluding specific bodies along age and fitness?
- **Political economies.** This lens explores how policy infrastructures and political-economic mechanisms enable or restrict sporting mobilities at a range of intrastate, interstate and non-state levels, and the power dynamics that emerge from these relationships. Sport mobilities approaches may consider how sport is a significant vehicle for philanthropy and awareness-raising or how it is a lucrative global industry predicated on the movement of players, supporters, cheap labour, foreign sponsors, TV rights, investors, capital, consumer goods and built environments. However, there are also many 'losers' in this game, such as those migrant workers who build the infrastructure for the World Cup in football, make sport apparel in faraway factories or the thousands of aspiring African runners who fail to become world-class (Ungruhe 2016). Hence, this lens asks questions about the winners and losers of sport mobilities and their uneven geographies and flows. Another intriguing angle concerns how abundant cheap oil (Urry 2013a) fuels professional sport and enables oil-rich nations to improve their political reputations abroad and diversify their economies away from oil extractivism.
- **Meanings.** Attention to the meanings of sport mobilities invites cultural analysis of why they matter or not to different individuals and groups. This lens questions: How

does sport make movement (or a lack of it) meaningful? How are these meanings culturally inscribed, expressed and represented? What impact do they have and how are they embodied or resisted? Sport mobilities approaches may consider questions like how does commitment to a sport, whether in serious and informal ways, contribute to meaningful lives or identity construction (Ronkainen et al 2020)? How do megaevents such as Tour de France influence everyday cycling? How does the emergence of 'fitfluencers' alter the digital representation of sport? How does the inclusion of breakdancing at the 2024 Paris Olympics or of men in artistic swimming for the first time alter representations of the sports? How does run-commuting change the meanings of both running and commuting?

### iii) Sport-mobilities orientations

We now discuss the orientations that can condition sport mobilities research with common ethics, stances, and dispositions. These emerge from orientations already apparent in mobilities research we wish to encourage towards the study of sport, and which find alignment with approaches in sport studies for smoother collaboration and connection.

- **Mobilities and immobilities.** First, mobilities approaches speak of (im)mobilities, that is, interactions between movement and stillness, or indeed more or less forms of mobility, particularly embodied movement and bodily (in)activity (Bissell and Fuller 2011). Sports can be interrupted by periods of rest, recuperation and relearning, but also injury and suspension. Moreover, experiences of active sports may induce states of paradoxical passivity, such as 'flow' and 'tunnel vision' where bodily automaticity and attention tunes out peripheral senses as noise. Moreover, we are not valorising mobility as essentially good, or universal, or unhindered, as in liberal notions of freedom and personal autonomy (Cresswell 2006). We understand sport mobilities as plural, as 'mobilities', performed with others, and in relation to others, including people, non-humans, natures and weather worlds.
- **Critical and justice.** Second, despite their association with leisure, fun, and enjoyment, we critically weave sport mobilities into relations of power, violence,

social differences and environmental degradation while seeking to cultivate justice (Koch 2016; Sheller 2018). Sport mobilities can question and critique discourses of ableism (Richard et al 2023), and explore how colonist anti-black racism, sexualisation and misogyny, humiliation and sexual violence, slavery and forced displacement perpetuate sport mobilities (Cleophas 2021). Hence, this orientation investigates inclusion and exclusion in sport mobilities along intersectional lines of gender, race, age, sexuality, disability, income and class, including the super-rich's elite mobilities (Urry 2013b) and exploitations of migrant workers and young athletes (Esson 2015).

- **Doing sport.** Third, we reinforce the importance in understanding how sport is done and what it feels like to do it. This has been the focus of much sport mobilities research to date and should continue. However, the critical commitments above invite attention to the positive and negative aspects of doing sport and avoid romanticism or the criticism of rose-tinted glasses. This is not to disown sport mobilities' inherent bodily and social pleasures, however. Sport is often pursued for enjoyment; for the emotions of competition, for thrill and exhilaration; for highs and well as lows; for camaraderie, togetherness, and belonging (Pringle et al 2015). However, enjoyment in sport mobilities can come with pain: negative emotions and experiences or even social harms, such as eating disorders, injury, depression and despondency. Sport mobilities are attuned the doing of sport and the interplay of their pleasures and pains.
- **Producing and consuming.** The fourth orientation attends to consumption and spectatorship entangled with sport mobilities. Sport mobilities are inseparable from capitalist commodification and high carbon lives as sport players become celebrities; major sport and fashion labels market clothes for sports practices; sport clubs and events are run as businesses or taken over and owned for profit or sport-washing or other political, legitimacy or cultural gains (Skey 2023); where television and streaming communicate sport and build advertising revenues; and even where every movement in sport can potentially become a valuable data-point in the

calculative metrics of sports analysis and infrastructures of data-capitalism. Sport mobilities approaches can investigate how the global capitalist order turns sport into a mobile commodity.

- **Transitions and change.** Our final orientation assumes that change and transition are normal and often desired in sports mobilities. Sport practices and skills are always on pathways of improvement or decline and decay. Sport bodies abruptly crash or injure. Sport may be new for some, getting old for others. Sports are rarely stable and how sport mobilities change is important. Indeed, many structural changes are desirable, and approaches sensitive to decarbonising sport mobilities, widening their participation, and eliminating exclusion can underpin sport mobilities research. However, other changes may be less desirable, including losing bodily strength through ageing, foreign investors' takeover of local clubs, the rise of super-rich sport stars, the middle-classification of sport and the rising cost of doing and attending sport.

#### **4. Conclusion: enacting sport mobilities approaches**

This article puts forward sport mobilities approaches to transform the study of sport in mobilities from an undercurrent to a lively field of enquiry with common forms, themes and orientations. We hope to make sport more central to mobilities scholarship and make mobilities research more relevant to sport scholars. Our framework applies cross-tabulation and intersecting layers to generate research questions, directions and agendas (see Figure 2). Forms of sport mobilities can be questioned through the prism of each thematic analytical lens, prompting directions that embody the sport-mobilities orientations. To demonstrate this in action, we trace the framework through an illustrative discussion of motorsports.

Automobility remains a central concern for mobilities scholarship but occupies a more marginal position in sport studies and may seem a counter-intuitive example given the involvement of a less-than-mobile driver. However, we demonstrate the multiple and

entangled possibilities of sports mobilities approaches, and where the identified forms, lenses and orientations animate research and advance work in both sport and mobilities.

		Thematic Analytical Lenses				
		Bodies, embodiment & experience	Spaces, places & environments	Socialities & social relations	Political economies	Meanings
Forms of sport mobilities	Mobility as sport					
	Mobility in sport					
	Sport as transport					
	Mobilities for sport					
	Material mobilities of sport					
	Virtual mobilities of sport					
	The travel of sport					

Figure 2. Blueprint for enacting sport mobilities approaches

Motorsports are all about mobility and being the fastest car over a set distance on a racetrack or on closed streets. So as a **form of sports mobilities**, car racing demonstrates both **mobility as sport** (for the vehicle) and **mobility in sport** (for the bodies) where the primary object of concern is not simply the car or the driver, but also the driver-car assemblage. Within this, other actors swiftly appear to be suppressed from view again: the racing directors, the chief engineers, the safety officials, the pit crews, the worn tyres and brakes, the engines' conformity to the racing rules. This can extend sport mobilities' interests to the **material mobilities** of motorsports or indeed the **virtual mobilities** through which they are consumed far away from the track. Furthermore, motor racing **as transport** signals how sport cars may be commercially available – even if only aspirationally – and people might imagine participating in a motor race somewhat vicariously when driving to work. Such conflation of commuting with motorsport (**meaning**) may cause excitement but also dangerous driving, or perceptions and accusations of it.

In applying the thematic *lenses* and illuminating motorsports through different sports mobilities *orientations*, racing does demand extreme physical capacities and exertions of the driver's body in their **embodied experience** of driving, even if they are harder to appreciate in contrast to the phenomenal audiencing of the car's speed, sound, and the danger of the race. Motor racing requires significant physical endurance of **pain**, stamina, strength, attention, and the acceptance and management of numerous physical risks caused by moving at high speeds on different surfaces and **environments**. In-fact, coaching and steering the car-driver-road assemblages and **doings** or practices of motorsports is extremely physically intensive. Those physical and material capabilities of both the car and driver are also heavily scrutinised through tracking and monitoring where mobility is measured on minute scales, the driver-car's performance, tyres, engines, forces, and the balletic coordination of refuelling and tyre crews moving together in time.

Researchers have already shown how certain racialised bodies, such as Black drivers and people of colour, are often excluded in motor racing but that a counter-politics are possible. By interpreting Wendell Scott's (the first Black American to win a NASCAR race) struggle for inclusion, legitimacy and survival within NASCAR – his 'counter-mobility' of antiracism - Alderman and Inwood (2016: 598) suggest that 'sports cultures are deeply involved in reinforcing and also challenging racialized identities and inequalities'. If the racism in motorsports can be a potent way through which **bodies** and **social relations** are co-produced, we can also see the production of dominant **meanings** that reinforce some of these relations but also suppress them, existing in dissonance and tension.

Like the cultures of the car, motor-racing is associated with masculinity, heteronormativity, speed and celebrity cultures, and can be examined through **critical justice** perspectives, to explicate the kinds of racialised normativity Scott was fighting. Equally, motorsports have been grafted onto colonial-imperial and racialised settler mobilities structures, through which the narratives of bodily endurance can be heroically cast against the dangerous outlands of (post)colonial frontiers (Clarsen 2017). Speed testing in putatively empty salt flats or rallying across jungle and desert conditions has involved intense resource

extractions, environmental degradation and the displacement of indigenous communities, ranging from racing in the Pilbara, Western Australia in the early 1920s and 1930s, to the much-protested move of the Paris-Dakar rally to South America (Chen 2023).

These relations are perpetuated through motorsport's **political economies, virtual mobilities** and hugely profitable television rights, sponsorship and economies of branding and advertising, social media and magazine publications. As motorsports have internationalised (Formula 1 initially involved races in Europe only), it has been attracted by oil, resource and capital-rich economies, some with poor and questionable human rights records, to the extent that motor-racing has been considered as sport-washing (Chadwick 2023). Motor races are also the locus of elite social networks and mobilities, such as private jets and personal yachts, forms of luxury and conspicuous consumption. They are displayed and staged on roads, tracks, stands and stadia in luxury tourist venues and cities such as Monaco. This blanket of luxury, however, does not equate to sensory insulation in spectator appreciation. Motor-racing is renowned as an audience spectacle because of the more-than visual sensations of noise from the roar and thrum of car engines, which stadia can intensify, and crowds can reverberate in inter-affective resonance.

Finally, carbon-intensive material mobilities make these motor-racing automobility networks possible. **Transitioning** the production of spaces and infrastructures that support and constitute vast audience mobilities, and the logistics chains of moving motorcars, drivers, other equipment, engineers, tools and parts around the world, is a challenge and incompatible with decarbonising agendas. For international Formula 1, this involves thousands of tonnes of airfreight facilitated by commercial logistics providers such as DHL.

This is a sport mobilities take on motorsports. It demonstrates the potential of the outlined approaches for researching and thinking about sport mobilities. It entwines different forms, themes and orientations of sport mobilities, inviting attention to new areas of inquiry and attuning scholars to perspectives both significant for mobilities research and in dialogue with sport studies. It forges directions for sport mobilities research in rich,



meaningful and complex ways. This is overdue. The latent potential of sport mobilities is exciting but unrealised. We hope the approaches proposed here allows sport mobilities research to flourish.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

		Thematic Analytical Lenses				
		Bodies, embodiment & experience	Spaces, places & environments	Socialities & social relations	Political economies	Meanings
Forms of sport mobilities	Mobility as sport					
	Mobility in sport					
	Sport as transport					
	Mobilities for sport					
	Material mobilities of sport					
	Virtual mobilities of sport					
	The travel of sport					

**Figure Captions**

- Figure 1. A framework for sport mobilities approaches.
- Figure 2. Blueprint for enacting sport mobilities approaches