

The making of the Tour de France cycling race as a tourist attraction

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Abstract

The Tour de France (TDF) cycling race has become the world's biggest annual sporting event. Every July, it attracts approximately 11 million tourists along the roadsides of France, as well as several millions of TV spectators worldwide. Using MacCannell's sight sacralization process, this study examines the gradual development of the TDF as a major economic tourist attraction. By deconstructing how the TDF became a tourist attraction, the goal of this article is to reveal economic and sustainability implications for communities in hosting such a mega event. The article suggests that the TDF, both as a sporting event and a top tourist attraction, represents an opportunity for local development and economies in the form of short-term peaks in hospitality, direct financial benefits, as well as in the promotion of cycling as a sustainable means of transportation. The study also explores how challenging hosting a stage of the TDF can become in terms of environmental sustainability for remote and rural communities.

Keywords

Tour de France; sport tourism; bicycle tourism; community development; economic development.

1. Introduction – a prologue from inside the first stage of the 2018 edition

Saturday July 7th, 2018, 5:00 am. My brother and I, as well as several thousands of cycling enthusiasts, are driving towards the island of Noirmoutier, on the French Atlantic coast, for the launch of the world's biggest annual sporting event. The Grand Départ (Big Start) of the 105th edition of the TDF cycling race is going to occur in six hours. Every July, the race starts from a different city. Nevertheless, the location of the Grand Départ's hosting city does not matter, since every July the same ritual happens for thousands of cycling enthusiasts: a pilgrimage towards the start of the world's most popular cycling race. The closer we get to Noirmoutier, the more we find ourselves surrounded by other aficionados, coming by car, bike, or RV, alone, with friends or family, from France or abroad. After an hour of driving, there we are, amid the bustle that generates the TDF. All around are swarms of supporters from different countries, waving flags, and also journalists, teams' members, sponsors, and official representatives, as well as members from the various companies that work for the TDF. This is a hive of activity and part of the excitement. This enthusiasm also springs from memories from our childhood, when our parents took us to the Pyrénées almost every year in our family RV, so we could assist the mountain stages and support the riders that were at the time our heroes. The excitement from the tumult of such a sporting event combined with the reminiscence of childhood memories led to an intense passion for the TDF and cycling in general. About twenty minutes prior to the long-awaited start, the first riders are lining-up under the departure arch (Figure 1). Similarly, the first journalists with their cameras are approaching, getting ready for the live broadcast. We are situated right next to that arch, front row behind the fences; we cannot miss a single moment of this exhilarating spectacle. The Grand Départ is getting closer. Five minutes left before the kick-off, the live broadcast has started while the road is cleared of the journalists, referees, and team members, which are all joining their respective vehicle. As the departure approaches, the sound of the helicopters filming from above gets louder, indicating that the race is about to start, which also contributes to the

excitement. There it is! 11 am, the mayor of Noirmoutier waves the official flag of the race; the 176 riders lock into their automatic pedals under our clapping and cheering and all slowly pass in front of us, our eyes wide with child-like amazement. They have finally begun the 3,351-kilometer journey they will have to ride over the next three weeks and 21 stages.

Every stage attracts thousands of cycling aficionados, and as such, the TDF has become a tourist attraction itself, although it is a temporary event and its location changes every year. According to the race's official website (TDF, 2019a), between 10 and 12 million spectators gather along the 21 stages. This would make the TDF one of the most visited French tourist attractions, behind Disneyland Paris, but ahead of some other popular sites such as the Louvre Museum, the Palace of Versailles, or the Eiffel Tower (Table 1).

FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1. Only a few seconds before the start of the first stage of the TDF's 105th edition. Photo: Alix Varnajot, July 2018.

TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1. The tourist frequentation of the TDF, compared to some of the most visited French sites.

Among these millions of spectators are day-trippers and people arriving on site several days prior to the actual day of the stage. Early arrival is often necessary, to secure the best spots for watching the race and cheering for the riders. Therefore, in this article, the term "tourist" refers to those waiting by the side of the road from a few hours to several days, following Lamont's definition of bicycle tourism (2009, p. 20):

Trips involving a minimum distance of 40 kilometers from a person's home and an overnight stay (for overnight trips), or trips involving a minimum non-cycling round trip component of 50 kilometers and a minimum four-hour period away from home (for day trips) of which cycling, involving active participation or passive observation, for holiday, recreation, leisure and/or competition, is the main purpose for that trip.

Despite its popularity, academic studies have rarely focused on this sporting event from tourism and leisure perspectives, since sports like soccer, baseball, football, basketball, or tennis have usually been more interesting among scholars (Torgler, 2007). Although in the last decade, the relationship between cycling and tourism has been increasingly attracting scholarly attention (Lamont, 2009). According to Grant Long (2012), the lack of scholarly interests for the TDF might come from the fact that it is always held in France, contrary to the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, and therefore, it does not attract foreign attention. Hence, relatively few studies have focused on the TDF, especially from the economic impact perspective.

This study examines the gradual development of the TDF as a major economic tourist attraction, using MacCannell's "sight sacralization" process (1976). By analyzing the TDF as a tourist attraction, the goal of this conceptual article is to explore issues related to economy and sustainability affecting communities hosting the race. After the application of MacCannell's framework to the TDF, the following section will first scrutinize the economic benefits for host communities and will secondly raise sustainable challenges linked to hosting such a tourist attraction.

2. From a cycling race to a major tourist attraction

In *The Tourist* (1976), MacCannell introduced a theoretical framework for the making of tourist attractions that he called sight sacralization. He proposed that attractions usually develop in five identifiable phases:

naming, framing and elevation, enshrinement, mechanical reproduction, and social reproduction, although these different phases can occur in a different order (Jacobsen, 1997; Löytynoja, 2008). MacCannell's sight sacralization framework is beneficial for examining the development of the TDF as a tourist attraction because it considers any attraction as a sight, an object. Nevertheless, a major critique of MacCannell's theory is that it considers attractions as static elements (Löytynoja, 2008), rather than as "dynamic socio-spatial [structures], subject to continual transformation and reformation, production and reproduction" (Saarinen, 2001, p. 36). Nevertheless, over the decades, several authors have applied the sight sacralization framework to various kinds of objects, from precious or remarkable sights like North Cape, Norway (Jacobsen, 1997), the Arctic Circle (Löytynoja, 2008) or the Lindheimer House, Texas (Fine & Speer, 1985) to more common and everyday items like a cocktail served in Dawson City, Yukon (Cooper et al., 2019). Other classical theoretical lenses such as Leiper's (1979) framework of interconnecting geographical, human and industry elements and Butler's (1980) tourism area life cycle, for example, both present limits due to the intrinsic characteristics of the TDF. Indeed, although the geographical context of the TDF remains in France, hosting cities, stages and thus, the geography of the TDF changes every year (Bačík & Klobučník, 2017; Fumey, 2006), and Leiper and Butler's frameworks focus on fixed geographical contexts. The spatial variability of the TDF has been developed as a tool for promoting the different French regions, hence the strategy of the race's organizer to explore the country and find new roads, new cities or new landscapes (Bačík & Klobučník, 2017).

Additionally, the use of MacCannell's framework is supported by French intellectuals' reflections on the TDF. In his book *Mythologies*, the semiotician, Roland Barthes (1957), argues that the TDF has an important social role in connecting heroes (the cyclists) with the public (the French society) and nature. In addition, a decade earlier, the poet Louis Aragon highlighted this mediation role, connecting all parts of the country, and wrote in the daily *Ce Soir* (Dauncey & Geoff, 2012):

The Tour is the festival of man's summer [sic], it is also a celebration of our whole country, through a specifically French passion. Too bad for those who are unable to share its emotions, its follies, its hopes. It is a lesson, renewed every year, which shows that France is alive and that the Tour really is the tour of France.

MacCannell's sight sacralization process aims to locate these attractions in their sociological contexts and to reveal the role of society in underlining the authenticity of an attraction (Cooper et al., 2019; Forristal et al., 2011; MacCannell, 1976). By understanding how the social recognition of the TDF functions, we will be able to reveal implications from an economic and sustainability standpoint.

2.1. Naming

The first stage of MacCannell's framework is naming. It refers to the differentiation of the sight from other attractions that are worth visiting (Löytynoja, 2008). According to MacCannell (1976, p. 44), a "great deal of work [for] the authentication of the candidate for sacralization" is necessary, including the recognition of aesthetic values and historical and recreational significance.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, cycling was becoming an affordable and popular leisure activity, due to inventions that made bicycles less dangerous, more reliable, and comfortable, and to mass production techniques that led to reduced prices. Indeed, innovations such as the pedal, air-filled tires, and brakes, combined with bicycles produced for a diverse clientele, participated in the emergence of a new sport (Mignot, 2016; Reed, 2015). As a result, it allowed modest workers to be able to purchase a bicycle, and interestingly, as Thompson (2008, p. 11) reminds us, "it was largely from their ranks that the first

generations of Tour racers would emerge". This contributed to the reason cycling became such a popular sport. It was, and still is practiced by humble people, that ride several hundreds of kilometres, sometimes facing extreme weather conditions and climbs. This is the context in which cycling as a sport started to develop, and rapidly, several long-distance races, linking towns, became popular. Among them were Paris – Rouen, Milan – Munich, Paris – Brussels or the still renowned Paris – Roubaix (Mignot, 2016). These races were often organized via press sponsorship and at the time, the sport newspaper, *Le Vélo*, dominated the sector with 300,000 daily sales and already organized prestigious cycling races (Wille, 2003). However, in October 1900, the sport newspaper *L'Auto-Vélo* was launched, renamed *L'Auto* in January 1903. The two first years saw relatively low sales with about 20,000 daily sales. In order to boost their treasury, their reputation, and to compete with *Le Vélo*, Henri Desgrandes, editor-in-chief of *L'Auto* and Géo Lefèvre, head of the cycling division, decided in 1902 to create the biggest cycling race that ever existed, which would take riders around France in several stages (Grant Long, 2012). Therefore, the creation of the TDF is the result of fierce economic competition among the sports press sponsoring races (Mignot, 2016), and the first edition of the TDF was launched on the 1st of July 1903. During the build-up of the race, *L'Auto* used eulogistic promotion for its race and the TDF was marketed as "the most grandiose competition there has ever been" and as "the gigantic professional race that would revolutionize the world of cycling", the creation of which "[constitutes] one of the great dates of our history" (Thompson, 2008, p. 22). In the end, *L'Auto* rapidly became the leader in sport news, and during the prewar 1914 TDF, the paper had up to 320,000 daily sales. They organized the TDF until 1939, before it was stopped by the Second World War. In 1947, the newly established newspaper, *L'Équipe*, took over the organization until 1965, when it was bought by Amaury Editions. It was renamed Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) in 1991, which is the current owner and organizer of the TDF, and several other races in Belgium, Norway, Germany, Spain, and Oman. Cycling competitions emerged rapidly after the development of production techniques and technologies that allowed modest workers to become heroes, to use Barthes' words. Furthermore, the creation of the TDF is intrinsically connected to the media. Indeed, as shown, the race originated at the beginning of the twentieth century from press sponsorship competition.

2.2. Framing and elevation

The second stage is framing and elevation. This stage is subdivided into two processes that are the placement of an official boundary around the attraction, referring to the framing, and the placement on display, referring to the elevation (Cooper et al., 2019). Framing can take the form of controlling the admission to a sight or placing a sacred object behind glass, whereas elevation could mean displaying the sacred object under a spotlight or the use of promotion.

The framing of the TDF is an intricate notion. Indeed, on the one hand the race cannot visit every region of France in a single edition. Therefore, its organization naturally creates boundaries for those who would like to attend it in their home region. Although the route of the TDF changes every year, there are still geographical inequalities, as some cities or regions are more often visited than others (Bačák & Klobučník, 2017). For example, Corsica welcomed the race only once, in 2013. Overseas territories are left out due to organizational challenges and time differences that would affect riders' efficiency. On the contrary, places like Pau, the central Pyrénées region or the northern Alps, are visited on a regular basis, and Paris has hosted the finish of the last stage every year. In addition, the size of cities plays an important role in the framing of the TDF. Indeed, although small cities host stages of the race on a regular basis, this represents challenges for the organization of the race in terms of logistics for the movement of teams to the next location, as well as the mobile infrastructures (fences, finish line, and the various trucks for TV, sponsors, etc.) that are moving from one stage to another, day after day (Fumey, 2006). On the other hand, one could

argue that there is no framing, no boundary in the TDF, because the race is a free event. Anybody can go by the side of the road and wait for the race to pass by.

The elevation of the TDF, however, started even before the actual beginning of the first edition with the build-up promotion in *L'Auto*. The TDF's elevation is intrinsically linked to media coverage. This relationship between the race and the media can be divided into three stages. Firstly, from 1903 to the 1930s the press was the main media covering the TDF. Then, in 1930, for the first time, part of the race was broadcasted live on the radio. This marked a change, and from the 1930s onwards radio became the main media for covering the race, as the results of each stage could be shared live and it was no longer necessary to wait until the following morning to read the results in a newspaper. Although a few experiments were attempted to transmit the TDF on TV in the 1940s and 1950s, radio remained the leading media until the 1960s, when the first TV reports were broadcasted. As soon as the 1960s, the viewers could dive into the peloton with cameras onboard motorbikes, with images transmitted via helicopters. Today, TV is still the main form of media, and the organization took advantage of innovations to provide more immersive footages. For example, since 2013, drones have been used for filming monuments ahead of the race; in the last few years, action cameras have been installed on racers' bikes and allow viewers to witness crashes from inside the peloton, etc. According to the official website of the TDF (TDF, 2019b), in 2019, about 35.4 million French viewers followed the race on TV, which is more than half the French population. Worldwide, the race is broadcasted in more than 180 countries (Sparkes, 2014). In addition, more recently, social media has been embraced by the organizers. In total, the videos shared on these social media platforms reached 73.4 million views for the 2019 edition (TDF, 2019b).

By the turn of the mid-twentieth century, live radio and TV technologies' improvement allowed the race to grow and to be followed by increasing numbers of spectators. More recently, the TDF organizers have also taken the opportunity offered by social media to expand their visibility on various platforms and applications such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

2.3. Enshrinement

MacCannell identified enshrinement as the third stage of his framework of the evolution of attractions. This stage starts "when the framing material that is used has itself entered the first stage of sacralization" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 45). In other words, the container becomes an attraction on its own (Cooper et al., 2019). In addition, Fine and Speer (1985, p. 82) widened the idea of enshrinement to tourist attractions that "contains within [their] boundaries an even more valuable attraction". To illustrate his argument, MacCannell used two examples. The first one is the Sainte-Chapelle church, built by Saint-Louis as a container for the true Crown of Thorns, and the second one is the Gutenberg Bible, displayed under special lights in a darkened room wherein the walls are hung with precious documents, including a manuscript by Beethoven. In both cases, the Sainte-Chapelle and the manuscripts have become attractions and sights in their own rights. As a result, the enshrinement phase can also lead to an increased reputation and visitation (Clark, 2009).

The TDF uses public roads, although they are temporally closed the day of the stage. The peloton meanders on asphalt strips, in the landscapes, in-between castles, monuments, deep gorges, and mountain valleys and climbs (Figure 2). The TDF race as a tourist attraction is "contained" within the French landscape. In 2017, Barnes raised the question of whether the landscape was the "real star" of the TDF. This is a legitimate question. Indeed, according to van Reeth (2016), for 61% of TV viewers, landscapes are the major incentive for watching the race, whereas the actual competition is a major incentive for only 32% of viewers.

In addition, following Fine and Speer's (1985) widened application of enshrinement, the publicity caravan, La Caravane du Tour, has become an attraction itself, within the TDF. Indeed, according to a CNN article from July 2017, "47% of fans come primarily to see the caravan". La Caravane was created for economic reasons in 1930 by Henri Desgranges when the format of the race changed from teams sponsored by brands to national teams. The incomes generated by the caravan, via brands paying to be part of it, were used for team's accommodation along the different stages and to provide bikes (Fagnoni & Castoldi, 2018), and in 1930, the caravan included only 10 vehicles (Lagae, 2016). Today the publicity caravan is composed of 200 vehicles, representing about 40 brands (Lagae, 2016), including approximately 480 representatives and 120 persons responsible for safety and logistics (TDF, 2019c). In addition, during the three weeks of the race, about 15 million promotional items are distributed to spectators waiting on the roadsides (TDF, 2019c). The publicity caravan has turned into a choreographed spectacle, a parade with colourful and modified vehicles aiming at entertaining spectators (Fagnoni & Castoldi, 2018).

Furthermore, the TDF is symbolized by the Maillot Jaune, the yellow jersey that celebrates the leader of the overall classification after each stage, and to a lesser extent by the Maillot Vert, Maillot Blanc, and the Maillot à Pois. The yellow jersey was created and was worn for the first time in 1919 by Eugène Christophe. The iconic yellow colour came from the pages of the *L'Auto*, organizer of the race, that were printed in yellow (Viollet, 2007). Since then, the yellow jersey has become a marker of the leader for several other cycling races such as the Critérium du Dauphiné, the Tour de Californie, Paris – Nice. The other jerseys were created later, for secondary competition within the race. The Maillot Vert, or green jersey, rewards the leader of the points classification since 1953; the Maillot à Pois, also known as the polka dot jersey, is worn by the King of the Mountain, the rider reaching mountain summits first, since 1975; and the Maillot Blanc, the white jersey, celebrates the best rider under 26 years old since 1975. These jerseys and especially the Maillot Jaune have become symbols of the race, often associated with iconic names like Eddy Merckx and Bernard Hinault that participated in the renown of the TDF (Barthes, 1957).

FIGURE 2 HERE

Figure 2. Spectators supporting the riders in the Col du Tourmalet, in the Pyrénées. Photo: Alix Varnajot, July 2019.

Although the race itself remains the core attraction of the TDF, side items or events like the caravan, the various jerseys, and even "being in the landscape" have also attracted interests among spectators. As a result, various leisure-related motivations draw people to engage with the TDF.

2.4. Mechanical reproduction

The fourth stage corresponds to mechanical reproduction. In this phase, the attraction is represented through "the creation of prints, photographs, models or effigies" (MacCannell, 1976, p. 45). For example, these might be souvenirs made in China or photographs taken by tourists, brochures, or guidebooks (Löytynoja, 2008).

The mechanical reproduction of the TDF takes place under various forms, starting at least as far back as the mid-1920s. Indeed, in its early times and until today, the TDF has inspired many songs, comic books, and movies. Among them, is the relatively recent movie from 2015, *The Program*, starring Ben Foster and Dustin Hoffman, which recounts the life of Lance Armstrong and his pursuit of winning the TDF, which is a central sight in the intrigue. In the early times of the TDF the caravan was also created, since then, it has had a constant role in mechanical reproduction. Indeed, and this is especially true today, the publicity caravan distributes to spectators all sorts of items bearing the effigy of the TDF, from key chains to playing

cards, teddy bears, hats, and giant green hands. In addition to an online boutique, official stores are installed every day at the departure and arrival locations, selling various types of souvenirs such as t-shirts, umbrellas, cycling bottles, replicas of the official jerseys, mugs, gloves, sunglasses, watches, etc. Also, daily, several vans transformed into stores roam the stage and stop in key crowded locations to sell even more of these items.

In recent decades, digitization has taken the mechanical reproduction of the TDF to another level, especially with the development of new technologies such as digital cameras, internet availability everywhere, smartphones as well as photo-sharing social media applications like Instagram and Facebook (Balomenou & Garrod, 2019; Gretzel, 2017; Varnajot, 2019). As a result, the TDF has also entered this era of immediate production and consumption of photographs due to the possibility to take, delete, retake and share as many digital photos as one wants in real-time (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In line with this, tourists have become “prosumers” of the TDF. A prosumer is defined as “an active consumer involved in the production process and consumption to a larger degree than an average buyer” (Niezgoda, 2013, p. 131). According to Urry and Larsen (2011, p. 181), “photography’s networked convergence with mobile devices and the internet means that the technical affordances of photography dramatically expand”. More people have been taking photos and consequently, it has reduced the physical distance between the spectators and the cyclists. This has increased the number of dangerous situations for both the public and the riders, and it is not unusual to see spectators cause riders fall when trying to get a photograph. Furthermore, as argued by some scholars, the growing mechanical reproduction of the TDF via digital photography has led to the alienating nature of tourism (see Albers & James, 1988; Bruner, 1995). Tourists experience the race through screens, “rather than being in the moment” of the race (Osborne, 2000). This is what Urry and Larsen (2011, p. 181) termed the “screen-ness” era.

The mechanical reproduction of the TDF was introduced relatively early in the sight sacralization process through arts. Today it largely takes the form of both physical and digital items, although this is not specific to the TDF, but to most tourist attractions.

2.5. Social reproduction

The fifth and final stage in MacCannell’s sight sacralization framework is social reproduction. This final stage is achieved when groups, cities and regions begin to name themselves after the attractions.

There are two types of social reproduction associated with the TDF. Firstly, this is examined from the sport perspective. During the past two decades, several sporting events were created by ASO, to which the TDF gave its name. In 2017, two criterium races (bike races consisting of several laps around a closed circuit) were organized “by Le Tour” in Shanghai, China and Saitama, Japan, to promote cycling in Asia. In addition, since 2014 La Course “by Le Tour” has been organized, featuring a one-day female race taking place on one of the 21 stages. The first edition was raced on the Champs-Élysées, only a few hours before the men’s stage. With La Course, organizers are using the aura of the TDF to promote female cycling by broadcasting the race live on French national television. Finally, in 1991 ASO also launched a cyclo sportive event called L’Étape du Tour. This is a mass participation event that allows amateur cyclists to race over the same route as one of the TDF stages. These initiatives, consisting of using the popular image of the TDF, are also an opportunity for host cities and communities to generate economic benefits by attracting tourists and cycling aficionados that will also potentially visit the local area and use local restaurants and other services (Fagnoni & Castoldi, 2018). Secondly, from outside the sport perspective, a few streets have been renamed after the race. For example, “TDF streets” exist in the cities of Perpignan (southern France), Chaintré (north of Lyon, France) and in Ciney (Belgium).

Through the organization of other races under the name Le Tour, the social reproduction of the TDF reveals a strategy of internationalization, especially in Asia. In addition, the image and notoriety of the TDF is used as a strategy to promote female cycling, which is overshadowed by men's races in terms of public and sponsor interests.

3. Hosting the TDF: economic and sustainability implications for host communities

3.1. Economic implications

Sport is usually considered as an attractive tool for communities to develop their image as a tourism destination, and to develop their tourism products (Derom & Ramshaw, 2016; Ziakas & Boukas, 2012). In line with this, the TDF has received considerable attention from potential host cities and municipalities given expected economic benefits for local communities (Dickinson & Robbins, 2009). Indeed, hosting the TDF generates short-term peaks in local spending in hospitality services during the race (Desbordes, 2007). However, through worldwide broadcasting, the TDF is also an opportunity for communities to showcase their valuable assets to an international audience, and thus attract potential future tourists (Grant Long, 2012). As such, through the tourism industry, the TDF has become a resource for economic growth (Chalip, 2004). Indeed, several authors have shown how hosting the Grand Départ of the race can boost the local economy, but also promote the host city as a tourist destination, attract investors, as well as promote cycling within the host communities (Balduck et al., 2011; Berridge, 2012; Bull & Lovell, 2007; Grant Long, 2012).

Cities, municipalities, and regions must show interests in hosting a stage of the TDF by sending a letter to ASO. Cities are then selected depending on their topography, the race's route scenario and road conditions. Once selected, subvention fees are charged by ASO to these cities. According to Grant Long (2012), in 2010 these fees were of 50,000€ for hosting a start of a stage and 100,000€ for a finish. However, local communities are often required to dedicate some budget for technical services such as security, access, signage, communication, road renovation, etc. (Desbordes, 2007). In a study published in 2007, Desbordes showed how hosting a stage of the TDF positively contributed to the local economy of Digne-les-Bains, a city of 17,000 inhabitants in the South-East of France. Digne hosted the finish of the 12th stage of the 2005 edition. According to Desbordes, the city spent a total of 150,000€, including subvention fees to ASO and technical services, for hosting the TDF, and estimated that spectators spent a total of 476,000€ in food, drinks, souvenirs, etc. As a result, according to the author, the city of Digne received 326,000€, which was directly injected into the local economy. In addition, his study did not consider aftermath benefits. Indeed, Desbordes (2007) showed how local tourism indicators were boosted thanks to the TDF. For example, the local tourism office experienced an increase of 113% in mail received, compared to previous years during July, and about 15,000 people visited the city's website on the day of the race, which was a record. In 2017, Scotland showed interests in hosting the Grand Départ. In their strategy, they planned a total investment of 5 million euros and expected a gross economic benefit in excess of 100 million euros (Grant Long, 2012). Similarly, in 2007, London paid 2 million euros to ASO for hosting the Grand Départ, plus an extra 3 million in event costs, and direct benefits to the local economy were estimated by Collins et al. (2012) to equal 170 million euros. Nevertheless, there is a need to be cautious with these figures. As raised by Burgan and Mules (1992), measuring positive economic impacts of sporting events remains a challenging task. Indeed, "since such economic impacts relate mainly to expenditure associated with tourists who are attracted by the event, care is needed in measuring the amount of expenditure that would not have occurred in the absence of the event" (Burgan & Mules, 1992, p. 709). The budget investment spent in hosting stages of the TDF has even been considered an economic bargain for local taxpayers, compared to hosting other

sporting mega events such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup (Grant Long, 2012). Roche (2000, p. 1) defines “mega events” as “large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance”. As a result, every year several municipalities are lured to the potential economic benefits that the TDF can generate. According to Grant Long (2012), in 2010, more than 250 cities expressed their interests in hosting the TDF for only about 30 opportunities. Although cities compete to host stages, they also change every year, ensuring that all of France’s regions have the opportunity to host the race and be featured, “achieving a national distribution of benefits rarely achieved in sports or other mega events” (Grant Long, 2012, p. 357). Therefore, as demonstrated, the TDF boosts the economy of local communities through tourism on a short-term period, and potentially on a longer timeframe due to visibility in the media and particularly on TV, although more studies need to be conducted focusing on the aftermath effects (Desbordes, 2007).

Mega events generally produce desirable economic impacts for local communities both in terms of direct financial benefits and long term positive legacies (Jago et al., 2003; Li & Jago, 2013), although this depends on the participating countries, whether this event is held during a peak or off tourist season, and on the type of event (Fourie & Santana Gallego, 2011). Nevertheless, no major studies have been conducted on potential economic drawbacks for communities in hosting the TDF (Grant Long, 2012). However, other mega events have been scrutinized from that perspective and the Olympics, for example, provide several cases of economic drawbacks (short and long term) for host communities. Firstly, as Blake (2005) recalls, hosting the Olympic has not always been associated with financial reward. Indeed, estimations show that the 1972 Munich Olympics and 1976 Montreal Olympics accrued £178 million and £692 million in losses, respectively. Secondly, long-term economic drawbacks have also been analyzed in several Olympics hosting cities. Kissoudi (2008), for example, analyzed that in Athens the huge and expensive facilities built for the 2004 Olympics have been the source of political conflicts and “four years after the games, the enduring benefits of the post-Olympic use of the facilities to the economy, culture, sport and tourism in Greece still remain to be seen” (Kissoudi, 2008, p. 1987). The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics cost US \$55 billion, entirely publicly funded, are considered to be the most expensive Games ever organized (Azzali, 2017), nevertheless, “the Games failed in the achievement of almost all the legacy promises made in the bid book” (Azzali, 2017, p. 329). The main goals in hosting the Winter Olympics were to turn Sochi into an international Riviera, to develop the city as both a summer and winter destination, and to develop a cluster of higher education in sport management and administration (Kuznetsova & Morozov, 2015). Expected positive legacies for local communities, however, are still below promises made in the bid. Indeed, according to Azzali (2017) the Games have led to an increase of land price for local inhabitants, and the creation of new jobs, as well as the involvement of local communities in sports were both below expectations. The TDF, however, has a different function since it does not require massive investments for building facilities and infrastructures. Indeed, as Palmer (2010, p. 876) narrates, “in the days immediately following the departure of the Tour from a stage village, civic space is once more reconstituted and reordered. Barricades and scaffolding are dismantled, and the start and finish areas, the television commentary boxes, the race jury headquarters, the medical centre and portable toilets are all removed”. Therefore, TDF’s legacies in host communities are mostly intangible, contrary to events like the Olympics.

3.2. Challenges for environmental sustainability

Although by hosting the TDF, communities would profit from an economic perspective, they are not equal regarding environmental sustainability. While large metropolitan areas can easily “absorb” such a mega event, including the infrastructure and all the tourists coming for the race, this can become a challenge for smaller communities located in sensitive environments. This becomes particularly of interests since the TDF

organizer has put efforts into giving opportunities to small communities to host the race. For example, the 12th stage of the 2020 TDF will finish in Sarran, a village of 275 inhabitants located in the Massif Central. These situations have become particularly critical in mountainous stages, where the finish line is sometimes placed on the tops of mountain passes. Bringing the TDF to remote and rural locations brings three major challenges regarding environmental sustainability, namely the pressure on environments, pollution, and the carbon footprint.

Firstly, the TDF consists of a moving caravan, composed of 1,300 vehicles, moving from one stage to another, day after day, together with thousands of tourists. This generates considerable pressure on local environments, although local communities have developed special regulations (Fumey, 2006). Indeed, as Fumey recalls, in 1992 one of the stages ended in the protected Vanoise Massif, in the French Alps. Due to the protection status, special regulations were set for this specific stage, such as limitations on helicopters, overnight camping was forbidden, and the presence of cars was limited to reduce the pressure on the environment. Nevertheless, the restrictions were not respected by the spectators and the site was damaged. Following this event, regulations became even more restrictive, especially when the TDF stopped in the Mercantour Massif (in the southern Alps). As a result, spectators started to avoid these areas and the festive atmosphere by the roadsides, that usually characterize cycling races, already described by Aragon in 1947 and that are part of the attraction (Figure 2), disappeared (Boury, 1997). This reveals a challenge for host communities that will hold stages of the TDF in the future. Indeed, how is it possible to balance protection of local environments and the preservation of what constitutes the backbone of any sport, namely the veneration (Gibson, 1998)? Still, many mountain areas are not officially protected and the presence of thousands of cars, RVs, and trucks is not restricted. They park for several days in a row and become a major factor of disturbance, pollution, and noise, leading to temporary land conflicts with other community members and users of the area. For example, Figures 3 and 4 show some alpine pastures with herds of cows wandering between tents and cars in the Col du Tourmalet, in the Pyrénées, at an altitude of 2,115 m. Tourism as a conflicting land use has been widely studied in academic literature (see McKercher, 1992; Olsen, 2016; Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1987; Sæþórsdóttir, 2012), but rarely in the context of mega events and especially in respect to the TDF. Nevertheless, Palmer's study on temporary spatial transformation induced by the TDF relates how the race is usually met with very little resistance due to its temporary nature, contrary to some other events like the Formula One European Grand Prix held in Valencia, Spain from 2008 to 2012 (del Romero Renau & Trudelle, 2011).

FIGURE 3 HERE

Figure 3. Thousands of tourists parked their vehicle in the alpine pastures of the Col du Tourmalet. Photo: Alix Varnajot, July 2019.

FIGURE 4 HERE

Figure 4. A herd of cows reaching summer pastures among cars and tents, during the 14th stage of the 2019 TDF. Photo: Alix Varnajot, July 2019.

Secondly, although the publicity caravan has developed a popular image among spectators, the media, and environmental groups, such as Zero Waste France and Surfrider Foundation Europe, have raised its "hidden side." Indeed, over the 21 stages, the caravan distributes more than 15 million pieces of plastic (souvenirs, water bottles, wrapped food, etc.) to the crowds waiting along the roads (TDF, 2019c). The future of a more sustainable TDF lies in the capacity of the publicity caravan to adapt to a more sustainable way of entertaining spectators. In addition, the caravan keeps tossing gadgets and tracts to crowds along every

stage, including in sensitive areas, which creates increasing noise and rubbish in sensitive environments, as noted by Fumey (2006). Nevertheless, in the last decade, host communities have been including in their technical services' expenditure the cleaning up of all forms of pollution left behind by spectators and the race in the affected areas. This creates another challenge in terms of balancing sustainability and economic profitability. Indeed, ASO has tried to bring the TDF to the most scenic French regions. As discovering the landscapes is one of the incentives to watch the TDF on TV for many viewers, the race has become an opportunity for local communities to attract potential future tourists. There is, therefore, a need for the organizer to bring the TDF to these scenic vistas, which inevitably means temporary overcrowding and pollution in these sensitive areas.

Thirdly, although this is not of concern to mountain regions only, the global footprint of such an event becomes another challenge in times of climate change awareness. The TDF attracts tourists from all over the planet. In their 2012 report on environmental impacts of major cycling events, Collins, Roberts and Munday analyzed in the case of the Grand Départ in London in 2007 that, "the main contributor to the ecological footprint was travel" (p. 3). They found that the average spectator travelled about 734 kilometres to attend the event and that almost 59% of the total distance travelled was by international air travel. In the end, according to the authors, the ecological footprint of the average spectator "was almost 2.2 times greater than if they had not attended the event and gone about their regular everyday activities at home" (p. 3). Additionally, the organization of the race itself requires hundreds of vehicles, for the transport of equipment infrastructure, riders, journalists, the caravan, officials, sponsor representatives, etc. At the moment, two initiatives have been considered in order to reduce the ecological footprint of these cycling events. The first one is the use of electric vehicles. For the first time, ASO, the organizer of the Arctic Race of Norway, a cycling race taking place in the Norwegian Arctic, provided in August 2019 electric cars for the organizers, officials, and referees (Arctic Race of Norway, 2019). Although, the Arctic Race of Norway is on a smaller scale than the TDF in terms of logistics, this first attempt to provide a greener cycling sport represents a step further in a more sustainable TDF. Nevertheless, a challenge remains. Some stages end in relatively small and remote locations, where charging batteries for hundreds of vehicles can become a difficult task. The second, much simpler, would be to reduce the number of cars following the race, especially among journalists that are not necessarily linked to the organization. Reducing the number of cars and motorbikes is a solution supported by the riders in general for safety reasons, as it would decrease the risks of hitting a vehicle during the race (Blocken et al., 2016).

4. Conclusion

In over a hundred years of existence, the TDF has become more than a sporting event. Initially developed by press media, it is now a true tourist attraction, as demonstrated by the application of MacCannell's sight sacralization framework. Hosting the race has become critical for some communities, since it has allowed them to significantly boost their economies given the large number of tourists attracted by the TDF on the one hand, and those who might visit afterwards due to the visibility temporarily gained in the media on the other hand. As recalled by Kulusjärvi (2019), tourism is often perceived as a tool for regional and community development in rural and sparsely populated areas. Even though the TDF is facing environmental sustainability issues, it serves as a tool for promoting cycling as a sustainable means of transportation among host communities, particularly by improving cycling infrastructures (Grant Long, 2012). Some studies have already demonstrated the immediate positive implications communities benefit in hosting the TDF in terms of direct financial reward. However, aftermath outcomes still need to be properly investigated, although it remains complicated to measure. Future research should therefore focus

on these various long-term effects, including potential economic drawbacks, brought to communities by the TDF. In addition, more effective methodologies should be developed to better assess mega events' long-term implications on affected communities, especially for intangible legacies as in the case of the TDF.

Sustainable development is now integral to tourism development discussions (Hall, 2012), and the environmental impacts of mega events are attracting increasing interests (Collins et al., 2009). Cycling is a sport with European roots. The first races were created in France, Italy, and Belgium. The most prestigious races of the calendar are all held in Western Europe. Nevertheless, in the past two decades, cycling has become globalized, with new races taking place in the Middle East (Qatar, Oman), Africa (Gabon, Rwanda), Malaysia, California, and Australia. Even more recently, new countries opened to professional cycling such as China, Argentina, and Colombia. These new races organized all over the planet should become laboratories for experimenting with new and future leads for developing cycling races as more sustainable tourist attractions.

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