

Research Article

How to develop a road cycling tourism destination. Girona as a case study

Lluís Mundet^{a,*}, Jaume Marin^a, Adriana Figueroa^b^a University of Girona, Faculty of Tourism, Plaça Ferrater Mora 1, Girona, Catalonia, Spain^b Catholic University of El Salvador, Faculty of Business Sciences By Pass a Metapán, Santa Ana, El Salvador

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ABSTRACT

Road cycle tourism is a modality of cycling which, by virtue of its characteristics, can contribute to the de-seasonalising of tourist demand in destinations with very rigidly marked tourist seasons. In addition, it can favour the decentralisation of tourist and recreational activities, moving them away from urban centres towards the rural periphery, and promote the inclusion of new tourist agents. Despite the growth and benefits of this tourism product, it is still insufficiently researched. This being so, in terms of the management and promotion of destinations, it is worth arriving at a fuller understanding of how to develop this model of cycle tourism from the suppliers' perspective.

Bearing in mind the points mentioned above, the present study set out to evaluate the conditions and factors involved in the successful development of a tourist destination for road cycling and to analyse the attractiveness of the particular tourist destination referred to. With that in mind, the article seeks to shed light on the significance of road cycling for tourism purposes and to develop a value-based system which can be used in the planning for road cycling in tourist destinations.

Management implications:

- Road cycling tourism can contribute to the de-seasonalising of tourist demand.
- Conditions and factors involved in developing a road cycling tourist destination: geography, climate and transport connectivity are the main conditions involved.
- Professional cyclists can contribute to develop a road cycling tourist destination.
- Planners must identify the specific needs of this segment to configure provision.
- Specialised tourist services are necessary to support road cycling tourism.
- Road cycling tourism can boost the emergence of related businesses and services.
- Tourism products should connect tourist attractions with cyclists' interests.
- Cycling infrastructure and road education must be part of the development.
- Road cyclist tourists are consumers with medium to high level purchasing power.
- Ambassadors and cycling-related brands can help improve destination's positioning.

1. Introduction

With the popularisation of the bicycle as a means of transportation in the 1890s (Lamont, 2009) and as the motivations for its use diversified, cycling began to be related to recreational activities and tourism, and as a result, bicycle touring has been the subject of both special interest tourism and outdoor recreation (Asan, 2021).

According to the data compiled by González Moreno (2016), the period between 2000 and 2010 was especially prolific in terms of cycling

tourism for various European countries. For example, between 2008 and 2010 a million foreign cyclists visited France, generating revenues of 2,000 million euros and 16,500 jobs, while in Germany, between 2000 and 2009, cycle tourism brought in 9,000 million euros, with some 5,000 establishments specialising in cycle tourism.

In the case of Spain, González (2016) notes that the data are similar, but with two- or three-years' lag in growth, due to the fact that both France and Germany (and other European countries) have traditionally had a strong cycling culture and the bicycle is promoted not only for

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: lluis.mundet@udg.edu (L. Mundet), jaume.marin@udg.edu (J. Marin), adriana.figueroa@catolica.edu.sv (A. Figueroa).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2022.100566>

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tourist or leisure purposes but also for daily use as a means of transport.

Later on, a study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2012 estimated that over 2.2 billion cycle tourism trips and 20 million overnight cycling trips were made every year in Europe. These had an estimated economic impact of €44 billion (University of Central Lancashire & NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences, 2012).

The economic, social and environmental values of bicycle touring and leisure cycling have led destination planners and policy-makers to finance, plan and develop bicycle-related infrastructure in their communities and to promote the development of a range of services to cater to the needs of cycle tourists (Kaplan et al., 2015; Lee, 2014).

This process is inevitably of interest to Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), associations, businessmen and academics who wish to understand the factors and conditions that may favour an area's capacity to establish itself as a cycle tourism destination and how to exploit that potential in order to position the new offering in the tourism market. This is especially important for those emerging destinations that have identified a growth opportunity in catering to cycle tourism and/or are looking for strategies to de-seasonalize their tourism.

However, we must not forget that different regions will, by virtue of their particular geography, possess more or less favourable conditions for the various types of cycling: road cycling, mountain biking, enduro, saddlebag cycling, gravel cycling, velodrome cycling, time-trial cycling and triathlon cycling (Martín Moreno, 2017); and that each modality requires specific infrastructure, facilities and services.

In particular, Mallorca, as a sports tourism destination, has been so far an European referent on road cycling. Muñoz (2015) explains that Mallorca is a popular destination focused on a low-cost cycle tourism, attracting some 100,000 cyclists per year (Kirchner, cited by Martín Moreno, 2017) and registering high indexes of occupation in different types of accommodations. Nevertheless, this implies that the destination is saturated and this exerts significant pressure on the quality of life of its residents.

Girona (Catalonia, Spain), on the other hand, registered about 40,725 road cyclists per year in 2018 (the authors based on Malina Kohn & Rodríguez Aliciardi, 2018). This municipality has been successfully developed as a destination for sports, and specifically, for road cycling tourism following a different model, recognised for the conditions of the territory, the high quality of the services offered and the articulation of the different aspects of its tourist offer around road cycling (D. Millar, personal communication, March 15, 2019; J. Wertz, personal communication, June 12, 2019). This being so, it is important to aim for the growth of this type of tourism but without reaching massification.

Thus, section 3 addresses the results of qualitative in-depth interviews conducted with the main economic actors within road cycling tourism in the municipality of Girona, that allowed to identify the conditions and factors that influenced the development of Girona as a road cycling tourism destination. Moreover, the discussion and conclusions aim to answer the research question: how to develop a road cycling tourism destination?

2. Literature review

2.1. Background of cycle tourism

Although the origins of cycle tourism date back to the end of the 19th century (Lamont, 2009), it was only in the 20th century that it became a widely practiced form of tourism in Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia.

In addition, global cycling festivals and events were some of the contributing factors to building up the cycling culture (BBC, 2019). For example, in 1903 the first of the Tour de France races was held, the most important stage cycling competition in the world to date. The new cycling culture was fuelled by the participation of professional riders in the races, who attracted the interest of more and more aficionados of this sport.

According to (Griffin, 2016), cycling tourism actually started to gain popularity through the touring organisations of Ireland and Britain, since cycling was extremely popular until around 1920.

Subsequently, between 2000 and 2006, according to Transport for London (cited by Berridge, 2012), London was the European city that committed most strongly to developing its potential as a cycling destination, so that cycling in London increased by 72%, more than any other city in Europe, as a result of various actions aimed at 'making London a city where people of all ages and abilities have the incentive, confidence and facilities to cycle whenever it suits them' (Social Research Associates (SRA) (2007). One of these actions was the hosting of the Tour de France Grand Depart, in July 2007.

As of that year, and the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union was to formulate a Tourism Policy, within which the EU supported cycling tourism as a form of sustainable tourism, and financed several projects aimed at its development in 2011. Among these projects was the extension of the EuroVelo network (European Cyclists' Federation, n.d.). These initiatives were to have a significant impact on the development of cycling tourism.

2012 marked a milestone in the development of cycling culture with the London Olympic Games. The event had an impact of unprecedented importance on cycling culture in the UK. (Grous, 2012) describes how, thanks to the 'Olympic Cycling Effect', cycling became a genuinely mainstream activity in the UK, influencing the purchasing habits of those who already cycled occasionally or frequently and prompting many non-cyclists to take up the activity. This was reflected in an increasing number of retail sales and was supported by businesses and organisations helping to make cycling a part of everyday life.

2.2. Conceptualisation of cycling tourism and the cycle tourist

In light of the expansion of cycling as a recreational, leisure and tourist activity, several studies have been carried out with the aims of analysing the relationship between cycling and tourism and defining what cycling tourism is and who might be considered a cycle tourist (Lamont, 2009; Lumsdon, 2010; Ritchie, 1998; Simonsen & Jorgeson, 1996).

In 1996, Lumsdon defined cycle tourism as "recreational cycling activities ranging from a day or part-day casual outing to a long-distance touring holiday" (Lumsdon, 2010).

In turn, Ritchie (1998) suggested that "bicycle tourism should be defined as any activities undertaken by those who are on vacation for longer than 24 h or one night, and for whom the bicycle is an integral part of the trip. In this case, vacations may be independently organised or part of a commercial tour, and may include the use of a transport support service and any type of formal/informal accommodation."

Likewise, Sustrans — an entity promoting sustainable transport in the United Kingdom — describes bicycle tourism as recreational visits, either overnight or day visits away from home, which involve leisure cycling as a fundamental and significant part of the visit (Sustrans, 1999, p.1, cited by Lamont, 2009). Lamont (2009) extends this idea in proposing that, as such, cycling, involving active or passive participation, should be the main purpose of a trip to be considered a bicycle tourism trip. Brotherton and Himmetoğlu (2011) agree that this delimitation is beneficial because it is recognised that a specific interest in an activity drives decision-making amongst special interest tourists. Thus, defining cycling as a strictly recreational phenomenon may be overly restrictive (Lamont, 2009).

In relation to the person who takes part in cycling activities, Simonsen and Jorgeson (1996) believed a cycle tourist could be defined as a person of any nationality, who at some stage or other during his or her holiday uses a bicycle as a mode of transportation, and to whom cycling is an important part of this holiday.

Deenihan and Caulfield (2015) reinforce the proposal above by arguing that cycle tourists are people who travel away from their home region, for whom active or passive participation in cycling is the main

purpose for that trip.

Taking into account the definitions proposed by these authors and the focus of this article, 'cyclists' will thus be considered to be those tourists who travel to a region other than their own for a period of longer than 24 h, or involving an overnight stay, for whom the bicycle is a fundamental part of the trip and for whom the main motivation for this trip is to take part in some type of activity related to cycling and tourism, and who will usually require accommodation, food, travel organization services, mechanical services, the purchase of materials and components for bicycles, clothing and footwear for cycling and so on, with these activities taking place in rural and/or urban environments.

2.3. Factors and conditions with a bearing on demand

The rapid growth of cycle tourism has made bicycle-tourism destination marketers, related-industry practitioners and local government agencies see the importance of bicycle tourism industry, and various strategies have been made to attract more bicycle tourists (Han et al., 2017b). In fact, there has been a growing number of supply initiatives and demand for bicycle tourism products (Lamont, 2009), and current trends indicate a significant market potential for cycle tourism (Kaplan et al., 2015).

In this regard, a number of authors have undertaken to analyse the conditions and factors that cycle tourists regard as decisive when choosing which tourist destination to visit. For the purpose of this article, conditions refer to the state of the destination with regard to its appearance, environment, and quality of life; while factors are those circumstances or events that support the realization of road cycling tourism, as indicated in Table 1.

Although the findings of each author give more weight to some conditions and factors than to others, those that were common and most important were the landscape and climate (including tourism attractions), good quality roads and route diversity, bicycle complementary services (like hire or repair shops), accommodation and food services, and road security and signposting. Therefore, these same conditions and factors have been engaged to shed a light on Girona's particular case study as a road cycling tourism destination being that, consequently, the existence of these determines the likelihood of a destination to provide bicycle tourists with a satisfying experience (Lee, 2014).

3. Methodology

The study conducted as the basis of this article is of a qualitative nature. A field study was first conducted to identify who were the firsts agents to arrive to Girona, why and how they did so. In consequence, it was found that the first to arrive was Johnny Weltz and from there on, the next agents to arrive were tracked.

With this information, it was possible to determine who were, until 2019, the agents developing the economic activity related to road cycling tourism in the municipality of Girona, based on their influence as suppliers for specialised services and promoters of tourist routes for cycling tourists. There was a total of four agents.

Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with the following subjects: Johnny Weltz (a former professional cyclist and a pioneer in promoting Girona as a destination among the English-speaking cycling community), David Millar (a former professional cyclist and founder of the sportswear company CHPTR3), David Welch (a former professional cyclist and founder of the travel agency Bike Breaks), Louise Laker and Brian Canty (cyclists and founders of the agency Eat Sleep Cycle Girona), and Jaume Cabruja (cyclist and founder of the agency Bikecat).

The interviews were carried out between March and June 2019, with a duration of between 30 and 60 min each (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015). Articulated around a script with open questions (Adams & Cox, 2008), and using an audio recorder (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015), information was obtained from the aforementioned agents, together with their opinions regarding the development of road cycle tourism in Girona.

Table 1

Conditions and factors that cycle tourists regard as decisive when choosing a tourist destination to visit.

Author (s)	Conditions	Factors
Ritchie (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scenery ● Overall road safety ● Quality of driving ● Road congestion ● Weather ● Signposting ● Road quality 	
Stinson and Bhat (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lower travel times ● Road classification ● Types of cycle infrastructure ● Barriers between motorists and cyclists ● Pavement quality ● Fewer intersections. 	
Parks and Trails New York (2010), cited by Lee, (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The actual ride (e.g., length, difficulty and type of route). ● The nearby attractions (e.g., scenery, rural areas, historical sites and cultural uniqueness). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The supporting services along the way (e.g., availability of good maps, ease of finding their way, provision of lodging and catering).
Han et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tourist attractions such as natural conditions (e.g., comfortable climate, beautiful landscape). ● Man-made tourist attractions (e.g., heritage sites, cultural and historic sites). ● The degree of difficulty or convenience in moving from one place to another (e.g., connection-oriented transport services, bicycle parking lots, traffic flow and density, bicycle lanes/paths, and road surface and pavement). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Amenities (including accommodation and restaurant services), especially in long distance cycling. ● Provision of safety and security systems (e.g., first-aid stations, police stations, bicycle hire/repair shops). ● Information services (e.g., visitor centres, sign of attractions).

Source: the authors, based on Han et al., 2017a; Lee, 2014; Ritchie, 1998; Stinson & Bhat, 2003.

The variables investigated include: the history of the companies founded by these agents, the reasons why they came to Girona, their views on the factors and conditions that have enabled Girona to develop as a destination for road cycling tourism and their perception of the events that have influenced the growth of cycle tourism in Girona.

In addition, the data obtained in the interviews have been compared and validated with secondary sources such as specialised websites, event communications, reports in the media, research, theses, academic articles, etc. that make reference to the conditions and factors of the city of Girona as a road cycling destination.

4. Case study background

4.1. Girona, cycling and tourism

According to Martín Moreno (2017), cycling activities in the city and municipality of Girona, date back to 1886, and notes that, since then, many local cycling organisations have emerged to boost this sport.

However, the real turning point in the development of cycling tourism in Girona came in 1986, with the arrival of the professional cyclist Johnny Weltz (GRUP, 2020 AVANT, 2020) who, thanks to his friendship with the Girona cyclist Pere Muñoz, settled in the region of La Garrotxa (Catalonia) and began to train (Martín Moreno, 2017).

Afterwards, the 1990s saw the creation of the Cicloturisme firm, which can be considered the first travel agency specialising in cycling

tourism in the city of Girona (Cicloturisme Europa, 2018). Empar Baqué, founder of the company, states that 1996 is the year in which cycling tourism really became established in Girona. It was then that the region began to make the most of its characteristics to host activities related to cycling and tourism (Martín Moreno, 2017).

Since then, the urban development of the city and an important network of paved roads of various degrees of difficulty (Catalan Tourist Agency, 2021) have been harnessed by agents and tourists for road cycling activities, as this cycling modality does not require specialised infrastructure, because it makes use of the existing infrastructures. Moreover, the upscaling relevance of road cycling tourism at international, regional and local levels has helped to structure the services offer, which coincides with the most common and important factors analysed by other authors as presented in Table 1. Additional conditions and factors will be addressed in more depth in the following sections 3.2 and 3.3.

Thanks to the existing conditions, another important step for the development of road cycling in Girona took place between 2006 and 2007, as the renown professional cyclist David Millar convinced a whole team to train together for the first time in Europe. From this point on, more and more cyclists arrived to Girona. As a result, it can be stated that professional road cycling is the reason why Girona became a hub for road cycling (D. Millar, personal communication, March 15, 2019) and later, for cycle tourism.

In that sense, Hinch and Higham (2004) have discussed how the development of sport-related leisure services is one successful approach that can be used to reimage a place, and that in order for sport tourism to develop in a destination, resources and infrastructure to cater for the targeted sport and tourism must exist. It is for these reasons that the city of Girona, in Catalonia, was chosen as a case study.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight the de-seasonalising character of road cycling tourism for the tourist demand in Girona, a traditionally popular destination for its cultural and natural attractiveness. In this case, the cycling seasons take place as indicated in Table 2 and can be compared to the cyclist events listed in Table 3:

From Table 2, it can be concluded that road cycling tourism contributes to de-seasonalize the tourist demand in Girona, as cycling high seasons differ from tourist high seasons: For example, between July and August there is none or very low cycling tourist flow due to high temperatures and the limited accommodation capacity because it is high season for other types of tourism (sun and beach). The same happens in December when it is holiday season.

Moreover, research conducted by Malina Kohn and Rodríguez Aliardi (2018) with tour operators in the province of Girona who were specialised in road cycling tourism showed that April, May and June concentrate 40% of the cycle tourists passing through Girona along the year. Reinforcing the seasonal adjustment premise as a result of this tourism modality, for both the tourist flow and the economic impact.

In that sense, the same study shows interesting economic data: the

Table 2
Cycling seasons in the municipality of Girona.

Months	Seasonality	Motivation
Mid-January to mid-March	High	Training camps (professionals and amateurs.) ^a
March to June	High	Sports vacation Participation in races and cycling events
July to mid-September	Low	
Mid-September to November	High	Sports vacation Participation in races and cycling events
December to mid-January	Low	

Source: the authors, based on A. Güell (personal communication, June 8, 2022) and the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) calendar.

^a Season especially dedicated to training for the races and events starting on March.

Table 3
Road cycling festivals and competitions that include the city of Girona.

Activity	Month	Description
Girona – Manter Duathlon	March	A competition combining two disciplines, athletics and road cycling, organised by the TGCBINN club and the Catalan Triathlon Federation.
Volta a Catalunya	March	A pro-level competition very highly regarded by the country's cycling community.
Gran Fondo Girona Cycling Festival	June	A popular cycling tour organised by the company Bike Breaks which takes in the most emblematic sites in the region, including the old town (Barri Vell) of Girona, with a tourist-oriented perspective.
Sea Otter Europe	September	The classic US cycling fair chose Girona to be its first location in Europe. The festival is centred on an exposition hall and a series of cycling trials in road and mountain bike modality. It is used by brands to launch their new products.
Gerundona	October	A popular bike tour for women cyclists new to the sport designed to promote uptake of the practice.
Gerunda Road –Cicloturismo	November	A popular road tour staged during the annual Festes de Sant Narcís to promote cycling in the city and organised by Girona Enjoy Sport under the auspices of Girona City Council.

Source: the authors, based on Martín Moreno, 2017.

daily average expenditure of road cycling tourists is 162.09 euros and the average quantity of nights spent in Girona is ten nights. Likewise, the total of road cycling tourists visiting the territory during the spring high season (April to June) ascends to 16,290 cyclists who account for a direct economic impact of 25,326,227 euros and an indirect impact of 10,175,927,53 euros. The authors (Malina Kohn & Rodríguez Aliardi, 2018) also calculated the annual economic impact (direct and indirect) of road cycling in the province of Girona, from the ratios indicated by the specialised agents, which reaches nearly 89 million euros a year.

4.2. Conditions for the development of road cycling tourism in Girona

As already mentioned in Table 1 within the literature review, a region needs to meet a particular set of conditions in order to be favourable to the practice of road cycling, whether at an amateur or a professional level. These are the attraction that leads a tourist to choose one place over another.

A variety of primary sources, consisting of the interviews conducted for this study with Johnny Weltz, David Millar (CHPTR3), David Welch (Bike Breaks), Louise Laker and Brian Canty (Eat Sleep Cycle Girona) and Jaume Cabruja (Bikecat) in 2019, and secondary sources such as specialised websites, event communications, reports in the media, research, theses, academic articles, etc. that make reference to the conditions of the city of Girona as a starting point for its development as a cycling destination:

- **Exceptional geography:** The municipality of Girona is an extensive area with different types of terrain (flat, hilly, mountainous) with a variety of good quality roads and bike paths (distances from 60 to 120 km) in optimum condition for cycling. This is suitable for road cycling as it does not require specialised infrastructure but uses the existing paved roads. Likewise, well signposted roads with little traffic, are ideal for cyclists to train at their respective levels and develop their skills, as well as hosting specialised events, with result that cyclists tend to make the city of Girona their starting and finishing point.

It should be noted that some of these routes are part of longer routes

such as the *Vía Inter Catalunya* (which links Girona with the cities of Vic, Manresa, Tàrrrega and Lleida) and the EuroVelo Network, which links a series of European cities.

In addition, Girona is a strategic location (see Fig. 1), since it is close to the routes of the most important cycling competitions in the world, such as the Giro d'Italia, the Tour de France and the Vuelta a España. For this reason, Girona is a place for professional cyclists with conditions that facilitate their training for the various types of stage in the different competitions in which they compete. At the same time, it is also an attractive destination for those beginner or leisure cyclists who like to engage in cycle tourism during their holidays.

- **Enviably climate:** the region experiences relatively stable temperatures during all four seasons and little rainfall over the course of the year. This is significant when we bear in mind that the climate allows cyclists to train all year round and not only in certain seasons, in addition to the fact that, in comparison with other regions, there is less risk of a road accident as a result of rain.
- **Good transportation connectivity:** Thanks to its proximity to the airports of Girona and Barcelona and the accessibility of the train stations, in addition to an excellent network of bus lines and taxis, cyclists can easily travel to Girona and from the city to attend events and competitions in other parts of Europe.
- **Good quality of life:** This is one of the most important conditions for cyclists planning a long stay or permanent residence in Girona, in view of the fact that it is an ideal place to live not only due to the excellent basic services available (housing, food, education, health, etc.) but also on account of the large number of resources, services and activities – cultural, natural, sporting and tourist-related – at their disposal over the course of the year. Therefore, professional cyclists not only have access to routes perfectly suited to their training needs but can also do so in a significantly healthy training environment to improve performance.

One of the valuable amenities available is specialist health care

tailored to the needs of professional cyclists, exemplified by the leading osteopath Arturo Cerdán at Clínica Bofill in Girona. Dr Cerdán is a highly respected figure in sports medicine, and his clinic has become a resource of first resort for professional cyclists, a complementary service to the treatment of injuries or ailments related to their physical activity (Martín Moreno, 2017).

- **Anonymity:** Girona does not have a long-standing cycling culture, so professional cyclists can go about their day to day lives and train without being recognised or bothered by the locals, and this continues to be the case.

4.3. Factors which have contributed to the development of road cycle tourism in Girona

In addition to the conditions of the region, there are also other factors that have contributed to Girona's development as a destination for road cycling tourism. Some of them belong to the particular case of Girona and some others coincide with the factors mentioned in Table 1.

- **Arrival of the first professional cyclists:** It could be claimed that the above-mentioned development is due in large part to the arrival in the region of professional cyclists who have become ambassadors for the region in the world of professional cyclists and in particular within the English-speaking cycling community.

Starting with the arrival of Johnny Weltz in 1986, Weltz has gone on to become a leading advocate of the province of Girona within the professional cycling community.

Later on, around 2001, in France and other countries, the anti-doping movement began to exert greater pressure on the authorities to enforce thorough drugs testing of Tour de France cyclists. The same pressure was not present in Spain. When the professional cyclist Lance Armstrong took up residence in Girona, he made the city a point of reference in the cycling world (López-Egea, 2016). According to the studies carried out

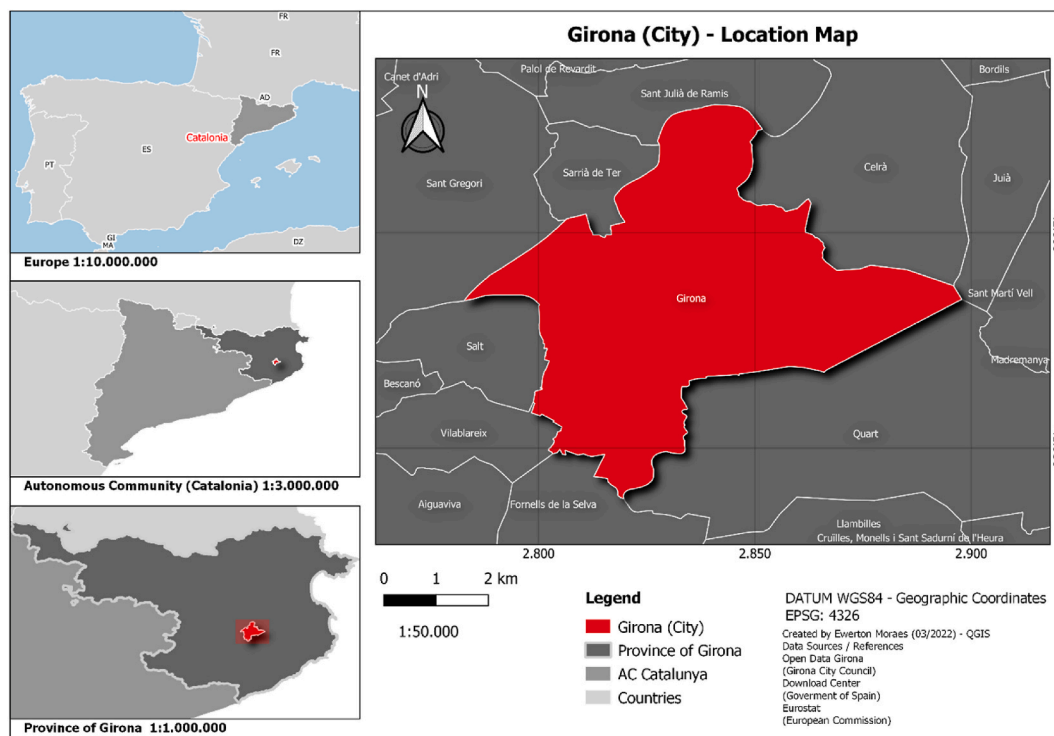


Fig. 1. Location Map of the city of Girona. Source: authors.

by [Martín Moreno \(2017\)](#), it was Johnny Wertz who persuaded Armstrong that Girona was “the best place in Europe to train”.

With a professional cyclist as famous as Armstrong living in Girona, and the eyes of the international cycling community turned on the city, both the public and the private sectors began to pay more attention to the region’s facilities and potential with a view to this specific market segment ([Martín Moreno, 2017](#)).

Furthermore, the presence of such professional cyclists in Girona set the precedence on the quality of the geographical and life conditions of the territory, positioning the ‘image’ of Girona within the international cycling community on a high level. Thus, this itself, serves as the principal attraction to other professional and amateur cyclists.

- **Girona has become the headquarter of the most important cycling teams:** According to Eduard Kirchner of the Cicloturisme firm (cited by [Martín Moreno, 2017](#)), Girona was very convenient for Armstrong, both on account of its climate and as a strategic location in which to train for the Tour de France and other major races in which he competed, and he did not come alone, but brought his entire team. Hamilton, Van de Velde and Landis all took up temporary residence in the city, where they were in contact with other professional cyclists such as Hincapié, Vaughters, Danielson, Andreu and Leipheimer ([Giner, 2020](#); D. Millar, personal communication, March 15, 2019). So it was that Girona became for the first time the headquarters of one of the top international professional cycling teams: US Postal.

In addition, several other top professional cyclists, such as David Millar, David Welch, Dan Martin and Christian Meier, also began to come to Girona to train on a temporary basis until they retired from the sport (D. Millar, personal communication, March 15, 2019).

By 2014, Girona had become the home of the Garmin, Orica Green Edge, BMC and Argos Shimano racing teams ([Martín Moreno, 2017](#)).

- **Cyclists becoming ambassadors and influencers in the promotion of Girona as a cycling destination:** Professional and amateur cyclists who had had the opportunity to tour and get to know the region of Girona were generating content (photographs, interviews, videos, blog entries, etc.) that reflected their experience and their recommendation to other cyclists of Girona as a destination ([Martín Moreno, 2017](#)), placing them in the role of micro-influencers.

This coincided with the boom in the number of Instagram users, which greatly enhanced the spread and reach of the content. Therefore, cycling became a mainstream sport at social media.

This content generated relayed the message “Girona sells exclusivity and anonymity” and established Girona’s international reputation as “the place to be if you want to become a professional cyclist”.

- **Articulation of the existing provision with other tourist services:** Bikecat and Bike Breaks are some of the first and most popular travel agencies specialising in cycle tourism that saw the light between 2005 and 2008 as a response to the ever-growing community of road cyclists coming to Girona that needed adapted services.

Thus, the articulation of the existing provision with other services in the fields of accommodation, food, transport and so on was met in order to consolidate specific products for this segment.

- **The formation of the cyclists society within the Girona society:** More and more cyclists moved to Girona between 2008 and 2012, so a new society was formed within the wider society of the city: that of English-speaking professional cyclists (D. Millar, personal communication, March 15, 2019; J. Wertz, personal communication, June 12, 2019), who found compelling reasons to stay in the Catalan city in the sharing of a common language and the mentoring of former

top riders. As a result, and as this community grew, the lingua franca of the cycling elite in Europe changed from French to English.

- **Campaigns to raise awareness of and respect for cyclists:** This initiative summed to the high-quality road cycling tourism destination that Girona aimed to be by seeking to ensure that people could cycle in safety ([González Moreno, 2016](#)).
- **Emergence of a promotion body:** With the growth in demand, more companies and bodies came into being in the cycling tourism sphere, and this resulted in the joint work with the public authorities, clubs, consortia and other entities directly related to cycling at a national and international level.

In this sense, the Costa Brava and the Girona Pyrenees Tourist Board, as the body responsible for promoting tourism in the province of Girona and its municipalities, created the Nature and Active Tourism Club, and within it a specific section with a remit for cycling tourism ([Martín Moreno, 2017](#)), with the aim of articulating the provision of different tourist actors in an action plan aimed specifically at the development of cycling tourism.

- **Promotion of the cycle tourism segment in the city of Girona:** As a consequence of the synergy generated by the various actors, in 2009 the Cycle Tourism Congress was held in Santa Cristina d’Aro (Costa Brava, Girona), as one of the first actions with long-term impact to be undertaken by the public authorities with the aim of promoting the cycle tourism segment in the city of Girona.
- **International promotion of Girona as a road cycling tourism destination:** In this regard, one of the first and most important promotional campaigns that helped position Girona in the United States was an advertisement by the Garmin company showing images of its racers Dan Martin and David Millar training on the region’s rural roads and cobbled streets. The target market for this campaign was American cyclists who might wish to follow in the footsteps — or the tyre tracks — of their leading professional cyclists ([Martín Moreno, 2017](#)). At the same time, Girona has appeared in international tourist magazines and newspapers focusing on the segment of cycle tourism.
- **The positioning of the brand Girona as a road cycling tourist destination:** Thanks to the presence of word-class professional cyclists and the promotional actions being held, Girona became the “Mecca of Cycling” (Lluís Hortet cited by [Martín Moreno, 2017](#)) and the city’s growing popularity in the world of cycling had begun to make its mark on social media and attract to the city new generations of cyclists training to become professionals and earn a place on an elite team, following the same routes travelled by their idols and predecessors in the past. Furthermore, more and more amateur cyclists and followers of the sport, from the United States, Australia, South Africa and Canada also set foot in Girona.
- **Appearance of cycling-associated brands:** From 2014 on, the arrival of cyclists in the city of Girona became even more notable, with recommendations spread by word of mouth, boosted by the appearance of cycling-associated brands with innovative services and products (such as Rocacorba Cycling, CHPTR3, The Service Course and La Fàbrica) (2014–2018).

In addition, over the course of 2015 and 2016 another new phenomenon emerged in Girona: ‘coffee culture’, thanks to the influence of former professional cyclists who had retired from competition and decided to make their home in the region, opening businesses that combined the concepts of cycling and good coffee. This was so much the case that, in the imaginary of the cycling community in Girona, the mere presence of a group of cyclists in a cafe was taken to signify that the coffee there was very good. Of these businesses, special mention should be made of the cafeterias La Fàbrica, Espresso Mafia and The Service Course as notable additions to the range of cycle tourism provision already present in the city, and so successful as to become points of

interest always worth a visit on any stroll around the city.

- **Improvement of supporting services, amenities and information for road cycling tourism** (Han et al., 2017; Parks and Trails New York, 2010 cited by Lee, 2014): As from 2014, new cyclists arriving to Girona found a wider range of services for cycle tourism. For example, hotels and apartments for long stays, restaurants and cafes, bicycle tours, bike rentals and top-of-the-range cycle shops, mechanical services for bicycles, shops selling cycling clothing and equipment and so on.

In addition, there was much more information of the destination available, both in traditional and in social media, thus these new cyclists tended to be far better informed, which would attach greater value to the quality of services and had a clear preference for those establishments and shops that generate a pleasant and attractive environment around cycling (Martín Moreno, 2017).

- **Sports Tourism Destination stamp:** So significant was the growth achieved by the cycling tourism model in 2015 that the Catalan Tourist Board recently awarded Girona its prestigious “Sports Tourism Destination” stamp. This accolade is recognition that the city not only stands out for its history and architecture but also for its magnificent landscapes for running and road cycling, sports facilities, accommodation, specialised travel agencies meeting quality standards, and its excellence in resources and services for elite athletes (Catalan Tourist Agency, 2021; World Tourism Organization, 2021).

One important effect of this was that the Catalan Tourist Agency specifically featured Girona in its international promotional campaigns, which in turn led to the city being chosen as the European home of the Sea Otter Europe bike show (Sea Otter Europe, n.d.).

- **Organization of important events and competitions:** Besides Sea Otter Europe, a series of events have been organised such as congresses, festivals and competitions, attended by amateur and professional cyclists and consisting wholly or in part of road cycling. These are set out in Table 3:

Regarding the impact of these events in the destination, a study conducted by the Girona Tourism Board in 2018 focuses on the Sea Otter Europe event, which has become one of the most important cycling events to have place in the city of Girona. Table 4 presents the most relevant data:

Although the Sea Otter Europe organization published statistics for the 2021 edition (Sea Otter Europe, n.d.) that reflect a total of 45.000 attendees and the presence of 240 brands, the only economic impact study available is that of the 2018 edition (Table 4).

- **Configuration of tourist activities aimed at cyclists:** González Moreno (2016) also mentions the range of tourist activities aimed at cyclists by local travel agencies, under the heading “thematic cycle tourism”, as a distinguishing feature of the region: among the options singled out for mention here are the bicycle route through the city of

Girona’s old town (Barri Vell) and historic Jewish quarter, El Call, and other routes linked to activities for tourists centred on local wine and olive oil production.

Thanks to all of the above factors, together with better governance and public-private partnerships, it has been possible for the city of Girona to develop as a destination for road cycling tourism.

At the same time, although the development of Girona as a destination has focused more on road cycling, other modalities that make use of unpaved roads and mountain tracks have also been promoted. As a result, the numbers of local and foreign tourists who come to cycle the Greenways of the Girona counties has increased (Consorci Vies Verdes de Girona.d.; Mundet & Coenders, 2010), and this has led on one hand to the decentralisation of tourist activity towards the outskirts of the city and, on the other, to the extension of routes and the inclusion of new service providers as beneficiaries of the positive impacts that this activity generates (Mundet & Coenders, 2010).

4.4. Profile and motivations of the road cyclist who visits Girona

This section will be developed by referring to two studies, carried out in 2015 and 2019, respectively, centred on different agents related to cycle tourism in Girona. Although the statistics may not be representative, they are important, since they allow to have an overview on the profile and motivations of the road cycling tourist who visit Girona. In addition, qualitatively, these results reflect a coincidence between the preferences of the tourists surveyed and the conditions and factors that characterize Girona as an attractive destination for road cycling tourism. It should be noted that it is necessary to carry out more detailed and in-depth studies on this demand, especially after the pandemic.

The first of these is the study conducted by Marcos Muñoz and published under the title “Current situation and future perspectives of cycling tourism in the city of Girona: Analysis of the provision” (Muñoz, 2015), for which he carried out interviews with different agents working in the cycling tourism sector in the province of Girona, to find out their opinion of the state of this growing segment.

Among the results of the study was the finding that the agents agreed about the countries of origin of the cyclists, most of whom are from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; and that amateur cyclists specialising in road cycling who come to Girona tend to follow the patterns and preferences of the professionals who have their training bases in the region. In relation to this, a large number of cyclists can be found in Girona during the winter months (thanks to the favourable climate of the region), thus confirming the contribution made by road cycling to the de-seasonalising of tourist demand.

At the same time, the cycling tourism agents also agree that foreign cyclists prefer to stay in 2-star to 4-star hotels, apartments and rural houses, provided that the accommodation has an individuality and a distinctiveness linked to the local culture. On the whole, these are consumers with a medium to high level of purchasing power and low level of sensitivity to price.

In addition, cyclists who travel with their partner, with their family, or as part of a group tend to look for other compatible activities to complement their cycling activities, such as high-level gastronomy or cultural events, with attendance at live shows. Similarly, they tend to require other services such as hairdressing or massages, which the conventional tourist does not usually ask for. Meanwhile, the professional cyclists who are resident in the city frequently make use of the specialist services of doctors, mechanics, drivers, trainers and/or physiotherapists.

Another of the significant findings of the study is that the agents interviewed consider that up until 2015 Girona was gaining in popularity because it was a clear alternative to other already crowded European destinations such as Marseille, the Dolomites in Italy or Mallorca.

In 2019, Angela Pons completed her thesis, “Profile and motivations of the cycling tourist client of Girona companies specialising in road

Table 4
Impact of the 2018 edition of Sea Otter Europe in the city of Girona.

Variable	Results
Total economic impact	2,763,773 euros
Attendance (general public)	50,000 persons
Attendance (participants)	5,230 cyclists
Exhibitors	190

Source: the authors, based on Girona Costa Brava Pyrenees Tourism Board, 2018.

cycling. Case study: Bike Breaks Girona Cycling Centre” (Pons, 2019), in which she provided an update on and another approach to understanding the profile of the cycling tourist who visits Girona. On the basis of a structured survey applied to a sample of 100 clients of this travel agency specialising in cycling tourism between the months of February and May 2019. These results are presented in Table 5:

5. Discussion

Since bicycle tourism can be increased by modifying destination marketing and management practices (Lee, 2014), these outcomes constitute a system based on the perception of the value of a region by cyclists (professionals and amateurs), motivating them to travel from their place of origin to train, compete, tour and/or take up temporary residence in that region, consuming specialised products and services. These premises can be used in the planning and development of a road cycling tourism destinations.

In that sense, the municipality and city of Girona has proved to successfully develop as a road cycling tourism destination, in terms of its particular geography, climate, quality of paved roads, tourist attractiveness, good transport connectivity and quality of life, meeting the conditions pointed by authors such as Han et al. (2017), Lee (2014), Ritchie (1998) and Stinson and Bhat (2003) (see Table 1).

Additionally, Girona offers cyclists something that other massified road cycling destinations cannot offer: anonymity and exclusivity. Maintaining these values is essential if Girona is to grow as a destination, without neglecting the quality of the facilities and the offer of services for road cyclists.

The above-mentioned conditions constitute the key characteristics that attracted the first professional cyclists to arrive to Girona, Johnny Wultz and Lance Armstrong, and set the starting point for the convergence of various factors that boosted the development of road cycling in this tourist destination. As David Millar related, professional cycling is the reason why Girona became a road cycling hub (D. Millar, personal communication, March 15, 2019), because the sole presence of the above-mentioned renowned cyclists (and later, entire elite teams) served as a tacit “quality stamp” for Girona.

Although the case study mentions specific factors that have influenced the development of Girona as a destination and may not be replicable for other destinations (such as the arrival of Johnny Wultz and Lance Armstrong), some of these can be taken up as referents and tailored to the particular conditions and capacity for intervention of other regions, given their importance in enhancing the appeal of the tourist destination. As has been shown by Bakogiannis et al. (2020), although the infrastructure may be limited, entrepreneurship can support the development of such a tourism sector, as cycle tourists have specific needs to be met.

In view of the above, and with a growing demand, the private sector has focused on developing the range of specialised services on offer, adapting to the needs and interests of cycling tourism, with accommodation, restaurant services, rentals, clothing and equipment, mechanical services, health services, transportation, etc., which need to be fundamental considerations for the marketing and product development of a bicycle tourism destination (Lamont, 2009).

In addition, as we know, cycling tourists also find value in many of the destination’s other attractions (Han et al., 2017), such as its landscape, history, culture and gastronomy, among others, which they can get to by bike, and this clearly indicates the importance of developing tourism products capable of connecting these attractions with the interests of cyclists to further enhance the offer.

In similar vein, it is very important to take advantage of the power of the social media (managed by the DMO) for the promotion of the destination, and also especially helpful to make the most of the UGC (User-Generated Content) disseminated by influencers and ambassadors (Marin et al., 2018) of brands associated with road cycling tourism, especially if this content is generated by professional cyclists, as they

Table 5
Profile and motivations of the cycling tourist client of Girona companies specialising in road cycling. Case study: Bike Breaks Girona Cycling Centre.

Categories	Variables	Comments
Sociodemographic profile	Origin of the cycling tourists.	The principal outbound markets are the United Kingdom (30%), the United States and Canada (29%). In other words, they are predominantly English-speaking tourists, and in this coincide with the profile of the first communities of professional cyclists who arrived in the region in order to train there, and with the language of the promotional campaigns referred to above.
	Gender	The majority of Bike Breaks Girona cycling tourist customers are male (76%), although women (24%) also account for a significant portion of the total, indicating that it would be worth considering the provision of a specific offer for female cycling tourists.
	Age	Almost half of the cyclists (46%) are in the age range between 31 and 50 years of age, followed by those over 50 (35%), who make up the second largest group. This coincides with the fact that cycling is a sport which requires a significant economic investment in clothing and equipment, as well as in the bicycle itself, so that it tends to be practiced by people with a medium to high level of purchasing power. This economic/professional status is not usually attained under the age of 30.
Behavior	Fidelity and frequency	55% of those surveyed were visiting Girona for the first time, compared to 45% who were making a repeat visit. Of the latter, 65% had been to the city between 2 and 4 times, 22% had been to Girona only once before, and the remaining 13% reported that they had visited Girona more than 5 times.
	Length of the trip	The majority of cyclists (31%) stay in Girona for a week, followed by the group (29%) that stays between three and four days, the ones staying for 5 and 6 days (21%) and those who stay for more than a week (19%). The tourists who tend to stay in the destination longer are mostly those from more distant points of origin (United States, Canada and Australia), who may also take advantage of their trip to become acquainted with the local culture.
	Preferred season	For 58% of those surveyed, the preferred season for cycling around Girona is spring, followed by autumn and summer, respectively.

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

Categories	Variables	Comments
	Form of travel	Although the majority of cyclists surveyed travel with groups of friends or acquaintances (42%), alone (26%) or with their partner (23%), it is striking that only 5% of those surveyed state that they travel as a family and 4% with members of their cycling club. It can perhaps be inferred from this that cycling tourists tend to travel with people in their own age group with whom they share tastes and preferences.
	Preferred type of accommodation	Cyclists prefer to stay in tourist apartments (44%) and 4-star hotels (32%), which makes sense considering that they are people who mostly travel with friends or acquaintances and who have a medium to high level of purchasing power. Furthermore, the 17% stays in 3 stars hotels, 5% stays in 5 stars hotels and a 2% prefers hostels.
	Use of rental bicycles	80% of those surveyed answered that they had rented their bicycle from Bike Breaks Girona, while 14% travelled with their own bicycle and 6% rented from another company in the city.
Motivations	Most important conditions and factors	The majority responded that the condition of the roads, the climate, nature and landscape, gastronomy and the quality of the local restaurants are the conditions which they assign the greatest value, whereas the presence of specific services for cycling tourism and prices are less important factors.
	Most required services from companies, for road cycling tourism	Bicycle rental was the service in greatest demand, clearly in line with the fact that 80% rent a bicycle on reaching the destination. Next in demand were recommendations and assistance in planning routes and group outings. Finally, only a few respondents prioritised services such as a support vehicle and luggage transport, private guide service and transport options for travel with their own bicycle.
	Areas of tourist interest visited in Girona	Here, only half of the respondents say they engage in activities such as visits to spas and wellness treatments, attending concerts, gastronomic tours and cycling activities, respectively.

Source: authors, adapted from Pons, 2019.

have a significant influence on their followers and within the cycling community and can help improve the local and international positioning of a destination.

To the above we might also add cycling and tourism journalists or bloggers, who have the ability to encourage their community to visit a certain region and with whom alliances and specific actions can be worked on (Marin et al., 2018).

In addition, as shown in Table 2, road cycling tourism is an effective strategy to de-seasonalize the tourist demand in Girona as the cycling seasons take place at different times during the year than the high tourist seasons, because cyclists need certain climate conditions that favour their training sessions in which they do demanding physical efforts: not too high and not too low temperatures. The cycling seasons also include the periods of cycling events and races organization (see Table 3); thus, they strategically attract amateurs and general public that may have any interest in the cycling environment multiplying the total effective demand for road cycling tourism and related services.

Furthermore, a very interesting factor to highlight is that Girona, as a road cycling destination, has a joint promotion structure but not a management structure. This is because in the particular case of road cycling, it makes use of the existing road infrastructure and does not directly affect the urban infrastructure of the city. Thus, although a management structure is important it does not exist yet, but its establishment should be addressed by all agents in the near future if they aim for Girona to keep growing as a road cycling tourist destination.

At the present time, each agent related to road cycling tourism has its own management strategy but converge in and support the promotional actions carried out by the DMO to position Girona as an attractive destination within the international road cycling world. Including the organization and hosting of local, regional and international road cycling events (see Table 3) as the Sea Otter Europe (see Table 4).

From the demand perspective, there are some studies (Girona Costa Brava Pyrenees Tourism Board, 2018; Muñoz Rodríguez, 2015; Pons Moll, 2019) that were only used for descriptive purposes to support the case study. As the data is not representative of the demand it is clearly a limitation that should be addressed in future research.

Broader and more exhaustive analyses of potential demand should be conducted to understand visitors' wants and needs more fully and go on to consolidate the cycling tourism products and services that they most demand, especially when our daily lives are still affected in one way or another by the COVID-19 pandemic, in the knowledge that worldwide there is a before and after for the different profiles of tourists.

Finally, as stated in the previous sections few industry and economic impact data is available, thus it is also a limitation that should be addressed in future research lines to obtain additional insights on road cycling tourism destinations in order to develop or improve management and promotion strategies.

6. Conclusions

The focus in this article on a case study such as Girona is likely to mean that specific conditions of climate, topography and infrastructure will be very different from those of other destinations and for this reason it is very important to bear in mind that one of the first requisites for successfully developing road cycling tourism in a destination is to identify and evaluate the specific conditions of that region. Likewise, it is also important to take account of the cultural characteristics of the residents of the local population, as this can affect the development of the local cycling culture.

In light of this, it is also essential to study and appreciate the specific needs of cycle tourists before, during and after their stay in their chosen destination to be able to configure a range of provision that is specific, equal to demand and innovative.

On the basis of this diagnosis, a development plan should be drawn up with a view to improving existing road infrastructure for cycling. And, as it is the case in Girona, this must be accompanied by inclusive road education with the emphasis on mutual respect among cyclists, pedestrians and drivers and on promoting a cycling culture in the city or destination, since the stronger the cycling culture, the larger the cycling community and the greater the demand for specialised services in cycling tourism.

Of course, these initiatives must be carried out on the basis of a solid governance which articulates the work of the public sector, the private

sector and the national and international bodies linked to road cycling tourism.

The next step is to draw up an action plan for the specific management and promotion of these products which includes the development and strengthening of alliances with international organisations linked to road cycling, the staging of specialised events (congresses, festivals and races), the formulation of policies and regulations in relation to cycling tourism, the establishment of quality standards and certifications (Bakogiannis et al., 2020) both for companies and for the destinations themselves, and so on.

Additionally, in a further stage of development of the destination, there should be a formulation of urban, management and promotional plans at regional levels, consolidating the efforts of all agents involved in a regional superstructure and brand around road cycling tourism.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Lluís Mundet: Research idea, Conceptualization, Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Discussion, Conclusions. **Jaume Marin:** Research idea, Methodology, Discussion, Conclusions. **Adriana Figueroa:** Conceptualization, Introduction, Literature review, Methodology.

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