

## Article

# Subjective Bodily Experiences of Island Cyclists in Different Contexts: The Case of Hainan Island, China

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**Abstract:** A single subjective bodily experience is at the core of sports tourism activities, but the current literature on sports tourism largely ignores both the continuous and ephemeral experiential processes of individuals in mobile sports activities from a bodily perspective. In this study, we developed a “context–body–perception” framework and selected a sample of tourists from Hainan Island, China, in order to explore the embodied experience of cycling tourists, using a qualitative approach. We found that the contexts encountered by island cyclists could be divided into a human context and nonhuman context. The human context included the companion context, pan-companion context, and host context, and the nonhuman context comprised the natural context, mediated facility context, and digital technology context. The cyclists’ physical experiences and perceptions in multiple different contexts were inseparable from each other, and both were embedded in a specific context through the five senses, through the state of body and activity, through emotions and memories, and through interaction with a specific context, all of which formed a dynamic feedback system. Through bodily practices in different contexts, cyclists acquired meaningful representations of their bodies, social relationships, and self-worth. The findings of this study can enrich the study of embodiment in sports and recreation areas, as well as provide an initial foray into bodily research in island-based cycling.

**Keywords:** bicycle tourism; island cyclists; embodied experiences; contexts; Hainan



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## 1. Introduction

The development of sports tourism is recognized in many countries as a way to better avoid the seasonality of tourism [1,2]. Bicycle tourism has been one of the most important niche markets for sports due to the greater flexibility, accessibility, and environmental friendliness of the activity itself [3]. It first emerged in Europe and the United States during the late Victorian and Edwardian boom in Irish tourism and has become increasingly popular around the world ever since [4,5]. In the context of tourism, the bicycle is not simply a means of transportation or equipment for sport, but a medium of interaction between cyclists and the environment as well [6]. Furthermore, because most bicycle rides take place through transitions between places, cycling shows great potential for integration with other tourism activities [7]. Although cycling has received much attention within sports research, there are few research perspectives that combine the sport and tourism attributes of cycling.

Another key aspect of cycling and tourism that has received little attention is the cycling mobility experience. Combined with the definition of cycling tourism put forward by Ritchie, the cycling mobility experience refers to the use of bicycles as the main means of transportation during the mobility process, or where bicycles play a very important role during a tour [8]. Current studies have deconstructed various cycling phenomena around the themes of cycling infrastructure [9], the socio-economic impacts of cycling [10,11], cyclists’ motivations and

preferences [12,13], and cyclists' embodied practices [14]. Although some scholars have explored the embodied practice aspects of cycling, most of these research findings have focused on the subjective experience more so than on the body of travelers [15]. However, the bodily experience is most memorable and important, which can be triggered by the variability of the environment and encounters with human and nonhuman elements during a ride [16]. These encounters in turn frame diverse contexts, giving rise to different meanings that constitute the whole cycling experience.

Unlike tourism by conventional transportation, bicycle tourism, which is more autonomous and embodied, is an unconventional mobility experience that allows cyclists to relate to a wide range of places and space [17,18]. However, such a research theme has not received sufficient attention [19]. Most previous studies of tourism and transportation have separated travel and transportation; however, the new mobility paradigm challenges this view [20]. It argues that no point or space is completely isolated and advocates a relational turn, emphasizing the connections among elements [19,21]. However, studies on the bicycle tourism experience are still described in a more traditional, static way [3,12]. Bicycle tourism not only has the typical human–land connection characteristics, but also allows cyclists to actively experience the natural and human environment of cycling in depth [17–19]. It also allows them to gain both explicit and tacit knowledge in the process [18]. Therefore, we adopt an unconventional mobility perspective and a relational geography approach to explore the relationship among context, body and mind, and perception in bicycle tourism. This study can further compensate for the neglect of previous studies on the tourism transportation experience. It also complements the study results on the relationship between tourism activities and subjects under the transformation of the new mobility paradigm.

Against this research background, this article attempts to explore further, through qualitative research, which contexts island-based cyclists encounter in their cycling using independent bicycle tourists on Hainan Island, China. What are the processes of the cyclists' embodied practices in these contexts? What kind of meaningful representations does the embodied practice of cycling bring to these cyclists? The specific research process is as follows. First, we found the gap in previous studies based on a literature review and constructed the “context–body and mind–perception” three-dimensional theoretical framework that guides this paper. Second, this study collected data through a mobile ethnographic approach, and the authors also accumulated a large amount of primary data from several Hainan rides. The data cover the types of contexts generated, the outcomes of the physical and mental perceptions, and the learning and understanding of explicit and tacit knowledge in multiple contexts. Finally, we analyzed the themes that emerged from the data in conjunction with the theoretical framework to arrive at our perspective.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *The Embodied Experiences: Context, Body, and Perception*

The field of phenomenology and the emergence of embodied cognition influenced by phenomenology have pushed people to rethink the role of the body [22,23]. Concern for the concept of embodiment originated from Heidegger's concept of “being” and Merleau-Ponty's concept of “embodied subjectivity”, which affirms that the body and mind are one [24]. Phenomenology emphasizes the body as the subject that shapes our perception and cognition in various environmental forms. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the body is not only a part of space, but is also integrated with the mind as a prerequisite for people to perceive space [25].

In the process of understanding space in the context of the body, human beings are capable of producing numerous contexts based on their cognition, and these contexts can be used to help perceive the world through certain rules [26]. More precisely, the term context as used here refers to a tendency to structure different factual elements by combining them in multiple different ways by forming different contexts to reflect different information through different relationships [27]. In the course of their activities, subjects

form different contexts by establishing connections with human and nonhuman elements, and the individual bodily sensations and perceptions formed in these contexts reflect their characteristics [28].

These contexts are not completely neutral but are influenced by the process of embodied practice, subject identity, and cultural contexts as well [29]. This notion of context is in line with what Polanyi calls cognitive conditioning, where he argues that there is a very complex field emergence mechanism behind the cognitive activities that occur in us [30]. The knowledge acquired in such contexts is distinguished between explicit and tacit knowledge [31,32]. In Polanyi's work, tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge are two opposing concepts. The former refers to "silent," "unspoken" knowledge, while the latter refers to "explicit," "articulate," and "clear" knowledge [32]. In contrast to explicit knowledge, which can be expressed in words, diagrams or formulas, the acquisition of tacit knowledge is based on individual behavior [31,33–35]. It is always associated with a specific situation and has unconscious characteristics, and it is difficult to be expressed clearly in words, language, images, and other explicit forms [20,31,36]. Among human practical activities, there is focal and subsidiary consciousness. In his book, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi also mentions that the realization of individual skills in cycling is a state of "not knowing how it happens", and in cycling tourism, too, individuals have a great deal of unspoken and unexpressed tacit knowledge [31,36].

While the exploration of embodied contexts is still ongoing, researchers generally accept that the way a subject's body structure, senses, and motor systems operate affects his perception of the world, the way he thinks, and the content of the various contexts he forms about space [37]. For tourists, the "context–body–perception" interaction has also been reported in some tourism studies. Liu argues that honeymooners form their initial impressions of the honeymoon destination through the operation of five senses (the senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) [38]. The involvement of the body and the functioning of the bodily senses form the important experiences in honeymoon tourism within the confines of a tourism context, which in turn contributes to the generation of tourism cognition, and the results of bodily functioning and perception, in turn, have a counter effect on this tourism context through the mediation of individual behavior. Thus, the body and mind, perception, and context in the embodied experience of honeymoon tourism are organically integrated. Mertena found that tourists create human and nonhuman contexts during the flow of a train ride as well [39]. Here, the human context includes emotional experiences formed by talking with companions and playing games, the rhythm of the train machinery, and the bodily movement experience brought about by the train track. In this nonhuman context, the train as a transportation intermediary brings the tourist unique experiences when passing through different geographical environments.

In summary, the dynamic relational mechanism established between perception, the body, the environment, and various contexts provides a way of thinking about the process by which humans make sense of the world. Constraints serve as connections between elements of a context, and they may be natural laws, conventions, logical rules, empirical analysis, or law-like correspondences [26]. Thus, the body and a subject's perceptual outcomes are both referents and constituents.

## 2.2. Bicycle Tourism

Sports tourism experiences are generated by the interaction of the two more fundamental experiences of sport and tourism, and embodied experience is also a particularly important part of the tourism experience [40]. The tourist experience is at the core of what draws people to engage in tourism, and it covers four dimensions: individual emotional experience, experiential learning, physical ability enhancement, and spiritual transformation [41]. The mobile experience of cycling is different from the traditional touring mobile experience [42]. For example, cycling requires more use of the legs, and the visual and auditory sensory experience is a complex, dynamic process [43]. In addition, bicycle tourism gives people a certain sense of control, which is expressed in the individual's active

regulation of body and senses during the cycling process. Take the travel rhythm as an example: the speed of travel depends entirely on an individual's physical capabilities and will. As long as the cyclist wishes, he can interrupt the trip at any time, reduce the cycling speed to zero, and enjoy the scenery.

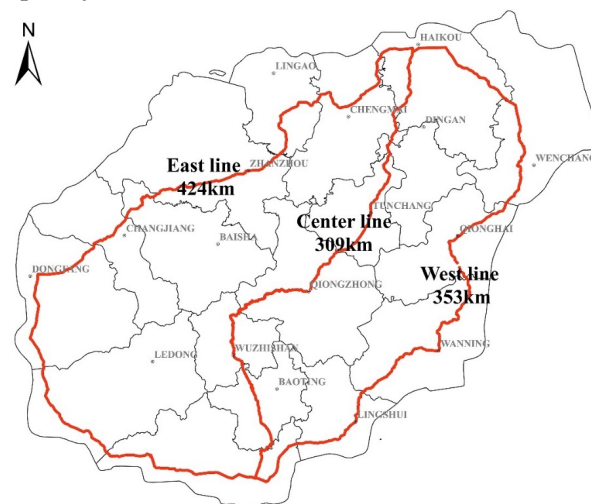
Differences in cycling type also bring about differences in mobility experiences. For long-distance cyclists, the perception of "space" and "place" plays an important role in the cyclist's embodied tourism experience [44]. Riding not only gives people a mobile perspective on people, things, and objects but also constructs a panoramic mobility experience together with other senses such as touch and smell [45]. Riders can also become emotionally connected through mobility [46]. Furthermore, for cycling mobility, the speed formed by the interaction between the bicycle and the outside world is an important stimulus for the cyclist's emotional arousal. Meanwhile, a change in speed and velocity also can trigger different physical experience output results [47].

In summary, a cyclist's travel experience is complex and dynamic and comes from the continuous process of collision and contact with various elements of that particular mode of travel [48,49]. Although some scholars have focused on analyzing cyclists' embodied experience, their research has been more empirical, which can lead to insufficient theoretical development. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the various contexts that cyclists generate during their activities, from a physical perspective but also from their encounters and perceived outcomes when riding in these specific types of environments.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Study Area

For this article, we chose Hainan Island in southeastern China as a case study. Hainan Island is known as the "Hawaii of the East" and is one of the world's most important tropical destinations, with rich tourism resources, well-organized cycling, and excellent infrastructure [50]. As of 2020, including the third top international cycling event in Asia, the "Tour de Island", China's Hainan Island has held fourteen international road cycling races, and its high profile as a result of the "Tour" race has continued to attract cycling enthusiasts from both China and abroad, creating a strong cycling tourism atmosphere. With its newly created, island-wide "Sports Tourism Demonstration Zone", the Hainan Provincial Government has also now incorporated the island-wide cycling tourism industry into its new round of overall tourism planning [50]. Hainan cycling routes are primarily divided into the East, West, and Central routes (see Figure 1), each with its own characteristics and charm. The East route has the most densely populated towns and has a deep cultural heritage; the West route is relatively challenging, slightly less convenient, and has relatively small towns; and the Central route is more difficult to ride and requires climbing up hilly and even mountainous terrain.

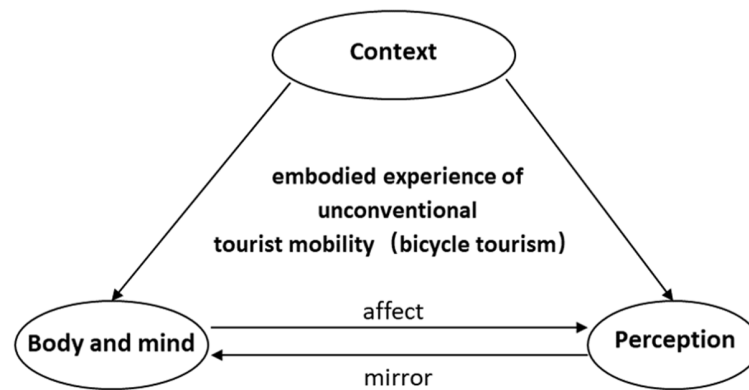


**Figure 1.** Diagram of the Hainan cycling routes.

### 3.2. Research Framework and Data Collection

From the literature review, it is clear that the physical sensations and inner perception of tourists are inextricably linked to the environment they experience. The embodied experience of a cyclist is influenced by a variety of situations arising from the interaction of subject and object [51]. More precisely, tourists learn about a place through practice and establish relationships with it [52]. This active participation creates a dual relationship between individual and place by using tourists' physical sensations and psychological perceptions as tools. In other words, tourists will encounter different situations in their tour that will affect their emotions, memories, senses, etc. In turn, this multifaceted embodied experience simultaneously keeps the context constantly changing.

This article combines the objective space, body space, and the third space (perceptual space) proposed by Merleau-Ponty, and uses the conceptual framework of an embodied experience, including body and mind, perception, and context (Figure 2), to explore the process of diverse bicycle tourism experiences [25]. Our conceptual framework emphasizes that the interaction between body, perception, and situation influences tourists' meaning construction and cognitive outcomes in tourism spaces and explores the specific effects of diverse situations on tourists' physical experience and perceptual outcomes.



**Figure 2.** The “context–body–perception” embodied experience framework.

In the conceptual framework we use, the context is consistent with the Gestalt context mentioned by Polanyi. Both refer to the field generated by the subject during the participatory activity. Explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge are mixed in the rider's physical and mental feelings and perception. At the consciousness level, according to Polanyi's view, this paper argues that explicit knowledge in bicycle tourism includes information about the destination, riding skills, and knowledge of other equipment. The tacit knowledge includes the individual's perception of the destination based on his or her own experience, and the individual's unspeakable cycling experience formed through the concrete practice of cycling. The individual's body and the bicycle cooperate during the cycling process. Finally, explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge are interconnected and integrated.

This study focuses on mobile ethnography to collect data. Nonrepresentational theory suggests that there is a lot of information to be found in people's behavior and nonverbal mannerisms [53]. Therefore, to learn more about nonverbal content, a researcher should be physically present in the research setting to pick up on the original intent of the subjects [54]. Furthermore, the mobile ethnography method allows researchers to shift between different contexts and participatory experiences randomly with the cycling “companions” and “pan-companions” with whom they are on the move. This can allow a researcher to conduct semi-structured interviews to obtain tangible representations of physical and psychological feelings, companion relationships, and electronic media use during the ride. It can also help him to observe and collect nonrepresentational content, such as the physical characteristics, emotional changes, and companion emotions of cyclists [55].

The field researcher for this article interviewed and observed a total of 23 cyclists in depth, subsequently excluding 3 invalid samples, to obtain a total of 20 high-quality,



in-depth interview samples for follow-up analysis. The interviewees' information is shown in Table 1. In addition, the authors also self-reflected during several rides and recorded their reflection results, and they were also able to obtain some high-quality web texts from other cyclists' blogs (35 people in total) that involved the sharing of photos, event experiences, and moods and feelings during their rides. The collected original texts were integrated and theorized with text analysis methods, and the key categories extracted from the texts were then linked several times with the analytical framework through qualitative methods to help form generalized conclusions.

**Table 1.** Profiles of the interviewed cyclists.

| Code    | Residence | Gender | Age | Traveling Method | Interview Time (Times) |
|---------|-----------|--------|-----|------------------|------------------------|
| F1-LWL  | Guangzhou | male   | 26  | companionship    | 3 h (2)                |
| F2-XC   | Guangzhou | male   | 24  | companionship    | 2 h (3)                |
| F3-NCC  | Beijing   | male   | 26  | companionship    | 3 h (2)                |
| F4-TJH  | Shenzhen  | male   | 31  | companionship    | 1 h (1)                |
| F5-NJY  | Guangzhou | female | 46  | personal         | 1 h (2)                |
| F6-SC   | Hangzhou  | male   | 38  | companionship    | 2 h (2)                |
| F7-DDM  | Hangzhou  | female | 34  | companionship    | 1 h (2)                |
| F8-TXL  | Guangzhou | male   | 23  | personal         | 0.5 h (1)              |
| F9-YJ   | Shantou   | female | 39  | companionship    | 1 h (2)                |
| F10-JM  | Shenzhen  | male   | 21  | companionship    | 3 h (2)                |
| F11-CYC | Chengdu   | male   | 41  | personal         | 0.5 h (1)              |
| F12-XF  | Guangzhou | female | 20  | personal         | 2 h (2)                |
| F13-NJD | Shenzhen  | male   | 33  | companionship    | 2 h (2)                |
| F14-DJ  | Guiyang   | female | 21  | companionship    | 3 h (2)                |
| F15-FYT | Guangzhou | male   | 48  | personal         | 1.5 h (2)              |
| F16-LY  | Zhuhai    | female | 34  | companionship    | 0.5 h (1)              |
| F17-ZMM | Shanghai  | female | 22  | personal         | 1 h (2)                |
| F18-XB  | Liuzhou   | male   | 26  | companionship    | 1.5 h (2)              |
| F19-ZXH | Shanghai  | male   | 35  | companionship    | 1 h (2)                |
| F20-LYH | Changsha  | male   | 24  | companionship    | 0.5 h (1)              |

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Cyclists' Embodied Experiences in a Human Context

The "companion context" is one of the most important human contexts for cycling. Riding companions are informal groups formed to engage in cycling activities, and the behavior and personality of members have an important impact on the physical and mental experience of the cyclists involved [56]. Importantly, however, not all individuals in such cycling teams have the same purpose and power. For example, the lead rider (F2-XC) controls the team's movement speed and human-ground interaction activities, which may take more energy than simply enjoying the scenery along the ride. The riders in the middle tend to be emotionally stable and their body movement speed is derived from the riders in front of them. Riders at the end of the fleet tend to be tense due to the possibility of disengaging from the team at any time. Because of the unstable nature of cycling activities, the position and power of the cycling team may change with emergencies, and the change in the role of cycling companions may be influenced by the cyclists' physical qualities, age, gender, and family structure [57].

The term "pan-companion" refers to cyclists who have a spatial and temporal intersection with the individual cyclists in Hainan in this study, and encounters between "pan-companions" may occur at nodes or during a linear journey. During a journey, accompanied by pan-companions day after day, pan-companions may become cycling companions. However, in most cases, the physical interaction between them is simply due to their relational distance; for example, a simple social interaction with a thumbs up and a wave while on the road, as F19-ZXH said:

*Every time we meet cyclists on the road, we will give a thumbs up, shouting to each other to cheer.*

What follows is a typical example of tacit knowledge being transformed into explicit knowledge and changing the individual's behavior. In the process of cycling, cyclists often

experience incidental events that are like “people in the mirror”, reflecting on themselves in the flowing landscape composed of others and adjusting their physical riding behavior, as one of the lead cyclists (F11-CYC) mentioned:

*In that section of the seaside highway section, we saw the trash left by other cyclists and felt that it would be harmful to marine life, so I reminded my companions to behave [in a civilized [manner] throughout the ride.*

Additionally, the human context also includes the “host context”. Unlike traditional tourism, the large number of stopover nodes in cycling activities promotes the generation of special human–ground interaction experiences [19]. To ensure the completion of cyclists’ activities, residents provide materials for cyclists’ physical and mental experiences in different venues and bring cyclists rich stimulation for their vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. When cyclists enter a series of town nodes from the sparsely populated cycling trails, the first sensation they encounter is the visual change, from the natural landscape to the more human landscape of the town, such as the streets, local food stores, ethnic minority residents, and special transportation, and all become objects of the cyclists’ gazes. Sensory experience is accompanied by the accumulation of explicit and tacit knowledge; for example, unlike the food culture of the hometown of cyclists, Hainan’s tropical climate helps the locals create unique and delicious dishes that bring wonderful treats to the rider’s mouth and help restore and heal the rider’s body and mind, as cyclist F12-XF pointed out:

*After the meal, the tour leader took us to a dessert store to eat Hainan Qing Tonic Liang and mango intestinal noodles, which not only neutralized the greasiness of dinner, but also took away the fatigue of the day.*

Accommodation is also an important part of the cyclists’ experience throughout the ride. For cyclists who sleep in the wild, only simple facilities and clean, comfortable accommodation are needed, but for others the services and facilities of the local hostel also bring multiple sensory experiences to cyclists.

#### 4.2. Cyclists’ Perceptions in a Human Context

Embodiment theory asserts that a subject’s perception is generated by the experience of the body interacting with the environment and that the body plays a key role in this process [58]. In both the “companion context” and the “pan-companion context”, travel companions can have a positive arousal effect on unknown and challenging activities. In other words, riding companions and “pan-companions” can help individuals with negative emotions during long rides. In addition, in team riding, the competition and cooperation among riding companions can enrich individual physical practice, strengthen relationships, and form a sense of group identity and shared memories. Both explicit and tacit knowledge plays an equally motivating role here; for example, the explicit knowledge represented by cheers and slogans of encouragement, and the tacit knowledge conveyed by the silent leader of the pioneers. Cyclist F2-XC recalled:

*There was a long uphill climb that I was ready to give up on, it was already 7 pm, almost dark and I was extremely exhausted. But with the encouragement of my fellow leaders and the encouragement of the group ahead of me, I persevered little by little over the rainforested mountains to reach the destination.*

Of course, in any companion context, conflicts may occur among cyclists sparked by events such as route finding, destination selection, and unexpected accidents during the ride, and negative emotions such as anger, rage, hard feelings, and sadness may occur, affecting the way cyclists behave and feel psychologically among their companions.

In the “host context”, tourists can empathize with certain elements of the destination context through diverse embodied practices, triggering their past emotions or memories. Along the long-distance ride in Hainan, the information gained from the various senses of the cyclists in the “host context” always evoked microscopic feelings from the cyclists, contrasting and reflecting on their original life. This is because of the implicit knowledge

embedded in the scenes of island life, which is silently conveyed to cyclists, as cyclist F11-CYC said:

*On the ride, you can always see the Hainan countryside surrounded by coconut groves. Every house has a hammock, and everyone will go to the teahouse everywhere to drink tea and chat. It seems that people do not have any worries, which reminds me of the leisurely days before I started work.*

Some of the scenes that cyclists see in the “host scenario” make them feel relaxed, comfortable, or full of admiration, and also evoke their memories of a “stress-free” and “leisurely” life. In addition, the individual behavior of the hosts also plays an important role in the emotion generation and memory recall of the cyclists. Sometimes cyclists may even inadvertently participate in local festivals, religious ceremonies, and other folk activities. These host individuals and diverse folk activities can remind cyclists of the similarities and differences in their cultural backgrounds in the context of local images and cultural perceptions.

#### 4.3. Cyclists’ Embodied Experiences in a Nonhuman Context

The nonhuman context consists of a natural context, mediated facility context, and digital technology context. First, the “natural context” is one of the most important nonhuman contexts that riders experience. The contemporary natural aesthetics theory believes that people need to perceive the world through the five senses to make the true aesthetic characteristics of natural objects appear [59,60]. Hainan, with its unique natural geographic location and multi-ethnic intersection, has formed a diverse natural landscape that is distributed in different forms in the spatial and temporal range of the Hainan cyclist’s path.

However, there are times when natural environmental conditions exceed the limits of the body; for example, in some extreme weather (such as typhoons) cyclists have to leave the field temporarily and give up the physical and mental experience of island riding. In addition, the elements of the natural environment are constantly changing during the flow of the ride, triggering the body to pay attention to the natural environment and driving the body to change the rhythm of its movement. For example, the direction of the mountains, the distribution of the sea, and the status of plants and animals in the activities not only bring cyclists a diverse sensory experience but also limit the position, direction of movement, and forward speed of the cyclists’ body, as cyclist F11-CYC said:

*The section to Changjiang Li Autonomous County was hell for the body: 130 km, headwinds, many slopes, and an overall rising altitude. [I was] so physically and mentally exhausted that I doubted my life, and all the body’s senses were numbed in the final sprint.*

Second, a “mediated facility context” in a “nonhuman context” refers to the context created by the cyclist during the bicycle experience. Transportation plays a mediating role in the mobility of a traveler and influences the extent to which he/she is involved in the road space. In contrast to automobiles, the mobility of bicycles can shape the experience of particular human–terrestrial interactions during the cyclist’s activity [47]. A cyclist’s experience generation is accomplished in part through the bicycle, and this mediated experience is more susceptible to factors such as the weather, road conditions, and the cyclist’s abilities. However, a cyclist stays at more nodes during a riding tour compared to mass transit, so the cyclist’s body interacts with the external space more frequently, presenting him with more travel options as a result. For example, cyclists are free to choose their riding routes, from national highways, provincial roads, county roads, and even country roads, and they get to form visual, auditory, and taste sensations different from those of mass tourism. In addition, cyclists also commonly experience discomfort in specific parts of the body due to bike overuse, such as wrist, knee, and hip pain, as cyclist F2-XC recalled:



*On the first day of the ride, after less than 50 km, I started to feel vague pain in my leg muscles after almost a year of no exercise, and my buttocks started to burn because of the hard saddle of the bike. My knees were not ideal even though I had brought knee pads.*

Third, the “digital technology context” also belongs to the “nonhuman context”. The rapid development of digital technology, the Internet, and mobile devices has changed travelers’ behavior and influenced both the content and methods of travel experiences [61]. As a result, digital contexts require riders to use more explicit knowledge to engage. In particular, a mobile phone, as a vessel for “total media”, with various functions such as a camera, Internet, music, and navigation, plays an important role in cyclists’ activities. Research has shown that rhythmic music can make exercisers more relaxed and persistent [62], and the “cooperation” between cell phones and headphones can provide cyclists with just such an external rhythmic power. Furthermore, the music, through the auditory system, can have a regulatory effect on the cyclists’ functions, spurring the auditory and motor states to interact. Music not only relaxes the muscles and nerves but also gives cyclists a broader spatial and temporal connection. A cyclist’s body and mind, perception, and context all fit together in the rhythm of embodied movement to achieve a harmonious state of cycling. In addition to communication devices, some cyclists also carry GoPro sports cameras, bicycle recorders, drones, and other devices. These can provide technical support for recording the whole process of cycling, extending and enriching the limited sensory sensations of the cyclist’s body.

#### 4.4. Cyclists’ Perception in a Nonhuman Context

Merleau-Ponty argues that we in the world must experience and perceive things with a priori knowledge and a biological body as a mediator [25]. For the cyclist, the “natural context” provides the raw material for perception, while the mediating aspects and digital technologies equipped on a cyclist’s body enrich the results of his perception. Therefore, cyclists have the opportunity to feel happy as long as the subject perceives the beauty of nature [63]. The natural context is not only the explicit knowledge of appearance, but also has the potential to bring about unexpected behavioral adjustments in the acceptance of tacit knowledge by the riders. For example, in the process of natural landscape transformation, a rider’s body and mind in the repetitive and ordinary monotonous natural landscape are more likely to be affected by the negative feelings of exhaustion and dullness brought about by riding long distances. Cyclists are also more likely to have negative emotions, such as frustration, regret, sadness, feelings of difficulty, and helplessness.

A diverse combination of natural landscapes or landscapes with greater impact than what a cyclist is used to may allow a cyclist to show greater willingness to ride continuously during a ride, and to relax physically and mentally in a wonderful riding environment, as cyclist F6-SC said:

*On the road to Wanning, the scenery is really great, first the endless blue sea, and then the lush [greenery]. The tropical rainforest behind, in such a shocking scene, feet pedals are also more powerful, and the fighting spirit is also higher even if tired but also uplifting.*

In addition, in contrast to mere static images, the flowing natural landscape during the ride itself can also have a significant impact on an individual cyclist’s vision, which is conducive to triggering the psychological tendency of those engaged in cycling activities to want to continue. Because of the special mode of transportation and the formation of the “intermediary context”, shuttling in Hainan’s various remote corners can also form a different perceptual experience for cyclists who travel there. For example, the end of the journey of the cyclist will not lose the flow of space and may still bestow profound observation and reflection. Cyclist F11-CYC said:

*After ten days of cycling around the island, passing through villages, towns, and then cities along the way, you can feel the development of the times and the change of people’s needs, as if you are witnessing the sculpting process of history for space.*

During long road trips, the bicycle creates a mobile experience of both “connection and separation”. The “connection” refers to the cyclist’s ability to travel around Hainan by bicycle as a means of transportation, to see the natural and human landscape at a more appreciable speed of movement, to perceive space and the landscape in depth, and develop a love and preference for space and place. As bicyclist F5-NJY believes:

*I have been in the city for too long, and I feel that riding in such a good ecological environment can make me and nature become one.*

“Separation” is a way of movement in which the cyclist, although deep in the cycling space, always uses the bike as an intermediary to travel and gaze, and there is often a sense of separation from the outside world, as cyclist F19-ZXH said:

*I am sitting and observing the environment around the bike.*

However, throughout a long ride, a cyclist may also become integrated with the bicycle, gaining a deeper sense of road space and physical experience. The practice of cycling requires coordination between nearly all parts of the body, and during the cycling process, a cyclist’s body and mind can gradually become more in tune with the bicycle as intermediary equipment.

Cyclists use their bikes to perceive changes in the road environment as well. Changes in road material, slope, route direction, and type may also trigger emotional changes and memories for cyclists. Additionally, the convenient and low-cost communication method of the Internet, supported by digital technology context, has facilitated cyclists’ travel-sharing behavior. The cyclists recorded their images and “self-gaze” during the ride through cameras, cell phones, and other media, while other users of social media liked to comment on what they shared, giving cyclists a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and other positive emotions. In addition, the cyclists used electronic products to record the sensations of the body while also strengthening the cyclist’s sense of conquest and control over the natural space of the ride. Cyclist F2-XC mentioned:

*What I read in a magazine said that the motivation for humans to take pictures during travel is similar to hunting activities in the primitive society period. The long lens of the camera is like a pair of wild eyes in the jungle, aiming at the prey, only now the prey is replaced by a photo.*

The space and place in the cycling journey are recorded in multiple media with digital technology support and form a unique cycling space between individual recollection and group memory sharing in the future. With the selection of new landscapes to explore, more riding spaces may be filled with riding places that are full of emotions and subjects’ perceptions, thus drawing a treasure map of riding places.

#### 4.5. Value Generation of an Embodied Experience in Different Contexts

In the tropical landscape of Hainan Island, cyclists arm themselves with cycling tools such as bandanas and sunglasses. In this way cyclists can travel through different types of geographic areas and road systems, temporarily distancing themselves from their original social identities and immersing themselves in cycling activities. In a differentiated environment such as this, cyclists can reawaken their anesthetized, mechanized bodies and feel the purest natural projections and reactions of their bodies, such as breathing, muscle aches, and bodily pains. In addition, the body goes through a “rhythm cycle” consisting of a painful period, an adjustment period, a climax period, and a final sprint period during a long ride.

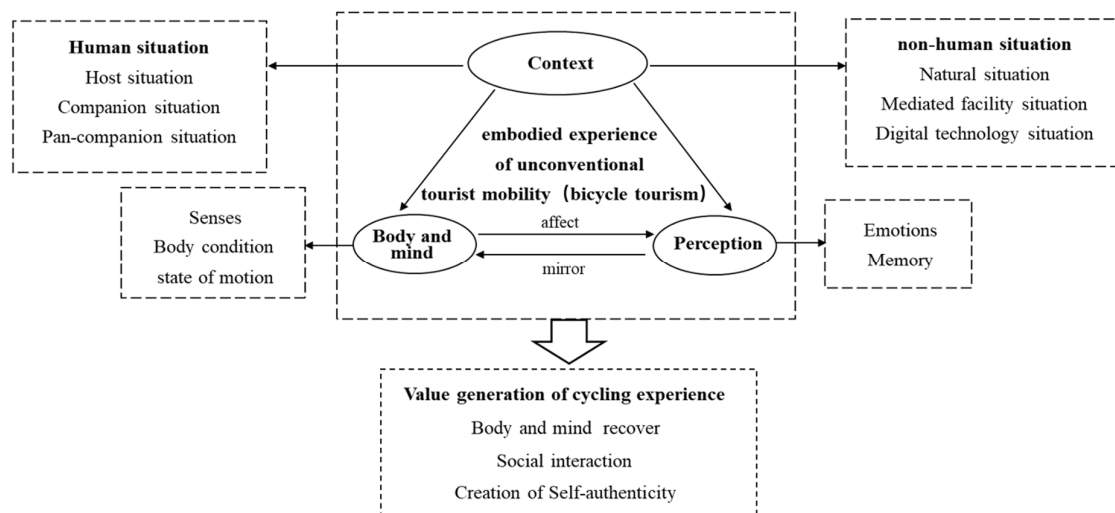
In addition, deep social interaction is important to cyclists in ephemeral spatial experiences [50]. In long-distance cycling, cyclists and their companions gradually construct inner connections and their mutual relationships shift from the weak relationship of strangers to the stronger relationship of acquaintances. Moreover, cyclists open themselves to each other and construct both a self-identity and group identity. Therefore, cycling activities go

beyond physical movement and become a ritual of personal relationship production and emotional connection in the cycling space.

In the process of bodily practice, cyclists experience multiple levels of suffering and pain and generate a new self with a tough character and multiple types of cognition. During a ride, cyclists unconsciously socialize with other cyclists or the host, which involves the exchange of explicit knowledge such as local tourist information. Moreover, a cyclist's body can serve as a social mirror image, and the better body shape and appearance achieved by cycling activities may inspire praise and commendation by other individuals inside the cyclist's social network; that is, the objective experience of cycling can trigger a rider experiencing truth [17] and complete self-growth while awakening body consciousness.

## 5. Discussion

Because they employ a mode of mobility different from the usual means of travel of the general public, cyclists are freer to choose the content and intensity of human–place connections and to face more complex contexts, resulting in the special embodied experiences. Therefore, this paper explored the types of contexts encountered by cyclists during island cycling, as well as the physical experiences and perceived outcomes encountered by cyclists in different contexts (Figure 3). Our specific findings are reflected in the following areas.



**Figure 3.** Diagram of the embodied experience mechanism of cycling in Hainan.

First, the contexts encountered by cyclists in the Hainan traffic circle include human and nonhuman contexts, and the combination of these contexts constitute their cycling experience system. The environmental variables that limit cyclists' physical experience and perceived outcomes include the road network characteristics, the natural environment, the social environment, and the building environment. In addition, cyclists gain embodied experiences in mobility ranging from visual experiences to multisensory experiences [19], and this paper also analyzed the micro-practices of embodied senses such as taste, smell, and hearing in mobility experiences one by one. Han found that the main components with the greatest perceived value for cyclists were tourism attractions, accessibility, amenities, and complimentary services [9], and this study identifies the key elements that influence embodied experience and uses this as a basis for classifying contexts into human and nonhuman contexts. Among these contexts, the human context included the companion context, pan-companion context, and host context, and the nonhuman context included the natural context, mediated facility context, and digital technology context.

It is worth mentioning that during the Hainan ride, cyclists gained explicit and tacit knowledge in the embodied experience of different contexts. These two kinds of knowledges are interchanged in certain behaviors. Polanyi argues that an individual's consciousness is composed of focal awareness and subsidiary awareness in the context to which the

behavior is associated [31,32,34–36]. Associated with the bicycle tour context, the “focal awareness” is the target point of the act of cycling, while the body’s senses are used as “subsidiary awareness” to serve the “focus awareness” of cycling [31,34]. However, in order to accomplish the action of “cycling”, both “focus awareness” and “subsidiary awareness” are indispensable, and it is not necessary to say which is more important. The basis of an embodied experience is based on bodily sensations, and from the above analysis, it is clear that bodily sensations are used as a kind of “subsidiary awareness”, which Polanyi calls “tacit knowledge”. This “tacit knowledge” is integrated into the action of “cycling”, thus forming the embodied experience of the rider’s final ride.

Second, as mentioned by Shipway, there is a unique interaction between the cyclist, the cycling environment, and the activity, but the mechanism or process of this interaction has rarely been explored [64]. This paper finds that different contexts generated by the cyclists together with their bodies and perceptions constitute a dynamic system. As for long-distance cyclists, the local community plays an important role in the cyclist’s travel experience, as a node for cyclists to resupply and rest [18]. In this study, we also found that hosts are important actors in providing embodied experiences for cyclists, providing them with the basic physical needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Embodied experiences in a nonhuman context mostly cover the direct and indirect contents of the natural environment, intermediary facilities, and digital technology products that help cyclists gain physical experiences and perception. The natural landscape not only serves to heighten a rider’s multi-sensory experience but also limits the direction, rhythm, and energy efficiency of his body, while the changes in the grade and combination of the natural landscape itself can trigger emotional changes. This finding also agrees with Han, Meng, and Kim’s research that natural elements, such as plentiful natural resources and weather, are important experiential elements in cyclists’ mobile visuals [9,65]. As the main mediating facility during cycling, the bicycle is the main tool for cyclists’ mobility and observation, and cyclists gain unique physical and mental experiences by using it to interact with the outside world. In addition, while previous studies have rarely explored cyclists’ use of digital technology to enrich a specific context and their embodied experiences, this study expanded cyclists’ context perspectives and developed encounters within a digital technology context that not only broaden the cyclists’ sensory experiences and physical abilities but also facilitate further storage of the nonrepresentational contents, such as memory and emotions, for the cyclists’ subsequent reconstitution of their cycling trips as historical experiences.

Third, there is still a lack of attention paid to the interpretation of the cycling space in shaping the experience of cyclists, but in this paper we made a series of explanations of the cyclists’ experience in their relevant space [64]. For example, during the cyclists’ entire ride, the places along the route were not only physical spaces, but also generative spaces filled with individual emotions and memories. The cyclists were far away from the space of daily life, free from the atomized and disciplined body of daily life, and returned to the life-state body, a form of embodied practice that Levers called “anti-rhythmic” [66]. Human beings are social animals and need to enter into social relationships. Riding with a partner or multiple partners not only enhanced the emotions of the fellow riders during the ride but also formed beneficial social interactions with many hosts, satisfying cyclists’ innate human interpersonal needs. This finding is similar to that of Xu’s study where cycling was found to help consolidate old social relationships and possibly also enable new ones to be established during brief social interactions [50]. Unlike the mobile stage deliberately shaped by cycling events, independent cyclists in Hainan, China, were more random and freer in their choice of context. For many individual cyclists, cycling is an embodied practice driven by their random combination of routes, landscape choices, and accompanying intrinsic motivations, and the stage it creates lacks the political intentions of large-scale sports promotion and local showcasing of sports events [45]. Instead, for these riders, cycling is more of a self-actualization process for individuals pursuing their dreams and discovering their true selves.

## 6. Conclusions

Understanding the different embodied experiences of sports tourism requires exploration of specific sports tourism contexts. Therefore, to explore the embodied experiences of independent bicycle tourists in tropical islands, this study used qualitative methods to analyze the human and nonhuman contexts and their bodily sensations and perceptual outcomes in different contexts. We believe that the cyclist's body and mind are inseparable, and that the two become one in different contexts. Moreover, these unique physical sensations and perceptual outcomes both help cyclists restore their physical and mental rhythms, strengthen social relationships, and discover a new aspect of themselves. This paper further enriches the application of existing embodiment theory in tourism experiences and expands the study of the integration of sports and tourism from a micro analytic perspective. In addition, we also incorporated Polanyi's theory in our study, giving examples of explicit and tacit knowledge that cyclists may acquire during their rides.

Tourism riding experiences, from the embodied perspective, are the result of the interaction of a series of related elements, such as perception, body, and context, in the tourism process. Therefore, tourist destinations that feature cycling may attract more tourists if they optimize the various contexts encountered by cyclists, create a more personalized cycling environment, develop cycling routes, and regularly maintain cycling infrastructure. Moreover, bicycle tourism product providers may want to focus on the design of cycling routes so that they switch between diverse landscapes, highlighting the regional characteristics of the landscape to bicycle tourists. In addition, governments or other entities who wish to promote the bicycle tourism market may want to form a complete spectrum of bicycle tourism products, as high-intensity bicycle tourism activities may not be suitable for all people, and there is a need to develop a diverse range of cycling tourism products to meet the requirements of the different groups.

This paper makes a useful exploration of island-based cycling experiences through a three-dimensional embodied theoretical framework, but the breadth and depth of the original materials obtained in this article are limited. In addition, the article lacks an analysis of the differences in context types and embodied experiences of the three main existing cycling routes on Hainan Island. There are several directions for future research. First, suitable distance and psychological testing equipment can be used to obtain various aspects of the cyclists' physical data during cycling to help reveal the dynamic relationship between cycling distance and cyclists' physical and mental rhythms more scientifically. Second, the similarities and differences in the physical experience and perceived results of individuals under different mobility modes, such as self-driving tours, motorcycle tours, and hiking tours, can also be explored. Finally, further research is needed on the physical sensations of cyclists in various nodal stops to explore the physical and perceptual differences between these stops and the cycling process itself.

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