



SPORT EVENTS WORTH TRAVELLING ALL AROUND THE YEAR

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Abstract *The general objective of this paper is to study sport events and the phenomenon of sport tourism. The specific objective is to investigate the distribution of sport events throughout the year to provide a deeper understanding of the area, which is gaining more and more importance in the tourism industry. The research methodology used is exploratory, studying the major sport events attracting tourists throughout the year. Results indicate the evolution of such events, typology of participants and consumer behaviour evolution. Sport events are an important part of both sport and tourism businesses generating large revenues, which can push for greater levels in participation increase, consumer experience, and product development in the near future.*

Key words:

Sport events, Sport tourism, Consumer behavior, Sport marketing, Touristic product

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major industry globally and an important sector in many economies. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and diversification to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. As well, sport activities, in terms of both participation and spectator involvement, represent key leisure interests for a significant part of society: apart from amateur, school, and college play, there are professional sports, sponsored by powerful commercial interests and promoted by advertising, public relations, television, radio, magazines, and newspapers and supported by the loyalty of millions of fans who identify closely with their favorite teams and star athletes (McLean and Hurd, 2012).

Sport is a source of important moral values: (1) contributing to health and physical fitness as a form of rigorous training, conditioning, and exercise; (2) building personal traits such as courage and perseverance, self-discipline, and sportsmanship; (3) encouraging social values linked to obeying rules and dedication to team goals, as well as providing a channel for social mobility, especially for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds; and (4) serving as a force to build group loyalty, cohesiveness, and positive

morale in schools and colleges and in communities throughout the nation (McLean and Hurd, 2012). It is impossible to fully understand contemporary society and culture without acknowledging the place of sport, as an international phenomenon. It is important for politicians and world leaders, it contributes to the economy, some of the most visible international spectacles are associated with sporting events, it is part of the social and cultural fabric of different localities, regions and nations, its transformative potential is evident in some of the poorest areas of the world; it is important to the television and film industry, and the tourism industry (Jarvie, 2006).

Since ancient times, sports people have travelled in search of competition. Sport has long been an agent of personal and professional mobility (Higham and Hinch, 2009). The ancient Olympic Games is commonly cited as one of the earliest forms of sporting competition that stimulated considerable travel flows (Crowther, 2001). These regional and national flows of people included competitors but extended to merchant traders, politicians and other notable dignitaries, for many of whom competition spectatorship was of minor importance (Crowther, 2001). The earliest sporting events were also frequently linked to festivals or religious celebrations, like the ancient Greek Olympic games, which were contests related to military prowess. But as societies progressed, the evolution of sport as a social phenomenon seemed inevitable. Yet,

at the beginning of the twentieth century, sport was seen as an amateur activity and those who participated in sport for financial reward were treated as outsiders. Therefore sport, as a major component of society and as we know it today, is a relatively new phenomenon, in recent years, became a big business, a large enterprise across the world. There are millions of jobs in sports throughout the world, including a growing number specific to the production, managing and marketing of events.

Sport, as a component of leisure experiences, is an integral part of many communities. Reasons individuals continue to participate in leisure sport activities are varied but include the opportunity for affiliation with others, improving one's appearance, taking up a new or continuing challenge, competition, enjoyment, positive health, social recognition, stress management, and weight management, to name a few (McLean and Hurd, 2012).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As Urry (2002) has pointed out, 'it is a crucial element of modern life that travel and holidays are necessary'. For an increasing number of people the lifestyle choice came to involve both sport and travel combined. This is illustrated in particular by two types of sports tourism: outdoor pursuits and international sporting mega- events (Weed & Bull, 2009). The former is linked to a range of motives and values relating to health, fitness, image, excitement and, even, fashion, while the latter is associated with experience and spectacle. The definition of sport tourism, provided by Weed and Bull (2009), includes five aspects of sport tourism:

- Tourism with active sports content; is an active sports participation, where the choice of the place exclusively depends on the sport, e.g. skiing, surfing, tennis, etc.;
- Tourism with passive sports content; it is a passive sport tourism, where the choice of holiday destinations does not depend on the sport but on other activities (congress, business travel etc.);
- Sports events; it comes to sports tourism, which is the reason for traveling and watching sports events in local or global dimension (Olympic Games, World Cups etc.);
- Luxury sports tourism; it is a kind of sport tourism, which includes members of the upper class, who actively participate in sport events (golf, sailing boat competition, etc.) or passively, through visits and tours of elite sport events (Monaco Grand Prix Formula 1);

- Sports training; concerns specified amateur and professional athletes who just have to do sport, e.g. sports camp, where young and old learn skills of each sport (basketball, golf, tennis, etc.). This category also includes sport preparation.

Graham, Goldblatt and Delpy (1995) argued that sport events and other special events share commonalities, including their service orientation, the incorporation of celebration and drama, media coverage, and similarities in organizing and operations. Motivations of customers and travelers might also be similar, especially with regard to the ritual of attendance and related traditions. Traditional sport events like the Olympics always incorporate ceremonies and festivals, and it has now become commonplace to build a program of special events around a sport meet to create a "festival" or special event with heightened appeal (Graham, Goldblatt and Delpy, 1995).

Event tourism is a term used mostly in the tourism literature to describe a destination development and marketing strategy to realize all the potential economic benefits of events (Getz, 2005). The main tourism and economic roles of events are highly important for a host community or destination, and event managers should evaluate how their events can make a positive contribution or tap into tourist markets. Graham, Goldblatt and Delpy (1995) described an important typology for sport events: land versus water-based (or air-borne); indoor versus outdoor; regularly scheduled versus periodic or one-time only; public (spectators sought) or private; professional versus amateur (or pro-am combinations) and events which must be bid on versus those which stem from league play.

Another classification approach is to look at the format of sport events:

- The regularly scheduled game, race or competition (in a league)
- Scheduled tournaments and championships (for leagues or invitationals)
- One-off sport "spectaculars" (media or spectator oriented)
- Exhibition games with touring or invited teams
- Sport Festival (emphasis on celebration and usually youth)
- Multi-sport events (e.g., Olympics; Masters Games)

Spectator events result in static guests, whereas participatory sport events require physical activity from everyone. Sport participation is seen as an opportunity for members of society to engage in socially positive and healthy activity that contributes to society (McLean and Hurd, 2012). Sport as leisure has grown as the population and economy have grown. Sport has immense appeal, both for participants and for the vastly

large audience of fans who often attach themselves to their favorite teams, wearing their colors or uniforms, cheering them enthusiastically, traveling to spring practice or "away" games, and contributing as loyal alumni to the recruitment or support of star athletes.

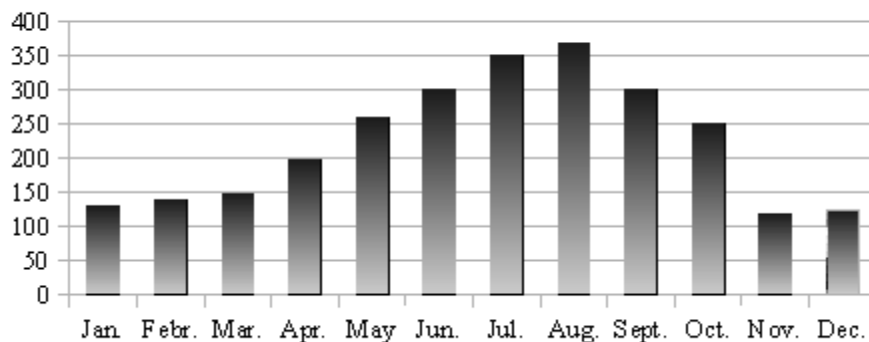
A widely accepted leisure and travel motivation theory has been put forward by Mannell and Iso-Ahola (1987) who argued that leisure and travel behavior is stimulated by both a desire to escape undesirable conditions and, simultaneously, to realize desired experiences. This seeking-escaping behavior operates within both personal and interpersonal dimensions. It can therefore be said that a trip to an event is motivated both by the desire to escape and the desire to seek out new experiences, relative to the person's interpersonal and personal needs (Getz, 2005). Age and gender are usually important factors affecting demand for events, along with marital and family status. Household type and size are potentially useful, such as the distinction between one and two-parent families, and identification of non-traditional households. Age, gender, family status and other variables combine in the "life-stage concept", which has important implications for all leisure activities and preferences, younger generations being more likely to attend sport events (Getz, 2005). The socio-economic status is also a key factor, as income is the greatest predictor of travel consumption and entertainment expenditure.

Mega-events rely on a "must-see" image linked to their uniqueness, but lesser events can stress unique features as well, thereby catching the eye of casual tourists. For many people attending events is more than just entertainment, it is an integral part of their lifestyle and a major component of sure pursuits. "Serious leisure" is a term coined by Robert Stebbins (1982) to describe life-long interests typified by the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, perseverance, amateurism, searching for durable benefits or self actualization, enhancement of self-image and self gratification. Serious leisure often encompasses one's entire social world, and this description certainly applies to many people who take sports and hobbies seriously enough to attend or compete in many events or to volunteer for events that match their interests, often resulting in travel over great distances.

3. SPORT EVENTS AND TOURISM

As the below figure shows, there are numerous major sport events around the world throughout the year, which worth traveling. Evidently, there are more opportunities in the spring and summer season, but also the autumn and winter month offer various events.

Figure nr. 1: Sport events in 2017



Source: created by the author based on top major events in the world (each sport usually has at least one important event, such as the world championships or world cup. National championships are not listed.)

Sport events as attractions: although many tourism organizations stress international tourism, there is no doubt that most festivals and events are dependent on local and regional audiences. But whether events are true tourist attractions, or a reason for visitors already in an area to stay longer, they can have tourism value (Getz, 2005). But on the other hand,

events can also have the effect of keeping people and their money at home, rather than traveling outside the region.

Sport events as touristic products: sport has been encouraged by governments for a host of extrinsic reasons, and tourism has similarly been

supported in recent times due to its economic contribution, especially in relation to employment (Weed and Bull, 2009). However, the realization that certain forms of sport can attract tourists, especially the mega-events, has led many governments in the latter part of the twentieth century to be especially proactive in seeking to host such competitions. Several cities have found their economies and environments significantly transformed as a result of such events with the stimulus of sports tourism producing far wider benefits for both tourism generally and the wider economy. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) believes that potential visitors will be drawn to Olympic venues after being exposed to them through the games. Also, mega-events promote tourism but it is important to take in consideration that the gain is dependent on the type of mega-event, the participating countries, the host country's level of development, and whether the event is held during the peak- or off-season.

Sport events as animators: built attractions, like sports stadiums and facilities have everywhere realized the advantages of "animation" - the process of programming interpretive features and/or special events which make the place come alive with sensory stimulation and appealing atmosphere (Getz, 2005).

Sport events as image makers: it is apparent that major events can have the effect of shaping an image of the host community or country, leading to its favorable perception as a potential travel destination. With global media attention focused on the host city, even for a relatively short duration, the publicity value is enormous, and some destinations use this fact alone to justify great expenditures on attracting events (Getz, 2005).

Sport events as destination marketers: Kotler, Haider, and Rein (1993) identified the value of events in enhancing the image of communities and in attracting tourists. They demonstrated how places compete for investments, quality people, and tourists, all in pursuit of more livable and prosperous communities. One key feature of place marketing is its attention to cultivating a positive image (Getz, 2005).

Sport events as catalysts: mega-events, such as World's Fairs and Olympics, have been supported by host governments in large part because of their role as catalysts in major redevelopment schemes. Major events tend to attract investment into the hospitality sector, especially hotels and restaurants. Sometimes these additions have been brought forward in time, while others represent new infrastructure related to expected longer-term increases in demand. Sport events generally lead to new or improved facilities. There are three ways in which local sports participants can benefit from tourism. First, in the

opening up of tourist-based facilities for local resident use (dual use); second, in the support the tourist market can provide for local sports provision; and third, in the case of potential rather than actual participants, contributing to the development of sports participation and healthy lifestyles (Weed and Bull, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS

Sport is a major influence in society. It is a topic of high interest at work, over the Internet, among friends, and yet for all its engagement and involvement, only a moderate percentage of the population actually engages in sport participation or spectating. But as industry statistics and also the current study shows, there is a constantly growing number of different level of sport events which attract more and more participants and spectators both as part of the local community and as tourists, sport tourism contributing by a significant share to the tourism industry. Sport-related attractions, different forms of entertainment are powerful magnets for tourism, and understanding different spectator motivations can be of significant benefit to the sport marketer. On the other hand, creating a tourist orientation for events is a complicated task. Becoming a tourist-oriented event requires much more than adoption of the marketing concept, because the needs and motives of tourists are likely to be different from those of residents, and the tourism and hospitality industry must be accommodated.

It is widely considered that mega-events such as Olympics boost economic growth and tourist visits. Although this affirmation has to be considered carefully, by investigating both the short-term and long-term benefits and negative impacts of these events, it should be highlighted the effects of Olympics in building up the brand images of the hosting countries. Also the potential benefits of animation through events are of major importance to facility and attraction managers: to attract people who might otherwise not make a visit because they perceive the facility or attraction itself to be uninteresting; to encourage repeat visits by people who might otherwise think that one visit is enough; to attract publicity for the site or facility; to encourage longer stays and greater spending. (Getz 2005).

Sport events are important attractions for most host communities, but a particular concern has to be the spreading of tourist demand over time in order to overcome the tourist seasonality problem and space, in order to spread demand throughout a country or region in order to facilitate sustainable tourism, generating the most positive impact on both the tourists traveling and the host community during sporting events.

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