

THE ROLE OF SMALL-SCALE SPORTS EVENTS IN DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SPORT TOURISM – A CASE STUDY OF FENCING

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Abstract: Promoting sports and sport tourism is considered as a strategic development objective at the local, regional and national levels in Hungary. However, sport tourism is present in many different forms, depending on the type of sport activity, the related sport events and its participants, therefore it is challenging to decide on the type of sports and sports events that should be supported to ensure long-term social and economic benefits for a local community.

The scale of sports events ranges from the small, local competitions to the international mega sports events. Although the economic benefits of mega sports events are generally appreciated, there has been growing critique about their negative social and environmental impacts. Small-scale sports events also have important potential for tourism, and they may have more advantages for the local community than the mega events by providing additional incomes, using the already existing infrastructure, raising local pride and community spirit. Sport tourism related to small-scale events is generally considered to be a more sustainable form of tourism.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the tourism development potential of small-scale sports events, particularly focusing on fencing competitions. It highlights the demand side of the sport tourism market, investigating the behavioral profile of the participants of an international fencing tournament. A questionnaire survey was conducted at the Budapest WestEnd Women's Epee Grand Prix 2014. The data revealed that participants of the sporting event spend only a short period of time at the destination, and shopping and eating out are the most preferred free time activities. The paper identifies and discusses issues regarding the role of sports organizations and tourism agencies in cities hosting such events to increase the tourism potential of small-scale sports events in the future.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, small-scale sport event, active sport tourist

Introduction

The impacts of large scale events are widely discussed in the tourism literature. (Hinch and Higham 2011). These mega or hallmark events include major festivals, cultural and international, national and regional sporting events. International sport competitions boast with increasing attendance, thus their role in creating economic advantages as well as conveying a favourable image of the hosting destination is greatly acknowledged. (Hall 1996) While mega-events may take place once in a life-time in a country, there are several small-scale sport events of all sport types that are held regularly and even become a more influential part of a community's life.

Fencing has a high profile in Hungary due to its centuries-old traditions, the outstanding olympic results of the sport and their media coverage. Besides catering for the professional sportmen, fencing clubs attract recreational athletes of all ages and abilities in the country. Competitions of various size and status are regularly held not only in the capital but also in the smaller towns of the country all around the year. In spite of its popularity and deep roots in Hungarian culture there has not been any research conducted on the potentials of fencing in sport tourism development in the country. Understanding

the factors that influence active sports events tourists has not been widely observed in the sport tourism literature either (Kaplanidou and Gibson 2010).

The current study draws upon the works that aim at examining the characteristics of small-scale sport events and their participants (Gibson et al. 2012, Kaplanidou and Gibson 2010) but it places more emphasis on the demand side of a specialized market: the active sport tourists of a women's fencing tournament. In terms of sustainable sport tourism development it is essential to be aware of the needs of the key stakeholders of tourism: businesses, host communities, government and tourists. Long-term strategic planning necessitates research on stakeholders' behaviour, which includes the investigation of the tourist profile of visitors of small-scale sport events. Exploring the demand of this niche market is, that is active and passive sport tourists of small-scale events is the first step in understanding the variables that affect the long-term sustainability of sport tourism.

Literature review

Sustainable tourism development has become a prevalent topic in tourism research literature since the introduction of the

term "sustainable development" by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. (WCED 1987). The concept of sustainable tourism has been approached from various angles, resulting in a proliferation of - sometimes contradictory - definitions. The definition given by World Tourism Organization, according to which sustainable tourism is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO 2004) serves as a starting point in the quest for sustainability. It highlights the importance of the three dimensions of sustainability, which entails the continuous strive for the balance of the economic, social and environmental interests in tourism development. This approach has become widely known and accepted as the triple bottom line (Smith 2009). Additional dimensions including moral, legal, technical and political ones were suggested by several authors (Pawlowski 2008).

As the needs and interests of the stakeholders are clearly emphasized in the definition, it is worth noting that sustainable tourism development is the responsibility of all the stakeholders, namely tourists, host communities, businesses and governments alike (UNEP WTO 2005). On the one hand, the informed participation of all the stakeholders in decision-making is of vital importance, while it is the role of political leadership to ensure participation and consensus-building. Achieving sustainability of the sector also requires long-term, strategic planning based on the assessment of the resources of a destination. Finally, continuous monitoring of the impacts and introducing the necessary corrective measures are important steps in the practical implementation of the concept (UNWTO 2005).

After the term 'sustainable tourism' had become widely known, there was a common misinterpretation of the concept, which resulted in the fact that certain nature-based tourism types, especially ecotourism were falsely identified as primary forms of sustainable tourism. However, it has been recognized that certain ecotourism products, often taking place in sensitive natural environments may be even more harmful than mass tourism in an urbanized environment. It must be emphasized that the principles of sustainable development are applicable to all types of tourism in all destinations, including the niche types of tourism (UNWTO 2004).

Consequently, the requirements of sustainability are to be considered when developing sport tourism in a destination. Tourism and sports are closely linked, as it is manifested by the growing number of travellers who aim at participating actively or passively in recreational or competitive sport activities. Sport may be either the primary or secondary motivation for travel or it may serve as an additional holiday activity contributing to the travel experience. Sport tourists, whose primary travel activity is participating in competitive or recreational sport can be differentiated from tourism sports, which implies that sport is a secondary or incidental travel activity (Gammon and Robinson 2003). Several definitions of sport tourism emphasize that athletes as *active* and spectators as *passive* sport tourists constitute the demand side of the sport tourism market (Hinch and Higham 2011).

Gibson et al. (2012) suggest that in the current academic literature the emphasis is on the needs of host communities and the environment rather than the needs of tourism demand when investigating the possibilities for sustainable tourism development. Dovetailing with many other authors' arguments she believes that tourist satisfaction and tourism demand should be the core components of any sustainable tourism development plan, since tourism development is based on recurring visitation of the tourists (Cater 1993; Liu 2003).

Sport tourism can be defined as „sport-based travel away from the home environment for a limited time where sport is characterized by unique rule sets, competition related to physical prowess and play” (Hinch and Higham 2001). It takes many different forms. Gibson (2005) differentiates among active, event and nostalgia sport tourism, which may serve as the starting point for a sport tourism market analysis. Active sport tourism refers to participatory sports-related travel, which includes events (e.g. the Olympic Games or recurring small-scale events such as local fencing tournaments as the present case study) and non-event sport tourism (e.g. golf, skiing) (Kaplanidou 2010). Nostalgia sport tourism is a dynamically growing sector, which „includes tourist visitation to sport museums, halls of fame, themed bars and restaurants, heritage events and sports reunions (Hinch and Higham 2011).

As the present study investigates the role of small-scale events in sustainable tourism, it is important to highlight some characteristics of event sport tourism. The scale of sport events ranges from mega-events attracting millions of visitors to small-scale local events, where athletes may outnumber the spectators. Mega sports events clearly have several advantages from tourism's perspective, as they create a positive image and identity of a place and they divert visitors' attention to the hosting destination, thus contributing to destination marketing. Mega sport events may create interests in other tourist attractions of a destination that are not related to the sport. The most frequently cited benefits of hosting large-scale international sport events are the positive economic impacts (Hall 1996).

However, sporting events may have certain negative impacts as well, which seem to increase with the scale of the event. Mega sports events usually require the development of new infrastructure, whose maintenance may become a burden on the local community some time after the event (Hiller 2006). Mega events also generate a considerably higher influx of people, which may cause overcrowding, infrastructure congestion, environmental degradation and disturbance to the host population (Chernushenko 1996).

As opposed to advocating large-scale regional, national or international events, Gibson et. al (2012) highlight that organizing small-scale sports events "which are consistent with the host community's infrastructure and human and cultural capital may be a viable form of sustainable tourism development". This resonates with previous work (Higham 1999) arguing that small-scale event sport tourism may be more suitable from the perspective of sustainable development, as they may cause less serious negative impacts, although the economic benefits are usually smaller, too. Small-scale

events are generally contribute to the reduction of tourism seasonality, use the existing infrastructure, require less public funding and generate a smaller, but more reliable income from tourism (Higham 1999).

The size of the event and the way in which a sport event is hosted has implications for the sustainability of the event, and that of the sport tourism destination. As a result, it is of vital importance that event managers make informed decisions, which entails that they need to understand the various niche market segments to meet their sport and travel preferences as well as planners need to estimate visitors' behaviour patterns. It is necessary to examine the behaviour profiles of competitors and spectators of small-scale events in order to estimate event impacts, and consequently the sustainability of a sport tourism destination.

Materials and methods

In order to better understand the visitor profile of a small-scale sport event, participants from a recurring fencing tournament were selected. The Budapest WestEnd Women's Epee Grand Prix 2014 is held annually in Budapest, organized by the Hungarian Fencing Federation. The duration of the competition is 2 days, and it is usually held in February, which is a low season for tourism. The event targets women fencers of any age, but on average the age of the participants ranges from 18 to 30. Although it is an international competition with fencers coming from 34 countries – even from China and the USA – it can be considered as a small-scale event, as the number of athletes was 149, escorted by some of coaches, as well as friends and relatives. The number of spectators was approximately 150 on the two days.

The event population was surveyed onsite during the event by using questionnaires. Trained interviewers assisted in completing the questionnaires on both days. The questionnaire included 19 closed and open questions, asking for information on the participants' activities and tourism related behaviour, including their expenditure. Out of the 149 participants and their accompanying coaches and friends or relatives, 108 completed the questionnaires, representing 22 nations. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics as it is usual in tourism literature regarding sports events (Veltri et al. 2009; Gibson et al. 2012).

Results and discussion

Sample description

The present study focuses on the active and passive event sport tourists who participated in a small-scale event. 71%

of the respondents were athletes, while 29% were coaches. The vast majority of the respondents were female (74%) and 26% were male. As it was a women's tournament the active sport tourists were female, while the male participants were passive event sport tourists (coaches, team leaders, friends and relatives). They represented all age groups, 34% aged between 21 and 25 years, 22% above 40 and 19% aged between 26 and 30 years. Only 9% were under 20 years of age, while 16% of the respondents were in their 30s: equally distributed between 31–35, and 36–40 years of age. Most of the athletes were in their twenties, while the passive sport tourist were usually above 40. In accordance with this characteristic, most athletes have pursued this sport for 5–15 years, while 22% started fencing more than 15 years ago. In terms of education, an outstanding 82% of the respondents held a degree from higher education, which reflects the social status of fencers in general. As far as the nationality of the sport tourists is concerned, while the participants represented 34 countries, the respondents were from 22 countries, only 13% coming from the distance of less than 500 km from Budapest, i.e. the neighbouring countries of Hungary. Figure 1 illustrates the nationality of the respondents in the sample (Figure 1).

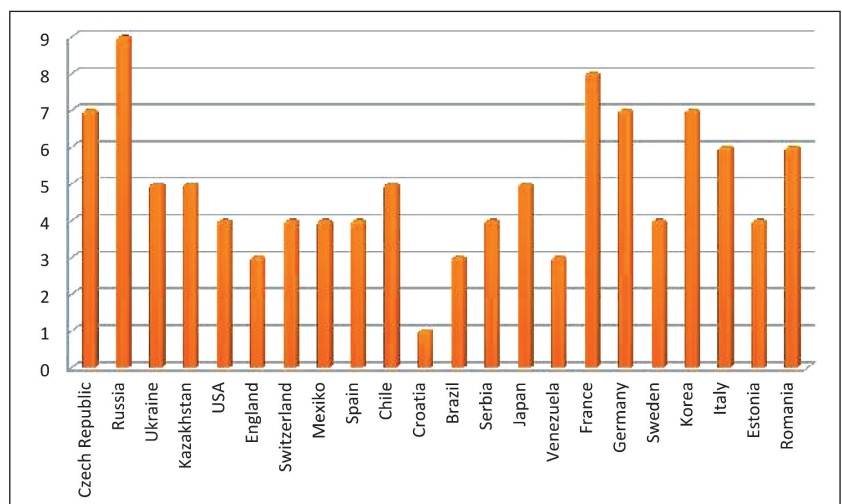


Figure 1. The distribution of respondents' nationality
Source: Serra, 2014

Tourist behaviour of sport tourists

Length of stay

The Westend Budapest Grand Prix lasts for 2 days; on the first day all athletes compete, while on the second day only those, who qualified for the finals. If a respondent spends only two days in Budapest, it entails that their only motive for travel was participation in the competition. As Figure 2 clearly demonstrates, one quarter of the participants reported staying for more than 3 days, which implies that they may have devoted some time for other tourist activities. However, most respondents arrived solely for the purpose of participating in the sport event, as they stay only for 2 or 3 days. (Figure 2) This finding is consistent with the tourism literature, which highlights that active sport tourists, who

take part in a competition rarely devote time for visiting the tourism attractions of the destination.

The fact that the majority of the respondents stayed only for the short period of the competition can be explained by two additional factors, as well. On the one hand, their expenses were mostly covered by their national fencing associations (58%), which strive to reduce the travel costs by limiting the number of days spent at the venue of the sport event. On the other hand, 44% of the respondents had visited Budapest more than twice and 33% visited at least once before this year's event, so the vast majority (77%) were returning guests, who may have already seen some tourism attractions during their previous visits.

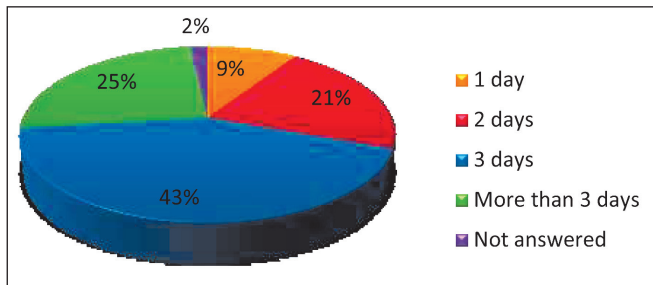


Figure 2. Number of days spent at the Westend Grand Prix World Cup
Source: Serra, 2014

Accommodation

When asked about sport tourists' preferences on gathering information on accommodation and booking, it was found that the participants of a fencing tournament usually prefer choosing from the accommodation officially recommended by the organizers of event, as shuttle buses operate from these hotels to the event venue. In the present survey 28% of the respondents selected from the hotels offered on the invitation for competition, while 30% made the choice based on their previous experiences, which includes former stays at hotels recommended by the organizers. A further 28% searched the internet for finding accommodation, and 5% took advantage of their friends' advice. The remaining 9% of the respondents reported that accommodation was arranged by someone else or used other sources for getting information on hotels.

As far as the accommodation preferences of the participants are concerned, the overwhelming number of respondents reported that they stayed at 3 and 4 star hotels (33% and 39%, respectively), while others stayed at 2 star hotels or private apartments (Figure 3).

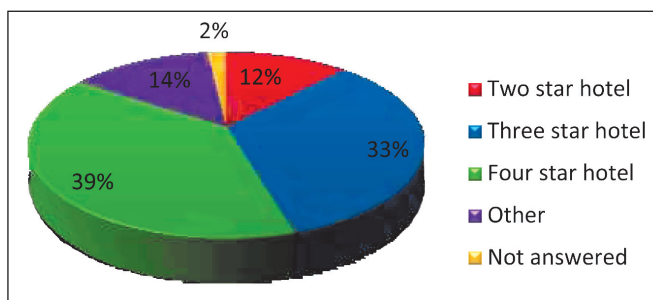


Figure 3. Accommodation choices of respondents
Source: Serra, 2014

Tourism activities of sports tourists

The economic impacts of sport tourism greatly depends on the services (hotels, restaurants, organized sightseings, etc.) that the active or passive sport tourists utilize, therefore participants of the tournament were asked about their activities during the time of their visit besides doing or watching sports.

The top activity cited by the respondents was eating out: 83% of the respondents reported having a meal in a local restaurant. As the results on Figure 4 indicate, most participants ate locally, either by eating out in a restaurant or ordering meals, at least a pizza (Figure 4). For professional athletes the quality and quantity of eating during the competition is of vital importance. Therefore they usually prefer the restaurants recommended officially by the organizers, however after the competition they may explore local restaurants and sample local specialities.

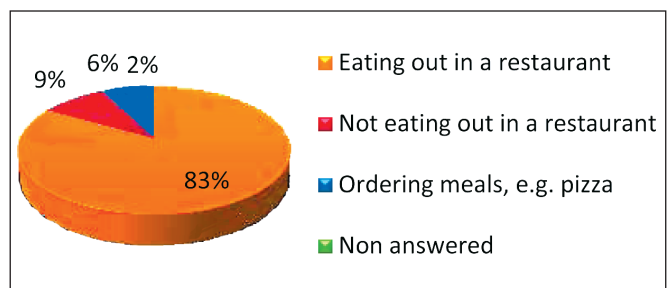


Figure 4. The respondents' eating preferences
Source: Serra, 2014

In terms of sports tourists' involvement in other activities apart from taking part in the competition, it was found that the majority of the respondents (63%) did not visit any other tourism attractions or places of interests at the destination. Out of the 37% who indicated that they visited some attractions, a short sightseeing walk to the city centre of Budapest and to the shopping street „Váci utca” was mentioned. These findings are in accordance with the results of previous surveys that indicate that eating out and shopping are the most frequently cited activities of event sport tourists (Daniels and Norman 2003; Gibson et al. 2012). In addition, as Figure 2 demonstrates, participants of the sporting event spend only a short period of time at the destination, which is normally strictly scheduled for the competing athletes. It is often the coaches, friends and relatives who may have time for tourism activities. It must also be noted that the events organizers rarely offer complex tourism packages for the event participants, which include specific services, such as massage or other health tourism services.

It has been suggested that organizing compatible activities with the event and structuring the competitions in a way that allows time for activities besides sport could effectively increase the length of stay and tourists' spending (Gibson et al. 2012).

Expenditure

The participants of the Westend Grand Prix were asked to estimate the amount they spent at accommodation, meals

and tourism-related services excluding the costs of transport, furthermore they were asked who covers their costs of travel. In the case of professional competitive sports, the national sport federations fully or partially contribute to the participation costs of the athletes.

As Figure 5 shows most participants (79%) spent less than 500 euros in the course of the event, while 21% reported spending more than 500 euros. (Figure 5) In terms of direct economic impact of the event these amounts of money do not appear to be substantial, but this result is modified by the fact that 58% of the respondents reported that their federations bore their costs, 14% declared that their participation in the event were funded by sponsoring, and in 4% of the cases the fencing club of the athlete provided the amount necessary for the competition. In contrast, only 24% reported covering the costs of travel from their own budget.

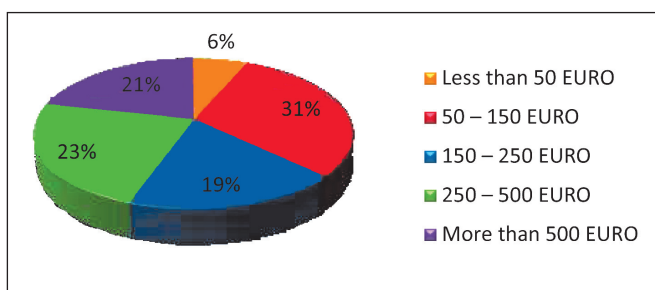


Figure 5. Tourists' spending in the course of the event
Source: Serra, 2014

In terms of economic impacts of a small-scale event, it is obvious that the economic activities are limited, when compared to a large-scale event. However, small-scale sports events taking place in smaller or medium-sized communities may have proportionally more positive impacts than in larger cities (Gibson et al. 2012). During the planning phase of a sport event initiatives should be considered to increase the overall direct spending impact associated with the event. It must also be noted that youth sports events and tournaments targeting females are reported to entail a greater number of passive sports tourists (the athletes are escorted by more friends and relatives) and higher spending in the course of the event (Gibson et al. 2012).

Several authors emphasize the importance of friends and relatives as a key market for event sport tourism (Hinch and Higham 2004; Weed and Bull 2004; Gibson 2012). The VFR market appears to have special characteristic features in terms of behaviour and consumption patterns. It has been suggested that their length of stay is generally longer and their spending is generally higher, which may be explained by the fact that they are emotionally related to the competing athletes. (Scott and Turco 2007) Preuss et al. also suggested that the consumption patterns of sports event visitors depend on their economic and psychological investment in the event, their interest in the particular sport, as well as the distance travelled to the event. (Preuss 2007) Kaplanidou and Gibson's study clearly highlights that attitudes toward event participation influence tourist behaviour directly. (Kaplanidou and Gibson 2010)

Conclusions

This study examined the tourist profile of an international fencing tournament, the Westend Budapest Grand Prix 2014. As sustainable tourism development requires strategic planning and informed decision making, it is necessary to understand the demand side of the sport tourism market, the behaviour of active and passive sports tourists. Being aware of the behavioural profile of competitors and spectators, event and destination managers may estimate the economic, social and environmental impacts of a sports event, and plan accordingly.

Although the participants came from 34 countries the tournament can be regarded as a small-scale event, since the overall number of active sports tourists was 149, accompanied by a limited number of coaches, team-leaders and friends or relatives. Research concerning small-scale sporting events is rapidly growing, demonstrating the significance of these types of events in sports tourism.

Tournaments in fencing, even at the international level are usually small-scale events attracting more competitors than visitors, receiving little media attention and attracting less sponsorship than mega events. However, there is a tourism potential in these events which communities should realize in Hungary. Fencing tournaments are recurring events, which means that they are regularly held even during the low seasons. There is already existing infrastructure for fencers throughout the country, which needs continuous improvement but it requires less public funding than organizing large-scale sport events without the necessary infrastructure. Although the economic benefits are of a smaller scale, but the reliable flow of visitors may generate a substantial revenue for the local communities. Compiling a portfolio of small-scale sport events has been suggested by international tourism literature (Gibson et al. 2012). This may be a viable form of sustainable sport tourism development in the case of fencing, as well.

Fencing tournaments primarily attract active sport tourists, whose main motive is to compete. It is generally difficult to entice active sport tourists to take part in other activities besides sport, however efforts should be made to do so, as there are international "good practices" in this field. (Gibson et al. 2012) Hungary's health tourism products provide a solid basis for developing combined products of health and sport tourism. The results of the present survey show that fencers are highly educated, they prefer high quality accommodation and conscious of their food choices when travelling to participate in a competition. These characteristics should be taken into account when offering tourism packages for them. Sports commissions, event managers and travel agencies involved in serving the sport tourists should cooperate to maximize the positive economic and social impacts of small-scale events.

The present study constitutes a starting point in exploring the role of small-scale events in sustainable sport tourism development. Future research should focus on measuring the impacts of the various types of sport events, which may have implications for academics and practitioners alike.

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