

SPORT TOURISM EVENTS IN PELOPONNESE REGION

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ABSTRACT

Sports-touristic events' organization is experiencing significant growth worldwide and is used as a lever to promote the local touristic product. In Greece, despite the favorable geopolitical and climatic conditions, sports tourism has not promoted adequately, although the economic benefits arising are undisputable at a regional level. Aim of this thesis is to investigate the development potential and problems related to the promotion of sports tourism via sports events' organization in the Peloponnese, by examining the views of various stakeholders in the region. According to the findings of the qualitative research applied, clear untapped potential for development of sports tourism are identified in the region, despite the fact that the assistance of the state and other entities are insufficient. The effective promotion of the local touristic product can be achieved through coordinated actions within an integrated tourism strategy, which combines initiatives for the development of various alternative touristic forms, while promoting the settlement of critical problems associated with sports and tourism facilities.

Keywords: sports tourism, sports events, alternative tourism, regional development

I. Introduction

In recent decades sport event industry has presented an international growth with explicit effects on tourism, due to the fact that sport tourism is considered to be an alternative form of tourism. The active sport tourism market, which is the visitor's participation in sport events, has experienced major growth, bringing about positive impacts to regional development. It has been proved that, the organization of sport events, including competitive or non competitive sports, supports the promotion of cities with low tourism attractiveness, thereby it is used as leverage diversification of the tourist product.

In Greece, the last decade there has been an effort to promote alternative forms of tourism, as the country is considered an ideal destination characterized by favorable climatic and geopolitical conditions. Particularly in the field of sport tourism and after the success of the Olympic Games in 2004, various initiatives are undertaken with purpose to promote sport tourism product, mainly through organizing events with tourist interest. However, the lack of sport facilities or the inadequate maintenance of the existing facilities, the lack of cooperation between stakeholders and the reduction of the available financial resources from State inhibit further growth of sport tourism. In contrast to these problems, a number of agencies and organizations involved in sport

tourism market seem to be active enough, undertaking actions and initiatives with significant opportunities for regional development.

The aim of this study is to investigate issues related to the promotion of sport tourism through organizing sport events in the region of Peloponnese. The significance of this research is based on the fact that the organization of sport events with active or passive participation can be an important factor for regional tourism development especially in regions like Peloponnese where there are unexploited touristic developmental possibilities. Furthermore, due to the fact that sport tourism is relatively a new touristic field in Greece, there is a need to explore the variables and the factors that compose it.

II. Literature

Sport Events

Event industry is one of the largest employers worldwide, contributing crucially to economic growth (Theocharis, 2008). As Eckerstein (2002) supports, activities refer to events in which individuals participate in a share experience, where a common message is communicated, even if the purpose of events varies considerably, depending on participants, organizers, place and other variables. These events occur in “*unique special moments*” and “*aside from everyday occurrences*” (Beeridge, 2007).

Although sport can mean different things to different people, it could be considered as an activity of entertainment and recreation. In the same time it could be considered as an industry whose success can be measured by customer satisfaction and economic impacts (Smith & Stewart, 1999). According to Shank (2009), sports events are one of the most important and universal issues that modern societies are facing, including all the forms of physical activity which manage either casual or organized in order to improve participants' fitness and creating social relations.

The organization of sport events, apart from the impacts that it brings to the participants, can have significant effects on sport events' operators and to local societies (Gratton & Taylor, 2000). Through a social aspect, sport events play a central role in shaping culture and society (Gouws, 1997). In short, sport activity is an event that occurs as a form of entertainment with specific participants, organizers, audience and duration (Pope & Turco, 2001).

In addition, sport events should be examined through different characteristics such as sport type (traditional or extreme sports), organization context (sport tourism events, university championships), management models (type of supplied sport product or service), and economic impact (Parks et al., 2011).

The importance of sport events consists of effects like the increased interest of media, investments in infrastructure, budgeting and the overall positive effects on tourism (Burton, 2003). In this point it should be noted the social impact of sport events, including improved quality of individuals' life, projection of sport's benefits, and strengthening social ties (Anon, 2005). Also, an important element of the organization of sport events, associated with economic impact, is public participation, because it has to do with individuals who are motivated not only by sport but also by further social extensions (Apostolopoulou et al, 2006). The result of this view is sponsorships and financing,

which are accompanied by the expectation of achieving specific commercial goals (Boyle & Haynes, 2009). Therefore, it can be supported that sport events play an important role to social well-being and economic growth, since sport industry contributes to economic, social, political, and technological terms.

Since all kinds of events are leisure activities (sport tournaments, team sports) which affect on quality of life, the number, range and variety of related activities has increased significantly in recent years, proving basic economic benefits for event planners and agencies. The organization of an event requires a careful planning (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2004) and specific strategy in fields like operation management, marketing and public relations, budgeting, human resource management, etc. (Tassiopoulos, 2005).

Sport Event Management

Due to the unique nature of each event, planning is a procedure that should be happening in a continuous basis, from the initial idea until the end of the event, where it should be evaluated to the achieved goals (Watt, 1998). Thus, according to Saayman (2004), the activity is a designed and programmed event which is unique and it has specific duration, whilst according to Masterman (2009) a sport event is organized under management models, which are based on structure, scale and size of the event. Under this structure sport events can be categorized into low or high scale. The distinction between large – scale events is referred to those that rare happen in a specific place (hallmark events) and those that implement on an international level (mega events).

In any case, however, event management is an organizational activity aimed at programming, preparation and production of a specific outcome (Berridge, 2007). Event management includes processes of evaluation, organizational resources management, control, time management, budgeting, human resource management, and performance management

(Silvers, 2008). At times, various models of sport event management have been proposed, of which three are most known and widely used in sport industry. These models are: flat model, vertical model, and network type (Jiapeng, 2012).

Sport event management is considered as a utilization activity of available resources (human, technological, financial, knowledge) to achieve commercial goals for the sport organizations and businesses (Pitts & Stotlar (2002).

Sport Event and Tourism

Tourism industry has been affected by the development of sport facilities at tourism destinations, providing at the same time to local communities significant opportunities, including employability (Weed & Bull, 2004). Participation in sport events that take place outside of residence with purpose either competition or evaluation of leisure (free) time, constitutes the central element of sport tourism, which is considered to contribute to regional and sustainable development (Gibson, Attle, Yiannakis, 1997).

The distinction between passive and active participation in sport events is of critical importance for consumer behavior, having explicit implications on sport events organizing method and strategic planning (Kurtzman, & Zauhar, 2005). Therefore, active sport tourism market consists of individuals seeking to participate with their physical performance in competitive or non-competitive sports (Hinch & Higham, 2004).

The participants of sport tourism events can be divided into those that maintain or not motives of parallel holidays, and in turn they are divided into active or passive participants (Deery et al., 2004). Subsequently, passive sport tourists are categorized according to the importance of the sport event during their vacations. Therefore, there are: casual observers (the participation is low in the sport event), “insiders” (presence of important sport motives during the programming of the trip), and active sport tourists (sport event is the basic motive).

Additionally, Delpy (1997) divided sport tourism market into four categories: (1) performance athletes (important factor is the efficiency of sport event organization), (2) travelers dealing with mass sport (basic motive is the maintenance of their physical condition and quality of additional services), (3) occasional participants (basic factor is sport and culture motives), and (4) passive tourists (main motive is the quality of accompanying tourist services). On the other hand, Kurtzman and Zauhar (2005) divided the participants as: (1) sporadic, (2) occasional, (3) regular, (4) dedicated, (5) motivated, and (6) “by chance”. Lastly, Weed (2006) reports that the different categories of sport tourists are based on type of sport event that is developed, so he indicates sport event tourism, outdoor activities tourism, and luxury sport events tourism.

The trends due to tourism development are: (1) increased awareness for positive health behaviors, (2) strong developed vacation market (holidays based on specific activities or thematic categories), and (3) massive demand increase for short breaks (second holidays and complementary touristic activities during primary holidays) (Weed & Bull, 2004).

The organization of sport events (e.g. team sport tournaments for amateur athletes) is experiencing significant growth at international level, giving important economic benefits. Small – scale events that organized in cities of the region can be an important tourist development field. According to Gibson (2004), this type of local sport events have low impact scale, which is identified to the level of the local society or region (Maier & Weber, 1993). It should be noted that, their systematic organization at a particular place can lead to the formulation of a tourism destination with a strong brand name (brand destination) and it could attract investors/sponsors, positive influencing the development of sport facilities and infrastructure and in general, it could be a catalyst for the strengthening of the touristic market in regional areas which

have limited tourist attractiveness (Getz, 2003).

Tourism Policy and Sport Tourism in Greece

According to literature, the development of new tourism policies at national and European level is observed. The development of these tourism projects has as a purpose the extension of tourist season and the strengthening of regional and sustainable development.

The country's basic policy is being found to the forms of alternative tourism. These particular forms are the recreation sport tourism, water sport tourism, rural tourism, gastronomic tourism, and health and fitness tourism.

Lytras (1993) notes that, even though the country has all the geopolitical and climatic conditions in order to be a center of sport meetings, the lack of sport venues and relevant infrastructure are main obstacles for the sport tourism development. However, the last years, it has begun generating more sport and recreation facilities, and at the same time many regions of the country provide services of alternative forms of tourism (Hatzimanouil, Glinia, and Smernou, 2010). At the same time, more and more regional tourism destinations use sport events as a tool of regional and economic growth (Papadimitriou & Gibson, 2008).

The benefits which arose are related to the touristic upgrade of destination host, the increase of tourism revenues (transportation, accommodation, catering and all kinds of consumer activity), the international promotion of host cities as tourism destinations, the strengthening of employability, the lengthening of touristic season, and the regional and sustainable development.

According to Goutzioupa (2006), the basic forms of sport tourism that are being developed in Greece are: coaching tourism, sport event tourism, sport activities tourism, and sport recreation tourism. A conscious shift of tourism consumption to the demand of alternative tourism is observed, marking

the increasing demand for more targeted touristic products. Indeed, it has been proved that, sport tourists return to the destination if they have a positive experience from their last visit.

However, sport tourism has not being sufficiently developed in Greece, even though many Hellenic regions are available for the sport activities development.

III. Method

The qualitative methodology that is used in this particular research is content analysis.

Sample and Survey

The individual interviews were fulfilled during personal meetings with each of the respondents at their workplace from 6/1/2014 to 10/1/2014. The duration of the interviews was from 15 to 20 minutes. The questions were formulated in the same order for everyone and in some cases there was parenthetically clarification to the better understanding of the questions.

The sample of this research was consisted of 6 persons, who are active in sports, administrative, and commercial operators of the city. The participants were:

The President of the sport club AEK Tripolis

The President of Arcadia Football Union

The Mayor of Tripolis

The Mayor's Advisor for sport issues

The President of the Trade Union of Tripolis

The President of Hoteliers Association of Arcadia

The inquiring tool of this research includes 13 questions, which are:

1. Which sports event have you organized until now in order to strengthen sport tourism?

2. Which objectives were pursued by hosting sport events? Which are the main

resources you need to organize successful sport events (coordination with other agencies, human resource, finance, technology, facilities)? How are you experiencing these coordination issues?

3. Which potential problems you encounter during the planning and implementation of such events?

4. Which are the main characteristics of the sport events you organized in terms of type, participation, duration and facilities?

5. Who are the addressees of sport events?

6. To what extent and in which way do you consider the sport events' participants are satisfied? Do you measure the participants' satisfaction degree in sport events?

7. How and by whom is the finance of sport events that take place undertaken?

8. In which way you do consider that sport events generate economic benefits for the organizers and the stakeholders (local businesses and organizations)?

9. In which way do you consider that hosting sport events contributes to the development of tourism in region and generally to the regional development?

10. Do you consider that the State contribute actively in the organization and promotion of sport events so that the region be developed?

11. In which ways do you consider that stakeholders will have to project and support sport events in the region in order to be highlighted as a tourist destination?

12. Are there new ideas from you in order to support sport tourism for the development of your region?

13. Which, in your opinion, is the most effective way to implement this new idea (finance, organizer, resources, promotion, and facilities)?

IV. Results

1. Sport Events in order to strengthen sport tourism

The sport events that have been organized are: a) World Championship Roller Ski (2012 - 2013), b) International

Women's Tournament Polo "Thetis Cup" (2012), c) National Swimming Championships, d) National Championship Wrestling adolescents (2012), e) Climbing Meeting at Mainalo park, f) Track and field (Athletics) meeting "Greece - Cyprus 2013", g) National Championship Rally, and several competitions at regional and local level.

Further sport events have taken place in cycling and tennis (AEK Tripolis), also the football club Asteras Tripolis who compete at Super League category consists a strong communication vehicle for the destination.

2. Aims and required resources

Football can be the vehicle so that Tripoli be characterized as "Sport City", through the promotion that it could get from the football clubs' successes, with the aim of hosting major football games and in general sport events like cycling and tennis.

Establishing Tripoli as sport and training center will bring tourism development, highlight the importance of sport in the local community and increase the projection of the region, economic growth of the region, etc. (Mayor of Tripoli)

The Municipal Authority is the main provider of the required resources for the operation of football clubs and for the organization of sport activities, through offering, maintaining and improving sport facilities, and when it's required from the Region of Peloponnese.

The human resources' financial coverage is realized through the Municipality resources, and in a similar way financial coverage of sport clubs and unions is made.

3. Problems and Workarounds

The main problems that are present during the planning and implementation of sport events are inveteracy and small capacity of sport facilities, financial reduction from government sector, inadequacy of hotels for hosting athletes and visitors, and lack of personnel.

To address the problems of the organizers of sport events based on

concluding a proper project planning, there is an effort made to build a volunteer network which will participate in the process of organizing. Also, the workaround for the hospitality of athletes and visitors is been accomplished peripherally with arranged transport.

4. Main characteristics of sport events (type, participation, duration, facilities)

The operators who are active in Tripoli have developed an organization network for both big and small sport events. The city's facilities (even with the problems that are showed) can cover the needs of large nationwide tournaments and also they can cover tournaments in an international level. The participation of the athletes and fans is satisfactory. The spectators who attend are of all ages and of all social and economic profiles and they are mainly from surrounding areas.

The main key for the success of sport events is the accomplishment of the predetermined objectives. The high response from visitors and the coverage of their needs is achieved through a total coverage of their habits, the high level of facilities and logistical infrastructure, and also the coverage of their needs for accommodation, catering and entertainment.

5. Addressees of Sport Events

The main receiver of these sport events is the local society. Certainly, a greater degree of acceptance presents the relevant stakeholders, such as athletes and their families, coaches, and the city's commercial sector.

During the organizing periods there is an observed upward trend in clothing shops, footwear and sportswear shops. At the same time the increase of tourism flows significantly contributing to the rise in demand for hotel services.

6. Satisfaction degree of participants

There is no specific way to measure the participants' satisfaction. The acquisition of knowhow by stakeholders for the proper organization of sport events has significantly

contributed to increasing the satisfaction degree of participants in sport events.

7. Finance of Sport Events

Significant is the assistance of the Municipality and when it is needed from the Regional Authority with the absence of the State. Much of the events are financed from the clubs that undertake the organization of sport events. Although, valuable is the contribution of the business community which takes part as sponsor to sport events. At high level events which attract a large number of fans, there is potential revenue of advertising, tickets, and TV rights which contribute to the successful organization of events.

8. Economic Benefits

The increase of visitors due to sport events increase tourism demand in the region and enhance promotion. In this way the income of local society is stimulated and there is an increase of employment levels. The multiplicity of economic benefits of sports events is reflected in the improvement of the services' quantity and quality which is provided by local businesses with significant gains across industries and the whole economy of Tripoli's local society.

9. The contribution of sport events to tourism development

The region of Tripoli is characterized by huge potential for winter tourism, recreation tourism and adventure tourism. Attracting a large number of visitors leads to the average of a general reformation, modernization and region's economic growth and also increase in the region's tourism GDP. At the same time, the probability of the return of visitors in the region at other times is been increased.

By consolidation and stability of large sport events' existence, the region can be recognized as a sport and cultural center.

10. The State's and Public sector contribution to sport events

The contribution of the Central Government as a supporter for the organization and promotion of sport events that take place in Tripoli is extremely inefficient and this happens because of the

economic downturn which has been brought about in our country. Respondents consider as satisfactory the contribution of Municipal and Regional Authority. It is highlighted the need of cooperation between the Committee of Tourism Promotion and Development and the sport and commercial sectors in order to develop sport tourism.

11. Promotion of Sport Events in order to emerge the region as Tourism Destination

“Tripoli should focus her interest and responsibility to cover sport tourism events. Stakeholders have to turn to organized plan of Tripoli as Sport and Adventure Destination (hiking, etc). Tripoli should be viewed as a unique place of sports and entertainment” (President of Arcadia Hoteliers Union).

12. New Ideas in order the region’s development

To support sport tourism for a wider development in the region of Tripoli, it is proposed to promote conference tourism with sport content themes. Also, it is proposed to upgrade sport facilities in combination with low prices of accommodation and catering. The cooperation with domestic and foreign travel agencies could offer attractive financial packages and could also contribute to the region’s development.

13. Embodiments of new ideas

It is required to obtain a total formula that includes financial resources, proper promotion, modern facilities in order to offer a high level of services to visitors and to sport events’ participants which will satisfy their needs and expectations.

V. Discussion

The significant growth that is observed on a global level in the sport events’ industry has brought about important impacts on tourism. The tourism industry has been affected by the development of sport facilities and sport events (Weed & Bull, 2004), which in the context of alternative tourism are used as a way to attract tourists in urban and regional areas.

According to literature review, sport tourism is considered as a main aspect of alternative tourism, which contributes to regional and sustainable development. In recent years, the increased sensitization about issues relating to health, the massive increase in demand for alternative forms of tourism and the strong developed market of thematic tourism constitute basic trends for the sport tourism development by organizing sport tourism events.

In Greece the last decade there has been an effort to develop alternative tourism, including sport tourism, view of the favorable geopolitical and climatic conditions. But the deficiencies of specialized sport facilities, inadequate infrastructure, low activation level of stakeholders and providers of touristic services and inadequate support from the State are the main obstacles to further development, particularly in remote areas of the region. However, the organization of sport events in order to attract tourists can contribute to the region’s economic growth.

According to survey results, city’s stakeholders are strongly activated in strengthening sport tourism but the basic obstacle is the lack of participation of all stakeholders, such as trade unions and hoteliers. The main events that are held are club completion games, leagues, tournaments and hiking meetings. Furthermore, it is emerged that the most active sector is the city’s Municipal Authority. The basic objective of stakeholders in the field of sport tourism is the city’s characterization as “sport” by highlighting main sport events, including traditional sports. The organization of sport events as type of tourism development creates jobs and improves the region’s image to tourist, according to research findings. Also it was recorded that the required funds come from local and regional authority.

To deal with the problems, which arose from the results analysis, as basic route is the cooperation between stakeholders through a specific project

planning and through the activation of volunteers.

Regarding financing, the most important problem, according to the research results, is the absence of the State, even though Municipal and Regional contribution is significant. As individual financial resources consider sport clubs sponsorships, advertising, tickets and television rights. Moreover, due to the respondents' views, sport events contribute to the region's economic growth, both in the level of local society and local companies, due to the increase of visitors and tourism demand. Especially regarding alternative tourism, it seems that the development is at a high level by the side of sport tourism activities, such as winter tourism and adventure tourism.

Summarizing, this research revealed that a number of stakeholders in Peloponnese region are quite active in utilization of sport events for the region's tourism promotion. However, the State's support is necessary. The positive view arising from this research is that local stakeholders recognize the value of sport tourism as a means of achieving regional development. It is worth to mention, as a common assessment that the tourism promotion of the region cannot rely on individuals' initiatives and actions. In contrast, the promotion of local tourism product should incorporate various aspects of alternative tourism, focusing on congress and winter tourism. Overall, the interconnection of sports events, sport tourism promotion and regional development can only be achieved by an integrated tourism strategy with the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders.

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