

## EVOLVING TOURIST BEHAVIOUR AT SPORT EVENTS?

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### Abstract

*The general objective of the current paper is to study consumer behaviour in a relationship with sustainability principles, as in recent decades, tourism industry has rapidly developed and brought various impacts to the nations and destinations. The specific objective of the current research is to investigate the consumer behaviour at sport events, to provide a deeper understanding of the behaviour of tourists engaging in sport events, such as motivation, expectations, underlying reasons for choices and decision making, what do they seek from their experience, what is their spending willingness during these events, and in what matter are they behaving according to the sustainability principles. The research methodology was based on field research, by collecting data through questionnaires and interviews from sport tourists to find out why individuals engage in sport events. Results indicate the typology of sport tourists based on socio-economic status, motivation and expectations. Sport tourism is an important part of both sport and tourism business generating large revenues and reshaping local communities and can stand as a basis for effective marketing to generate added value on tourism product development, but in the same time there is a high need for education about sustainability and environmental awareness on all levels in order to obtain a positive evolution of behaviour regarding sustainability in general and especially at sport events.*

**Keywords:** Sport tourism, Sport tourist, Consumer behavior, Sport events, Sustainability

**JEL Classification:** Q56, Z21, Z32

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### Introduction

Concerning the relationship between sport and tourism we should go back to the ancient Romans and Greeks, whose first tours were aiming to attend or watch sports games. Since then, eras of sports tourism widely broadened. In today's developed world, people on vacation tend to get involved in sports activities, either as spectators, or as participants (Omar and Ivancovici, 2015). Tourism and sport are characterized as interconnected phenomena, sports and recreation presenting a departure from everyday life where people gain new strength and relax. Many people in today's society are considered to be increasingly involved in sport. Throughout the last few years, sports were becoming more and more common way for quality free time spending, for the active tourists, sport has become an integral part of life also when on holiday. Sport is a social and cultural phenomenon of planetary dimensions, entering people's lives at all ages, including men, women, children, working people and seniors (Coakley, 2008). In the last few years there was a sharp increase in sport holidays among European tourists, sports holidays in Europe are a growing trend that will continue to evolve and develop. Active sport tourists are part of an increasingly specialized sector of the tourism industry. However, at present we know little about these people whose primary purpose for taking vacations is to engage in their favourite sport activities either as participants or spectators. Therefore it is important to find out who and why is participating in sport events, which lies in understanding behaviour, motivation, which enables more effective marketing. Today, sports fans everywhere are changing how they express their support and spend their time and money on their favourite teams, and sporting activities, as globalization, emerging new sports, time constraints, rising costs and especially the socialization of media are influencing their expectations, behaviour and spending patterns. This rises important questions both for academics and for business professionals: What makes fans tick? Which psychological, sociological and philosophical phenomena drive fandom? In order to find out, there is a need to understand the social world of sport spectating through an exploration of behaviour, understanding the reasons for their choices and decisions, what do they seek from their experience. In order to understand the social world of sport tourism the current research investigates the descriptive identification of demographics and psychographic influences, to provide a deeper understanding of the sport spectator.

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## 1. Literature review

In 1966, Don Anthony wrote a paper entitled 'Sport and tourism' for the Central Council of Physical Recreation in the UK, which appears to be one of the earliest writings on the links between sport and tourism and, although the paper simply reviewed the role sport played in holiday tourism, it is an important landmark in the development of the study of sports tourism (Weed and Bull, 2009). Since then, various studies were published on the subject as presented in chronological order by Weed and Bull (2009). In order to facilitate the definition of sports tourism in practice for the current study, we take in consideration the definition given by Gibson (2003), who suggests that there are three types of sports tourism: active sport tourism where participants travel to take part in sport, event sport tourism where participants travel to watch sport and nostalgia sport tourism where participants visit sports related attractions such as halls of fame, famous stadium etc. A wider definition though, 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.

In the current investigation, adding to the definition of sport tourism, it is also important to study the concept of sustainable tourism, which is a form of alternative tourism based on the following principles: minimizing the impact of tourism activity on the environment in order to acquire ecological sustainability; minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity on the local community and its members to obtain social sustainability; minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity on the culture, traditions and customs of the local communities to obtain cultural sustainability; maximizing the economic benefits of the local population as a result of developing tourism, to obtain economic sustainability (Baker, 2006). Also it is crucial the protection and economic development of local communities through education of both tourists and locals.

Sports tourism is an autonomous part of sports and tourism business. This special form of tourism gives the possibility to generate added value in tourism product development and general upgrading of social and economic level of destinations. As Weed and Bull (2009) concludes that sports tourism is seen as sustainable tourism that might „minimize negative effects and maximize social, environmental and economic benefits” while also having the potential to promote local cultures as the activities involved result in greater access to alternative routes and localities, with distinct natural and cultural characteristics. This is something which the WTO has recognized in 1988, commenting that the sport and recreation dimension can enrich the tourism experience by allowing greater integration with destinations and a fuller appreciation of the social and cultural life of local communities (Weed and Bull 2009). It is also important to mention, that even though social and environmental effects are most of the time higher than economical ones, mega sport events, which constitute the core for sport tourism, have long-term social and human legacy after the tourists leave, going over the immediate economic benefits and challenges (Stănciulescu, 2010). Sport consumer behaviour whether, it is watching or participating in a sport event, is about the experience, as stated by Funk (2008). Over the past years, sport scientists have shown an increased interest in the psychological factors that motivate individuals to consume sports. Although the list of potential motives is quite extensive, according to the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS), an instrument designed to measure motives of sport fans, eight of the most common motivations being: escape, economic, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, entertainment, family, and aesthetics as stated by Wann et. al., (2008).

## 2. Research methodology

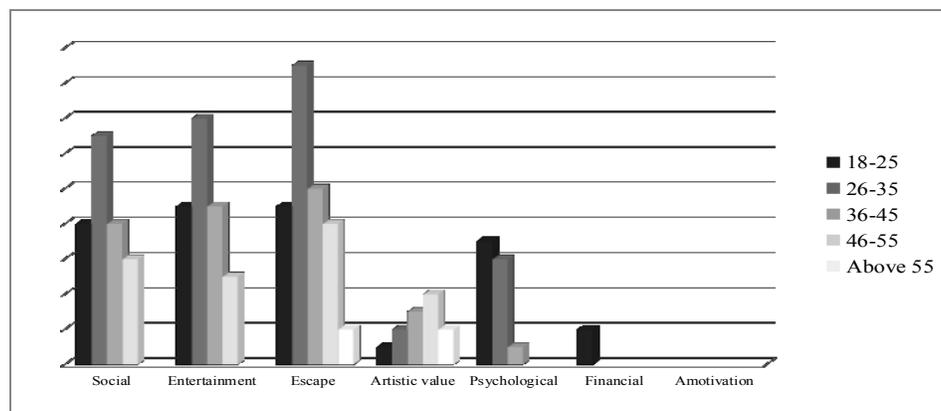
The study of consumer behaviour in general researches consumers and the exchange processes involved in acquiring, consuming and disposing of goods, services, experiences and ideas. The focus of the current study was specifically targeted on tourists as consumers and the acquisition phase of tourist consumption, and the factors that influence choices of products and services, and their behaviour towards the sustainability principles,

sport tourism being a type of social action in which people consume in various ways, seeking pleasurable experiences which create subjective emotional reactions.

The research process started with the analysis of previous works by researchers on the topic of consumer behaviour at sport events. As Wann (1995) already presented preliminary evidence that the SFMS is a reliable and valid asset tool, the questionnaire was formulated according, with specific questions added about sustainability. The current investigation is meant to be a screening, a basis for further, extensive research in the topic, and examined fan motivational differences, fandom perceptions and its correlation to sustainability principles, according to SFMS and additional features: social, entertainment, escape, artistic, psychological, financial, drama, acquisition of knowledge, physical skill and attractiveness of the athletes, enjoyment of aggression, amotivation, income and education. The sample (N=50), was a specific target group, all addicted to sports, either as frequent spectators or participants (but not professional athletes, only participating at sport events in their free time, as amateurs) from Romania. The data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire of 27 closed questions including 4 demographic and a group of lifestyle questions.

### 3. Results and discussion

As key finding, we can say that one motive, escape was present almost every time, regardless age, gender and financial possibilities, 92% of the total number of respondents strongly agreed that they attend sport events because it provides an escape from day-to-day routine. Furthermore, as the below graph shows, the main motivation, escape, is closely followed by entertainment and social interaction motivational factors regardless age or gender, whereas psychological motivation, meaning that the respondents get pumped up watching their favourite sports team, appears more emphasized at younger age-groups: 18-25 and 26-35 with scattered values among male and female respondents, artistic value in the meantime is being more emphasized at a later age, and mainly for females. A motivation, meaning that individuals watch sport because they have nothing else to do, was not present at any case for the current research. Gender differences generally appear in sports fan motivation, including higher scores for male fans on eustress, economic, self-esteem, and higher scores for female fans on aesthetic and family motivation. Individuals, who are motivated by one or more of these six motives, tend to view themselves as sports fans, and tend to spend also higher amount of money from their income on sport events in a year: only male respondents tend to spend more than 20% of their yearly income on sport events and additional costs, 70% of those who spend between 5%-20% from their yearly income were also male fans, most of the female respondents tend to spend less than 5%. These figures suggest, that fandom, expressed by the level of willingness to spend money on tickets, traveling and other services, different gadgets related to sport events show high differences in gender, which can be an important concern for marketers, for example to develop touristic products for women either to join their partners to sport events, or to develop subsidiary products to attract women in the same time to the same destination where the sport event in cause is taking place, but for different touristic activities. Similar to the income, the number of sport events individuals attend in a year show significant differences in gender, as male respondents tend to participate in much higher number of events than female ones. Also the enjoyment of aggression (fighting and rough play during the game and the aggressive behaviour of the players) indicates gender inequality: 78% of male respondents strongly and mostly agree with the statements above, whereas women tend to be neutral, or disagree with aggression.



**Figure 1: Motivation to attend sport events by age-group**

Source: Designed by the author, based on the on-line research responses, accessible at the following link:  
[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1K9rwQyNBpI9LUy13X\\_J3ZOCpnrf\\_f\\_ziW8ELTMazmhs/edit#gid=1283086916](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1K9rwQyNBpI9LUy13X_J3ZOCpnrf_f_ziW8ELTMazmhs/edit#gid=1283086916)

Fandom tend to be affected by various factors, like financial capabilities, lifestyle priorities and amount of free time available. The income level, which most of the time is highly affected by the educational level, is a key factor in the willingness of spending on sport events related services and products. Some individuals with lower educational level are willing to attend sport events, but lacking the financial capabilities, they tend to follow their favourite sports team in television or on the internet, but they are core part of fan groups of local sports teams, the residents in our case. Regarding lifestyle, for most respondents work tend to be a very important factor, as usually this is in direct connection with their income level. Family, friends, free time and entertainment also occupy important part in a sport tourists' life, as the activity researched is usually practiced in groups for quality free time spending. Changes which occur over the life course relate to choice of companions. In early adulthood, many sport tourists report traveling with groups of friends while those in middle adulthood tend to travel with their families. Religion, culture and sustainability is more significant for female respondents, politics and education has scattered values. The acquisition of knowledge, and the physical attractiveness of the players are not rated as important factors affecting fandom. Unfortunately sustainability is not considered as an important part of individuals' life in general, therefore it is not reflected in their behaviour, which shows high need for education in this sphere, to have environmentally and socially aware tourist behaviour at sport events.

## Conclusions

The results of the research prove that 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. Tourism has become a major economic activity due to the combined effects of transformation of offers and postmodern requests. The changes which have evolved are such that consumption is more qualitative, more demanding and more varied. As a result of these changes, sport tourism has become a profitable market due to the potential for world-wide destinations and to the diversification of sport services. Also, sport spectating has become one of the largest leisure behaviours in contemporary society, and there is growing need to understand the spectators' behaviour in order to capitalize on the tourism leveraging opportunities provided by sport events.

Sports tourism activities can be catalysts for development, and it is necessary for the central and local government and the private sector to effectively work together for development and promotion. Over the last twenty years, many cities, regions and countries have introduced strategies and policies to systematically host sports events, and allocated human and financial resources to attract elite or mass-participation single-sport or multi-sport competitions (Chappelet, 2015). Some introduced also heritage sporting events, generally involving a single sport, that has taken place in the same place for many years and that has been held regularly since its foundation, and can be a tourism product with high added value, as in the same time can attract both sport addicts and visitors interested in the specific destination. From marketer point of view, it should be important to differentiate the touristic products for sport tourists and possible companions, as the latter can be potential consumers of the touristic products additional to the sport-related ones, if marketed effectively.

Unfortunately sport tourists are usually not aware of sustainability issues, as they seek for positive experiences and entertainment, neglecting if the service or product they are buying was produced in a sustainable way. Therefore there is a high need for education in order to improve the general knowledge of the sport tourists regarding sustainability, but also there is need for further investigation, if the issue of neglecting sustainability is a sport event specific issue, or general, affecting individuals' everyday life? Social responsibility has also become increasingly prevalent in the sport industry (Walker and Kent, 2009) in recent years, sports fans tend seek out positive information about elements that they endorse and may be dismissive of information that is contradictory to existing positive feelings. (Walker, Matthew, Kent, and Aubrey, 2009). In order to ensure the success of sustainable development, it is helpful if all of the groups that make up society are active and respected players in the process set in motion, here a key role can be played by the sporting event organizers, sport teams, athletes, the Olympic movement etc. by respecting sustainability requirements, and being socially and environmentally responsible, evolving in the positive way the sports tourists' consumer behaviour.

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