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Barbir, Rafaela

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2021

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **RIT Croatia / RIT Croatia**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:229:079474>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-04-17**



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Challenges and Perspectives of Sport Tourism in Dubrovnik

Rafaela Barbir

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT Croatia)

HSPT.490 Senior Capstone Project

Course Instructor: Rebecca Charry

Mentor: Zrinka Friganović Sain

3rd of May, 2021

ABSTRACT

Sport tourism has become one of the most challenging, profitable and the biggest industries in the world. COVID-19 has impacted negatively many sectors and many businesses. This research paper investigated the impact of COVID on the organization of sport events in the period of 2019-2021, as well as the perspectives and challenges of the sport tourism with the focus on the City of Dubrovnik. The data collected show that Dubrovnik is still not developed enough despite the potential, cultural heritage, good climate and the fact that the town is already recognized as a famous tourist destination. The recommendations are to apply the successful organizational methods of events organized and adapt to new circumstances.

Key words: Sport tourism, Sport events, Dubrovnik, COVID-19, organization

The overall picture in the world

The pandemic of COVID-19 has greatly affected business in many areas and in many aspects. The consequences are visible in hospitality and tourism industry, as well as in its special branch: sports tourism. A completely unknown virus, which started in December 2019, hit the whole world and unpredictable change everyone's lives. COVID-19 has evidently had a huge impact in every sector, but especially in sport and tourism. In the last two years, there have been many restrictions in the organization of all events, especially sport events. Restrictions force so many events, for example, Olympic Games, which are the most popular sport event in the world, to be cancelled and postponement. The area of sports events organization has suffered enormous financial losses and it does not seem that it will recover soon. Social distancing makes problem for organization. Many sport clubs, sponsors, broadcasters, hotels, need to close their doors because of money loss or bankruptcy. Many individuals lost their income totally or it is cut. It becomes clear/evident that both areas, sport and tourism need to collaborate and find the best possible responses to the actual crisis that affects them mutually. According to *Wahlström*, (2020): "There are some obvious physical limitations to what anyone can do but there is a lot that can be done." (*Wahlström*, 2020)

The whole world needs to adapt to new strategies that will help organizing events in specific conditions. The health and care of people is at the first place of every serious business. The crisis of COVID-19 is still between us and nobody can predict how long will take to go back to "normal life" or whether that life will ever be possible again. All what can industries do is to adapt and recreate some sports and touristic trends and strategies in order to satisfy better their own needs as well as the needs of their customers. It is clear that all countries have a specific potential in this area related to many factors, such as economical background, intercultural background and

historical background. What still remains to be true is the need to help developing a new lifestyle that will encourage people in these stressful time.

Even though Sport tourism was not so popular in the remote history, according to the official pages of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sport tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in tourism. It has now become a multi-billion business. “Sports tourism is the act of travelling from one locality to another, with the intention of being in some way involved with a sporting activity or event.” (“Sport Tourism Explained: what, why and where”, October 2020). There are many different types of sport events, of various kinds and sizes, which attract tourists and involve them either as active participants or just spectators. Because of that fact, many tourist destinations try to introduce these types of events in their local offer in order to distinguish them and provide authentic more local experiences. Sport tourism is not only watching live an event, as many people believe, it is much more than that. According to the research, there are four main types of sport tourism: Sport Event Tourism, Active Sport Tourism, Nostalgia Sport Tourism and Passive Sport Tourism (Kapur, 2018).

Sports event tourism is the type of tourism, where the focus is on the organization of sporting event, and the size or the importance of these events are not that crucial as the organization and the involvement of people in this process. For example, Olympic Games, bring millions of tourist to the host destination. On the other hand, a school competition, which is a small event and with no big importance at all, comes in the same box. Active Sport Tourism is travelling in order to actively participate in a sport event, or when a sport’s event is the traveler’s focus and the most important part in this experience. It does not matter if someone is an amateur or a professional: they are travelling for the same reason.

Nostalgia Sport Tourism is travelling to visit popular sport places, for examples, visiting sporting hall or museums with sport items or celebrating sport related topics or persons. This type of tourism celebrates the sport past or present of a certain travel destination. Passive Sport Tourism is when people are travelling to watch a certain event as supporters or just in order to cheer as spectators.

According to Travel Mole (2010), “All kinds of sport attract fanatical support, both at the event and at home, and there are both economic and social benefits on a national and regional level from hosting sports events, the visiting sportsmen and women, their support teams and supporters.” Besides the direct benefits from the sport tourism there are other benefits that can be noticed, such as: as increasing employment, new or renovated infrastructure that attract people to come and make a history, accommodation related with active sports and passive sports. Sport tourism is also very connected with experiences that are nowadays the most popular reason for traveling. According to Vandenwyngaert (2020), nowadays people travel in order to search for new and unique experiences. Sport events makes a very consistent and visible impact on the development of any country. Tourism plays a big role in attracting and encouraging people to not visit only the sport event, but also to explore the city and culture. People are willing to connect love for sport and their leisure time in some other city or country. When people are planning to travel where sport is their main aspect, they will also engage in other activities that are offered in certain destination.

Many destinations are already known for their yearly (regular) organizations of a specific sport event that is recognized all over the world. People are willing to return each time or even bring other people with them. “Sport and tourism bring people together in many unimaginable ways and can play a major part as instruments of change”. (Rifai, 2010).

According to The World Tourism Organization, “Sport events of various kinds and sizes attract tourists as participants or spectators and destinations try to add local flavors to them to distinguish themselves and provide authentic local experiences.” Dubrovnik is already recognized as a touristic destination, but unfortunately, the city’s involvement in this type of tourism is dependent on massive tourism and a short seasonality. According to Albers (2020), Mass tourism is destroying destinations. Nevertheless, it should be stated that Dubrovnik with its beautiful nature and pleasant climate definitively has a great potential for improvement in this sector of sport tourism. Dubrovnik as city is authentic with its history and culture. Our food, ingredients and drinks people cannot find in every destination. Building sport tourism in Dubrovnik would be a big step forward for whole city, but also and a country. Dubrovnik would have extended season and additional profit for organizing sport events.

Sport tourism in time of Covid-19

There is no question that whole world has been impacted severely by the consequences of the pandemics COVID 19. Almost every industry is suffering with the crisis because the world all of a sudden stopped, especially ones that are connected with tourism and hospitality industry. People lost their jobs or they are afraid what can expect from tomorrow. Many large and renomated companies need to close their doors because of money loss and bankruptcy. Every day companies counts an increasing amount of lost money, the number just got terrifying. Hotels calculate if is profitable and possible to stay open and safe place for people who are coming. Besides their guests, the hotel administration also needs to protect their employees from being infected. Social distancing also makes a significant problem because of limited movement of people and organizing events. Every wrong step for organization in these times can makes problem for the company, but also for the whole industry in the near future.

Organization of sport events

Organizing any type of the event is very challenging in itself as a process, and organizing sport events poses perhaps most challenges than the organization of other types of events.

The organization of sport event requires long and detailed preparations, so every bigger sport event or with the higher importance start planning year or even more before the event. At the beginning of organizing sport event there are numerous things to do. It is very important to get the valid and appropriate information from legal institutions where someone is planning to organize a sport event, for example, the City of Dubrovnik should give permission for the organization of sport events in the Old City of Dubrovnik. It is significant also to declare event to the sport federation in order to exceed the value. The organizers of sport events need to be aware of all injuries and accidents that may happened during a sport event. In order to be ready for all situations and to avoid all possible consequences that can affect someone's firm, organizers need to be insured. Injuries of participants can cause drastic consequences on organizers and reputation as well. The insurance must cover not only firm name, but also people that are involved in organizing and participating in sport event, such as volunteers and security section.

As technology advances every day, it is expected that this will show also in the organization of these types of events and overall in sport tourism industry. Nowadays, there are specific tools and modern technology aids that have become part of every serious sport event. Specialized equipment is established for different types of sport events that help all attendees to have visible information, situations and to help judges in decision making that is hard to decide and see correctly with human eye. Some organizers do not have all modern equipment that they needed, but they still have an opportunity to organize major sport events that involve a great number of participants. The partnership with some of sport equipment stores can be very useful to them.

Organizers can request from producers the possibility to exchange the equipment that is required for event period of time and thus do the maximum visibility of their brand as their promotion.

According to Event drive (2020), “When organizing a sports event, local communication should not be forgotten.” The place and event cannot be on top level without local people. Organization should include local people in some way, no matter is it organization or the atmosphere.

Organization of sport events during COVID-19

The location of the event is not relevant for the need to plan the events in accordance with the regulations, and, according to Alen (2020) each sport should be analyzed separately, taking into consideration relevant risk factors and the ways to alleviate the conditions (Alen, 2020). At the moment, it is obvious that organizers of sport events cannot find adequate ways to organized sport events that include more participants, and most of regular events are either postponed or cancelled. However, the money for postponed events would never come back. Japan lost 13.4 billion U.S dollars for organizing Olympic Games in 2020 that are postponed for 2021. For now, in Japan for Olympic Games 2021 the only spectators can be Japanese. That is a hardly profitable for the Japan and Tokyo. Postponed and cancelled events are followed by the subsequent loss of individual incomes. In USA, 3 million jobs within 524 occupations are dependent on sport, which is almost 75% of the whole population of Croatia. The number of people that lost an income is dramatic, but the worst thing is that this is not over yet, and these numbers are still increasing every day.

The loss of profit and the new challenges in the organization of the events are not the only problems in the times of COVID 19, since mental and physical health of people are also negatively affected. Fear, anxiety and depression are main consequences of world’s unexpected lockdown. People do not have freedom as before to do their usually activities. Their movement is reduced, the contacts

with people in team sports are forbidden: only professionals are allowed to do sport, but in certain conditions. In the first quarter of 2021, the research shows that some sport events have been organized but without spectators, which have not been profitable for the organizers and have not been appreciated by sportsmen themselves.

Sport events classification

Sport events can be classified according to different criteria. According to Plojović (2010), sport events can be categorized based on the industry of sport (for example swimming, football or basketball, according to the quality of sport (that distinguishes amateur and professional competitions), in relation to the age of participants (for example, children, junior or senior competitions), in relation to the type of sport facility (outdoor or indoor events), according to the typology of sport (individual or team competitions), and according to the geographical mark (school competitions, local competitions, national, regional competitions, continental or world competition).

The purpose of this research paper is to explore how the current situation with COVID-19 affects the sport tourism industry with focus on Dubrovnik. My two main research questions for this research paper are “How did the current pandemics affect the organization of sport events in Dubrovnik?” and “Who organizes sport events in Dubrovnik?” My first hypothesis is “Dubrovnik has not developed sport events programs, what also follows the current situation with Corona”. Next hypothesis is “In Dubrovnik, there is no financial support for sport events. Sport clubs organize and finance by themselves.” I wanted to see if the number of attendees of sport tournaments in Dubrovnik increase? Were there more foreign participants who came in Dubrovnik with the main purpose of doing an active sport? Besides the number of active participants and number of countries that participated on specific tournament, the event duration plays a big role

because of the profit. Tournaments that last for more than one day need to ensure the accommodation, F&B and help participants who are coming with transportation. Professionals who are coming want more time for preparing and resting from the travel, but they would not use their free time as amateurs does. Professionals are more focus on training in sport halls, gyms or pools that are available also in the hotel. Besides that, they have diet plan that is already prepared in agreement in hotel. On the other side, according to researches amateurs who are coming to with main purpose to participate in some type of sport, love to extend their trip in order to see the location, to have some fun there and spend money.

METHOD

In order to find all information that I need, I observe official websites and media content. For media content, newspaper's articles and official websites helped me to find all numbers and information that I needed.

This research compared the number of different sport tournaments in 2019, 2020 and 2021, as the 2019 was a record year in many industries in Croatia and Dubrovnik. The research was aimed to identify who organized the events (amateurs or professionals). I wanted to find out who is the organizer of events, is that City of Dubrovnik or association trying to improve our sport and sport tourism or is there any financial support from the city.

RESULTS

In order to answer my first research question, all sport events that happened in the last two years were identified with exact numbers of attendees and countries that participated. Based on the results, DU Motion was the most significant sport event in Dubrovnik in the past few years. DU Motion in 2019 (10,500 of attendees from 68 countries) had drastically larger number of the second biggest event called Tomo Tournament (768 attendees from 10 countries). (See figure 1) Other 8 sport events did not reach even 250 of attendees, but 3 of them counted attendees from 20 to 38 different countries. (See figure 2) It is an interesting result because there is no large number of attendees, but many countries recognized Dubrovnik sport event possibilities. It is important to mention that all of 10 tournaments were different type of sport. Results show that only water polo (Tomo Tournament) is the one of the main developed sports in Dubrovnik area. Besides water polo, Du Motion had increasingly number of attendees and countries that participated every year, but the current situation with Corona starting in 2020 halt that growth. DU Motion and 6 out of 10 other sport events in 2020 in Dubrovnik was postponed. Dubrovnik and sport events could not find the way to organize most of the events in last year with all epidemiological recommendations and lockdowns for counties all over the world. The only indoor sport event that was held in 2020 was Dubrovnik Senior European Cup (judo) with 136 attendees and 16 countries less than in 2019. Their number of attendees was cut more than half as usually, but it was still success to organized multinational sport event where human contact is needed. Other 2 events that were held in 2020 were outdoors with no human contact, Đuro Kolić (swimming marathon) was held only for local Dubrovnik people with reduced number of attendees for more than half. Rowling tournament was held only for people in Croatia but the information about this tournament was not made public and it was not possible to find the exact data about the event.

Most of the sport events were outdoor (6 out of 10) and it was a lower risk of spreading a virus in the outside area, still organizers could not reach that level of preparation for events in the time of Corona virus. Indoor events that were in minority (4 out of 10 are indoors) were extremely hard to organize in certain conditions because most of them demanded human contact and masks for health security. Many people wanted to avoid mask and the possibility of being infected.

One of the questions aimed to find out if the events were organized for amateurs or professionals. Professionals (7 out of 10 sport events) are ones who are paid to play sport and active participate in tournaments. Amateurs are willing to stay longer in specific destination where event is held and they are willing to connect sport with many other activities on their trip. Amateurs event in Dubrovnik area are in minority (3 out of 10 sport events).

When it comes to second research question, it seems that results do not support my second hypothesis. Surprisingly, sport clubs that were organized and had financial support from the City of Dubrovnik (6 out 10 sport events). It is clear that in a small city such as Dubrovnik, financial support is needed from the local authorities in the City of Dubrovnik in order to ensure that more significant sport events are organized. Unfortunately, there are still sport clubs that organized sport events by they own, with no financial or other support from the city (2 out of 10 sport events). It is expected that event with no financial or other support will not be recognized on national neither world level. There are also kind of associations that organized most of amateur sport events (2 out 10 sport events), but it depends on financial stability and recognition itself how they would success. It is a big risk for association to organize sport event because of recognition.

When it comes to my second research question, "Who organizes sport events in Dubrovnik?" results were very surprising and my second hypothesis was not supported. In contrast, more than half (6 out of 10) of sport events that I investigated were organized by sport clubs with the financial

support of City of Dubrovnik. It turns that City of Dubrovnik is willing to help and support most of the sport events in Dubrovnik city in order to attract specific type of sport people.

Discussion

The conducted research has proven that sport tourism in Dubrovnik is still not developed enough despite the potential, cultural heritage, good climate and the fact that the town is already recognized as a famous tourist destination. Unfortunately, Dubrovnik has a short touristic season and many local people work in this sector and depend from it. Developing sport tourism in Dubrovnik, Dubrovnik would not have to focus only summer season, but the season would be prolonged. Besides that, that could be an opportunity for developing the city and it would open new jobs for local people. Dubrovnik is a small city with not so many inhabitants. Young people moved to another city or country because they cannot find the job that is not seasonality in this region. The secondary research has shown that amateur sport events can also be very profitable. Umag, city in Croatia with 14,000 citizens, successfully built strategy about development of sport in Umag that leads to development for the whole city. According to Udruga Gradova, Umag was candidate for the best European city of sports in 2018. Umag has organized Sport festival that combines sport and tourism. Sport festival in Umag is the only sport festival in this region. Amateurs who are coming are willing to stay longer in the city and most of them are coming with the family. The example of Du Motion proves that the organization of such an event in the town can be beneficial for the local community and the overall image of the town. The number of attendees was increasing every year; in 2019, Du Motion counted 10,500 attendees from 63 countries that is the biggest sport_event in Dubrovnik. There need to be more events like that here, people are willing to come and combine the sport and travel in the same time.

The most important and interesting fact that was revealed in the research shows that even though the City of Dubrovnik does support financially six out of ten events organized in the town, the most successful event that had the highest number of participants and spectators is not sponsored by the City authorities. This shows that there are possibilities to organize other sport events like Du Motion which could be beneficial for the town, and that the most important thing in the organization of the sport events is not only if the town sponsors the event but if it provides help and support in the organization of the event itself, alleviating the process of the organization.

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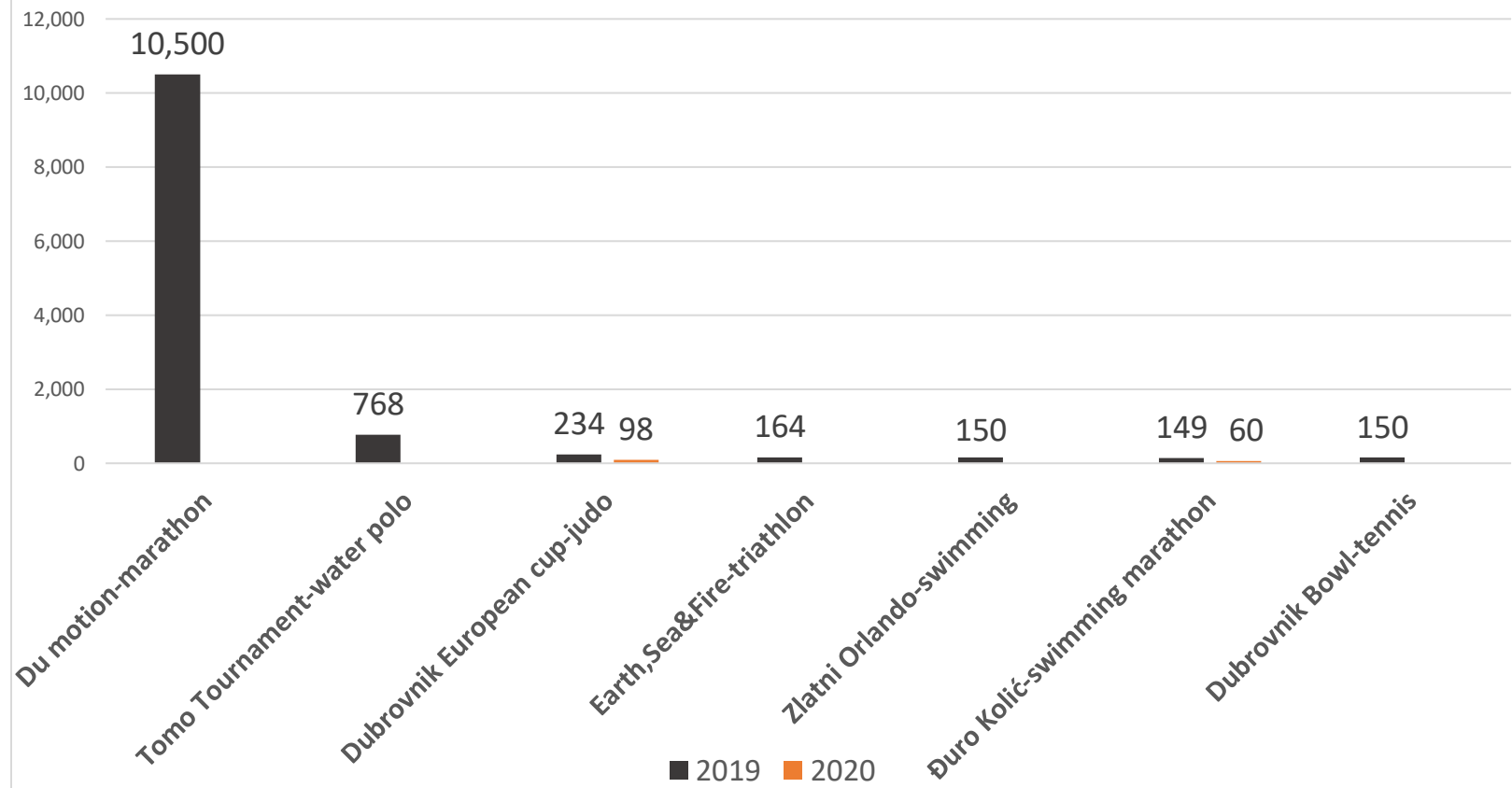
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Appendix 1

Source: The author of the paper

Sport Tournaments in Dubrovnik and number of attendees



Appendix 2

