



## The importance of sports events in the development and attractiveness of the tourist destination Split

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### Abstract

*Tourism destinations offer different elements of tourism that attract visitors and generate revenue for different tourism stakeholders. Events play a significant role in motivating visitors to choose the destination. The paper looks closer at the connection between organizing sporting events and the number of visitors to the destination. Findings from other relevant literature are presented related to primary and small-scale events and the destination image. Adequate destination management is essential, with which sports events can be strategically planned and conducted so they can result in an increased number of visitors and increased revenue for different tourism businesses. The aim of the work is to show the importance of the events for the city of Split. As part of paper, there is overview of sports events in Split. The overview of collected data can be helpful for tourist boards so they can create a positive destination image and diversify tourism offers in the destination.*

**Keywords:** sports events, event management, destination management, destination image, Split

### 1. Introduction

Tourism destinations have multiple factors that motivate customers to visit, such as vacation that includes sun, sea, cultural, sports, nautical, and other types of specialized tourism offer or business purposes, family motives, and similar. The paper examines whether adequate offer of events can improve destination attractiveness and development. The emphasis is on sports events and their meaning for destination.


Tourism destinations compete to offer experiences and high-quality service, and events can create added value for tourists (van Niekerk, 2017, based on Roxas & Chadee, 2013). The event portfolio for a tourism destination should be created in a way that makes the destination brand and attracts visitors to the destination (van Niekerk, 2017). Destination branding is a term that includes different marketing activities that help to identify and differentiate destinations, create experiences and meet expectations, and reinforce the emotional connection between the tourist and destination – all these activities create a destination image that can positively influence tourists to choose the destination (Blain et al., 2005).

Previous studies showed that sports events can be helpful destination marketing tools and encourage destination branding (Jeong & Kim, 2019, based on Chi & Qu, 2008). Sports events provide a destination with different opportunities, such as improving its image, advertising local products to global and domestic audiences, boosting local patriotism, creating jobs, and developing sports infrastructure (Jeong & Kim, 2019, based on Kaplanidou, 2012; Kim et al., 2014).

Sports tourism is a rapidly growing industry, and sports events drive tourism-related growth in a destination (Morgan et al., 2021, based on Cheung et al., 2017). Based on a paper published by Jeong and Kim (2019), small-scale and large-scale sports events should be perceived as essential elements of marketing strategy that can improve quality, image, value, satisfaction, and loyalty to the destination.

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Sports events should have professional management that fits well with the image of the destination (Getz & Fairley, 2004, p.136). Individual events can have a great impact on the image of a destination, even more so if promotion is used appropriately (Brown et al., 2002, p. 173). The image of the destination can be analysed from two aspects: projected and perceived image (Andreu et al., 2000, p. 48). The image of the destination occupies six domains: contents and attractiveness, access to culture, environment, natural and cultural resources, safety, hospitality, sports, and food (Im et al., 2012, p. 391).

All these findings make a good case for the active use of sports and other events to attract more visitors to a destination. The paper will further present importance of sports events for a destination and its image and current availability of sports destination in city of Split.

## 2. Literature review

Organizing events and manifestations dates back to ancient times, when attending various festivities, such as the Olympic Games, was a typical leisure time. In recent times, the phenomenon mentioned above has gained momentum with the increase in free time, increase in income, and increase in the number of retirees. All of the above has resulted in increased demand and the offer of events on the market.

The paper defines key terms such as manifestations and event tourism. Manifestations or events are according to Bladen et al. (2012), "contemporary and purposeful gatherings of people". For Getz (2008), they represent "a one-off or rare event outside the usual program or activities of the sponsoring or organizing body" and "an opportunity for an experience outside the normal range of choice or outside everyday experience". The definition of Shone and Perri (2004) is "non-routine occasions that have separate free, cultural, personal or organizational goals from the normal activities of everyday life, the purpose of which is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or provoke the experience of a group of people". According to Allen, O'Toole et al. (2008), manifestation refers to specific rituals, presentations, performances, or celebrations that are consciously planned and created to mark special events or achieve specific social, cultural, or corporate goals.

Tourism and sport are two interconnected activities. Sports tourism is one of the critical drivers for tourism development as it can also deal with seasonality issues of the destination and diversify tourism offers (Jakšić-Stojanović et al., 2019). Sports tourism is a type of tourism that offers active or passive experiences where the passive experience is the spectator who is a visitor to a destination. The active one is a sports competitor (Morgan et al., 2021). Sports events can contribute to a destination's brand and image by increasing visitor numbers and having media coverage of the event and destination itself (Morgan et al., 2021). Additionally, they can generate income from tourists and encourage growth for the local economy and businesses (Morgan et al., 2021).

Sports tourism is a rapidly growing global industry, and sports events drive tourism growth in a destination (Morgan et al., 2021, based on Cheung et al., 2017). Both small- and large-scale sports events can generate a better-perceived image for the destination and help with destination branding (Morgan et al., 2021). Sports events are an essential part of destination branding and promotion. This means sports events should have proper event management following the destination image (Jurišić, 2018, based on Getz & Fairley, 2004).

Looking into reasons why a visitor would come to a destination hosting sports events, the reasons can be experiencing positive outcomes such as sport, escape, unwinding, socialising with other visitors, exploration, and prestige but in same time experience what a destination has to offer such as natural heritage and activities not related to a sports event (Chen & Funk, 2010). In most cases visitors that come for sports events or activities need a special natural environment and geographic conditions which are generator for visit on their own, but events can contribute too as they can be main motivator for a visitor (Hallmann, Zehrer, Muller, 2015). Attributes of a sports event as well as its benefits for visitors are positively connected with participants event attitude which relates to event loyalty, destination image, and destination loyalty (An & Yamashita, 2022). Sports events can be one of influencers on the process of re branding of a destination and this can change the perceived image of destination (Bazzanella et al., 2023).

According to Allen et al. (2008), before organizing an event, it is necessary to assess the environmental effects that it could produce because a large number of factors should be kept in mind when planning an event, the most important of which is the venue. Suppose the manifestation is held in an adequate place such as a stadium, sports field, or entertainment center. In that case, the adverse effects will undoubtedly be minor, but they can be much greater if the manifestation is held in public places unsuitable for manifestations - in a park, on the town square, or the street. On the other hand, destination management is the way to improve conditions in the destination and work towards sustainable tourism in the destination while making it more competitive and maximizing tourist experience (Fyall & Garrod, 2020).

When event management is looked into in more detail. Usually, the most important thing when the event is being researched is the economic impacts and benefits of an individual event (Backman, 2017). Among other things, necessary event research and planning elements are looking into visitor motivation to come to an event and their satisfaction with quality, event loyalty, and the connection between value and satisfaction (Backman, 2017). The questions connected to

event planning are security at different events, how to increase visitor experience, how to use technology and social media to advertise and promote the event, and finally, how to make events more sustainable (Backman, 2017). Regarding tourism and event planning, events are an essential part of tourism offer of the destination, where a visitor can decide on their desired destination based on what is offered from the events and plan their visit based on what is happening in the destination (Backman, 2017 based on Getz, 2013).

Destination marketers use hosting sports events to strengthen destination image and differentiate its tourism offer (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007 based on Chalip & Green, 2001; Chalip et al., 2003; Dimanche, 2003; Jago et al., 2003; Chalip & McGuirty, 2004). Local communities perceive sports events as an effective marketing tool that can significantly contribute to the destinations future success in terms of generating awareness, improving destination image and further developing tourism businesses to generate future inbound travel (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007 based on Dimanche, 2003). Sports events are recognized as integral components within a destination's offered activities and attractions that cater to both emerging and established segments of the sports consumer market (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007 based on Dimanche, 2003).

Based on research of Tsekouropoulos, Gkouna, Theocharis and Gounas (2022) it can be visible that sports events have greater impact on the promotion of the specific area in regard to the financial and social benefits. Sports events affect the attractiveness of the destination at the tourism level and can positively influence economic and social aspects of locals (Tsekouropoulos, 2022).

When discussing sports events, it is essential to mention that there are different sizes and levels of event organization (local, regional, national, international, and global). They can be professional or amateur competitions, and most often, they are world championships, national championships, and cups. Allen et al. (2008) emphasize that events of a sporting nature have a remarkable potential to attract visitors and generate media coverage. In addition to achieving benefits for the destination where they are held and its organizers, they primarily reflect on the participants and spectators in providing an entertaining and often educational experience.

According to Jeong and Kim (2019), who presented available information from Aicher et al. (2015), sports spectators have several motives for visiting a sports event, which includes a sense of accomplishment, positive stress, escape, entertainment, economic gain, group affiliations, and family motives.

From all these motives, entertainment is vital in sports events because they want to see the team or sports person, they support to win the event and cheer for their country in different destinations (Jeong & Kim, 2019).

## **2. Methodology**

The paper looks into academic papers and research related to events and sports events in a destination and how different events in sports attract visitors. The analysis for this paper is based on secondary data. The search criteria for selected papers were papers containing information relevant to this paper. Selected papers written about the active use of sports events in destination and how it changes destination image and perceived value in the eyes of the customer. This paper shows the practice that can be implemented for a tourism destination in Split, Croatia, by looking into available papers. On the other hand, the paper presents secondary data collected from Tourist Board Split on various events and event planning in the destination to showcase up-to-date work on event management.

### **2.1. Case study of destination – Split, Croatia**

This part of the paper looks into a more detailed list of events emphasizing sports events and numbers of tourism arrivals and stays in destination Split, Croatia, from 2018 to 2023. All events marked with an "X" took place, and the black box means no event was held. Based on information from Tourist Board Split, events which didn't take place had different reasons for it - some are just discontinued in last few years, and some are didn't happen only during COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. and in 2021 which were a challenge for anyone in the event industry. For more reasons on why event did not happen, the event organiser could provide more details, but the paper will not research this at this point. The table has events Split Tourist Board has in their database so there is a possibility not all sports events are listed.

Table 1 shows the city of Split has a fair number of sports events. However, these events need to be promoted more strongly because they need clear promotion. Split is recognised for many outstanding sports results by teams and individuals, but this is not necessarily the case with the sports events taking place in Split. Although the city of Split has the image of a sports city, additional efforts are necessary to ensure that events are even more recognizable and if possible, there are even more events related to sports. Increase of sports events doesn't necessarily needs to be something connected directly with tourist board and destination, but on destination level organisers of sports events, necessary funding and infrastructure should be supported by tourist board and destination. Other events cover cultural, historical, and gastronomical heritage but are not listed in the paper.

Table 1. List of sports events in tourism destination Split 2018-2023.

Name of event	Year					
	2018.	2019.	2020.	2021.	2022.	2023.
Split Marathon	x	x	x	x	x	x
Youth Sports Games	x	x	x	x	x	x
Split Open - Brazilian Jiu Jitsu	x					
Dalmatinsko kup - International Children football tournament	x	x	x	x	x	x
International rowing regatta St. Duje: Oxford - Cambridge - Split	x	x		x	x	x
Adria Rugby Oldies Festival - International veteran tournament	x	x			x	
Goalkeeper war - International goalkeeper football tournament	x	x		x		
Marjan Trail Race	x	x		x	x	x
Split Chess Open - International chess tournament	x	x		x	x	x
Croatia MMA Challenge	x					
Croatian Championship for youth in Thai boxing	x	x				
Split 1700 - traditional sailing regatta for the Optimist class	x	x		x	x	x
International football tournament "Prvi koraci"	x	x	x	x	x	x
International cup St. Duje - sport fishing	x	x				
St. Duje Tournament for deaf and Christmas Tournament for deaf	x	x	x	x	x	x
Split Open - ATP Challenger Tour			x	x	x	x
Davis Cup 2023 - Finals Group D in Split						x
Marjanski djir - open championship	x	x		x	x	x
Split and (CUP) Croatia in the Olympic triathlon						
International volleyball tournament "Split Open"	x	x			x	x
EURO - Rugby klub Nada	x					
Kickboxing Summer Camp	x	x	x	x	x	x
Mrdujska regata - Sailing festival in Split (JK Labud)	x	x		x	x	x
Split bicycle race	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sambo Club World Cadet Championship Pit Bull	x					
Futsal tournament	x	x		x	x	
Christmas Regatta Krstaša - JK Zenta	x	x		x	x	x
International camp of handball goalkeepers		x				
Race for the Cure Split	x	x		x	x	x
HEP tournament of European champions for juniors - basketball (European Champions Youth Tournament Split)	x	x				
International kennel event - 4 summer night dog shows	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dota Pit Season 5 LAN Finale		x				
Regional eSports gaming competition	x					
European University Futsal Championship						x
Split Glow Run	x	x	x	x	x	x
B2B Run Split	x	x			x	x
Nordic Walking SplitFest 2023 (1st Festival of Nordic Walking and Hiking)						x
Startup Europe Regatta		x	x	x	x	x
European water polo championship in Split					x	x

Source: Split Tourist Bord

Table 2. Number of tourism arrivals and overnight stays in tourism destination Split, 2018-2022

Year/ Month	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	Arrivals	Nights	Arrivals	Nights	Arrivals	Nights	Arrivals	Nights	Arrivals	Nights
1	10.625	32.500	8.819	29.357	10.663	33.117	3.991	19.512	8.364	34.998
2	10.624	27.955	13.401	33.944	14.091	36.537	5.521	20.375	14.777	46.044
3	22.917	53.730	22.495	54.609	5.927	27.974	6.588	26.596	18.094	61.312
4	45.681	113.752	59.884	156.657	409	13.325	8.639	33.451	40.175	137.411
5	84.984	218.263	92.263	238.409	1.967	13.751	15.933	55.546	65.184	207.609
6	118.943	324.284	133.331	374.005	12.995	45.100	35.640	125.913	105.993	350.792
7	182.065	613.834	194.011	647.514	55.680	239.156	118.073	442.225	174.627	623.772
8	184.122	630.850	196.477	674.440	72.291	329.461	152.287	594.534	176.534	665.345
9	115.640	324.094	122.948	347.327	17.306	69.736	81.292	281.583	106.609	352.734
10	59.975	157.640	69.927	186.558	8.258	35.179	36.981	124.219	54.645	178.327
11	16.951	43.247	19.148	46.788	5.035	26.937	13.428	47.430	19.017	66.109
12	14.595	37.711	17.856	44.108	4.329	22.779	11.282	39.692	17.424	58.054
<b>Total</b>	<b>867.122</b>	<b>2.577.860</b>	<b>950.560</b>	<b>2.833.716</b>	<b>208.951</b>	<b>893.052</b>	<b>489.655</b>	<b>1.811.076</b>	<b>801.443</b>	<b>2.782.507</b>

Source: Split Tourist Board

Table two shows the number of arrivals and overnight stays per month in the city of Split, which aims to show overview and dynamic of tourism arrivals. It is important to emphasise that the biggest number of tourism arrivals without any connection to an event happens in peak tourism season (May-September). As the sports events usually take place in warmer part of the year it makes sense events that took place happened also while there were more tourists in the destination. Again, there is obvious decrease of arrivals and stay in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, not related to a destination or sports events, when there was reduced number of visitor and lack of sports events or any other event. Having a sports event in a destination certainly creates added value for the destination and encourages visitors related to a specific sports event to visit the destination as a participant of event or as a spectator.

### 3. Conclusion

Organisation of events in a tourist destination generate a higher number of arrivals, higher expenditure by tourists, employment of the local community, and other similar benefits. Due to the seasonal nature of tourism, tourist destinations become crowded with tourists if the number of events increases in the middle of the peak season. Many destinations have found themselves under enormous pressure to make their tourism offer as attractive as possible with events because they need more time to prepare for events. The work highlights the possibilities of improving the manifestations and event industry. Organising more manifestations in the pre-season is necessary to reduce the pressure in the summer months. In this paper, the characteristics and types of manifestations are not analysed. However, the aim is to highlight the broader picture of Split as a tourist destination. The coverage of manifestations and events is gaining an increasing role and significance for tourism development. Split abounds in various manifestations, from musical, historical, food and beverage manifestations, sports, and similar. The city of Split has potential to be perceived as a city for sports and other events, and it is necessary to highlight the manifestations and events by additional investment in their promotion and development. A sports event can be additional promotional tool for the destination – in this case Split. As Split is already recognised as city which is a hometown of many prime sportsmen, the suggestion to promote its available sports events communicating the fact there is a lot of variety to sports events held and strengthen the destination image in terms of visitor perceiving Split not only as an outstanding tourism destination but also as a destination where there is a possibility of actively or passively participate in sports events. Also, the tourist perspective needs to be analysed more, and if there is a need for more events, in what context should they be improved. The sports events and manifestations will draw certain cultural, social, and economic benefit to any city, and this is the case for city of Split too. Having sports events in a destination will always be potential motivator for a visit and attract the attention of locals and tourists.

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