

Past, Present and Future Perspective of Sport Tourism in Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the largest industries of the global economy. It produces more than \$500 billion yearly and it is estimated that by 2011 it will have summated 10% of the global GDP (gross domestic product). More and more national economies are relying on the visiting tourist. Cyprus is one of the countries with a high degree of dependence. Mass tourism has been the driving force behind the economic development and prosperity enjoyed on the island. Although tourism has helped the economy of the country overcome difficult periods, the development of the industry today is being challenged. The mono-lateral development of the touristic product, the rivalry originating from other destinations, the dependence on tour operators, and seasonality made the country devise a strategic plan for the development of tourism. Sustainable development can be reached through the development of special-interest products; sport tourism is included in these as mentioned in the plan conducted by the CTO (Cyprus Sport Organization). In the first part of the paper the author attempts to provide an insight regarding the implications embedded in defining the phenomenon of sport tourism. In the second part, the potential and the need for the development of sport tourism is presented, especially after the incidents happening after 2001, namely terrorist attacks, natural disasters etc., in the international scene and specifically in Cyprus. In the third part, the author provides information regarding past and present tendencies and occurrences in the tourism sector in Cyprus and future prospects of sport tourism.

KEYWORDS

Cyprus Tourism Organization, tourism challenges, tourism development, sport tourism

Introduction

It is a fact that we are living in a world in which the prevalent value is money. Not because it is of more vital importance than health, family, education and so forth, but because we as humans through our lifestyles treat it as such. It is quite sorrowful that the human species has become so materialistic; yet, sometimes in the projected eagerness to produce profit, additional consequences providing so much more than mere profit also emerge. Profit can be derived if the product is successful, that is if the commodity attributes are appealing in a way to the demand side. Sport tourism has the capacity to provide attractions from a sporting and tourism perspective, making the nature of the experience unique: an experience of physical activity tied to a cultural experience of place. (Standeven, De knop 1999) Such reaction, although its existence dates as far back as the ancient Greek Olympics, is the phenomenon of sport tourism. In our world, sport is one of the largest social

phenomena, while tourism is the largest industry; recognizing the potential capacities of sport and tourism, it was just evident that these two would eventually be married, and would form an industrial couple that may someday become greater than the sum of its parts. The relationship between the two social sectors is far older than the attempts of binding them together from a scholarly aspect; and it was not until the 1970s that the common use of the term sport tourism started, in attempts for this special form of human travelling to be described (www.sport-tourism.com).

Travelling in order to participate in sport is not a phenomenon that has only made its appearance in recent years. Services in order to attract tourists were developed as early as the ancient Greek Olympics, as for other sporting festivals, namely the Pythian Games, the Isthmian Games, and the Nemean Games. Historical records refer to tens of thousands of visitors, not merely participants. Thus the development of services such as food, drinks, souvenirs, guided tours, and transport made their appearance earlier than one would think, not only at the venue but also on the roadways. Thus, making one of the constraints of travelling of that time seems easier (Zauhar 2003). Although this type of tourist attraction has existed for more than a millennium, it was not until recent years that attention was paid to the true potential of such a trend.

Cyprus may have been one of the countries in more need of the development of such special-interest products, since the country's tourism movement is suffering from seasonality, dependence on tour operators, mono-lateral development of the touristic product, and "not enough things for tourists to see and do", as is mentioned in the strategic plan of the Cyprus Tourism Organization (2000). The aim of this paper is to discover the position of sport tourism in national tourism and discover the reasons undermining its development.

Methods

In order to collect relevant information, two methods were used. Primarily in-depth interviews with people in key positions in the tourism sector in Cyprus, as well as in the Cyprus Sport Organization (CSO) and in major sporting federations were conducted. The questions in the interviews were in connection to the manner in which sport tourism is treated in Cyprus, the position of sport tourism in the national tourism sector, and the realization of sport tourism as a future prospect as a tourism direction.

Secondly, in order to establish and evaluate the information collected, documents published by the CSO and CTO were analyzed. These were documents in which the realization of the strategic plan for tourism development was evaluated, decisions related to sport tourism directions were described and reports referring to the present circumstances of the sport tourism improvements and developments were contained.

Sport Tourism= Sport +Tourism

Today sport tourism has become more prominent than ever before. Nevertheless, when attempts are made to establish a widely accepted notion of this form of travelling, there must firstly be an understanding of the sectors interacting in this phenomenon, and of what they encompass, that is tourism and sport. There is neither a definition of sport which is commonly used by all scientific disciplines, nor a common understanding of what is implied when referring to sport. Do we refer to sport only when it is held in an organized form with a fixed set of rules? Is sport restricted to competitive activities? What are the purposes of sporting engagement? Is it related to health or business? Alternatively, does sport include non-competitive, more freely-organized physical activities?

The same can be stated about tourism: what do we mean when we refer to a tourist? How long must they be away from home? How long must they travel? What is the purpose of their travel? Is professional or business travel included in tourism activity? Furthermore, much of the existing body of work in the field demonstrates a biased focus on either sport studies or tourism studies, evidently not bridging the artificial academic gap between the two disciplines. Taking the above-mentioned difficulties into consideration when defining sport tourism, one might ask how to refer to this form of tourism, “sport tourism” or “sports tourism” perhaps? What does sport-related tourism incorporate? Is it sport tourism, tourism sport, spectators attending hallmark events such as the Olympic Games, or does it refer to active participation in sport by individuals on vacation? Where does visiting sport-related attractions, such as halls of fame or a famous stadium, fit in? (Gibson 1998). “Sport tourism finds itself in a constitution phase of its true identity—the absence of globalized information of sport tourism is an obstacle in the analysis of this phenomenon and its delimitation” (Pigeasson 1997, p. 29).

According to Standeven and De knop, Sport Tourism is defined as all the forms of passive and active participation in sporting activities, participated in a casual or organized way, which are organized for business or non-business purposes which require the participant to travel (Standeven, De knop, p. 12).

An approach capturing the distinctive and synergetic aspects of the sport tourism phenomenon is the following, which incorporates three domains of this form of human travelling: (1) actively participating, (2) spectating, and (3) visiting (Neirotti 2005). Similarly Gibson (1998) labels the three categories as a) Active Sport Tourism, b) Event Sport Tourism, c) Nostalgia Sport Tourism. The first, respectively, refers to actively participating in a given sport, the second to spectatorship of an event, and the third to visiting and perhaps paying homage. Likewise Gammon and Robinson (1997) classify sport tourists as either “hard” or “soft”, a “hard” tourist being a person who travels with the intention of actively or passively participating in competitive sport, thus making sport the prime motivation for travel. A “soft” sport tourist meanwhile is someone participating in sport in a recreational manner. Consequently sport tourists are people travelling with the pursuit of involvement in a sporting activity, but also people participating in sport in a more casual manner while on vacation either actively or passively. It is not just a professional’s right to say he or she is physically active, but also that of an individual, in the context that sport is not his primary occupation or pursuit but a secondary or leisure activity. Accordingly, an appropriate definition of sport tourism can be the following: “leisure-based travel that takes individuals temporarily outside of their home communities to participate in physical activities, to watch physical activities, or to venerate attractions associated with physical activities” (Gibson 1998, p. 49). Elsewhere sport tourism is presented as a subset of overall tourism encircling contributing categories such as adventure tourism, health tourism, competitive tourism, recreational tourism, educational tourism, and business tourism (Neirotti 2003).



Tourism is being challenged

The inclining course of tourism was rumbled in September 2001¹; A key date for human history, in which the tourist movement throughout the world suffered a blow as well, entering a period of crisis with effects lasting to this day, reinforced by the subsequent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, the revival of the crisis in the Middle East, the outbreak of bird flu and the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London. Evidently, these are times that require the adjustment of the tourism strategy to such unpredictable conditions, that realize the importance of the subsets of tourism, that are based on individual passions, commitment or hobby, such as sport and adventure tourism (Foldesi 2004). Proof that sport tourism is an important sector of tourism is the fact that after "nine eleven" and the crisis that followed in the tourism industry, the sport tourism movement remained at the same levels in comparison with traditional tourism and professional tourism, especially family trips related to sport competitions for children and young people (Neirotti 2005). The contribution of sport tourism to a country's economy has a share of 1-2% in the gross national product, whilst the share of tourism is around 4-5%. Furthermore the annual growth rate of the sport tourism industry is estimated at around 10% (Hudson 2003). Understanding the effects of such a tourism trend and the significance tourism has for the island of Cyprus, it is thus evident that the issues included are of a great importance, affecting all the sectors of social living.

The Past

Touristic growth in Cyprus has been something of a natural choice, given the country's position at the crossroads of three continents, all the pledges for a successful touristic development and the diversity the island demonstrates over such a small geographic area. Tourism was the lifeboat for

¹ The September 11, 2001 attacks often referred to as 9/11—pronounced "nine eleven"—consisted of a series of coordinated terrorist suicide attacks by Islamic extremists on the United States on September 11, 2001. The victims were predominantly civilians.

the island's economy and more generally for its prosperity after the Turkish invasion in 1974, exhibiting a 700% annual increase in arrivals between 1976 and 1989. Its achievements were overcoming the country's post-invasion economic status, ensuring full employment on the island, being the dominant source of occupation, and setting the country third among all Mediterranean countries as far as per capital income is concerned. According to the modernization theory², economic growth and development are synonymous, with the former motivating the latter; in the case of Cyprus, the driving force behind the economic growth is tourism, and evidently the economic status reached by Cyprus today is directly related to the growth of mass tourism (Sharpley 2003). Having survived that challenge, the development of tourism faces problems today created due to policies pursued in the past. Cyprus, as an island destination, mainly invested in luring sun-and-sea clientele; this led to the formation of a one-dimensional product. It was the right choice for the 1980s, but today has set the country as one of many competing destinations. Having nothing unique to offer has decreased its competitive faculties in the field. Moreover, Cyprus has to contend with the rising rivalry originating from other Mediterranean countries. This is mainly an issue not of quality of the touristic product, but rather of the costs of fares and tourist packages, which are increasingly becoming influencing factors as time passes. The rivalry conditions are leading Cyprus towards a new direction as far as tourism development is concerned, aimed at attracting high quality tourism. In its Strategic Plan for Tourism (2000), by 2010 the CTO (Cyprus Tourism Organization) is anticipating that the tourism development will ensure the quality of the tourism experience, of the environment and of the native population's quality of life. The development of special tourism products can be capitalised on in the attempt to reposition Cyprus on the tourism map. The CTO has started developing such special forms of tourism, one of which is sport tourism.

Present

Although sport tourism is a newly-introduced trend on the tourist market, it is characterized by fierce competition due to its developmental potential. According to the conclusions at the World Conference for Sport Tourism held by the World Tourism Organization and the International Olympic Committee in 2001 in Barcelona, it is expected that sport tourism will exhibit one of the most important growth rates, as the share of all forms of sport tourism in the overall tourism market is estimated to be 32% according to the Sports Tourism International Council. The CTO, in order to access the position of its competitive faculties in the field, elaborated a SWOT analysis. The conclusions drawn by the research are listed briefly: 1) Cyprus is in an advantageous position due to the high quality of its sport infrastructure as well as owing to the excellent weather conditions, the high-quality hotel infrastructure and tourism services; 2) In comparison to other rival destinations, Cyprus is in a disadvantageous position mainly due to the cost of the tickets and the cost of staying, as well as the absence of direct flights from northern countries, which constitute an important source of sport tourism; 3) The integration of Cyprus in the EU was regarded as a possible way of overcoming the problem it faced with the high costs of the tickets due to the liberation of flights; 4) The main threat was regarded as the rising rivalry of neighbouring countries which is primary an issue of the cost of the touristic product (Development of Sport Tourism, Action Plan 2005-2007). In 2006, the CTO conducted statistical research on sport tourism in Cyprus in order to enable the organization to evaluate the island's position in relation to that of its competitors as well as on the international scene.

² A socio-economic theory, sometimes known as, or as being encompassed within development theories, which highlights the positive role played by the developed world in modernizing and facilitating sustainable development in underdeveloped nations. It is also a part of the wider theme of theories in sociology, known as the socio-cultural evolution.

According to the results, regarding just the four sports that were surveyed, sport tourism contributed more than £16 million to the country's economy in 2006 (Sports Statistics Report 2006). Cyprus in the past few years started developing various sectors of sport tourism, such as football, cycling, track and field etc. The greater portion of the clientele arrives during the period when other tourism movement is at its lowest, that is between October and April. The period of arrival also differs according to the kind of sport as well, for example, for football the period for training and tournaments is between December and March, for cycling it is between October and May, whereas for track and field it is the whole year round. As on the international scene, there are no precise data regarding the number of arrivals of professional athletes or teams to Cyprus for the purpose of preparation, or individuals that choose the country for engaging in a specific sport during their vacation. During 2006, attempts by the CTO were continued in relation to the granting of subsidies for the development and upgrading of sport facilities that are designed for sport tourism activities. Good results were met also by the policy of the organization for approaching tour operators from abroad in order for foreign football teams to select Cyprus as their winter training destination. An increase in the number of international sport competitions that Cyprus hosted was also achieved in 2006; such competitions were: the international rally of Cyprus, the Troodos rally of the Middle East, Balkans swimming competition for youth, the international FIVB challenger Beach Volleyball, the FIBA all-star basketball match, international cycling competitions, golf tournaments and water sports competitions (Annual Report 2006).

Contribution of the Public, Private and Civil Sectors

According to Standeven and De knop in their book *Sport Tourism* (1999), the sector is based on three types of service providers: the public, and the private and voluntary domain. In the case of Cyprus, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Tourism, the CTO and the CSO treat sport tourism from the part of the public domain with the various sport federations. In addition, the local self-governments are also engaged when it comes to developmental strategies, and provision of infrastructures and services. In the private sector, tourism agents, hotel owners, restaurant owners and sporting facility owners are involved. The engagement in this field is directly related to the anticipated profit. Within this margin, individuals, mainly in hotels which are out to serve professional sport, have developed facilities for attracting foreign teams and athletes to Cyprus for preparation purposes, and for recreational and leisure sporting activities. Regarding the voluntary domain, here people that provide services, mainly during sport events, can be included, predominantly members of the various sport federations. From a political aspect, in this sector Cyprus is still developing, since sport tourism as an alternative form of tourism has only been introduced in the past few years.

Future Prospects

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has forecast two significant travel trends as the dominant ones of the tourism market in the decade 2000-2010. Mass marketing is giving way to one-to-one marketing, with travel being tailored to the interests of the individual consumer. A growing number of visitors are becoming special-interest travellers who rank sport as one of the top 10 reasons for travelling. Sport tourism is an infant maturing vigorously due to the demands of the individuals engaging in such activities, seeking experiences that cannot be met in their home environments. This may sound a little different from the couch potato society usually cited to characterise the youth population. The technologically-advanced society that has the world in its hands at the touch of a button, might use this technological advancement to work for the benefit of sport. Can the worldwide addiction to video games work in favour of sport? Can a strong enough experience be created that it

would motivate a journey? Nostalgia sport tourism is one of the major reasons for engaging in travel in order to consume sport. Nostalgia sport tourism can be further distinguished according to reasons, attractions are luring tourists. They can be recognized as follows:

- a) The event, with the interest lying in the desire to be engaged in some form with a famous event,
- b) The stadia/facilities, where the aspiration is to experience a famous or meaningful sporting location or the opportunity to train at the same facility as the professionals, c) The team/club, usually connected with the fan of a famous team,
- d) The players/coaches – the reasons revolving around famous individuals
- e) The sport – the interest is aroused by the interest in the sport in its whole (Fairley, Gammon, 2005).

Can virtual reality cause such a strong connection in order for the those experiencing it to be motivated to visit the actual site, or does virtual reality, as Kurtzman and Zauhar state, demonstrate the possibilities of sport tourism, as the games of today will be realities of tomorrow for sports enjoyment, satisfaction and fulfilment? (as found in Kurtzman, Zauhar 2006).

Conclusion

The attempts made by the CTO are sustained and well-programmed following the guidelines set up by the Strategic Plan for Tourism. The establishment of an organization should be accomplished so that the various sectors engaging in sport tourism will be coordinated and so that the country's projection abroad will be thorough, and thus the selection of the country as a destination will not be hindered due to lack of information given by the country itself. Cyprus should be specialized regarding the sport tourism products it produces so that it would be easier to be established on the tourist map and for future travellers to associate the country with a sector. Senior authorities in Cyprus have recognized the importance of developing sport tourism. Although the Strategic Plan has been in place since 2000, sustainable development in the tourism movement in Cyprus has not yet taken hold. Sport tourism, if developed properly, is a good route to tackle the problems met by the island as a destination. It is stated in the strategic plan that the organization is aiming to attract new clientele, but in order to have sustainable development, it is also wise to ensure that the old clientele or those who already have visited the island have the impulse to revisit. A good possibility would be if guidelines were given to accommodation resorts so that sport tourism could be introduced or be provided as an opportunity to the existing market, which may also be regarded as a way of free advertisement or an intrinsic informational network.

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