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MANAGING SPORTS EXPERIENCES IN THE CONTEXT OF TOURISM

Marko Peric¹

Abstract

Participation in sports activities combined with unique sports resources can provide people with extraordinary experiences. It is especially true for tourism where sports activities are an important content of stay. The aim of this paper is to analyse how sports experiences could be planned and managed for the tourism purposes from the aspect of sports facility managers. In addition, the interrelations within the four realms of an experience were analysed and supported by proposed management models and examples. Results of the analysis indicate that it is possible for a facility to provide a full spectrum of experiences but only if it meets the standards of professional sports. Recommendations suggested by the paper provide new insight on organising the sports offer in the destination, and can be used by sports facility managers in order to better serve sports and sports tourism needs.

Keywords: tourism, sport, experience, management models.

Jel Classification: L83

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades there has been a kind of revolution in the perception of experiences and their market value. Modern consumers are getting more and more experienced and more demanding while in a continuing search for a wide range of experiences. But more importantly, they are willing to pay for it. The economic supply recognised this trend and put the actual focus of scientific activities on experiences (Bille 2012; Chang and Horng 2008; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Knutson and Beck 2004; O'Sullivan and Spangler 1998; Pine and Gilmore 1998, 1999; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Schmitt 1999; Schulze 1995). What's more, the concept of experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998, 1999) has gone beyond its boundaries and nowadays it could be related to many fields: retailing (Grewal, Levy, and Kumar 2009), branding (Atwal and Williams 2009; Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009),

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entertainment and arts (Petkus 2004), architecture and urban planning (Howell 2005; Lorentzen 2009), and other fields. However, its highly individualised approach is perhaps best expressed in tourism and hospitality, and tourism is surely one of the pioneer examples of the experience economy (Quan and Wang 2004). Getz (2008) even said that it is now almost a cliché to say that tourism and hospitality are key players in the experience economy.

When it comes to experiences and tourism, active or passive participation in sports can provide tourists with extraordinary adventures and experiences. Sports in general and sports tourism in particular pose new challenges for all levels of management in the destination. Sports and tourism managers are faced with the need to create new sports products, typical for their destination, transforming them into an inspiring travel experience.

Considering the above, the aim of this paper is to analyse how sports experiences could be planned and managed for the tourism purposes from the aspect of sports facility managers. The paper contains four sections. The first section provides a brief, necessarily incomplete review of the literature, emphasising the gaps that will be focus of this paper. The second section presents the main methodological concepts and framings that will guide the understanding and the analysis of the proposed management models. In the third section, starting from different realms of an experience, possible management models are proposed. The upgrading and interrelations of experiences are analysed and supported by examples. Also, for every realm of an experience within the proposed models it is defined what type of sports tourism it belongs. The paper finishes with conclusion remarks.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Tourist experiences

From the 1970s onwards, the tourist experience has become one of the most popular academic topics reflected in the constant growth of the social science literature (Andersson 2007; Binkhorst and Den Dekker 2009; Cohen 1979; Kim, Ritchie, and McCormick 2012; Knutson and Beck 2004; Lee and Crompton 1992; Leighton 2007; McCabe 2002; Morgan, Elbe, and Curiel 2009; Oh, Fiore, and Jeong 2007; Pearce and Moscardo 1986; Ryan 1997; Sheng and Chen 2013; Wang 1999; Williams 2006; Xu and Chan 2010; to list only a few). Tourism and hospitality sectors cannot be seen as immune to fundamental changes in the orientation of marketing. Innovative experience design becomes an increasingly important component of tourism and hospitality's firm core capabilities (Williams 2006). The reason for this may be the fact that the concepts of experience economy and tourism are linked to the origins of their theoretical and practical implications, as Morgan, Elbe, and Curiel (2009) claimed.

A more profound understanding of the relation between experience economy and tourism asks for additional explanation on how experiences are designed and created. From the aspect of the economic demand and the consumer, experience is defined as the result of encountering, undergoing, or living through situations that provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, relational, and functional values (Schmitt 1999). Looking from the side of the economic offer, Pine and Gilmore (1998) stated that experience occurs when the provider intentionally uses services as the stage, and

goods as props, in order to create a memorable event that penetrates up to each individual consumer. Pine and Gilmore found that the theme of experience, harmonization of impressions with positive cues, elimination of negative cues, mix in memorabilia, and engagement of all five senses are the key experience-design principles. From a manager's perspective, it could be said that attractive and memorable experiences have become products that require a lot of effort to create, develop and eventually sell. Following that logic, O'Sullivan and Spangler (1998) outlined three types of actors. While the first two only incorporate elements of experience into their products (“the infusers”) or use experiences to heighten the level of satisfaction (“the enhancers”), the third type belongs to the group of “experience makers” that is, service providers who create experiences as the core of their business. Furthermore, O'Sullivan and Spangler identified five key components necessary to create an experience: stages, actual experience, needs that are trying to be satisfied, roles of participants and other people, and roles and relationships with experience providers.

In addition, Andersson (2007) in his conceptual article claimed that the moment when tourism consumption and tourism production meet, is the decisive moment for the economics of tourism experiences. Also, the consumer is assumed to play an important role in the final link of the value creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000, 2004), that is that of realizing a consumption project by putting together four generic resources (time, skills, goods and services) in a consumption set that is needed to produce a tourism experience. The emphasis should be more on the side of modern consumers and less on destinations (Williams 2006). Respecting that, Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009) provided an innovative perspective on tourism in the experience economy, based on the principle of co-creation with a central role for the human being.

1.2. Sports tourism experiences

The relationship between tourism and sport is not new, and was analysed by many authors (Bartolucci 1995, 2003; De Knop and Van Hoecke 2003; Glyptis 1982; Hinch and Higham 2001; Radicchi 2013; Sobry 2011; Standeven and De Knop 1999; Turco, Riley, and Swart 2002; Weed 2001; Weed and Bull 2004, 2009). Their analyses indicate that tourism and sport are two cognate and closely interrelated social phenomena, very much like Siamese twins (Keller 2002). Therefore, the fact that sports can provide tourists with extraordinary adventures and experiences should not be surprising. Consequently, there are many works that explore the cultivation and development of various contents and types of sports and sports tourism under the concepts of experience economy; golf tourism (Petrick and Backman 2002), ice-snow tourism (Chi and Sun 2006), drifting sports tourism (Fu and Wen 2007), marine sports tourism (Su 2008), and so forth.

When it comes to sports tourism experiences, Kurtzman (2005) considered that sports experiences have been created and structured as a particular type of tourist experience. Bouchet, Lebrun, and Auvergne (2004) integrated spatial and social dimensions and proposed the framework for analysing sports tourism consumption which illustrates that consumer choices depend upon vacation destinations and sport services offered in relation to the experiences that vacationers are seeking. However, rather than trying to channel sports tourists into special areas, planners should give them space to create their own experiences by encouraging them to explore for themselves (Morgan 2007). Weed

and Bull (2009) stated that one way to achieve more detailed explanation of participation in sports tourism is to achieve a greater understanding of the nature of the sports tourism experience. Shipway and Kirkup (2011) suggested that event and tourism experiences are central for both active and passive sports tourists, and these distinct experiences are greatly enhanced by the sense of identity that sports tourists attach to their chosen activity in the respective tourism localities.

Indeed, sports tourism experience is something to be controlled and stage-managed. Though, one cannot forget the fact that sports experiences arise from a unique interaction of people, activities, and places (Weed and Bull 2009), where places could take the form of a natural or artificial, outdoor or indoor sports facility. Other authors also recognized physical facility (Greenweel, Fink, and Pastore 2002), quality of infrastructure (Harrison-Hill and Chalip 2005), and environmental aspect (Kaplanidou and Vogt 2010) as determinants that support the creation of overall sports and sports tourism experiences. Högström, Rosner, and Gustafsson's study (2010) even found that the physical service environment of a snow park destination has a major influence on customers' satisfaction and that physical conditions seem to affect the destination's image to a greater degree than interactions do. The above mentioned authors did not analyse the process of upgrading and the flow between realms of a sports experience as well as the relationship between sports facilities, sports experiences, and types of sports tourism. Only Peric (2010) integrated Weeds and Bull's (2004) types of sports tourism into the Pine and Gilmore's (1998) scheme of experiences thus connecting theoretically independent categories in order to allow better understanding and management of sports experiences and tourism. Still, Perić did not elaborate the relations between realms. That strengthens the need for further research in this area and provides grounds for this conceptual analysis.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A theoretical framework for the study of management of sports tourism experiences is made up of Pine and Gilmour's (1998, 1999) four realms of an experience (Figure 1). This model was based on two dimensions; customer participation (active/passive) and the environmental relationship, that is, a connection that unites customers with the event or performance (absorption/immersion). As a result, Pine and Gilmore (1998) sorted experiences into four broad categories:

- Entertainment experiences (E1) — tend to be those in which participants are mostly passive, their connection with the event is more likely the one of absorption than of immersion.
- Educational experiences (E2) — tend to involve more active participation, but participants are still more outside the event than immersed in the action.
- Escapist experiences (E3) — can teach just as well as educational events can, or amuse just as well as entertainment ones, but they involve greater participant immersion (they truly want to become an active part of the event).
- Aesthetic experiences (E4) — tend to minimize the active participation while participants are immersed in an activity or environment, but they themselves have little or no effect on it.

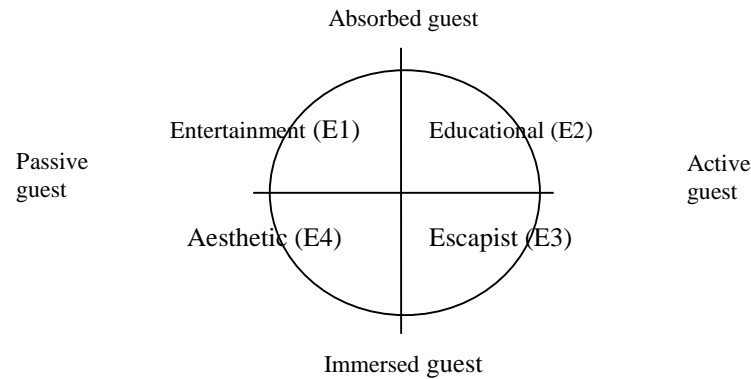


Figure 1. Four realms of an experience. (Adapted and reprinted with permission from “Welcome to the Experience Economy” by B. Joseph Pine II, James H. Gilmore. *Harvard Business Review*, July 1998. Copyright 1998 by Harvard Business Publishing; all rights reserved)

Based on this framework, a theoretical analysis on the management of sports tourism experiences has been carried out starting from each realm of an experience. Starting from the initial realm of an experience (marked with a small black triangle and curved arrows) the next step was to consider the opportunities for expansion and provision of new experiences to both active and passive sports tourism participants. This was repeated until all four realms were encompassed (where possible). Arrows (marked with numbers) represent both the interrelation and the process of experience staging/upgrading. The interrelations within the four realms of an experience were analysed and supported by examples. Taking into consideration the tourism demand as constant, an analysis of the supply side of sports tourism has been made. This means that it is defined what type of sports tourism every realm of an experience from the given examples belongs to. Weed and Bull’s (2009) classification of sport tourism has advantage over the others (Bartoluci 1995; Gammon and Robinson 1997; Glyptis 1982; Harrison-Hill and Chalip 2005; etc.) being the most appropriate for this analysis.

Two key concepts underlying Glyptis’ (1982) classification are that sport can be a primary motivation for travel or just a casual content of stay, whereas sports tourism can be active (competitors) or passive (spectators), what is consistent with participation as one of Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) dimensions of experiences. Glyptis (1982) divided sports tourism between sports opportunities on general holidays with sports opportunities, activity holidays, sports training, sports spectating and up-market sports holidays. This classification is too narrow and therefore inapplicable for the analysis. Firstly, contemporary analysis tends to refer to tourism rather than to holidays, in part to allow the inclusion of day-visits, which the vast majority of tourism definitions now include (Weed and Bull 2009). Therefore, a wider, more inclusive (e.g., British Tourist Authority 1981; Standeven and Tomlinson 1994) rather than exclusive approach encompassing all activities and trips that the tourist considers as tourism is accepted. Secondly, Glyptis’ classification covers only the passive aspect of sporting events (i.e., sports spectating), thus neglecting the active aspect (i.e., athletes).

Furthermore, Bartoluci’s (1995) classification (competitive sports tourism, winter sports-recreational tourism and summer sports-recreational tourism) is too broad for it

is based on the competitive level of athletes/participants and seasons of the year. On the other hand, his definition is too narrow since it involves only sports as the primary motif for travel, hence neglecting the situations when it is not. Similarly, Gammon and Robinson's (1997) classification (sport tourism and tourism sport) is based solely on motivation (whether or not sport is the main motif for travel or not) and, as such, it is not suitable for the analysis neither. Finally, Harrison-Hill and Chalip's (2005) forms of sports tourism (spectating, participating and venerating sport sites) differ between active and passive aspects like Glyptis' (1982) but venerating sport sites is a specific sports tourism type inconsistent with the proposed methodology and not allowing significant upgrading in terms of experiences.

Weed and Bull (2004, 2009) based their research on Glyptis' work (1982) but with a broader perspective. The first generic modification was the replacement in categories of the word "holidays" with "tourism" where it was necessary. Also, they acknowledged the active involvement in events and labelled Glyptis' category "sports spectating" as "event sports tourism". As a result, Weed and Bull's (2009) updated types of sports tourism were: supplementary sports tourism, sports participation tourism, sports training tourism, event sports tourism, and luxury sports tourism. Therefore, this classification is the most inclusive and the most consistent with the proposed methodology.

In addition, a few explanations regarding sports tourism and sports tourist types are added. Firstly, it could be argued whether spectators are passive or active participants. The fact that they had to get to the venue of the sporting event, and in some cases the cheering of one part of the fans and their role in the sporting event, is extremely important. Therefore, they are not completely passive participants (Pine and Gilmore 1998) and are undoubtedly an integral part of the sporting event and could be regarded as being active (Bartoluci 2003) or vicarious participants (Weed and Bull 2009). Vicarious participation implies a more active engagement with the event than the traditional view of fans as passive sports tourists. However, due to the fact that they do not directly participate in the game, and according to the participation dimension there could be a two-dimensional scheme of experiences, for the purpose of this paper Glyptis' (1982) and Harrison-Hill and Chalip's (2005) classifications are accepted, and spectators are considered as being passive.

Another issue regarding spectators is their relationship to the environment, that is, the event. If classified as passive, the question that arises is whether or not they belong to the entertainment or to the aesthetic realm of experience. Although Pine and Gilmore (1998) found that spectators' connection with the event could be one of absorption (entertainment) or immersion (aesthetic), for the purpose of this paper only the case of the biggest sporting events at carefully selected locations (stadiums or other sports facilities) that bring together the world's best players and where spectators are eager to be part of the event (immersed into the event) are considered as aesthetic experiences.

3. PROPOSAL OF MANAGEMENT MODELS

First management model (Figure 2) starts from Entertainment (E1). A suitable example could be a basketball national championship game. This event provides entertainment for spectators (local and visiting) which are passive and cannot significantly affect the event itself (1a). In parallel, the event provides players, as extremely active, with

escapism experiences (E3). The relationship between those two is presented with an arrow (1b). This type of sports tourism product is what Weed and Bull (2009) called event sports tourism but even supplementary sports tourism can be involved in the case of incidental spectators. If there is enough interest, a manager can try to organise a basketball camp or an academy where young players will entertain themselves and improve their skills (2). This type of sports tourism product is what Weed and Bull (2009) called sports training tourism. In addition, a full intensity training programme organised with some famous player goes toward the luxury end of the market providing participants with the perception of exclusivity. If this is supported by the quality of the facilities and the luxurious nature of the accommodation and attendant facilities and services, then it is luxury sports tourism we are talking about (Weed and Bull 2009). Besides training, young players could also have the opportunity to escape, that is, to demonstrate their skills (3). Having a facility with the licence for official games, and supposing there is appropriate support from the national association, a manager can bid to host and organise a major sports event, for example, world or continental championship with the best athletes/players (4a&b). Again, we are talking about event sports tourism providing aesthetic experiences to spectators (4a) and escapist experience to players (4b). To summarise, there are all four realms of an experience, four different sport tourism types (event sports tourism, sports training tourism, luxury sports tourism, and supplementary sports tourism) and three possible levels of competitiveness (lower – beginners, middle – advanced, and higher – elite) in this model.

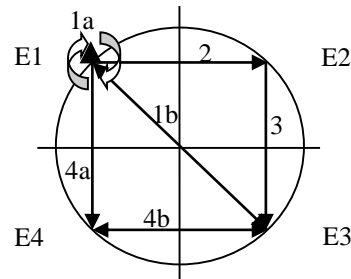


Figure 2. Management model starting from entertainment (E1)

The second management model (Figure 3) starts from Education (E2). A suitable example could be a tennis academy where instructors/trainers teach beginners how to play tennis or where advanced and elite players are taught how to improve their skills (1a). This sports tourism product is sports training tourism (Weed and Bull 2009). It is not likely that training itself will attract spectators (1b), but weekend tournaments where attendants will compete against each other (2a) will attract spectators for sure (2b). If facility meets criteria, it is possible to organise professional tournaments attracting best players and many spectators (3a&b).

Tournaments are what Weed and Bull (2009) called event sports tourism but they could attract also incidental sports tourists (supplementary sports tourism). This model also allows possibility for luxury sports tourism to overlap with the above mentioned. For instance, a training programme with some famous tennis player supported by five-star provision of attendant services.

To summarise, there are all four realms of an experience, three main sports tourism types (sports training tourism, event sports tourism, and luxury sports tourism; and there could always be incidental sports tourists as well) and three levels of competitiveness (beginners, advanced, and elite athletes) in this model.

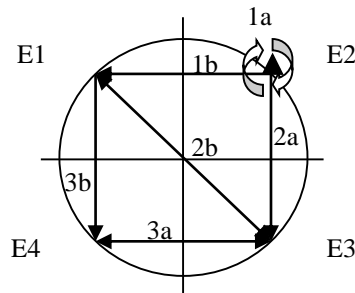


Figure 3. Management model starting from Education (E2)

Third management model (Figure 4) starts from Escapism (E3). Regarding sports tourism, fairly obvious examples could be skiing or golf sports tourism. This type of sports tourism product where active tourism opportunities are the main product offering is what Weed and Bull (2009) called sports participation tourism (1). At the same time there is often demand for some form of instruction and it is easy for managers to organise the supply (2). In this case managers enter the sports training tourism niche. Also, sometimes aspects of the trips other than skiing (après ski experiences) or golf (country club experiences) itself can be important. In other words, people ask for fun and entertainment (3). These sports tourism products fall into the luxury sports tourism category (Weed, 2001). The next step for managers would be to attract the spectators. It is possible only if some ski race or golf tournament is organised (4a&b&c). The event will include both competitors (4a) and spectators (4b) and, in case of a major event, it will cover even aesthetic experiences (4c).

To summarise, there are all four realms of an experience, four main sport tourism types (sports participation tourism, sports training tourism, luxury sports tourism, and event sports tourism; and there could always be incidental sports tourists as well) and three levels of competitiveness (beginners, advanced, and if facilities meets the criteria, even elite athletes) in this model.

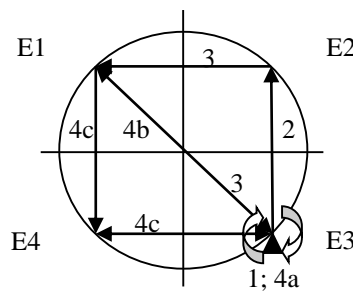


Figure 4. Management model starting from Escapism (E3)

An alternative model starting from Escapism (E3) refers to a more recreational end of the sports tourism spectrum (Figure 5). For instance, opportunities where sports tourism itself may be the method of transport for the trip, such as cycling, hiking and sailing which fall into escapist experiences and it is quite difficult to encompass other realms. Maybe, just sailing on the yacht with a crew (as the luxury end of the sports participation tourism) can provide entertainment and aesthetic experiences. Another example could be a site providing multi-activity sports tourism trips that belongs to sports participation tourism too. Activities are usually carried out as planned (1); however, the emphasis on one activity can increase the number of participants and raise its quality to a higher level. This opens the possibility to organise various tournaments and events that will provide entertainment to spectators (2). Also, if there is interest, a manager can organise “learn to” courses, and maybe advanced instructions (3a&b). The last step, organising a major event providing aestheticism experiences (4) is the most difficult, because sites and facilities providing multi-activity sports tourism trips usually do not meet the criteria to organise professional events. If this is the case, the participation of some famous player who will be mingling with other participants and take part in activities could help. To summarise, there are three realms of an experience (it would be difficult to encompass aesthetic experiences), three main sport tourism types (sports participation tourism, event sports tourism, and sports training tourism; there could always be incidental sports tourists as well), and three levels of competitiveness (beginners, advanced, and if facilities meets the criteria, even elite athletes) in this model.

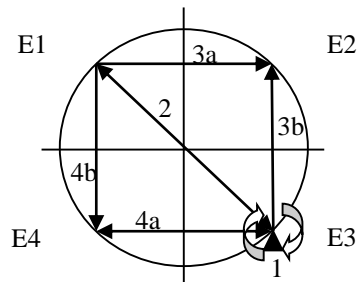


Figure 5. Alternative management model starting from Escapism (E3)

The last management model (Figure 6) starts from Aestheticism (E4). As previously stated, spectators that are immersed into the major sporting events perceive aesthetic experiences (1a). In parallel, the event provides players with escapism experiences (1b). This is what we know as event sports tourism. A suitable example could be F1 Grand Prix. Still, the nature of the hospitality provided at many of the high-profile events, such as the Monaco Grand Prix, would certainly put such provision into the luxury category. Taking advantage of the major sporting event, at the same facility (racing track), managers could organise some other events including driving school events providing both entertainment (2a) and education (3) to spectators and visitors. A kind of race against the stopwatch could be a true escapist experience for the new drivers (2b and 4). To summarise, there are all four realms of an experience, three main sport tourism types (event sports tourism, sports training tourism, and luxury sports tourism; and there could always be incidental sports spectators as well) and three

possible levels of competitiveness (beginners, advanced, and elite athletes) in this model.

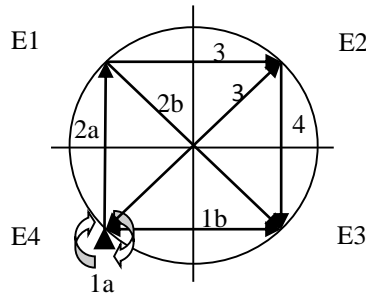


Figure 6. Management model starting from Aestheticism (E4)

CONCLUSION

The proposed models imply certain conclusions. First, it is possible to start from one core sports experience and upgrade it in a way to encompass a full range of experiences. However, no matter what the basic experience is, the provision of full spectrum of sports tourism experiences will primarily depend on the characteristics of sports facilities. This means that if the outdoor or indoor sports facility meets the criteria for professional sports (dimensions of the field, capacity, security issues, etc.), it will meet the criteria for amateur and recreational sports too. The reverse is usually not true. Also, it would be very hard, but not impossible to reach the aesthetic experience if the facility does not meet the criteria for the organisation of major sporting events. These conclusions are very much in line with some researches that highlighted physical facility (Greenweel et al. 2002), physical environment (Högström et al. 2010), and quality of infrastructure (Harrison-Hill, and Chalip 2005) as key factors that support the creation of overall sports tourism experiences.

Further, proposed models covered all types of sports tourism. Although it would be very hard to cover all types simultaneously because the characteristics of these markets are significantly different. In this regard, luxury sports tourism could be a significant consideration for providers wishing to maximise the profit (Weed and Bull 2009), but one cannot enter that market without high quality sports facilities and support of the luxurious accommodation and attendant services or some famous name (former or active athlete). The same is valid for sports activities carried out in nature.

It could be concluded that this paper holds important theoretical and managerial implications. It tried to integrate experience economy and sports management within the context of sports tourism. It adopts a different approach to managing resources and experiences in sports tourism and an alternative approach to strategic thinking of managers in sports tourism. Thus, it complements the existing literature by providing theoretical analysis of sports tourism experiences from the perspective of sports managers in particular, and sports tourism supply in general. Furthermore, managerial implications highlight the interplay of sports facilities and sports organisers in designing and setting valuable experiences. The proposed management models could

facilitate the research into the dynamics of sports tourism and as well as offer guidelines for practitioners as they constantly strive to provide the very best experience for sports tourists. Those are especially applicable to private sector suppliers who could have an incremental effect on the distinctiveness and competitiveness of the destination.

This study is not without limitations. First, implemented analytical approach did not consider all possible types and nuances in the sports activities and experiences. Studies considering other analytical approaches (e.g., case study method) may allow for deeper understanding of the relationship between sports facilities, sports activities, realms of an experience, and types of sports tourism. Also, the findings of this paper may be limited in the generalizability to other selective types of tourism and/or industries. Thus, future studies should focus its research scope on other selective types of tourism and/or industries in order to compare the overall conclusions.

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