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EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP IN FOOTBALL IN POLAND AND THE INCREASE IN FOREIGN TOURIST ARRIVALS

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Abstract

World-class and prestigious sporting events, especially in football, draw many international visitors. One of such events was the European Football Championship held in Poland in 2012. The number of foreign tourists arriving in 2012, compared to the year 2011, showed a significant increase in visits by 1,5 million, including 650 thousand coming exclusively for the occasion to watch the European Championships in 2012. This dynamic growth of arrivals continued in the years 2012–2015 and increased by more than 3 million persons when compared to the figures recorded in the year 2011. The dynamics of the provided accommodation and the number of one-day stays in Poland was also visible. What is more, the average expenditure of foreign tourists per person reached a record high in the year 2012 and amounted to USD 462. Also, the amount of money spent per day increased in the year 2012 by USD 82 and, in successive years, was even higher – USD 101 in the year 2013 and USD 95 in 2014. The presented data show that the organisation of European Championship in football in Poland in 2012 was an excellent opportunity to develop the Polish economy. Accordingly, it might be said that top-level sports competitions are also a chance to meet football fans from many different countries as well as start new economic endeavours.

Keywords: sports events, tourism, economic growth.

Jel Classification: Z32

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a significant part of economy that contributes to an increase in GDP in many countries. As the data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO Statistics 2015) indicate, tourism has been continuously growing for six years now. In 2015, the number of international tourist visits around the world increased by 50 million and amounted to

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1.184 million. In Europe, the pace of tourism growth was higher than in 2014 and reached 5.0% (against 2.4% in the previous year). Besides, according to the data provided by the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) for the year 2017, every tenth European company represented some sector of the tourism industry, with 2.3 million businesses employing 12.3 million people. All these facts seem to imply that tourism has become a large and fast developing economic sector in the world.

Europe, specifically the member states of the European Union, could serve as an example of such a trend. In 2015, its countries boasted of 578 thousand accommodation facilities (Eurostat Statistics Explained 2017), which were located mainly in Italy (29.0%), Croatia (12.7%), Germany (8.7%) and Spain (8.4%). As for the hotels, the dominant expansion by hotel groups was visible especially in Cyprus and Malta (Eurostat Statistics Explained 2017).

To understand how prestigious sports events impact economic growth, it is worth considering the fact that also the highest-level sports competitions, tournaments or contests play a vital role in the development of tourism (Cadima et al. 2004; Travassos 2008; Rose and Spiegel 2011; Ifeanyichukwu 2013). This mainly pertains to the most popular sports, including football (Borzykowski 2012; Erdogru and Yazici 2013; Marczak 2014; Aragones-Jerico, Kuster-Boluda, and Vila-Lopez 2015; Kirkup and Sutherland 2017), but also to other less prestigious competitions.

The European Football Championship played in 2012 in Poland and Ukraine was undoubtedly one of such events. Every match played in Poland was watched on the stadium by over 40.000 fans, with many more doing it in the special fan zones in the city centres. Furthermore, while the games were played in Poland in June, about 1.47 million tourists arrived, including 650 thousand who came exclusively to watch the championship. Furthermore, according to the survey conducted by the Institute of Tourism in Poland and the Ministry of State Treasury in Poland estimates, foreigners spent PLN 980 million during the time Euro 2012 lasted, and the total revenues from visitors amounted to PLN 1 billion 37.6 million (Ministerstwo Skarbu Panstwa 2017).

The presented data concerning the championships may indicate that the event spurred many visitors' interest in the so far less known or unknown destination and became a turning point in the development of new relationships or undertaking business endeavours. With the increased number of foreign tourists coming to Poland in subsequent years, the economic indicators related to the amount of invested money improved as well.

Presently, research in the field of sports tourism concerns a variety of other topics, including for example such issues as motives for participation in tourist events (Getz and McConnell 2011), personal happiness arising from such participation (Bosnjak et al. 2016), the role of the Internet in encouraging trips (Zhi 2017) or growth of local cultural sites (Yfantidou, Spyridopoulou, and Kouthouris 2017).

To investigate the possible association between the number of foreign tourists visiting Poland during the European Football Championship in 2012, an analysis of the international tourist arrivals to Poland before the championship in 2011 was made, and the data were subsequently compared to those gathered in the years after the tournament, i.e. 2013–2015. The obtained results allowed for interpretation and comparison of the main benefits of holding prestigious events and formulating some conclusions.

1. NUMBER OF FOREIGN TOURIST VISITS

The development of tourism in particular countries is best evidenced by the number of foreign tourists. In 2011, i.e. the year before the championship, Poland was visited by 13.35 million visitors (people who stayed for a minimum of 1 night) from different parts of the world. In the year the tournament was held, the number of foreign tourist visits to Poland increased by 11.1% per year, to as many as 15 million, which is a remarkable progression. Accordingly, it seems logical to assume that it was mainly football fans which contributed to such a high dynamics of unprecedented growth in tourist arrivals. The question that appeared right after the event was over was whether this increase in the number of tourists was just a singular incident, and whether it would lead to further dynamic growth.

A year later, it could be stated with great satisfaction that the effect of the European Football Championship in Poland in 2012 contributed to the on-going boost of tourists coming from different countries, increasing at the same time the country's visibility. The number of foreigners visiting Poland in 2013 stood at 15.65 million, with an increase of 810 thousand (5.5%) to the previous year. In 2014, the recorded expansion was 350 thousand (2.2%), which resulted in a high figure of 16 million visitors, which subsequently grew to 16.7 million in 2015 – an increase by 700 thousand (4.4%). Thus, over four year-span, i.e. from the year the championships were organised in Poland to 2015, the number of foreign tourists increased by 3.35 million, which amounts to 20.0%.

Table 1. Foreign tourist arrivals to Poland in the years 2011–2015 (in million)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of tourists	13.5	14.84	15.65	16.0	16.7
Increase year on year	-	1.49	0.81	0.35	0.70
Increase in %	-	11.1	5.5	2.2	4.4

2. FOREIGN TOURISTS IN ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES

A higher number of tourists should lead to an increase in the number of people using accommodation and nights spent in a particular country, which is one of the most significant sources of income for the tourist economy.

The increase in the number of guests staying in 2012 – the year of the European Championships in Poland, was 530 thousand (12.0%), which was a significant rise in the figures. The same could be said about the next few years. The number of staying guests experienced a steady upward trend in the subsequent years (year to the previous year). In 2013, it rose by 264 thousand (5.4%), in 2014 – by 222 thousand (by 4.1%), and in 2015 – by 262 thousand; that is by 4.6%. Altogether, the number of foreign guests using the accommodation in the analysed period grew by 1,28 million, which amounts to 12.9%.

What seems even more important is the number of overnight stays. Also, this comparison shows a constant progression. The number of accommodation units sold a year before the championship was 10,620.3 million. In the year 2012, it increased to 11,754.6 million; that is by 1,134 million (9.6%). The growth trend, though slightly less dynamic, took place in the subsequent years after the event. In 2013, the accommodation market grew by 607 thousand units (4.9%), in 2014 – by 508 thousand (3.9%) and in

2015 – by 897 thousand (6.5%). Altogether, the number of overnight stays in the analysed period increased by 3.127 million, i.e. by 22.8%.

Table 2. Foreign tourists in accommodation facilities (in million)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of guests	4.409,6	4.940,2	5.204,9	5.427,4	5.689,6
Increase year on year	-	530.6	264.7	222.5	262.2
Increase in %	-	12.0	5.4	4.1	4.6
Number of nights	10.620,3	11.754,6	12.361,7	12.860,0	13.757,6
Increase year on year	-	1.134,3	607.1	508.3	897.6
Increase in %	-	9.6	4.9	3.9	6.5

3. SPENDING OF FOREIGN TOURISTS

Another factor worth exploring in relation to people visiting other countries are the expenditure estimates, including the cost of the stays. The amount of money that foreign tourists spend in the country is one of the most objective economic indicators of growth of that sector. International tourism expenditure includes, among others, the average spending per person and per 1 day of stay. In the case of the event held in Poland in 2012, the average per person expenditure was USD 398 a year before the championship, whereas in the very year of the competition a record high amount was calculated and it amounted to USD 462, i.e. an increase by USD 28 (6.6%). However, in the subsequent years, the expenditure decreased and stood at USD 384, 337 and 332 respectively. A slightly different but a more favourable trend was evidenced in the category of expenditure for 1 day of stay. The year before the championships, the spending was USD 79, while in the year of the tournament, it grew to USD 85, with a similar growth recorded in subsequent years, i.e. USD 101 in 2013 and USD 95 in 2014. Altogether, the one-day expenditure in the 2011- 2014 period increased by USD 16, or 16.9%.

Table 3. Tourist expenditure per person and per day

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Average per person	398	426	384	337	332
Increase in USD	-	+28	-42	-47	-5
Increase in %	-	+6,6	-9,9	-12,2	1,5
Average for 1 day	79	85	101	95	No data
Increase in USD	-	+6	+16	-6	available
Increase in %	-	+7,1	+15,8	-6,3	

4. DISCUSSION

The available data on the arrivals of foreign tourists to Poland since the beginning of the new century indicate that the numbers have never exceeded 16 million. For example, in the years 2008–2010, they fluctuated around 13 million people per year. The presented analysis for the years 2011–2015 clearly shows that some favourable changes took place

in the year when the European Football Championship in Poland was held in 2012 as well as in the following ones.

Since 2013, the number of foreign tourists has remained more or less constant. The year 2015 took the lead in the number of foreign arrivals to Poland with its record of 16.7 million person, nearly 3 million more than at the time when the European Football Championship took place and 4 million more than in the year 2011 before the event. The increased interest in coming to Poland was also confirmed by the results of the polls conducted among foreign fans, 75% of whom expressed their will to visit Poland in the future.

We are aware that the organization of this particular sports event in four major Polish cities was not the sole reason for the increased tourist arrivals. The growing attractiveness of our developing country must definitely have had something to do with the expansion of tourist traffic. Still, it should be noted that in the successive few years, Poland did not demonstrate such a dynamic growth of foreign tourist arrivals. All these data may indicate that the European Football Championships held in 2012 was the most probable cause of an increased interest in visiting Poland. The number of foreign visitors using accommodation facilities and an increase in average spending per person in US dollars, especially for one day visits, show a similar dynamics during that time, which may confirm the drawn conclusions.

Finally, it is also worth noting that many new investments that preceded the preparations for this prestigious and most popular event in Europe were made, including the major repairs of the railway stations in the cities in which football matches were played and the stadiums which were built from scratch in the host cities. Undoubtedly, the organization of top-level sports competitions was a great opportunity to promote our developing country, which may become a recommendation for other nations to follow.

CONCLUSION

Holding high-level sports competitions, to which the European Football Championship may definitely be understood as an excellent opportunity to promote the country and influence the dynamics of foreign tourist arrivals in the years to come.

It is also a good opportunity to spur an economic growth in the tourism sector, as evidenced by the increasing number of people using accommodation facilities and higher spending per day during the stay.

Accordingly, it should be stated that it is worth trying to organize other sports competitions in Poland at the level of the World or European Championships, which is already being done in some other sports disciplines like volleyball, handball or the World Cup in ski jumping.

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