



Perspectives of the Development of Sports Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: Sports tourism is considered one of the fastest-growing sectors in tourism. More and more tourists are interested in sports activities during their travels, regardless of whether sports are the main purpose of the trip or not. Major sporting events can be a catalyst for tourism development if they are successfully used in terms of destination branding, infrastructure development and other economic and social benefits. This research analyzed the importance, potentials and challenges, as well as the perspectives on the development of sports tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Numerous destinations and specific attractions, along with natural and cultural heritage, provide the possibility of a diverse offer of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, with adequate strategies for further development and more intensive promotional marketing activities, contributes not only to the strengthening of economic growth, but also sports tourism, and sports in general. Sports Tourism is experiencing growth and attracts an increasing number of visitors from countries around the world. Using a combined methodological approach, which includes surveying stakeholders and analyzing collected data, we highlight the importance of sports tourism, as well as sports in general. The goal is to make Bosnia and Herzegovina an even more attractive destination by instructing policymakers and tourism professionals to strengthen and expand existing capacities and ensure sustainability and economic benefits for the well-being of the entire society, given the competitive environment of countries in the region that also abound in natural beauty, and a rich and attractive offer of sports activities and tourist experiences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of sports tourism can be viewed in a broader and narrower sense. Sports and tourism are two complex areas. The link between sport and tourism has been widely discussed in recent decades, and sports tourism has been a major and complex research topic (Gammon & Robinson, 1997; Gibson, 1998; Higham, 1999; Getz, 2003; Chalip & Costa, 2005; Weed, 2009). We can ask ourselves, first of all, who is an athlete and who is a tourist? An athlete engages in sports activity as his main occupation (professional) or it is not his only occupation (amateur), and competes within a sports organization or as an individual depending on the rules of the sports discipline, but the number of recreational athletes is also increasing. A tourist is a person who stays outside his permanent place of residence or outside the country where he lives, regardless of the reasons for his trip: business, health, politics, etc. In her comparative studies on the importance and role of sports tourism, Sue Glyptis concludes that the term “sports tourism” encounters different attitudes and reactions from actors in sports tourism, local authorities, the academic community to commercialized service providers, who not only do not see the integration of sports and tourism but even oppose it (Glyptis, 1982). He also points out that these are two separate areas, but sport and tourism are much more connected than it seems (Glyptis, 1991). The subject of studying sports

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tourism includes a broader conceptualization that includes organizers, service providers of sports tourism, government bodies that define policies and the academic community, however, these types of definitions are useful because they briefly indicate the complexity of this phenomenon (Borovčanin & Lesjak, 2021, p. 7). The conceptual tendencies of the modern development of tourism in relation to the traditional ones experience the transformation of the motive of vacation into content with numerous vacation activities. Modern lifestyle, inactivity, noise, climate change, etc. impose the need on modern man to create a counterbalance to the negative consequences of today's civilization. That is why the tourist offer should include a variety of sports content, i.e. adapted to the requirements of sports tourism. Sports tourism represents a very interesting and growing field, which has a unique ability to attract a large number of visitors (Klarić, 2012, p. 63). The development of sports tourism should be coordinated with the plans for the development of tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The experiences of others show that investing in the development of sports tourism improves and contributes to the overall quality of tourism (tourist offer).

The significance of the research stems from the fact that sports tourism in BiH is on the rise. The reason for this research is the underutilization of the potential that Bosnia and Herzegovina has in the tourism sector. The goal is to make Bosnia and Herzegovina a more attractive destination by instructing policymakers and tourism professionals to strengthen and expand existing capacities and ensure sustainability and economic benefits for the benefit of the entire society, given the competitive environment of countries in the region.

The paper is composed of several chapters. In the first part of the paper, an overview of existing literature is presented, and scientific achievements and findings are presented. The research methodology is presented in the second part of the paper, while the third part of the paper presents the results of the primary research. In addition, it includes recommendations for further research and concludes with a summary of key findings.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Many authors show interest in sports tourism and tourism in general. Despite the academic interest in the field of sports event tourism, there is still little synthesis and no overview of research directions (Bazzanella et al., 2023). In the study, they talked about sports tourism as a key topic and its complexity. In order to answer many questions, that have arisen over time, they have analyzed previous research that deals with sports events and tourism. They found that the legacy and impacts/effects of SE, especially in terms of their implications for tourism, were the most researched topics (Thomson et al., 2019). Among the topics covered, mega events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup stand out, while studies examining the effects of SE on tourism and their implications for the environment are on the rise (Collins et al., 2009; Fermeiglia, 2017; Pocza & Malchrowicz-Moško, 2018) and social context (Hautbois et al., 2020; Inoue & Havard, 2014; Jamieson, 2014). They came to the conclusion that some topics are poorly researched or even missing and that a diversity of research on topics is needed, including sustainability efforts, authenticity, using SE as a mechanism to transform a destination into a tourist attraction, experiencing tourism from different perspectives (fans, active participants, volunteers, officials, media, sponsors, etc.), and media technology to improve the viewer experience and participation, fan engagement, e-sports and entertainment. They also conclude that new methods and approaches are needed, especially in the field of medium and small SE, where evaluation metrics for mega-events are difficult to apply or produce a biased result, and the field of project management is under-represented and needs further research.

In recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been included in the group of countries with a tourism boom. Bosnia and Herzegovina abounds with numerous facilities for the development of tourism, including sports tourism. A rich cultural heritage in which remnants of former cultures and natural heritage (mountains, waterfalls, national parks...) are interwoven makes up the great potential that Bosnia and Herzegovina can offer. Recognizing this potential, USAID Tourism, in cooperation with international partners The Global Travel & Tourism Resilience Council and Travolution, gathers world leaders from the world of tourism in order to present in Bosnia and Herzegovina innovative solutions and best global practices for the sustainable development of tourism, which will take place June 6 and 7, 2024 in Sarajevo at the Hills Hotel. This is an ideal opportunity for professional networking and a key event for the regional tourism sector. The summit will serve as a platform for developing new opportunities in Europe and networking with leaders from around the world, including the US, the United Kingdom, the Balkans, the Middle East, North Africa and other regions.

The tourism industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina has experienced significant growth in recent years in terms of the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays. In 2019, the number of tourist arrivals reached 1,641,000, representing a 25.6% increase compared to 2017. The number of overnight stays in 2019 was 3,371,000, marking a growth of 25.9%.

This growth was primarily driven by an almost 30% increase in the number of foreign tourist arrivals and a 26.4% rise in overnight stays by foreign tourists. In contrast, the growth of domestic tourism was somewhat lower but still significant. Between 2017 and 2019, the number of domestic tourist arrivals increased by 15.4%, while the number of overnight stays grew by 24.6%. A significant increase in tourist arrivals and overnight stays was recorded in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, and the Brčko District.

From January to December 2023, a total of 1,733,071 tourist visits were recorded, representing a 17.3% increase compared to the same period in 2022 (Table 1.). The total number of overnight stays reached 3,645,839, marking a 13.2% increase from 2022.

However, a contrasting trend was observed between foreign and domestic tourists:

- The number of overnight stays by domestic⁴ tourists decreased by 5.1% compared to 2022.
- The number of overnight stays by foreign⁵ tourists increased by 24.3% over the same period.

Table 1. Tourist arrivals and overnight stays, January - December 2022 and 2023

	ARRIVALS			NIGHTS			I - XII 2023	
	I -XII 2022	I -XII 2023	Indices I - XII 2023 I - XII 2022	I -XII 2022	I -XII 2023	Indices I - XII 2023 I - XII 2022	Structure of nights %	Average number of nights by arrivals
Total	1.477.371	1.733.071	117,3	3.221.404	3.645.839	113,2	100,0	2,1
Domestic tourist	562.228	549.902	97,8	1.218.871	1.156.121	94,9	31,7	2,1
Foreign tourist	915.143	1.183.169	129,3	2.002.533	2.489.718	124,3	68,3	2,1

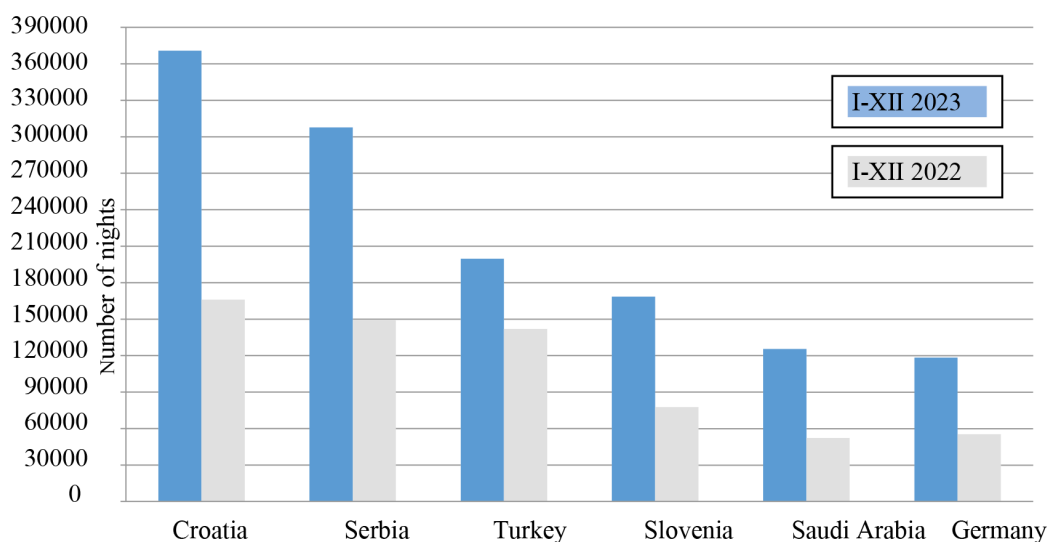
Source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2024)

In the total number of overnight stays, foreign tourists accounted for 68.3%, while domestic tourists made up 31.7%.

⁴ Domestic tourists are citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁵ Foreign tourist are pearson from other country (Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Germany, Turkey, etc.)

Graph 1. shows the foreign tourists who stayed the longest in BiH. Among foreign tourists, the largest share of overnight stays was recorded by visitors from: Croatia (14.9%), Serbia (12.4%), Turkey (8.0%), Slovenia (6.8%), Saudi Arabia (5.0%), Germany (4.8%), USA (3.3%), United Arab Emirates (3.1%).



Graph 1. Foreign tourist nights by country of residence, January - December 2022 and 2023

Source: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2024)

These countries collectively accounted for 58.3% of all foreign overnight stays, while tourists from other countries contributed the remaining 41.7%.

Regarding the length of stay, foreign tourists who stayed the longest in Bosnia and Herzegovina came from: Kuwait – 3.8 nights, Qatar – 3.3 nights, Egypt & Ireland – 3.2 nights, United Arab Emirates & Iran – 3.0 nights each, France, Albania & Bahrain – 2.9 nights each.

In terms of accommodation types, the majority of overnight stays (94.3%) were recorded in the Hotels and similar accommodation category.

The strategic platform of the tourism product of BiH is reflected in the directions of action that include: radical improvement of the quality of life - restructure the security sector, and communal economy, accelerating the development of green industry and circular economy (return to nature and reuse of already used), new accommodation facilities (hotels, apartment complexes, car parks), improvement of the transport infrastructure for tourism (highways, airports, railways), services and hospitality - that they are recognizable and different from others, that they follow trends and respond to the demands of potential tourists, organizing various manifestations of culture, sports, etc. of events - with a predetermined calendar of events and a person who will accompany the event (coordinator), i.e. that activities take place in a planned manner and not ad hoc, strengthening the brand of nature (diversity of eco-climate, flora and fauna) and all its products during the promotion.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

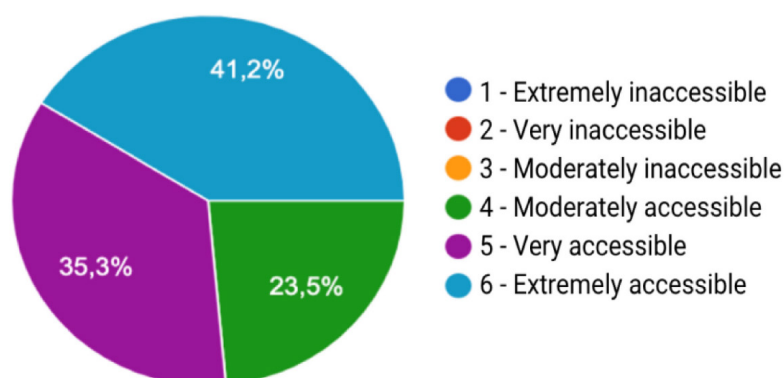
The original study, titled “Sports Tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” involved 17 major sports clubs from various disciplines across the country and provided comprehensive insights into the field.

The study aimed to assess the current state of sports tourism in different cities, confirm the hypothesis that sports tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is underutilized, and conclude its prospects and potential development over the next five years.

Participants of the Study and their Cities:

- RK Konjuh (Handball Club, Živinice),
- Odbojkaški klub Krivaja (Volleyball Club, Zavidovići),
- FK Bosna Kalesija (Football Club, Kalesija),
- OK KAKANJ 78 (Volleyball Club, Kakanj),
- IOK "AUTO SERVIS HUSO" MAGLAJ (Sitting Volleyball Club, Maglaj),
- OK Gradina (Volleyball Club, Srebrenik),
- ŽOK Igman (Women's Volleyball Club, Ilidža),
- OK Čelik Volley (Volleyball Club, Zenica),
- OK Novi Grad - Sarajevo (Volleyball Club, Sarajevo),
- Karate Klub Konjuh Živinice (Karate Club, Živinice),
- RK Krivaja (Handball Club, Zavidovići),
- ŽOK "Crvena Zvijezda" Obudovac (Women's Volleyball Club, Šamac - Obudovac),
- Odbojkaški klub "Goražde" (Volleyball Club, Goražde),
- IOK Tigar 119 (Sitting Volleyball Club, Banovići),
- OKK Sloboda (Basketball Club, Tuzla),
- OK Radnik (Volleyball Club, Bijeljina),
- ŽOK Bihać (Women's Volleyball Club, Bihać).

In the research process, participants were asked the question "How would you rate the accessibility of the location where your sports club is located for sports tourists?" The responses of the respondents are shown in the following graph (Graph 2).



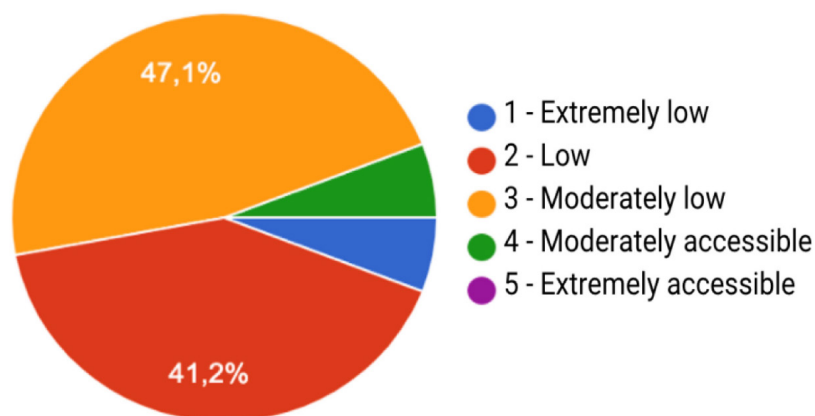
Graph 2. Accessibility of the club's location for tourists according to the respondents' assessment

Source: Own research

Respondents rated it as Extremely Inaccessible by 41.2%, Moderately Accessible by 35.3% of respondents, while 23.5% of those surveyed considered the location Very Accessible.

To the question: "What improvements would you suggest to increase the attractiveness of the area where your club is located for sports tourism?" - they answered: "To promote sports activities and tourism, it is necessary to improve accommodation capacities by providing larger and more accessible parking spaces, providing pedestrian and bicycle zones, building sports fields at picnic

areas, beach volleyball courts, modernizing sports facilities, improving training areas, engaging the local community, introducing new sports parks, increasing the number of sports halls in the investment plan, promotion and communication of the site and working on marketing efforts, especially during the summer season.”



Graph 3. Respondents’ assessment of the level of development of sports tourism in BiH

Source: Own research

Graph 3. shows the respondents’ answers to the question “How would you assess the current level of development of sports tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina?” The answers coincide with the hypothesis that the potential for sports tourism is not sufficiently exploited, i.e. 47.1% believe that sports tourism is moderately developed, while 41.2% believe that sports tourism is underdeveloped.

3.1. Conclusion of the Study

The survey results indicate a varied landscape of sports tourism opportunities within different clubs, highlighting the importance of infrastructure development, community engagement, and marketing strategies to enhance the attractiveness of localities, ultimately contributing to the promotion of sports tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, albeit with challenges such as insufficient information accessibility and the need for increased investment in sports and tourism infrastructure.

The biggest challenge to the development of tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the lack of awareness about its offerings and potential.

In the European Union (EU), the standardization of tourist guide education has been adopted by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN). The tourism sector has the largest number of regulations worldwide.

Tourism professionals require continuous education on tourism products (Figure 1), while competent institutions must develop curricula and training programs for adults in the tourism sector (non-formal education). These programs should cover business managers, travel companions, local tourist guides, entertainers, and other tourism professionals, aligning with best practices in the EU.

The analysis conducted by UTA BiH aimed to identify potential areas for further development and increased competitiveness. It is intended to encourage the adoption of tourism development strategies at all levels of government - state, entity, and cantonal - to support the preparation of future strategic development documents in the tourism sector.



Figure 1. Tourism product

Source: UTA BiH (2019)

Bosnia and Herzegovina, compared to other countries in the region, invests significantly less in sports and its development. Due to the constitutional structure of the state, different levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina – state, entity, and cantonal – allocate varying financial resources annually for the development of sports.

The **Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (n.d.)** has invested one and a half million BAM in sports over two years, equivalent to around 766 thousand euros.

The Federal Ministry of Sport allocated around 4.1 million BAM, or 2.09 million euros, while the Ministry of Sport in Republika Srpska allocated 5.1 million BAM, or 2.6 million euros.

Some cantons in the Federation allocated between 270 and 900 thousand BAM annually (138,000 to 460,000 euros). The Sarajevo Canton, which has the largest budget, allocated 6.7 million BAM, or 3.4 million euros, for sports needs in 2019. The Brčko District also allocated close to a million euros annually for sports.

According to estimates, various levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina allocate around 28 million BAM annually, or 14.3 million euros, for financing various sports events, clubs, and associations, as well as for the construction and renovation of infrastructure. Although precise data is not available, considering estimates of around 3.47 million inhabitants, it can be concluded that Bosnia and Herzegovina invests 4.1 euros per capita annually in sports.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Low growth, global economic stagnation, local wars, epidemics and other factors can negatively affect tourist movements. Nevertheless, from a long-term point of view, positive growth is certain and can contribute to the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the world, 10% of the global GDP is tourism, while the export of services and goods makes up one-third (about

30% of the world's export of services and 6% of the export of goods). Europe generates 41% of the world's income from tourism, and it grows at a rate of 3.5% to 4.5% per year and is the main factor in Europe's economic recovery. The European Union formed the Baltic macro-region, which consists of 8 EU countries and about 100 million inhabitants, the Danube region with 14 countries and about 115 million inhabitants, the Alpine macro-region with about 50 million inhabitants and the Adriatic-Ionian macro-region with about 70 million inhabitants, which consists of parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, Montenegro, Albania and Greece). The development elements of the action plan of the Adriatic-Ionian macroregion were coordinated by pairs of states, consisting of 4 EU member states and 4 non-EU states:

- Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for "environmental quality",
- Italy and Serbia for "connecting the region" (transport and energy networks),
- Greece and Montenegro for "blue development",
- Croatia and Albania for "sustainable tourism".

It should be noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina directly borders Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia and that the neighbors treat the development of tourism as a strategic priority. Also, more broadly, it is surrounded by tourist magnets like Italy, Greece, Austria, Hungary... Sports tourism is an activity that requires special resources. In addition, today's generations, unlike the previous ones, create a completely different approach to travel: they want to improve their physical and mental health, participate in a variety of activities from hiking and cycling, through yoga, to extreme sports. In addition to an active vacation, they have a unique experience of the destination, enjoying the beautiful nature, with a view of breathtaking landscapes, seasoned with an exceptional gastronomic offer, but also healthy food, a walk through history with a tour of cultural and historical sights and enjoying numerous facilities... Sports tourism is difficult to generalize and make decisions that can minimize the negative consequences of social development and tourism development.

Given that the infrastructural performance of business locations plays a significant role in attracting tourists and developing sports tourism in the future, it is necessary to study their causal relationship in more detail.

Many sports facilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina require modernization and renovation to meet the standards and needs of tourists. A lack of investment in maintenance and infrastructure improvement can hinder the development of sports tourism. Underdeveloped transportation and communication infrastructure can make access to certain sports destinations difficult, particularly in rural and mountainous regions.

The need for developing marketing strategies, collaborating with other countries to exchange expertise, jointly promoting sports tourism and creating regional tourism routes to attract more visitors, continuously monitoring global tourism trends and adapting the sports tourism offer in line with changing tourist preferences and market demands.

Understanding challenges and recognizing opportunities are crucial for the continued development of sports tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through strategic planning and targeted investments, the country can overcome obstacles and leverage its rich resources to establish itself as a leading sports tourism destination on the global stage.

5. CONCLUSION

This research indicates that a holistic approach to sports management and tourism is needed. The support and experiences of others in the world are realized through various support projects. In addition to financial support, projects should be implemented by managers. Bosnia and Herzegovina is rich in natural, cultural and historical heritage and has a lot to offer tourists. We can conclude that Sustainable development, respect for the local community and cultural values, as well as promoting inclusivity, are key to achieving long-term success in sports tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Efforts should be directed towards creating a recognizable and sustainable tourist destination that will attract sports and nature enthusiasts from around the world. Through joint efforts and a visionary approach, Bosnia and Herzegovina can become a leading destination for sports tourism, ensuring prosperity and well-being for both residents and tourists.

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