

VOICES IN THE DISCUSSION

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SPORTS TOURISM: A CONTRIBUTION TO A DEBATE ON ITS DEFINITION AND RESEARCH SUBJECT MATTER

The current state of research and the existing definitions of sports tourism

Many publications concerning the modern tourism market present the opinion that sports tourism is currently one of its most rapidly developing forms. On the other hand, its definition is being continuously argued over as well as whether it should be distinguished as a separate form of tourism and, consequently, a separate segment of the tourism market. Controversies concerning this are particularly interesting because the basis for distinguishing this form has accompanied tourism from the very beginning (e.g. the Olympic Games), although nowadays the links between them have become much stronger and much more important. Discussing sports tourism is difficult due to the fact that research is still at an early stage. Despite the apparent need for academic integration of these two domains, both sport and tourism have been mostly treated by researchers and practitioners as separate activity areas (GLYPTIS 1991, p. 165).

The literature offers many definitions of sports tourism, which have been formulated in various academic disciplines. They include those which try to define its essence in the simplest way possible, like the one which describes sports tourism as “travelling for non-commercial purposes, which involves participating in or observing sporting events far from the place of residence” (HALL 1992, p. 194), or the one which describes it as “holidays¹ during which a person takes part in sports activity, as a spectator or participant” (WEED & BULL 1997, p. 5). There are also definitions which have a more developed form and content such as the one formulated by Gibson, according to whom sports tourism is “travelling in one’s free time outside the area of residence in order to watch or participate in a physical activity, or to enjoy attractions related to this activity” (GIBSON 1998, p. 49). There is also the definition of STANDEVEN & DE KNOP, who see it as “all forms of active and passive engagement in physical activity, both occasional (unorganized – note: WA) and organized/scheduled, undertaken for non-commercial or business purposes and requiring travelling away from the place of residence and work” (STANDEVEN & DE KNOP 1999, p. 12). In many definitions, it is also stressed that sports (active) tourism (cf. KAGANEK 2015, p. 33) takes place in touristically attractive circumstances and its participants make use of sports and recreation facilities outdoors (MOKRAS-GRABOWSKA 2015, p. 14).

Sports tourism set against synonymous and related concepts

It seems that discussion on the essence and potential specificity of sports tourism should start from analyzing the two terms which constitute this concept, i.e. sport and tourism, as well as other expressions of related or/and similar meaning to them. The broadest is **physical culture**, understood as “... an expression of a specific approach to one’s own body, conscious and active care of one’s development, fitness and health, as well as the skill of

¹ It seems that the term ‘holidays’ used by the authors of the definition may be understood much more broadly – as any ‘trip’.

organizing and spending time to maximally benefit one's mental and physical health" (Demel & Skład 1976, after ŁOBOŻEWICZ 2001, p. 18). Even though there were some controversies in the past concerning the role of tourism in physical culture, it is currently accepted that next to sport, physical education, physical recreation and rehabilitation, tourism is the pillar of physical culture, though each of these areas is to some extent an independent social entity. A component which plays a significant role in shaping tourism activity and, consequently, in the study of sports tourism is **physical education**, which may be defined as "a pedagogically formatted form of participating in physical culture by young generations, whose aim is to enhance physical development and health, as well as to maintain and increase these qualities in later life" (GRABOWSKI 1984, p. 24). It performs a preparatory and prospective function in relation to tourism, by shaping the fixed habit of spending free time actively as well as the need to care for one's health and physical fitness. Another phenomenon closely related to tourism is **recreation**, i.e. "... activity undertaken apart from professional, household and social duties for the purpose of recreation, entertainment or the development of one's own personality" (WINIARSKI 1989, p. 9).

While considering sports tourism, however, the key issue is the way we define **sports**. Similar to tourism (as well as other terms quoted above), it can be understood in a variety of ways. One popular definition says that sport is "... an organized form of human activity, aiming – through regular training – at achieving the best results possible, characterized by competition and selection as well as growing commercialization" (Diweckert 1978, after WINIARSKI 1989, p. 12). When discussing sports tourism, however, it is worth adding that apart from this traditional approach (particularly as regards so-called extreme sports), there are also recreational sports which involve those kinds of physical activity which are practiced only in free time, for fun or self-improvement, and at the same time are safe, can be practiced throughout a person's life, giving pleasure and compensating for the deficiencies and hardships of contemporary times.

Does a form of tourism such as 'sports tourism' exist? What should be understood by it and does it fall into the range of currently functioning definitions of tourism?

Assuming that tourism is "all the phenomena connected with people travelling and staying temporarily and voluntarily outside their everyday environment, which involves economic and social interactions among tourism organizers, direct service providers, a local population and the tourists themselves, unless their main aim of travel is gainful activity, paid at the given destination" (ALEJZIAK 1000, p. 29), it should be concluded that sports tourism is a form of tourism as generally understood, and the basis for distinguishing it are its connections with sport, both as regards participation (undertaking physical activity by sports tourists to pursue their interests and for health reasons) and show / performance (organization and tourists' attendance at sporting events). I believe that it is possible to distinguish between several basic components of sports tourism, especially trips in the form of outdoor recreation, trips connected with amateur practice of various sports, trips connected with participating in sporting events and supporting favourite athletes. If I were to formulate my own definition, it might be as follows:

Sports tourism – a form of tourism whose semantic range encompasses both human activity and the activity of various institutions involved in organizing events and providing services for those who travel directly related to it – temporarily and voluntarily and not for gainful purposes – away from their everyday environment, in order to pursue their sports-related interests, either by undertaking physical (sports) activity, or by attending sporting events as spectators.

The drawback of this definition is that it is long, while its advantage is that it makes it possible to quite accurately define what forms of activity (human and institutional), traditionally (rightly or not) associated with sports tourism, can be included in it or not. I have excluded trips which involve just visiting sports facilities (i.e. at the time when no events are being held there) because I do not think this is a sufficient reason to classify such trips as sports tourism. I think that such trips are simply cognitive and sports facilities in this sense do not differ from other types of buildings, which, performing other functions, are visited by tourists as well (e.g. museums, churches, mines, etc.).

From my point of view, it seems important to differentiate between two concepts: **sports tourism** and **sport in tourism**. While the latter refers to sports (recreational) activity which constitutes the tourist activity of the population (basic or just supplementary), the concept of sports tourism additionally includes the activity of various institutions involving the organization of sporting events and providing services for the tourists participating in them. It seems that in this situation, with regard to this part of the broad term 'sports tourism' which concerns 'sport in tourism', we should be using the term 'active tourism'², while the use of the term 'sports tourism' should be restricted to the most general description of the relation between tourism and sport.

² We may also consider using the term 'specialised tourism', which has a long tradition and is frequently used in the Polish literature.

What should be done and what skills (predispositions) are required for sports tourism?

Taking into account what has been written above, this question should in fact refer only to those parts of sports tourism which concerns 'sport in tourism', i.e. active/specialised tourism. There is ample literature on this subject so I will only point out that it requires the participants to be fit and sometimes especially prepared and able to use appropriate equipment (skis, bicycle, sailing boat, etc.). Undertaking some forms of such tourism individually may also formally require having certain permits (e.g. sailing certificates). On the other hand, with regard to sports tourism, the 'predispositions' mentioned in the question may only concern interests in sports, enhanced with a person's willingness to participate in sports-related trips.

Other dimensions and aspects of sports tourism that may provide an object of study

Research into sports tourism focuses above all on the role of sport as a motivation for tourism and a component of tourism event schedules, as well as on the importance of sporting events on the contemporary tourism market, especially large-scale events, such as the Olympic Games or world championships in the most popular sports disciplines (e.g. football). However, sports tourism as broadly understood presents many other issues, interesting from a researcher's point of view, which are relatively rarely discussed or not approached at all.

For instance, it is worth noticing that when looking for areas shared by sports and tourism, it is usually stressed that sport plays a very important role in tourism, while the fact that tourism is also important for sport is rarely appreciated. The same happens as regards the significance of sport as a factor identifying tourism destinations, not only locally or regionally, but also nationally (e.g. Canada – ice hockey; New Zealand – rugby; Norway – cross-country skiing, etc.). So called 'national sports' may be an important marketing tool as regards tourist promotion. In the classification of sports tourists and the destinations they visit, there is a natural contradiction between the concepts of tourist and visitor, resulting from the differences between sport and tourism perspectives. For instance, from the tourism perspective, spectators at an international sporting event who live outside the host city and arrive to see a given event (e.g. a football match) are classified (e.g. at hotels) as tourists, i.e. in the same way as the fans of the opposing team who arrive for the match (often from another country or even continent). From the sports perspective, especially from a psychological point of view, the spectators who arrive to watch their national team feel at home at the stadium, even if they have come from other, distant cities. Thus, participation in the same event differs between sports and tourism perspectives which may be an interesting research issue.

Other issues which are worth investigating are the tourist aspects of a sports career, as well as how to refer to travel by coaches and other 'officials' travelling to sporting events. Are these business trips? Or perhaps, due to the large number they make (to competitions, training camps, etc.), such people should be treated as particularly active 'sports tourists'? A similar problem may concern journalists. As regards this aspect of sports tourism, we may ask a number of research questions about the socio-demographic features of the participants, their behaviour during a journey, the significance and specificity of service and other aspects of the functioning of each of these groups, as well as trying to establish whether and to what extent they may be regarded as sports tourists.

From the epistemological perspective, an interesting research aspect is the affinity of sport and tourism, in the sense that time and space play a particular role in both. No matter whether they are analysed in similar or different dimensions, they play an important role in both these domains (in sport – e.g. in connection with the achieved results; in tourism – in connection with the temporary change of the place of stay, seasonality, etc.). Another interesting issue is the question of turning sport into a commodity which can be studied not only in the context of sports tourism, but also other forms of tourism.

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SPORTS TOURISM: SOME REFLECTIONS ON SEMANTIC MISUNDERSTANDING

In the contemporary world, sport is becoming not only a huge ‘industry’, generating a gigantic turnover, but it is also a significant element of culture. Cities are fighting to organize important sporting events, which are a perfect tool for promoting a given area (destination), creating a positive image for a city and, consequently, stimulating the local economy, including the tourism economy.

As Smith rightly says, “for the local authorities, sports personifies a new era and is a new way for cities suffering from the post-industrial identity crisis” (SMITH 2001, p. 129). Sporting events, the positive emotions they evoke as well as the presence in national and international media, are a very good way to change the image of a city or region.

While in the 1980s sports and tourism were perceived by academics and business as separate domains of human activity, nowadays they are often put together and at the same time attempts are made to establish new semantic rules, not always entirely justifiable.

One such concept is ‘sports tourism’, usually defined as “all forms of active and passive engagement in sports activity, individually or in an organized way, for non-commercial or business-commercial purposes, which require travelling far from home and place of work” (STANDEVEN & DE KNOP 1999, p. 12).

Researchers distinguish four categories of sports tourism: tourism including elements of sport, tourism involving participation in sport, trips for training purposes, and trips to sporting events (WEED & BULL 2004, pp. 124-131).

The question arises whether such a definition of sports tourism does not distort the meaning of the commonly used definition of tourism.

The answer to this question is clear to me: tourism is a single entity while its motivations are many. The motivation to participate in sporting events (actively or passively) is just one of the numerous motivations behind tourist trips. Thus, as it is not an independent ‘entity’, sports tourism is not one either.

Semantic complications involved in sports tourism also refer to the current fashion for an active style of spending one’s free time during holidays or weekends. Is a person who spends their holidays at the seaside, goes jogging, cycling for pleasure or plays tennis, a traditional recreational tourist or perhaps a sports tourist?

It seems justifiable if we understand sports tourism as exclusively those trips where the main motivation is passive attendance at sporting events (fans) or active participation in amateur sporting events (e.g. running marathons, canoeing trips or hiking).

It is hard to call the remaining types of trips sports tourism, because their participants are athletes – professionals (the commercial effect), or people for whom the main goal is sports as such and not those elements which have long been ascribed to tourism.

It is also difficult to find the border between terms already functioning in tourism terminology, such as specialised tourism, active tourism and sports tourism. Similarly, it is hard to point to the skills (predispositions) which sports tourism participants should possess.

Tourists taking part in sport usually take advantage of the general tourism infrastructure (accommodation and gastronomic facilities, transports, tourist information) and sport-recreational facilities available to all tourists regardless of their motivations to travel to recreation destinations. Only a small part of highly specialised sport-recreational facilities is intended only for those with particular skills (e.g. sailing marinas, climbing walls, cycling tracks, etc.), but even these buildings and facilities can be used by tourists who arrive at a destination to spend holidays or weekends there. To me, they are tourists in the traditional sense.

As it is impossible to define sports tourism clearly and precisely, it is difficult to establish its scale and seasonality, or the measures which show what portion of all tourist trips can be treated as sports tourism. It seems