

PROMOTING TOURIST DESTINATIONS THROUGH SPORT EVENTS. THE CASE OF BRAȘOV

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Abstract

Sport event tourism is a huge and growing global industry with important economic implications for both the sport, the event and the impact of travel and tourism related benefits on host destinations. A primary function of a sport event is to provide the host community with an opportunity to secure high prominence in the tourism market place. However, international or regional prominence may be gained with significant social and environmental costs. Hosting sport events has been a focus of destination marketers as a strategy to enhance its destination image and differentiate its tourism products. Communities are attracted to hosting sport events to draw marketing benefits that will contribute to the success of the destination in the long run by creating awareness, improving their image with visitors and attracting tourism business to generate future inbound travel. As such, destination images can be influenced by the hosting of a sport event and the attributes associated with this event. The purpose of this paper is to outline the role of sport event tourism in the promotion of tourist destinations. A case study has been chosen in order to illustrate the interdependence between event and destination marketing: Brașov, hosting the winter edition of The European Youth Olympic Festival in 2013. The paper includes a series of recommendations for destination managers in order to maximise the benefits of this event and take this opportunity to promote Brașov on the international market.

Key words: *Sport event, Marketing, Brand, Destination image, Attributes.*

JEL classification: *L83.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Events can become the most common channel through which visitors satisfy their desire to sample local foods and traditions, participate in games, or are entertained. Local and regional events can have the added advantage of keeping the domestic tourism market active (Getz, 1991).

Sport event tourism is internationally recognized as a substantial and highly desirable niche market. Numerous American cities have established sport commissions to cultivate this form of travel; Australian states all have their special purpose event development corporations and destinations around the world are competing furiously for sport events (Getz, 2002).

Most of the tourism literature concentrates on mega sport events as The Olympic Games or World Cup (Gibson, 2002) while regional sport events or specific sport events are less studied.

Considering these international trends this paper examines sport event tourism as an opportunity to improve the international profile of Brașov as a tourist destination, hosting the 2013 European Youth Olympic Festival. The recommendations are aimed at assisting the destination in getting the most of sport event tourism and help the local authorities to develop appropriate and sustainable strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Events can be described by referring to their tangible components. Getz (1991) proposes that the tangible products of an event are actually presented to the public as a “façade”: these are the mechanisms by which a visitor experience is partially created. There is a synergistic process involving these products and many intangibles to create the atmosphere that makes the event. Further, events are usually produced as a means of achieving some greater goal. Event tourists or visitors can be defined as those who travel away from home for business, pleasure, personal affairs or any other purpose (except to commute to work) and who stay overnight at an event destination (Masberg, 1998).

Even in cases where events have not been planned with tourism objectives in mind, tourism tends to become a strategic factor once the destination managers begin to market, promote or package the event as part of the attraction mix of a destination. To become a product for sale, a sport event has to be attractive to specific target segments, high in quality and priced right (Hudson, 2003).

Sport tourism is not just an experience of sport activities. It forms a distinct culture of a destination, called by Pigeassou (2004), sport culture - a culture that can influence the choice of the destination (Pigeassou, 2004). According to Oh (2002), sport events can be used as the promotion tool of the tourism in the destination country. Sporting events attract more and more tourists. Such international

events like the Olympic Games are one of the ways to attract tourists to the destination, to create a favourable image of the country for the foreign tourists and to promote the host country in the tourism marketplace (Oh, 2002). In the changing tourists' behaviour sports become a part of tourism, resources that can gradually improve the host country's image and further promote tourism in that country. The development or upgrading of sport facilities may be an effective strategy to access new markets for sport event tourism (Hinch and Hingham, 2004).

From the destination's perspective, sport event tourism is the development and marketing of sport events to obtain economic and community benefits. To the consumer, it is travel for the purpose of participating in, or viewing, a sport event (Getz, 2002). Events and festivals have a significant economic impact (Formica, 1998). Community events are expected to increase the number of tourists and the amount of expenditures (Murphy and Charmichael, 1991). They are believed to bring social benefits towards community (Getz 1991; Ritchie, 1984) and last but not the least they lengthen the life cycle of destination (Getz and Frisby, 1998). The enhancement of community and creation of positive images (Jago and Shaw, 1998) improve destination's image. Several researches verified that image improvement is associated with hosting different events (Jeong and Faulkner, 1996; Pyo, 1995; Ritchie and Smith, 1991).

With growing technologies and advertising scenario, events also include media coverage. This is how the event and destination are two different entities but yet serving each other in a manner. Destination gets a wide media coverage as well as advertising. The participants of the events and the attendees of events visit the destination to take part in the event which brings lots of foreign currency to the particular destination. Thus an event can be the most powerful way to attract tourists to the destination. The events may be in the form of MICE (meetings, incentives, convections and exhibitions), sporting event, and cultural event or may be award functions like Oscar etc. Events also help to build an image into the minds of tourists who have never visited the place and point their attention to the destination through media coverage. Tourists have several options and the first that thing comes in their mind is the brand name which emerges from the level of satisfaction (Jayswal, 2008).

Uncontrolled crowding of facilities, strains on community infrastructure, and inappropriate guest behaviour are commonly reported as examples of negative effects associated with hosting major tourism activities (Lui and Var, 1986; Lankford, 1994). Special events promoted by commercial interests usually focus on generating economic returns for sponsors, while the social concerns of host communities may be downplayed (Williams, Hainsworth et al, 1995). This phenomena can be intensified when the sheer institutional strength and

sophistication of the promoters marginalises the efforts of local groups.

Local and national authorities are responsible for the management of a sport event and the visitor flows it generates but a successful planning requires a high degree of supportive cooperation received from both private and public stakeholders (Ali-Knight, Robertson et al, 2008).

Lasting social benefits are potentially available to the host community through properly planned and promoted special events. These include the enhancement of community spirit and pride, the promotion of cooperation and leadership within the community, the strengthening of support for local cultural traditions, and the building of greater cross-cultural understanding (Getz, 1992). These benefits all potentially lead to a stronger, more vibrant and capable set of local institutions and residents. For example, community residents often feel good about being at the centre of international attention (Burns, Hatch et al, 1986). The excitement generated by such events also helps to compensate for the associated costs tolerated by the host community (Van der Lee and Williams, 1986).

In managing the development and delivery of such special tourism events, it is critical to appreciate their potential strengths and weaknesses from economic and social-cultural perspectives (Williams, Hainsworth et al, 1995). Monitoring programs which incorporate such viewpoints provide a basis for informed management decision making.

3. BRAȘOV AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Brașov County is uniquely located within Romania and future tourism development should build upon this prime location. It attracts more than 400,000 visitors annually because it is at the heart of one of Romania's most important tourism assets, the Carpathian Mountains and the rolling hills of Northern Transylvania (MacGregor, 2005).

The tourism sector has long recognized the value of the Carpathian Mountains. The ski industry based in the Predeal - Azuga - Bușteni corridor, for instance, attracts about 200,000 visitors and there is an emerging interest in expanding the region as a summer mountain destination (MacGregor, 2005). This new orientation towards an integrated mountain tourism product can generate greater volumes, improve occupancy rates and position Brașov County as a more attractive national and international destination.

The main City of Brașov is centrally located and offers various natural and historic (one of Romania's best preserved medieval sites) tourism development opportunities. Its culture and heritage architecture, which come from the mixture of Romanian and Saxon traditions, provide a wealth of interpretive and sightseeing experiences.

Braşov is an ideal primary service area as it offers the most complete mix of visitor services including several excellent hotels, good restaurants, a complete variety of stores and retail outlets, inbound and outbound tour operators. It is also the main gateway to the rest of the County and therefore has an important role to play in distributing information (MacGregor, 2005).

The Destination Management Organization in Braşov County is the Association for the Promotion and Development of Tourism in Braşov County (APDT). APDT was the culmination of meetings and discussions with over 200 tourism stakeholders in Braşov County who recognized a successful and sustainable tourism destination requires hotels, pensions, tour operators, travel agencies, restaurants, municipalities and the county government to work together to share resources and information. In March 2009 APDT and The Sustainable Development Agency of Braşov County announced the creation of a destination brand: "Braşov, Be. Live it". This brand extends the marketing strategy of Braşov County, focused on three main pillars: nature, culture and people.

There has been a constant growth of tourist arrivals in Braşov County in the last years starting from 448,147 arrivals in 2005 and growing to 581,983 arrivals in 2008. However, due to the international crisis the number of tourist arrivals reported by Braşov's Statistics Institute in January 2009 was 12.9% lower than the same month in 2008. In January 2010 the tourist arrivals were 1.3% lower than the same month in 2009 and the average length of stay was 2.3 days (2.2 days for Romanian tourists and 3 days for foreign tourists) (Braşov's Statistics Institute, 2010).

In June 2010 Braşov's Statistics Institute reported only 38,611 tourist arrivals (75.8% international tourists and 24.2% domestic tourists), which is however an increase with 18.4% compared to the same month of the previous year. The average length of stay in June 2010 was 2.1 days, the same as the one registered in June 2009 (Braşov's Statistics Institute, 2010). The accommodation occupancy rate in Braşov County was very low in June 2010 – 19.5%, but higher than the one registered in June 2009 (17.2%). These statistics indicate a slight recovery of Braşov tourism in the context of the economic crisis which is still affecting Romania but it also captures the negative impacts on local tourism when compared to the previous years. Event tourism could be an important chance for Braşov County to revitalize the local tourism sector and to improve the destination's image on the international market.

Previous quantitative marketing research outlined that 45% of tourists are entirely satisfied with the quality of the accommodation units in Braşov city and 37.9% of tourists feel the same way about Poiana Braşov. This outcome of the research outlines the need for improvement of accommodation services in Poiana

Braşov resort. On a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 indicates total disagreement and 5 indicates total agreement, 38.3% of interviewed subjects have chosen 4 to evaluate the variety of sport activities and 46% the variety of leisure activities in Braşov (Ispas, Constantin and Candrea, 2010). On the other hand, tourists have a good attitude about Braşov tourism destination as the evaluations of many attributes are generally positive. In this respect, factors as "security", "environment" and "infrastructure" recorded very good attitudes of tourists, being identified from our analysis as the most important determinants of the overall image of Braşov tourism destination (Ispas, Constantin, Candrea et al, 2010).

Despite being one of Romania's most popular tourist destinations, Braşov has still to reach its full potential. The main issues that Braşov tourism is facing include: environmental protection of natural resources, improving the quality of tourist services, promoting its brand on the international market and increasing tourist arrivals through the penetration of new market segments. Continued tourism growth for Braşov County must therefore be based on professional marketing initiatives that promote both the current and new market-driven products.

4. PROMOTING BRAŞOV THROUGH THE EUROPEAN YOUTH OLYMPIC FESTIVAL

The European Youth Olympic Festival, is a biennial multi-sport event for young athletes from the 48 member countries of the Association of European Olympic Committees. EYOF first summer edition was held in Brussels in 1991, and the winter edition began two years later in Aosta. EYOF is the only all-European multi-sport event. Between 1991 and 2007 the biennial festival had a summer and a winter edition and it was hosted by Italy, Holland, United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal, Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Spain, France and Serbia.

Braşov will host the winter edition of the European Youth Olympic Festival in February 2013 along with other nearby winter sports destinations: Predeal, Râşnov, Sinaia, Buşteni and Azuga. This festival will be the largest sport event organised in Romania after The European Student Competition - Universiada that took place in 1981. Romanian authorities estimate the budget of the sport event to 83 million euro and expect 1,500 sportives from over 45 countries, accompanied by coaches and technical staff, over 1000 journalists and thousands of tourists.

Braşov city will host the ice competitions, Râşnov will host the ski jumping events, Sinaia will host the alpine ski and snowboard competitions and the media center and Predeal will host the olympic village. The opening and ending ceremonies will also be held in Braşov.

This international sport event will bring a variety of benefits to Braşov as a city but also as a tourist destination:

- It provides off-season benefits to the economy;
- It will increase demand of local business: hotel bookings, food restaurants, transportation;
- It can encourage tourists to stay for a longer time at the destination;
- It is also a tool to reach specific target market or a wider market both;
- It can reinforce the destination's image and help in promotion, positioning and branding of the destination;
- It helps to communicate the destination's awareness and build brand equity.

The long term advantages of hosting this event may be referred as improvement in infrastructure, attractive investment by big companies, quality of life for locals and amazing experience for travellers, destination's brand building and an added value to the city's identity.

In order to realize the benefits of sport event tourism in an increasingly competitive marketplace, a vision and plan is required for the promotion of the event and destination. Braşov's destination managers must identify the best target market segments, decide on appropriate strategies and forge a number of essential partnerships. A great deal of marketing research is necessary to better understand sport event tourist motives and to package and promote the event effectively. In order for Braşov to make the most of this sport event it is necessary for stakeholders to reconceptualise events as tourism products. To become a product for sale, the event has to be attractive to specified target segments, high in quality, priced right, packaged carefully to meet the needs of travellers and integrated with other tourism and hospitality services (Getz, 2002).

The major objectives of Braşov's promotion plan concerning this international event should consist of: advertising to niche markets, developing promotions and special packages for event tourists and fostering good media relations. Braşov destination managers can work with tour companies and transport carriers to package sport events, or do it themselves in partnership with the event organisers and sponsors.

Braşov destination managers should work closely with sponsors and media people to communicate the destination's goals and desired imagery, including familiarization trips. They should remember that sponsors often use media coverage in their marketing and networking and might produce their own videos.

The internet promotion of the European Youth Olympic Festival must be started years before the event (we consider it is already too late!) and it must be done in an uniform manner. Until this moment there is no Romanian internet page dedicated to the

2013 winter edition of EYOF and the main Romanian information about the event can be found in national newspapers referring to scandals about land leasing, the cost of the investments, project delays and other problems faced by local authorities in their attempt to assure the necessary infrastructure for this event. The lack of information concerning the sport event and the host tourist destination as well as the negative publicity can affect the opinion of future participants to the 2013 EYOF. The internet page dedicated to the event should be bilingual, attractive, dynamic, accessible and it should include: general information about the EYOF (history, editions, the logo and motto of the event), information about the host country and the host tourist destination, details about event organizers (the organizing committee), details about transportation, accommodation, gastronomy and activities in the destination, a section dedicated to spectators and one dedicated to sponsors and partners, a presentation of the competition sports and details about the access to each competition. A separate section on the website should be dedicated to media including information about press centers, media accreditation, press releases, details about the tourist destination and about the event and the possibility to download the EYOF logo.

An event can reinforce perceptions of attributes and benefits that are already established in the destination's brand and events can add new attributes and benefits to a destination's brand. Marketing communications need to enable a linkage between the event's attributes and benefits and those of the destination.

We must also take into consideration the fact that the co-branding of events with destination or vice-versa can be positive or negative. A huge event may hamper the destination's image as the tourist will be more involved with the event than the destination which will not have a long lasting effect whilst a huge event may not have good response if the destination is not well known (Jayswal, 2008).

Braşov's destination brand will be affected by EYOF advertisement as it increases awareness and may change attitudes towards perceived image of the brand. Promotion for the event as well as the destination is required to approach the targeted tourists. This requires adequate planned publicity campaign to balance the theme and advertisements well between destination and event.

Each tourist destination hosting a EYOF edition creates a specific logo for the promotion of both the event and the location, including the name of the city. Utrecht, the city hosting the summer edition of the EYOF in 2013 has already created a website, a logo and an animation film to promote the event. Tbilisi, the host of the summer edition of the EYOF in 2015 has also created a logo for the promotion of the event.

Considering the fact that Braşov has a brand with an interesting visual and verbal platform, the

event organisers should take it into consideration when creating the 2013 winter edition EYOF logo. The dynamic visual platform of the destination brand could be used in the creation of the EYOF logo especially considering the colours' symbols: red suggesting the residents' passion, orange suggesting their hospitality, yellow – the light, green – nature, turquoise – safety, blue – productivity and violet is sophisticated and simple at the same time. The apparently random display of the city's name suggests the diversity of the activities available in the tourist destination and it could be adapted for the EYOF logo in order to suggest different winter sports.

Event organisers should either create a specific verbal platform for the EYOF or they could use Braşov's brand which includes the verbal platform "Be.live it". Some host destinations of the EYOF, like Liberec in the Czech Republic, have created a motto of the event (Step out from the crowd, carve a path!).

The logo of the EYOF winter edition in Liberec has been realized by a student who participated in a national contest organized for this purpose. Braşov event organisers should be inspired by this idea and involve students of Transylvania University from Braşov in a similar contest.

Another promotion technique should be the creation of a mascot representing the event and the tourist destination that could be promoted in all the printed and online materials and sold as a souvenir. In order to use the attribute of Braşov as a well known tourist destination for its brown bear population the 2013 winter edition mascot could take the form of a bear wearing a winter sport equipment.

Public relations can also be used in the promotion of both the sport event and Braşov tourist destination. Unlike paid advertising for a destination, reporting about an event and a city or a country hosting that event is a purely journalistic activity in terms of coverage. It is absolutely essential that the events are covered for its pre-activities, then during the event as well as after event effects. It is thus necessary that PR activities be well planned. Press conferences, press releases, invites to events for impresarios are some means of networking for good public relations. PR personnel have the responsibility to identify and create rapport with press reporters and networking with influences so as to maintain a positive image of the event and destination (Jayswal, 2008).

Braşov 2013 edition should also be promoted in the preceding editions: Liberec hosting the 2011 winter edition, in Trabzon – 2011 and Utrecht in 2013

hosting the summer editions. Considering the absence of any promotion of Braşov as the host of the 2013 EYOF winter edition so far we consider that the left time should be used in an efficient manner.

Sport events have a capability of physical manifestation of the hosting destination. Braşov's most popular attributes (pleasant climate, surrounding mountains, the variety of tourist attractions and gastronomy, the residents' hospitality) could be used for the promotion of the destination through printed products and materials which are used for events marketing. The products may bear the destination's name promoting the key features of the host destination.

However, the success of such a sport event and the positive effects it can have on Braşov as a tourist destination require collaboration between destination marketers and event marketers.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Event tourism is an important option for destinations and place marketers, as well as a vital concern for event managers who want to develop their audience. Sport and tourism are now very strongly linked. As globalization progresses, new and exciting possibilities are opening up to enrich tourism experiences through sport, and to enhance sport development through tourism.

Tourist destinations should be constantly involved in tourism product innovation in order to remain competitive. Thus, events and attractions can be used in the tourism industry in order to develop new tourism products (Getz, 1989, cited in Eccles, 1995). Events can generate travel to a destination afterwards so event tourism strategies should always be integrated with the overall tourism strategies of destinations in order to maximize the possible positive benefits to the destination.

Braşov destination managers must identify the benefits of hosting the winter edition of the 2013 EYOF and take this opportunity to promote the destination on the international market.

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