

BOREK, Dominik & POLAČKO, Jozef. Sport tourism management in Poland and Slovakia: Olympic Games as an opportunity and a shared vision, the potential of joint promotion. *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. 2023;41(1):70-82. eISSN 2391-8306. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/JEHS.2023.41.01.006> <https://apcz.umk.pl/JEHS/article/view/44559> <https://zenodo.org/record/8066092>

The journal has had 40 points in Ministry of Education and Science of Poland parametric evaluation. Annex to the announcement of the Minister of Education and Science of December 21, 2021. No. 32343. Has a Journal's Unique Identifier: 201159. Scientific disciplines assigned: Physical Culture Sciences (Field of Medical sciences and health sciences); Health Sciences (Field of Medical Sciences and Health Sciences). Punkty Ministerialne z 2019 - aktualny rok 40 punktów. Załącznik do komunikatu Ministra Edukacji i Nauki z dnia 21 grudnia 2021 r. Lp. 32343. Posiada Unikatowy Identyfikator Czasopisma: 201159. Przypisane dyscypliny naukowe: Nauki o kulturze fizycznej (Dziedzina nauk medycznych i nauk o zdrowiu); Nauki o zdrowiu (Dziedzina nauk medycznych i nauk o zdrowiu). © The Authors 2023; This article is published with open access at Licensee Open Journal Systems of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland Open Access. This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author (s) and source are credited. This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non commercial license Share alike. (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted, non commercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper. Received: 15.04.2023. Revised: 15.06.2023. Accepted: 21.06.2023. Published: 11.07.2023.

SPORT TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN POLAND AND SLOVAKIA: OLYMPIC GAMES AS AN OPPORTUNITY AND A SHARED VISION, THE POTENTIAL OF JOINT PROMOTION

Dominik BOREK^{1*}, Jozef POLAČKO²

¹College of International Business ISM Slovakia in Prešov, 1 Duchnovičovo námestie, Prešov
080 01, Slovak Republic, dpborek@wp.pl, , ORCID iD: [0000-0002-4359-9426](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4359-9426)

*Corresponding Author

²College of International Business ISM Slovakia in Prešov, 1 Duchnovičovo námestie, Prešov
080 01, Slovak Republic, admin@ism.sk ORCID: [0009-0000-4417-4078](https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4417-4078)

Abstract: This article focuses on the promotional aspects related to the tourist attractiveness of the neighboring countries-Poland and Slovakia. The purpose of the article is to analyze the issue in question and point out the importance of the search for ways to increase the effectiveness of management of the area of tourism promotion in both countries. The authors used an empirical research method with quantitative-statistical and qualitative studies on specific promotional campaigns. The Olympic Games have the greatest marketing potential among sporting events, as the most important sporting event in the world. The possibility of organizing such an event in Poland and Slovakia would certainly serve to improve the recognition rates of both countries [1]. The authors will try to demonstrate this potential as part of the considerations in this article. Acknowledgement: This paper was

supported by the project NP-KSV-ET-01-2023-12/ST - International cooperation in the field of development, management and law in tourism and sports between the Republic of Poland and Slovak Republic. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and should not be taken as reflecting the position of any authority, entity or institution. This article presents the legal status as of 25 March 2023.

Key words: *sport, tourism, Olympic games, Poland, Slovakia*

I. Introduction

Sport activities are an important part of the society. Sport achieved the status of social institution in many forms, including value integration and affecting lifestyle [2].

Sport tourism is increasingly growing field at both international and national levels across the world [3].

Sport tourism includes two basic forms. Active sporting and passive sport events participation. Nonetheless both forms are not strictly detached. On the contrary they could be understood as complementary with mutual motivation to participate in both great sport events and personal sport activities.

Sport tourism still requires interdisciplinary academic research including proper education and training of professionals and cooperation between interdisciplinary researchers working on the theory of sport, tourism from various perspectives (economic, social, ethics, etc.), sport tourism marketing and many more.

Nonetheless number of manuscripts in the area of sport tourism is rising every year continually since the beginning of 21st century [3].

Sport tourism depends on collaboration not only from academic point of view, but also from all stakeholders and their sectors. This cooperation is very intense studied in actual scientific literature [4].

From our point of view one of the most important fields is also cross-border cooperation. All major sport events are organized at international level with participation of sportsmen from various countries, or even continents in an active form and their supporters or

other tourists participating in passive form. Cross-border cooperation required in major sport events could also be used to enhance the quality and raise the potential of minor sport events and tourist offer in both active and passive sport tourism.

Small-scale sport events often encourage stakeholders to engage in collaboration [4].

II. International cooperation in tourism between Poland and Slovakia

The legal basis for tourism cooperation between Poland and Slovakia is primarily the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic on cooperation in the field of tourism, signed in Jaworzyna Tatrzanska on June 26, 1997. the Agreement entered into force on September 25, 1998 [1]. Equally important is the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic on cultural, educational and scientific cooperation, drawn up in Bratislava on March 23, 2000 [1]. The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland approved the agreement on October 10, 2001 [1]. In turn, the exchange of notes took place and the agreement entered into force on October 22, 2001 [1].

Also important from the point of view of the neighborhood between the two countries is the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic on transboundary cooperation, drawn up on August 18, 1994 [4]. This agreement is automatically renewed in five-year periods, and can be terminated six months before the expiration of such period. By mutual agreement, Poland and Slovakia are to create favorable conditions for interregional cooperation. In addition, they are to strive to solve problems of a legal, administrative or technical nature that could adversely affect ongoing cross-border cooperation. The parties are to support the development of cross-border cooperation in key areas, one of them explicitly mentioned in the agreement is tourism [5].

The last key bilateral agreement from the point of view of tourism is the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic on border crossings, crossing of the border on tourist routes crossing the state border and rules for crossing the state border outside border crossings, drawn up in Trsten on July 1, 1999 [6]. The agreement entered into force 30 days after the exchange of notes stating this adoption, which took place on June 12, 2000.

The Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Slovak Republic, guided by the support of further development of mutual friendly relations and aiming to facilitate the crossing of the state border in tourist traffic, have concluded the above mentioned agreements.

Within the framework of the present discussion, the authors will mainly focus on organizational and legal issues of key importance for both nations. They will discuss the opportunities created by joint tourism promotion with the use of a marketing tool such as sports, and in particular an event product such as the Olympic Games.

The primary issue to be discussed within the framework of this subsection is quantitative research on tourism. An important remark is the one indicating that 2019 will be treated as the base year for all considerations undertaken within the framework of this article. The COVID-19 pandemic severely changed the situation in the tourism market, which was booming in 2018-2019 - both in Poland and Slovakia. The decline in international tourist arrivals worldwide was about 74% in 2020 [7]. According to expert estimates, the recovery of the market - taking into account the current volume of international traffic - will take place in 2023-2024, perhaps reaching a level equal to the indicated reference period [8]. Therefore, in referring to research and analysis it is by all means justified to use information and data produced in 2019.

The number of Polish citizens coming to Slovakia in 2015-2019 increased steadily, and in 2019 (the base year) amounted to almost 230,000 [source: Accommodation base of the CSO and UNWTO and EUROSTAT, materials compiled by the Department of Tourism of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism]. The number of tourists from Slovakia coming to Poland in 2015-2019 increased significantly from 64,000 in 2015 to 114,000 in 2019 [source: Accommodation base of the CSO and UNWTO and EUROSTAT, materials compiled by the Department of Tourism of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism]. Unfortunately, in 2020-2021, the number of tourist arrivals from Slovakia to Poland as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will decrease significantly. Detailed data on this subject is illustrated in the tabular statement.

Number of Polish citizens arriving in Slovakia in 2015-2021

(data from accommodation facilities)

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
163 840	181 225	201 777	217 165	226 801	108 172	56 877

Source: EUROSTAT

Number of tourists from Slovakia coming to Poland in 2015-2022

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
64 369	78 445	89 544	95559	114231	35953	39561	105 343

Source: (data from accommodation facilities), GUS, UNWTO and EUROSTAT.

As for cross-border cooperation, the importance of the Carpathian brand as a real opportunity for the region's tourism should be further emphasized. The Carpathian brand was created for the area covered by the operation of the Carpathian Euroregion, bringing together regions of 5 countries: Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary. Poland is developing cooperation in the Carpathian Euroregion most strongly with Slovakia. Cooperation of the Euroregion began after Poland ratified the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians [9]. The Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Poland organizes the work of the Task Force for Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention. Poland, together with Slovakia, actively participates in the work of the Task Force on Sustainable Tourism of the Carpathian Convention and the National Steering Committee of the Carpathian Convention [10].

III. Sport tourism management in Poland and Slovakia

Sport tourism consists in terms of content of diverse activities like attractions, resorts, tours, events, adventures and many more [3]. In terms of management it consists of involvement in sport and actively or passively participating in events organized for commercial, or non-profit reasons [4].

Sport activity knowledge areas are classified under their major functions: staffing, planning, organizing, leading and controlling [2]. Such definitions are very similar to the basic definitions of management. Therefore management is an integral and crucial part of sport tourism at all its levels.

Cross-border cooperation between Poland and Slovakia in the area of sports tourism management can be understood as a path to success on both sides of the border. We can certainly argue that so far we have not used much of the huge potential that is located at the borders of the two countries, especially but not only related to winter sports.

Huge promotional potential also exists in outstanding athletes on both sides of the Tatra Mountains. They can be ambassadors of the Poland brand and the Slovakia brand. It should be the task of the National Tourist Organizations to take advantage of the potential of such people. Alternatively, sports clubs or national teams participating in international competitions can also be considered as ambassadors of both brands. Examples in these areas are evident in both Slovakia and Poland and will be briefly outlined below.

The state tourism organization Slovakia Travel established a partnership with world-famous Slovak alpine skier Petra Vlhova in 2018 [11]. The sportswoman became a tourist ambassador of her country, her image began to be used for promotional purposes of the country. The most recognizable campaign aimed at the Polish market from November 2022 entitled. "Experience skiing in Slovakia", featuring Petra Vlhova was played by 5.7 million Internet users on Youtube within 5 months [12]. The success of the campaign was due to the fact that Petra Vlhova was the Olympic slalom champion at the 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing [13]. In addition, she was eventually ranked third in the overall World Cup [13]. The athlete's popularity also translated into interest in Slovakia as a destination. The campaign itself was also built as an inspiration for Olympic gold medalist Petra Vlhova. The advertising slogan developed by Slovakia Travel was: "Slovakia, so close to the experience, so close to you" [12]. The advertising messages highlighted the places where the Olympian grew up and gathered experience in alpine skiing. Among the places promoted, attention was drawn to the perfectly prepared slopes of the two-thousand-meter Tatra Mountains and the freeride zone on Chopok. As for other winter sports, attention was drawn to ski mountaineering, which can be practiced at Lomnická Pass, or tobogganing on Hrebienok Hill, which is famous for the beautiful Tatra Ice Dome. In addition, children's winter attractions in Donovaly and snowboarding and cross-country skiing trails in the winter village of Telgárt were promoted. In addition to the sport itself, high-end hotel facilities located in Orava and Liptov were promoted. Attention was also drawn to the Snow Camp at Skalnat Pleso, which consists of

building a camp, staying overnight in alpine conditions and walking with a mountain guide who leads the group [14]. All this proved so successful that the number of Polish tourists visiting Slovakia in 2022 exceeded the indicator of the reference year.

A completely different premise in promoting a country's tourist attractiveness using sports was adopted in Poland. It was decided to use sports clubs and the Polish national soccer team, i.e. teams, rather than individual ambassadors, for marketing activities.

The above was made possible by the Act of August 5, 2022, amending the Act on the Polish Tourism Organization and the Act on gambling [15]. The bill being submitted to parliament entrusted the Polish Tourist Organization (PTO) with new tasks involving the promotion of Poland by sports clubs participating in international sports competitions.

The rules of cooperation with sports clubs are defined in agreements between the PTO and sports clubs. However, the assumed developmental nature of the program does not exclude the possibility of including sports associations operating in given disciplines or entities organizing competitions, as intermediary entities under, for example, framework agreements [15]. The specifics of each sport discipline, promotional opportunities, as well as the capabilities of individual clubs along with their unique potentials will affect the individual scope of cooperation, optimized to maximize promotional effects [16].

Sports clubs wishing to participate in the project must meet one basic condition according to the explanatory memorandum to the Act - to be in a given edition of the program (season) a representative of Poland in European cup competitions. The specific scope of cooperation and reciprocal benefits is defined in each individual contract. Recruitment is conducted on the basis of an extensive list of substantive criteria directly related to promotional potential [15]. On the basis of substantive recruitment criteria developed and, as the program develops, cyclically updated (depending on the results of the evaluation, constant monitoring), the specifics of the discipline and its marketing potential, sports clubs on the basis of the agreement perform specific activities in the field of promotion and building the image of Poland, taking advantage of participation in international competitions [15]. For the purposes of the project, one common slogan (brand)- "Poland Travel" consistent visual branding was developed. With the advertising of this slogan on the shirts performed, among others, the players of Lech Poznan, which reached as far as the quarterfinals of the Conference League Cup of the season 2022/2023 [17]. In this context, it is worth pointing out statistics - for example, the last match in Poland - Lech Poznan vs. ACF Fiorentina on 13.04.2022 was watched by nearly 1.2 million TV viewers [18]. This shows that campaigns using a single athlete - as in the case of Petera Vlhova have an incomparably greater reach and

a longer time scale of impact. The campaign conducted by the PTO is much more modest than the one made by Slovakia, but it was the first such activity of Poland, which can learn a lot from its neighbor in this regard. In particular, a joint promotional campaign using the greatest athletes from both countries such as Kamil Stoch, Robert Lewandowski, Iga Swiatek, Petra Vlhova, Peter Sagan and Marek Hamsik should be considered.

Cross-border tourist cooperation between Poland and Slovakia is implemented in the individual form of various economic private subjects or local governments rather than institutionalized in a central way. Some microprojects supported by EU funds have also been successful with the participation of such subjects from Poland or Slovakia. However, greater support for cross-border cooperation in the field of sports tourism at the level of whole countries has not been implemented so far. This article will discuss past attempts at such cooperation and plans for such cooperation that may yet happen.

The world's biggest sporting event is the Olympic Games, widely understood. Olympic Games are the biggest sport tourism opportunity in the world, scaled as a mega, or hallmark event [3]. According to some authors, Olympic Games replaced historical religious pilgrimages in our era with enormous economic impact [2].

IV. Winter olympic games 2022 candidature

Before the candidacy was announced there was an intense public debate considering advantages and disadvantages in various fields like economics, environmental, social and legal aspects of the event [19].

Various positive and opposing opinions were heard in public. From the point of view of the executive of both countries, we can speak of an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the planned event. Above all, we can speak of a prestige issue not only from the point of view of specific authorities or their representatives, but of one and the other state as a whole.

The candidacy was abandoned mainly because of the result of a local referendum (organized on the 25th May 2014), in which the residents of Malopolska voted by a majority of up to 70 percent against the idea of holding the event. However, public opinion in Slovakia was against it at the time, and Slovaks supported the idea of such an event. The choice of venue in Poland was also said to be a problem, when public opinion in Zakopane was similarly positively aligned to the event as it was in Slovakia [20]. The problematic part of

this type of event organization does not link with the sport itself. It is the massive scale of the event that is causing shock in society [21].

V. Idea of Winter olympic games 2034 candidature

The media have begun to talk about the emergence of a new initiative to try to organize the 2034 Olympics together with Slovakia, consideration of which was to be confirmed by the Deputy Minister of Sports and Tourism of the Republic of Poland. The planned venue is to be the Tatra Mountains [22].

The argument against holding the games in 2034 is mainly climate warming and the huge cost of the entire event [22]. The decision on where to hold the Winter Olympic Games in 2030 has already been delayed for climate change reasons [20].

However, according to the authors, we should consider the potential for different kinds of income from the entire event and the effectiveness of tourism promotion, which, with the Olympic Games broadcast to the whole world, far exceeds the possibilities of any kind of ordinary tourism campaign.

According to the opinion of one Slovak economic analyst from Bratislava is not the idea of the organization sensible, in the Tatras and the surrounding area there are not enough opportunities for accommodation, parking, public transport, etc. and the last games profitable from the point of view of the organizer was in Lillehammer 1994 [20]. This opinion, however, in our opinion is too narrowly focused and does not look at the whole event comprehensively. It can be said that the Tatras, at least on the Slovak side, to this day benefit from the tourist infrastructure built for the organization of similar international sports events in the past. So why couldn't new development impulses be created for the future in this area? Of course, with the acceptance of certain organisational considerations regarding, first and foremost, the protection of the environment, which is a fundamental value of the Tatra area on both sides of the border.

Organizing the Olympic Games is about shaping the visitor experience. An orgominal role would be played here by organizers on both sides of the border, in Poland and Slovakia. Potential mistakes or inadequacies on one side would mean damage to the image of the entire games.

It is needed to create a true Olympic atmosphere and the way such an event is organized greatly affects sports tourism and its management [21] in Poland and Slovakia.

VI. Conclusion

Sport tourism is targeted by providers, who together with groups of participants create a significant linkage incorporating the unique sport as a cultural, social and economic phenomenon [4]. Events like Olympic Games are creating significant tourist experience for all the visitors, participants and organizers.

"As sport is pervasive in our society and tourism is highly salient in our social lives, the subject matter of Sports. Sport is common and constitutes mutual basic concepts, principles and approaches." [2]. This article and also our subjective experience as authors and researchers from Poland and Slovakia who are at the same time both active and passive participants of sports tourism only confirms the cited opinion. Sport in its various forms is an integral part of our lives within society and at the individual level.

Improved transportation infrastructure, construction of multi-purpose arenas and hotel infrastructure, combined with effective promotional activities, can increase the country's attractiveness as an economic partner [23] (increase in productivity), and thus attract media interest in an event held in the area [24, 25]. The use of sports as a promotional vehicle for the tourist attractiveness of Poland and Slovakia is a fundamental issue raised in this article. The increase in arrivals of Polish tourists to Slovakia and Slovak tourists to Poland is due to, among other things, effective promotional campaigns. It should not be forgotten that also ambassadors of both countries appear in sports clubs on both sides of the Tatra Mountains. Suffice it to point out that in the most popular sport in the world-football Dawid Kurminowski from Poland became in 2021 the king of scorers of the highest competition class in Slovakia - Fortuna Liga with 19 goals [26]. In turn, in one of the best clubs in Poland - Cracovia Kraków in appearing in the top division of PKO BP Ekstraklasa the captain is Slovakian footballer Michal Siplak [27]. They are ambassadors of their countries, who can promote them on both sides of the border. Skillful use of such figures and their achievements can contribute to raising interest in tourism in Poland and Slovakia.

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