

# SPORT TOURISM IN DUBROVNIK: EFFECT OF EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP IN WATERPOLO ON LOCAL COMMUNITY IN DUBROVNIK

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**SPORT TOURISM IN DUBROVNIK: EFFECT OF EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP IN  
WATERPOLO ON LOCAL COMMUNITY IN DUBROVNIK**

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## *ABSTRACT*

This study has explored how hosting the European Championship in Waterpolo affects Dubrovnik. It brings economic benefits and global attention, but also strains infrastructure and risks cultural heritage. To ensure Dubrovnik's long-term well-being, we must balance these factors through sustainable management strategies. By addressing challenges and maximizing benefits, we can preserve Dubrovnik's unique identity while embracing the opportunities of sport tourism. Examining the effects of hosting the European Championship in Waterpolo in Dubrovnik, this study reveals a mixed bag of outcomes. While the event promises economic gains and international exposure, it also strains local resources and cultural integrity. Implementing sustainable solutions becomes crucial in maintaining Dubrovnik's essence while harnessing the advantages of sports tourism. By addressing these complexities, the city can navigate towards a future where both residents and visitors thrive harmoniously; ensuring Dubrovnik remains a cherished destination for generations to come.

Key words: Dubrovnik, sport, European Championship, waterpolo, tourism, Croatia

## *INTRODUCTION*

Tourism is one of the most expanded economic branches in the world, and it plays a big role in the economy today. This paper investigates how the European Water Polo Championship in 2024 affected the local Dubrovnik community, with focus on locals' opinions, experiences, and attitudes around the competition.

According to Walton (2024), tourism is a product of modern social arrangements, beginning in Western Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which lets us know that the human interest in visiting many of today's popular destinations began a long time ago and is developing more every day. Tourism also has different sections that have developed over the years, from leisure to business tourism. Each tourist destination has its own tourist time:” In the majority of tourism destinations the development of tourism is characterized as seasonal.” (Škorić, 2006, p. 68).

Dubrovnik, as one of the most developed tourism destinations on the Adriatic Sea, has developed several different types of tourism, the most important of which are mass tourism, MICE tourism, tourism stimulated by the film and TV industry, and sport tourism. In the last 30 years after the Homeland War, Dubrovnik has started renovating and building hotels in the city and in the surrounding area.

The relationship between sports and tourism has drawn more attention recently as a significant engine of economic expansion and community development. Many events take place throughout the year in the city of Dubrovnik, such as the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, which has been organized every year for 74 years. In addition to festival events, sports tourism has started to develop exceptionally in Dubrovnik in recent years. One of the important sports event is Du Motion – Runners' Day, which has been held since 2015 and the event itself has attracted the attention of more than 70 countries around the world.

### *SPORT TOURISM – TERM DEFINITION*

According to Škorić (2008), sport tourism is a type of tourism in which sports activities and playing sports are the main motive of the trip and the tourist's stay in the tourist destination. Sports tourism belongs to the so – called specific forms of tourism, i.e. the motivation for playing sports is the primary reason of tourist trip. The tourist in sports tourism chooses a tourist destination solely based on sports activities that take place in the tourist destination.

### *TYPES OF SPORT TOURISM*

Sport tourism is divided into several different types. According to Hasanović (2018), the most famous types are: competitive sport tourism, winter – recreational and summer – recreational tourism. Competitive tourism is a type of travel where the primary motivation for the trip is a specific sports event. The most famous examples of this type of sport tourism are the Olympic Games or World champions in different sports. In this type of tourism, there can be distinguished two types of participants: those who actively participate (players) and passive participants (spectators).

Sports and recreational tourism are focused on human needs for movement, activities, games and entertainment, while winter recreational tourism is primarily held in winter sports centers. There are most often skiing, skating, ice hockey. Summer – recreational tourism is type of tourism in which guests enjoy their destination and want to spend their time there through some sport activities, such as swimming, sailing, diving.

### *SPORT TOURISM HISTORY*

According to Hasanović (2018), the ancient Greeks established the first link between sports and tourism through the organization of Olympic Games. Athletes from various regions of ancient Greece gathered to compete in these games, and many fans gathered to support their athletes.

It was not until 1896 that the Olympic Games became a key part of modern sports tourism, attracting athletes and fans from all around the world. This marked Greece as the origin of sports and connected sport and tourism to merge globally.

The Olympic Games symbolize the perfect blend of sport and tourism, attracting people from every corner of the world. This tradition highlights the strong link between sports and travel, enhancing the experiences of both athletes and spectators alike.

Modern sports tourism began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and enabled the travel of athletes and fans. After the Olympic Games and the establishment of the International Olympic Committee, other world competitions such as FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and UEFA (Union of European Football Association) are developing. With the establishment of these two organizations, football slowly established itself as the main sport in the world, and therefore the main sport that is associated with the development of sports tourism. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sports tourism began to grow and today it is considered one of the most important types of tourism in the world. It began to expand rapidly in the global market and generates income from many events.

### *IMPACT OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES ON TOURISM AND ECONOMY*

The world's most important sporting event, the Olympic Games, brings together competitors from all over the world to compete in a variety of disciplines. The Olympics, with its focus on sportsmanship, togetherness, and excellence, hold global audiences' attention and provide a platform for cross – culture celebration and exchange. Promoting the host nation and city during the Olympics offers a special chance to build a favorable international reputation. According to Miočić, Peran and Banić (2020), from an economic perspective, the Olympic Games' organization involves large financial outlays but also huge returns. Infrastructure

growth, a decline in unemployment and improved recognition both domestically and globally are examples of long – term benefits. Still, it is critical to account for spending which can add up, such as those related to infrastructure and organization. Hosting the Games can boost economic expansion, draw tourist from abroad, and generate employment possibilities despite the costs. In addition, the Olympics have the potential to provide lasting benefits like enhanced infrastructure and tourism options. It is important to recognize that a destination's hosting of the Olympic Games requires a large amount of consumption is important. Investing in the Olympics can provide a significant increase in tourism during and after the Games, which is beneficial from an economic perspective. According to Miočić, Peran and Banić (2020), there was a noticeable increase in tourists following the Olympic Games in Barcelona 1992, and Beijing 2008 was able to create the impression that it was becoming a more popular travel destination. The examples mentioned above highlight the possibility of post – Olympic tourism expansion and the revolutionary influence of hosting the Games on a location's tourism environment.

### *SPORT TOURISM IN CROATIA*

Over the past few decades, Croatia's tourism industry has grown significantly and is now one of the nation's top sectors. According to Lider (2023), there were 20.5 million tourists in Croatia and more than 107.4 million overnight stays from the beginning of 2023 to December 26. Tourists go to visit Croatia because of its breathtaking Adriatic Sea shoreline, charming old towns, and beautiful landscape. Known for their amazing architecture, lively nightlife, and rich culture legacy, the cities of Dubrovnik, Split, and Zagreb are among the most sought – after travel destinations. Beach lovers, fans of history, and adventure seekers can all find something to interest them among Croatia's numerous attractions. Croatia is also more tourist – friendly due to its reputation for excellent food, exquisite wines, and friendly people.

Compared to the rest of the globe, sports tourism in Croatia has not be that popular. Croatia is renowned for being one of the nations in the world with a thriving tourism industry that grows yearly or seasonally. Croatia offers many examples of how sports and tourism may coexist, including events and international tournaments in various sports held in various towns. A contributing reason to the growth of sports tourism in Croatia is its wealth of natural assets. As a result, numerous sports tourist industries are growing around Croatia's many natural charms. These industries include hiking, cycling, different athletic competitions, and

similar. Moreover, transportations connection with the outside world are crucial for all forms of tourism, including sports tourism, and Croatia has facilitated the growth of transportation infrastructure. (Hasanović, 2018)

Two categories can be used to categorize the effects of the growth of sports tourism worldwide, including in Croatia: social and economic groups. Health, education, and social functions make up the three segments of the social group. Sports and health have long been linked, and it is thought that these two aspects should work together, much like they do in tourism. Sport, along with tourism, is seen as a “ambassador of peace between countries “; the social function illustrates how people start to become closer and get to know each other through these activities. (Bartoluci, 2003)

More recently, Croatia has turned its attention to sports tourism, with different regions starting to host sporting events and provide vacation activities for visitors. The continental part of Croatia is mostly dedicated to rehabilitation facilities, both domestic and foreign visitors use the many spas located throughout the country’s interior. The Snow Queen ski event, which attracts many skiers and skiing fans, is well – known in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. There is potential for major Croatian cities to host a large number of sporting events. It is worth mentioning that Croatia hosted the 200 World Handball Championship. Seven cities in Croatia took part: Zagreb, Split, Zadar, Pula, Poreč, Osijek and Varaždin. Countless people packed the arenas and halls to show support for their home country. The European Handball Championship was held in Croatia in 2018. The host cities were Split, Poreč, Varaždin and Zagreb. A little over 35,000 people can fit in the four arenas where championship was held. The European water polo championship was held in Split in 2022, and the Spaladium arena received up to 11,000 people from throughout Europe. Croatia has great potential to grow its sports tourism industry and draw more visitors to the country, but many of its sport facilities are in poor shape, and it is unclear if any renovations will be made. (Wikipedia)



## *SPORT TOURISM IN DUBROVNIK*

One of Croatia's most well – known cities, Dubrovnik is referred to as the “pearl of the Adriatic “and has a rich culture past. Because of its expectational architecture and preservation, the city's historic center, which is encircled by imposing walls, has been inducted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Croatia, drawing people in with its charming streets, interesting historical sites, and stunning Adriatic coast beaches. One of Dubrovnik's main economic sectors, tourism offers a wealth of chances for the growth and prosperity of the city. According to Pejković (2017), the number of tourists visiting Dubrovnik has increased significantly over the past ten years, which has led to the growth of several tourism – related industries. One of the most popular types of tourism in Dubrovnik among them is cruise tourism. This has extended the tourist season and increased the number of visitors. These days, the peak travel months for visitors to Dubrovnik are early May through early November. Even if cruise tourism is one of the main draw, Dubrovnik has grown other tourism industries including cuisine and MICE tourism. Due to these initiatives, the city's tourism offerings have become more varied, drawing tourist who are not just interested in the typical sightseeing attractions but also in corporate events and gastronomic experiences.

The city of Dubrovnik' strong sports culture is enhanced by the attendance of international athletes and spectators at its sporting events. Sports events of all kinds, from regional competitions to global championships, take place in Dubrovnik all year along. The yearly Dubrovnik International Half Marathon is a highlight event that draws participants of all abilities who come to enjoy the breathtaking backdrop of the city as they race. There is also the Dubrovnik International Tennis Tournament that also attracts elite tennis players who compete in thrilling matches against the backdrop of the city's historical sites.

In the context of sports culture, waterpolo is the sport which Dubrovnik has a long and rich history. Dubrovnik is widely known for its competitive water polo team, which have won numerous national and international championships. Water polo is a very popular sport in Dubrovnik and enthusiastic spectators often attend local matches to cheer on their teams. Water polo matches are held in historic sites or contemporary swimming center, and the city's scenic setting makes for an amazing background. (VK Jug)

An important turning point in Croatian sports history was the 2024 European Water Polo

Championship, which was co – hosted by Zagreb and Dubrovnik. This competition marked the first – ever joint effort between these two well – known Croatian cities to host a significant international athletic event. The championship, which gathered the best water polo teams from throughout Europe, provided an opportunity to highlight the country’s ability to stage world – class sporting events. Athletes and fans alike were treated to a blend intense competition and cultural exposure against the backdrops of dramatic seaside panoramas in Dubrovnik and metropolitan environment in Zagreb. Croatia’s reputation as a top water polo destination was enhanced by this historic championship, which also demonstrated the nation’s capacity to host a successful competition despite the logistical difficulty of planning the competition in less than a month. (Brajdić, 2024)

## *METHOD*

This study investigated what was the impact of European Championship in Dubrovnik affected the local community using a quantitative research design. Residents of Dubrovnik were asked to complete a survey in order to get information about their opinions and experiences with the championship event. A set of 15 structured questions was created to evaluate different facets of the European Championship's influence on the city. The questionnaire contained both open – ended and Likert scale items. Following a study of the body of research on sport tourism and its effects on communities, the survey questions were developed. The study's target population were the people who were living in Dubrovnik. The poll was delivered to residents via a variety of channels, including social media platforms and local groups using a convenience sample technique. Being a current Dubrovnik resident and being at least eighteen years old were criteria for participation. In 4 days, data was collected for a total of 178 responses. To make the survey accessible to all residents it was offered in Croatian.

## *RESULTS*

According to the study results 55,60% of respondents said they regularly attended the European Water Polo Championship in 2024, and 52,80% of respondents said they followed it. Interestingly an incredible 63, 50% of respondents said the organization of the event was “extraordinary”. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of respondents (71, 90%) highly felt that Dubrovnik was positively promoted as a sporting destination by the championship, underscoring its potential for economic development. It is noticeable that 78, 10% of respondents firmly agreed that Dubrovnik should host more sporting events of this nature. However, the majority of 78,10% expressed support for the idea that hosting additional sporting events would harm the city's tranquility and aesthetic appeal, 46, 10%. According to the survey's open – ended question, most participants did not see any serious issues with the way the European Water Polo Championship in Dubrovnik was being organized in 2024. Some participants did, however, provide suggestions for ways to make future sporting events better organized. Some pointed out the need for more involvement in event advertising and improved information accessibility for all spectators, while others suggested more comfortable sitting arrangements in the stands for a better viewing experience. Many people

expressed great satisfaction with the organization, but some people also emphasized the need for greater funding to be allocated to sports infrastructure, such as the construction of new pools and larger stadiums. Nonetheless, there were also compliments for a well – run championship and a satisfying experience. Overall, the poll results show that people have a generally positive opinion of how the European Water Polo Championship is being organized in Dubrovnik, but they also highlight the need for constant improvements to improve both the participant and visitor experience.

## *DISCUSSION*

The results of the research provide insight into the complex effects that the European Water Polo Championship in 2024 has had on the Dubrovnik neighborhood. The majority of respondents said that they were generally satisfied with the way the championship was organized, highlighting both its potential for economic development and its beneficial role in promoting Dubrovnik as a sporting destination. It is significant to mention the large number of respondents who strongly agreed that they were glad to be in Dubrovnik during the planning of such important sporting events was especially remarkable; this suggests that the championship encouraged a sense of civic pride and communal involvement. In addition, a sizable percentage of locals actively watched or participated in the tournament, according to the poll results, demonstrating a high degree of interest and involvement in their own community. This emphasizes how crucial sporting events are for creating a feeling of community and identity, as well as how they contribute to the city's increased cultural vibrancy.

While the majority of participants acknowledged the positive impact of the event, some expressed concerns about potential negative consequences, such as increased traffic and environmental pollution. These concerns raise important questions about the long-term sustainability and future development of Dubrovnik, highlighting the need for careful planning and mitigation strategies to ensure that the city continues to thrive economically and environmentally in the years to come.

Politicians, event planners, and other interested parties who are involved in the development and management of sporting events in Dubrovnik may find useful conclusions of this study. Future events can be better customized to fulfill the requirements and preferences of the local community while maximizing their positive influence on the city's economy and cultural

heritage by making improvements to the championship and attending to the concerns voiced by the citizens.

This research paper investigated the impact of the 2024 European Water Polo Championship on the local community of Dubrovnik, shedding light on residents' opinions, experiences, and attitudes towards the event. Tourism, as a pivotal economic sector, held immense significance globally, with Dubrovnik emerging as a prime example of a tourist destination with diverse offerings. The city's tourism landscape encompassed various forms, from mass tourism to niche segments like sports tourism, which had gained traction in recent years. Dubrovnik's rich cultural heritage and stunning landscapes had positioned it as a sought-after destination for both leisure travelers and sports enthusiasts alike.

The hosting of significant sporting events such as the European Water Polo Championship served as a catalyst for economic development and global exposure. The championship, cohosted by Dubrovnik and Zagreb, showcased Croatia's ability to organize world-class events and spotlighted the nation's sporting prowess on an international stage. The survey findings revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the event, with a majority of respondents expressing satisfaction with its organization and recognizing its potential for promoting Dubrovnik as a premier sporting destination.

The 2024 European Water Polo Championship had not only left a mark on Dubrovnik's sporting landscape but also offered valuable lessons in leveraging sports tourism for community development and economic prosperity. As Dubrovnik continued to navigate the evolving tourism landscape, it was essential to strike a balance between harnessing the benefits of hosting major sporting events and safeguarding the city's cultural integrity and quality of life for residents. Through strategic investments, collaborative efforts, and a commitment to sustainable tourism practices, Dubrovnik could chart a path towards a vibrant and resilient future as a premier destination for sports tourism on the global stage.

## APPENDIX

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Petra Bošković, and I am a student at RIT Croatia in Dubrovnik. As part of my research on sports tourism, I am conducting a study on the satisfaction of the local community regarding the organization of the European Water Polo Championship in Dubrovnik. Your opinion and experience are crucial for my research.

This survey aims to better understand the perception and impact of organizing the European Water Polo Championship on the local community of Dubrovnik. Your responses will be used for analysis and interpretation purposes, providing valuable insight into the community's experience of this significant sports event.

The survey is anonymous, and your responses will be treated with confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary, and we appreciate the time you invest in completing the survey.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact me via email at pb4288@g.rit.edu or through my mentor, Barbara Perić, at barbara.peric@croatia.rit.edu.

Thank you for taking the time to contribute to this research.

Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Other Age:
  - 18 – 24
  - 25 – 35
  - 36 – 45
  - 46 – 55
  - 56 – 65
  - 65+

1. Did you follow the European Water Polo Championship 2024?

- I followed it regularly
- I followed it, but not regularly
- I did not particularly follow it, but I know it was held
- I did not have time to follow it
- No, I did not follow at all

2. Have you attended any of the live matches?
  - Yes
  - No
3. How do you rate the organization of the European Water Polo Championship in Dubrovnik?
  - Extraordinary
  - Good
  - Average
  - Bad
  - Very bad
  - I'm not sure
4. Do you think that the European water polo championship had a positive impact on the promotion of Dubrovnik as a sports destination?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
5. Organizing sports events in Dubrovnik can contribute to the local economy and the variety of offers for residents and visitors.
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
6. Do you think that a sports event in Dubrovnik can contribute to economic development?
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree

7. I am proud to live in Dubrovnik when such an important event in the world of sports is organized.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8. Do you agree that more sports events like this should be held in Dubrovnik?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

9. How much did the organization of the European Championship affect traffic congestion?

- To an extremely small extent
- To a small extent
- Moderately
- Largely
- To an extremely large extent

10. How much did the organization of the European Championship affect environmental pollution?

- To an extremely small extent
- To a small extent
- Moderately
- Largely
- To an extremely large extent

11. Dubrovnik should retain its cultural identity and focus on cultural manifestations instead of sports events

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



12. Holding more sports events in Dubrovnik can damage the peace and beauty of the city and lead to excessive commercialization of the area.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13. Have you noticed any shortcomings in the organization of the championship and what would you change in the organization itself?

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