

SPORTS TOURISM INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA: ORIENTEERING SPORT CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Sports tourism, especially in orienteering sports, where competitors travel over the borders of different countries for professional and amateur sports activities, has grown rapidly in the past decade. Poor weather conditions in the Northern countries and limitations in finding of adequate terrains at homeland, alongside with reduced transport costs and advanced Internet technologies have all played a role. With increasing globalization, Albania is considering to open the borders to greater cross-border movement for participants and spectators of international sports events. The aim of this research is to analyze the organization and outcomes of the first locally organized international orienteering sports event in Albania- “Albanian Orienteering Days” in 2015. This paper considers the issues that arise from the practical activity experience and tries to discover further outdoor sports tourism potential in Albania. A systematic analysis was carried out on “Sports Tourism in Albania” from the perspective of a further activity development, using the “Albanian Orienteering Days” in 2015 as a case study. The results of this research show that Albania has a great and still undiscovered and unexploited potential for development of international events in outdoor sports, especially, orienteering. Favorable weather conditions and challenging terrains for outdoor sports provide basic elements needed for attraction of foreign tourists- orienteering sports enthusiasts and professionals. With more than 150 participants from more than 20 countries, first “Albanian Orienteering Days” is a clear evidence for further necessity to pay special attention to the outdoor sports tourism industry development in Balkan area. The key recommendations from this paper are for more evidence to be collected at the local and international level from sports tourism events management for different types of outdoor sports, like orienteering, mountain-biking, rogaine, trail running and similar with considering and evaluation of various positive/negative impacts from further activity development.

Keywords: *sports tourism, orienteering, outdoor sports, Sportident, timing systems, ITC, Albania*