



Original Contribution

**SPORT EVENTS AS A COMPONENT OF TOURIST DESTINATION
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES
(BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE SNOWBOARD WORLD CUP,
BANSKO 2025)**

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ABSTRACT

Travel industry plays a pivotal role in the recent socio-economic relations, by encouraging economic growth, cultural exchange and technological innovation. Sports provide a huge potential for the implementation of innovative product policy in tourism.

The main objective of this survey is to explore and analyse the role of sport events within the tourism destination development strategies.

The research tasks are:

1. Targeted research and analysis of the sports' role as an essential component of the development of the travel industry in Bulgaria.
2. Implementation of a situational (SWOT analysis) based on experts' judgement, related to the role of sport event in the development of the tourist destination.
3. Conducting a structured interview with experts in the organization and hosting of the event.

The following research methods were used: content analysis, SWOT analysis, structured interview. During the research, the following improvement opportunities offered by the event to the tourist destination were identified: tourist infrastructure expansion and upgrade, brand new tourist packages and services design, including sport activities, stimulation of local businesses and entrepreneurship and expansion of the scope of these activities, destination growth and recognition in the context of sustainable tourism.

Keywords: sports tourism, sports events, tourist destination

INTRODUCTION

The travel industry plays a pivotal role in the recent socio-economic relations, by encouraging economic growth, cultural exchange and technological innovation. Tourism is one of the world's global industries that is experiencing dynamic transformations. The changes are affecting all aspects of the socio-economic life and are resulting from diverse factors such as the evolving consumer's habits, the digital communications influential presence, etc. (1).

Tourist destination is a key element within the tourist sector. The World Tourism

Organization (WTO) provides the following adopted and advanced operational definition: "a tourist destination is a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries, where a visitor could stay overnight. It's a products and services, as well as activities and experience's cluster (a co-location) along the tourism production chain and is a basic observation unit of the tourism analysis. A destination includes various stakeholders and can be networked to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with a profile and identity that could influence its market competitive rivalry" (2).

A key element of the marketing strategy of any organisation within the travel industry or a specific destination within the sector, is the product policy. In the context of the tourism, the product policy covers a wide range of activities

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including service design, innovation and tourism resources management.

A tourist product is a set of services and experiences that fulfills the tourists' needs. It includes:

- Basic components: transportation, accommodation, food, entertainment.
- Additional components: transfers, guiding, tours, insurances.

- Experiences: the emotional value and uniqueness of the destination or service.

There are diverse classifications that define and relate tourist products to different sectors. For example, the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria (2014-2030) categorizes tourist products into the following types (3).

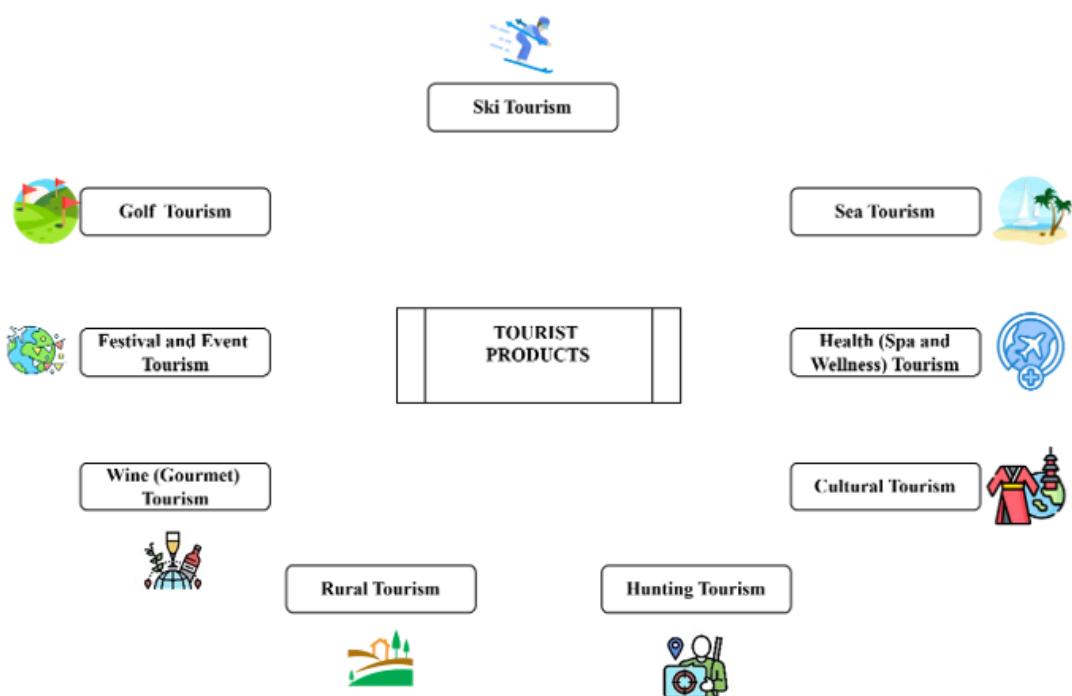


Figure 1. Tourist products types (Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism in Bulgaria (2014 - 2030))

Sport and tourist industries are interrelated and complementary to each other. The concept of sports and tourism activities collaborations during the events organization process is the foundation of sports tourism development (4).

Sports tourism is a major sub-division of the global tourism, constituting approximately 10% of its total financial funds. The estimated growth rate of sports tourism during the period 2023-2030 is 17.5%. This specific sub-division within the tourist sector develops assorted aspects of societal activities such as social, economic, and environmental, promotes and accelerates development, and creates a quality legacy in the long run.

Sports tourism could be distinguished by its multifaceted nature - as a social and cultural phenomenon (5), as a wide range of travel-related sports activities (6), and also as a certain

sort of tourism focused into active engagement and recreation (7).

METHODS

The main objective of this survey is to explore and analyze the role of sport events within the tourism destination development strategies.

The research tasks are:

1. Targeted research and analysis of the sports' role as an essential component of the development of the travel industry in Bulgaria.
2. Implementation of a situational (SWOT analysis) based on experts' judgement, related to the role of sport event in the development of the tourist destination.

The study subject are some essential components related to the travel industry progress via international sports events organization – press attention and publicity, viewers engagement, etc.

The object of the study are experts within the VISA FIS SNOWBOARD ALPINE WORLD CUP – BANSKO management.

The following methods and methodologies were applied in order to accomplish the research work's purpose and objectives:

IV.1. Content analysis of particular data sources, including scientific statistics on sports tourism related issues and its position in the strategies and methods for the development of tourist destinations in Bulgaria.

IV.2. Case Study - the method was applied in order to present fundamental aspects in the organization and conduct of a specific event - VISA FIS SNOWBOARD ALPINE WORLD CUP - BANSKO.

IV.3. SWOT-analysis - the method was applied to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and outside environment's threats of world ranking events, related to their impact on the tourist destination. Bulgarian Ski

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Federation experts, involved in the Snowboard World Cup in Bansko 2025 organization, are strategic analysis key participants.

RESULTS

The implementation of sports within the tourist sector in Bulgaria could be considered as a tactical approach for creating sustainable and attractive products and services that incorporate sports activities with tourist adventures. Ski tourism is an essential component of the global travel and tourism market. Strategically, it is directly associated with the event tourist sector. Hosting international sports forums attracts an additional people's flow - athletes, coaches, media, tourists, etc.

During the study course, the essential managerial strategies for managing sport events in the context of sports tourism were systematized (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2. Manager's strategies for Sports events management

The consolidation of organizational activities plays an essential role in the sport event's quality and the experience of the people involved - athletes, coaches, managers, media, tourists, spectators, sponsors, etc.

During the 2023/2024 season, the Snowboard World Cup in Bansko attracts 446 million spectators in over 20 countries, which is a validation of the keen interest in this sport. The races are broadcasted to the viewers in real time, recorded and via live streaming via media contributors such as Eurosport (Europe and Asia), covering Austria, Germany, the UK, Poland, the Nordic countries and more.

The economic and social benefits of the VISA FIS SNOWBOARD ALPINE WORLD CUP - BANSKO 2025 are mainly reflected in the presence of a large number of visitors during the competitions, which directly affects the local economy. This results in increased revenues for local businesses, including hotels, restaurants and retail outlets. Along with that, the international media coverage increases the character of Bansko and Bulgaria as attractive places for winter sports and tourism.

Media coverage plays a key role in promoting travel destinations, and the Snowboard World Cup in Bansko is a vivid example of how sports

could be a progress major contributor. Sports channels, online platforms and social media represent the exclusive environment in Bulgaria and excellent winter bracing climate that Bansko offers by grabbing the public attention worldwide. This reputation not only establishes Bansko as a leading ski- resort within the region, even so it also encourages the growing

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economy through increased numbers of visitors, infrastructure projects and increased interest of the travel industry.

Relevant data regarding all countries that purchased the World Cup broadcasting package, was obtained during the research. The information is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Tournament Media Coverage

Country	TV Channel	Category
ASIA/EUROPE	Eurosport, Eurosport 2 ITA	Live Streaming
AUSTRIA	ORF Sport+	Live/Delayed
BULGARIA	Nova Sport Diema Sport HD	Live
CZECH REPUBLIC	Ceska Televize CT Sport Plus	News Highlights/Live Streaming
DENMARK	Viaplay Vinter	Live Streaming
ESTONIA	Go3 Sport Open	Delayed
FINLAND	Viaplay Vinter	Live Streaming
FRANCE	L'équipe	TBA
GERMANY	Ard	News/ Highlights
ITALY	Rai Sport Rai Play	Delayed Live Streaming
L.AMERICA	ESPN	Live Streaming
LATVIA	Go3 Sport	Delayed
LITHUANIA	Go3 Sport	Delayed
NORWAY	Viaplay Vinter V Sport +	Live Streaming Live
POLAND	Polsat Sport 3	Live
SLOVENIA	TV Slovenia 2 RTV 365 TVMMC	Live Live Streaming
SWEDEN	Viaplay Vinter	Live Streaming
UKRAINE	Suspline Sport Suspline Reg. Net.	Live
UNITED KINGDOM	Viaplay	Live Streaming
USA	Skiandsnowboard.live	Live Streaming

The media coverage of the Snowboard World Cup in Bansko holds a significant impact on the resorts' worldwide prestige and the tourist infrastructure improvement across the region. The acquisition of broadcasting rights by 20 countries is evidence of the strong fascination to the event and the capability of Bansko to establish the resort as a premier ski location. The contests gain viewership of millions worldwide via massive broadcast coverage. The collaboration of telecasts, digital platforms and social media, ensure extensive publicity for both the happening and the travel destination. This not only makes Bansko recognizable among snow sports enthusiasts, but also among aspiring travelers looking for appealing winter escape.

World Cup broadcasting creates impactful marketing, attracting new tourists and investors.

Worldwide media reporting increases the attraction to Bansko and also leads to the rise of visitors, including off-season. In addition, local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, ski services benefit from the large influx of visitors, encouraging economic growth.

A situational (SWOT) analysis was conducted during the research, aiming to highlight promising prospects as well as risks and threats to the **VISA FIS Snowboard Alpine World Cup 2025** as an event effectively engaging visitors, sponsors, media, etc. The scope of the analysis also includes various factors and processes from the outside environment, i.e. all aspects unsupervised by authorities (the international and Bulgarian federation, organizing committee, etc.). Hence, while applying the method, there are four alternative outcomes, which are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. SWOT analysis findings

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Increasing tourist arrivals: International sports events such as the VISA FIS Snowboard Alpine World Cup become popular destinations for tourists worldwide. This results in growing interest in travel services within the region- accommodation, restaurants and transport services.</p> <p>Prestigious and respectable region: hosting high-profile events elevates the destination's influence and displays the location as an iconic tourist hotspot.</p> <p>Financial advantage: Sports events generate significant revenue for the local economy through growing tourist presence. This includes both the direct impact on hotels, restaurants and transportation services, and as well long- term economic benefits from the growing demand for products and services in the region.</p> <p>Popularization of sports within active tourism: Happenings such as the World Cup can encourage the interest in winter sports locally and worldwide, thereby increases the number of people visiting the destination fascinated by snow sports activities rather than only limited to tourist and cultural sightseeing.</p>	<p>Infrastructure complications: Hosting major international events could truly challenge the destination's facilities and amenities. Difficulties such as congested roads, hotel capacity and transport services can arise in case preparations in timely manner have not been applied.</p> <p>Potential adverse social and environmental impact: Large events could cause environmental pollution, ecological disturbance, and local resources overuse. The escalating number of tourists may generate overloading of environmental and cultural assets within the region.</p> <p>Non- seasonal: Lack of visitors' appeal risk is applicable for the winter resorts such as Bansko- this makes the destination subject to the events. I.e. If the events are being held during the winter months only, they cannot generate a stable tourist flow throughout the year.</p> <p>Risks related to event failure or unpredictability: Sports events could be affected by various unforeseen circumstances- poor weather conditions, technical issues or even political uncertainty. This might lead to a decrease in visitors' numbers and, therefore- to business downturns.</p>

Opportunities	Threats
<p>Development of tourism facilities: the VISA FIS Snowboard Alpine World Cup can inspire investors and authorities for renovating and expanding the tourist infrastructure of Bansko and around. This includes establishing new hotels, improving the roads, upgrading the ski lift facilities and introducing new attractions. Infrastructure investments can lead to enhanced visitors' experience and long-term benefits for the region.</p>	<p>Governmental policies: geopolitical uncertainty or evolutions in the political landscape could affect touristic flows and the large events management. For example, travel restrictions introduced due to political conflicts or alterations in visa regulations may reduce the number of foreign visitors. Political uncertainty in the region could obstruct long-term investment in infrastructure and travel industry expansion.</p>
<p>Launching new tourist packages and services: Events in Bansko could be implemented as part of the destination's strategies to expand its vacation package beyond the winter season. For example: once established as a hotspot for winter getaway, the region could develop new summer active tourism packages including mountain hiking, cycling or cultural events based on the regional heritage.</p>	<p>Economic uncertainty: Global economic climate also plays an important role in determining tourist fascination to a destination. An economic crisis, inflation, a decrease in the purchasing capacity of the tourists or a recession in the leading touristic markets (such as the EU or Russia) can lead to a downturn in visitors' numbers. In the event of financial distress people may cut back on travel or opt for cheaper destinations.</p>
<p>Fostering local commerce and entrepreneurship: Large sports events offer exceptional opportunities for local businesses to extend their audience. Restaurants, shops, transportation companies and others could benefit from the increasing demands during the events. This could be encouraging for local entrepreneurship and promote workforce expansion.</p>	<p>Technological evolution and innovations: technology has a two-way outcome on the travel industry. On one hand, new technologies can enhance the organization and accomplishment of events, improve destination marketing and provide new opportunities for interactive tourist experiences. On the other hand, the innovative technologies rapid development could cause competitiveness from emerging digital travel tourism experiences. An example of this could be the online tourism, which could reduce the need for physical travelling.</p>
<p>Destination evolvement within the context of sustainable tourism: By sustainable practices implementation within the sports events management, Bansko could be declared as a premier destination for environmentally-friendly travelers. For example, waste management eco-friendly technologies implementation, energy conservation and environmental protection can grab the attention of more and more visitors looking for environmentally friendly and socially responsible destinations.</p>	<p>Climate and environmental threats: Climate changes pose a serious threat to the winter resorts such as Bansko. Global warming leads to unstable snow conditions and shorter winter seasons. This might affect the hosting of winter competitions and could limit the number of visitors heading to destinations, offering safe snow conditions.</p>
	<p>Other destinations competitiveness: Winter resort experience locally and worldwide is not limited to Bansko only. Competition from other, established winter destinations might decrease the attraction to events, held in Bulgaria. Countries that have advanced infrastructure and greater investments, may attract a greater number of athletes and tourists, posing challenges to Bansko's growth as a winter resort.</p>

The following exclusive features of the World Cup can be concluded as a result of the research - they are a consequence of the demanding criteria imposed by the Bulgarian Ski Federation in organizing tournaments of this standing.

- Opening Ceremony.
- Children ski and snowboard athletes involvement in the drawing of lots process for the competitors numbers distribution.
- Creating a vibrant and positive environment for the competitors.
- Setting up a finish area with grandstands, a dedicated media mix area, individual facilities for each team to prepare prior to the start of the competition.
- A sponsors' dedicated area. All activities including audience and tourists of the so-called Title sponsor, as well as local ones, generate additional high attraction apart from the race.

CONCLUSION

The advancement of travel industry in Bulgaria, and in particular the incorporation of sports events as a key element, highlights significant potential for a sustainable growth and international recognition. The large-scale sports forums conduct, such as the VISA FIS Snowboard Alpine World Cup in Bansko, not only encourages the economic activity within the region through increased tourist interest and revenue growth for regional businesses, but also enhances the destination's appeal worldwide. Sports tourism is establishing as a crucial factor in the product policy of travel destinations, providing an exclusive experience that consolidates recreation, cultural exchange and media visibility. Despite of the challenges, such

as the need for infrastructural enhancement and environmental resource management, strategic planning and implementation of sustainable environmentally friendly methods create opportunities for Bulgaria's long-term enduring placement as a leading tourist destination in the context of sports and event tourism.

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