

Article

“Because We Don’t Want to Run in Smog”: Problems with the Sustainable Management of Sport Event Tourism in Protected Areas (A Case Study of National Parks in Poland and Slovakia)

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Received: 25 November 2018; Accepted: 7 January 2019; Published: 10 January 2019



Abstract: The practice of active and qualified tourism in national parks in Poland and Slovakia has longstanding traditions. Primarily, these parks have been a place of individual recreational activity, as well as a place to educate and convene with nature. Recently, sport tourism, which is characterized by the participation of tourists in mass organized sporting events mainly of a competitive nature, has been gaining more popularity. Even though this activity takes place in protected areas, sports are the main priority, rather than educational goals. Natural values have the primary function of enriching emotional experiences, and exploring wildlife is not an end in itself. Running events are now at the head of the list as the most popular sporting events in Poland and in Slovakia. The authors of the article focused on protected areas in Poland and Slovakia, largely because these countries were considering organizing one of the world’s biggest sports events together: The Winter Olympic Games (2022). The purpose of the study was to recognize the attitude of Polish and Slovak national park authorities toward the organization of mass sports events in protected areas. A diagnostic survey was conducted using the method of interviews with the directors of Polish and Slovak national parks. The research results shed light on the current state of development of sports event tourism in protected areas in the two countries. The article examines the response of Polish and Slovak park authorities to the changes of the current era of shifting societal needs regarding physical development, in particular with regard to the sustainability of protected areas. Currently, there is a lack of a strategic approach toward the development of sports tourism in national parks in Poland and Slovakia. The answers given in the interviews create an image that indicates a differentiated approach to the issue of permitting the organization of sports events in the areas of national parks. It turns out that the practice in these areas is different in individual parks. The diagnosis presented in the article indicates that it is necessary to undertake interdisciplinary and international research among environmentalists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and physical culture specialists in order to develop methods for measuring the impact of sporting events organized in natural areas in this part of Europe.

Keywords: sports ecomobility; sports tourism; national parks; sustainable development; running events; Winter Olympic Games

1. Introduction

In today’s world, sport is increasingly important in the sociocultural realm, often finding its way into national policies. This is thanks to what B. Houlihan (1997) calls the “instrumental quality of

sport”, as sport is valued for its capacity to “camouflage problems ranging from poor cardiovascular health and juvenile delinquency to low tourist volume” [1]. In the following text, we are going to take a closer look at the intersection of sport and tourism, which in the past thirty years has created public and political tensions, especially within the context of the natural environment, where both leisure activities often take place. Tourism, and sport tourism in particular, should be seen as an autonomous phenomenon of our time, reflecting current trends, needs, and lifestyles. At present, there are strong links between sport and tourism, which can be referred to as the touristification of sport or as the sportification of tourism. Sport tourism (especially sporting event tourism) is one of the fastest growing branches of the tourism industry. It is estimated that 25%–30% of the world’s tourism economy is currently related to sport, and furthermore that tourism development forecasts for the coming years also predict a further increase in this kind of tourism [2]. However, sporting events organized around the world for tourists are increasingly taking place in protected areas, which creates new challenges in the management of the sustainable development of sport tourism. Sporting event organizers often try to locate their events in the beauty of nature in order to increase their attractiveness in the eyes of potential participants: Athletes and fans.

Sport tourism management is a big challenge, especially when its development takes place in areas of natural value. The organizers of tourism should prioritize natural protection over the aesthetic expectations of sports tourists. However, this is no easy task when taking into account the growing needs of sports tourism participants. National parks and conservation reserves are subject to increasing levels of recreation, sport, and tourist pressure. These produce environmental impacts associated with travel, accommodation, and recreational activities. Typical impacts in parks and reserves include soil erosion and compaction, damage to vegetation, disturbance of wildlife, water pollution, vandalism, and excessive noise [3].

In natural protected areas, including the Polish and Slovak national parks, as we lay out in the following text, a growing tendency to organize sports events can be observed. Organizers of mass sporting events are increasingly looking for attractive locations, which often boosts the popularity of the events and leads to higher media coverage. This has caused tensions between park authorities and organizers of major and popular sports events. Therefore, the aim of the empirical research carried out for the purposes of this article was to obtain the opinions of the directors of the national parks in Poland and Slovakia concerning the organization of sporting events that attract tourists in the areas of the parks they manage. The geographical and sociocultural closeness of the selected cases also contributes to an interesting comparison.

Active and qualified tourism in the areas of national parks in Poland and Slovakia has a long tradition. One of the first documented excursions to the High Tatra Mountains took place in 1565, when a noblewoman of Polish descent, Beata Laska, traveled from the town of Kežmarok to Zelené Pleso Lake in the High Tatras. Back then, such an excursion was thought to be eccentric and inappropriate [4]. Mass tourism in the mountain regions of Poland and Slovakia would become a fashionable pastime activity with the development of tourism and spa centers, as well as with the building of new railway connections.

In Poland, in accordance with applicable legal provisions [5], the issue of the availability of all 23 national parks, among others, for tourist and sport and recreation purposes, primarily due to the natural or historical values of the parks, is subject to certain restrictions. It is up to the national park director to determine the usage of protected areas for scientific, educational, tourist, recreational, and sport purposes, and therefore the director is the determining factor with regard to the development of tourism in the national park [6]. Those areas of the national parks that are available for tourism, sport, and recreation purposes are designated in planning documents. There are certain restrictions in choosing venues for particular events. The Nature Conservation Act states, among other things, that it is prohibited to organize recreational and sporting events in national parks without the prior consent of the park’s director. The director of the park, as director of a public administration body, decides whether it is possible to agree to a sporting event in the park and under what conditions such consent

may be given. The director may charge fees for the provision of a national park, but it is not only about tickets for a single tourist admission to the park, but also about fees for organizing the events. The fees charged are, for example, intended to restore and maintain the condition of the area where the event took place. Fees are also charged for other reasons, including to discourage organizers from incurring costs or to preserve the security of the park's space, and the routes are marked well in order to avoid the spread of people to the wild. The regulations do not, however, specify the method of determining the amount of the fee or cases when it is strictly required. The law does not specify the guidelines to be followed by the park director when issuing consent for the organization of mass sporting, recreational, or tourist events. However, managing a national park cannot be done in isolation from the needs of society, as the protected areas are a special platform for communication between nature and culture [7], as they often feature natural elements strongly embedded in the national culture and traditions.

In Slovakia, sporting and other activities in natural protected areas are regulated within the Nature and Landscape Protection Act of 2002 [8]. The legislation makes a distinction between five stages of protection, depending on the uniqueness of the protected area. There are nine national parks in Slovakia, covering approximately 3000 km². The oldest park is the National Park of Tatras, which was founded in 1949, while the other parks were founded in the second half of the 20th century, all during the era of state socialism, under different legal rules than those in practice today. Furthermore, within the parks there are areas with different stages of protection, and therefore while some parts of the parks are opened to sport tourism, other parts are not. The classification and zoning of these areas, which also entails changes in legal restrictions, often appears in the public discourse as a highly problematic issue. All nine parks cover mostly mountainous or hilly landscapes, and thus hiking, skiing, and raft canoeing are among the most popular sports leisure activities done there.

2. The Need for Sustainable Development of Sport Tourism in Protected Areas

The concept of creating national parks was born in American culture in the late 19th century, and it quickly spread to other continents. The concept was not directly copied, but rather took the form of various adaptations depending on local social, political, and cultural conditions [9]. Undertaking physical activity in the protected areas of Europe has a long, several-hundred-year tradition, even though its purpose has not always been leisure [10]. With the increase in the popularity of tourism in protected areas, over the years there have been many studies on the sustainable accessibility of national parks to tourists and on the potential of ecotourism as a panacea for forms of tourism that have a negative impact on the environment [11,12]. The 21st century, however, poses new challenges for the management of sport and tourism to the managers of national parks in Europe, where the ideology of healthism and a healthy lifestyle has spread rapidly. Visits in parks are no longer just about individual recreation, but are more and more often related to the organization of massive sporting events of a competitive nature with the participation of athletes and fans.

In the last few years, the ideology of healthism has developed in Poland, Slovakia, and other countries in this part of Europe. This trend is visible in running events in which Poles and Slovaks are willing to participate. The scale of this social phenomenon is certainly an extraordinary phenomenon at many levels, because several interdisciplinary factors have to be taken into account. The popularization of this sport and active participation in running events is multifaceted. Its most significant components concern health care, physical and mental health, and well-being. The sense of gaining a high quality of life and the sense of joy resulting from an active lifestyle are conditioned not only by the course of motivational processes, but also by the level of satisfaction of psychological needs, which are a prerequisite for achieving satisfaction from one's own physical activity. The physical activity of Poles and Slovaks has increased dynamically in the last two decades. Previously, Polish and Slovak communities, contrary to Western societies, showed much lower physical activity. Social, cultural, and economic factors influenced the increase in physical activity of Poles and Slovaks. Currently, Poles and Slovaks are better educated, wealthier, and have more free time. They have moved to cities in which sports infrastructure has developed dynamically. They have also moved to offices. In the

past, they engaged in a lot of physical and agricultural work, which is why they rarely thought about physical activity as recreation. In modern times, the way people spend their free time has become an indicator of their social status. Sport and sport tourism have become a characteristic feature of the middle class in countries such as Poland and Slovakia, and running in particular has become very common and visible.

In addition, people are increasingly eager to engage in physical activity away from urban agglomerations, not only because of beautiful landscapes, but also because of air purity. Street racing organized in polluted cities is not as attractive as events in the natural terrain. Runners are afraid to take part in races organized in polluted cities because they think that it could lead to a decrease in lung performance. They also feel confused about the impact of a running event on their health, and above all are wary of training in large polluted cities. The result of these fears is that they are eager to find new natural spaces for training. One runner training in a protected area most likely will not permanently damage the ecosystem. However, if runners appear in the park in the hundreds or thousands, then a big problem arises, especially considering the national park theoretically should be accessible to everyone as a common public good. The increase in the popularity of mass sporting events for both professionals and amateurs creates a rivalry between the protection of biodiversity and the organization of these events. The popularity of protected areas among sports enthusiasts is also influenced by the popularity of extreme sports and the emergence of new sports disciplines [13]. It is also becoming feasible for middle-income countries such as Poland and Slovakia to organize the largest and most expensive sporting events in the world, such as the Olympic Games.

The common good theory is based on the principle of sustainability, which forces a holistic approach, i.e., one that takes into account both the economic as well as the social and environmental aspects of this good. An effect of this approach is increased development of social relations within the group, which is forced by a need to make joint decisions on matters relevant to the sustainability of using common resources and fair distribution of access to these resources [14]. How does the common good relate to allowing marathon runners to run in national parks? Should the National Parks' authorities allow the organization of sporting events in their protected areas? The opportunity to use protected areas belongs to everyone. However, the organization of mass events and the concentration of a large number of people in one place may have a negative impact on the environment. No one should be excluded from running in national parks in light of this theory, but if everyone runs, and biodiversity degradation occurs, everyone loses.

For years, the primary function of the national parks in this part of Europe was to provide a place especially for individual recreational activity, education, and connection with nature. Recently, sports tourism, which is characterized by the participation of tourists in mass organized sports events mainly of a competitive nature, has been gaining more popularity. Even though this activity takes place in protected areas, sports are the main priority, rather than educational goals. Natural values have the primary function of enriching emotional experiences, and being part of nature is not an end in itself. National parks in Poland are visited by about 11 million people annually [15]. Currently, several dozen major sports competitions take place in Polish national parks, not to mention hundreds of minor events. The development of urbanization also increases the frequency of visits to national parks by tourists seeking contact with wildlife, which also creates an opportunity for the development of marginalized rural areas [16]. More and more people want to practice sports in unusual scenery and in contact with nature, rather than in the "concrete jungle". On the other hand, one of the goals of national parks, besides natural protection, is also to make them available to people for tourist, sport, and recreational purposes.

Although analyses in the field of sustainable tourism and sustainable sport appear in scientific literature, the question of the sustainable development of both spheres meeting in the form of sports tourism, especially in areas with special natural qualities, is much less discussed [17]. Moreover, environmental effects of sports tourism are, unfortunately, much more often negative than positive [18]. Adverse effects of tourist development of the national parks' space are difficult to avoid in general,

because they result from the basic necessity of ensuring adequate conditions for the stay and safety of visitors. In addition, there are also the rising demands of visitors as to what “stay” and “safety” should mean. The forms of their negative impact on natural resources and the landscape are diverse. Among the most important is the urbanization of the environment, which comes as a result of the development of tourist and sports infrastructure [15]. Other direct effects of the development of tourism, sport, and recreation in protected areas include damage to vegetation caused, for example, by horse riding, running, mountain biking, or off-road vehicles [19]. Major sporting events especially lead to an increased amount of energy consumed, resources used, and trash produced.

To counteract this, the International Olympic Committee Sport and Environmental Commission was established in 1995. The aim of this commission is to promote awareness and provide education around environmental sustainability. Additionally, it focuses on the cities bidding to host the Olympic Games to meet standards of sustainable development. For example, countries hosting the Olympics are aiming for “Green Games”, in which they focus on keeping carbon emissions to a minimum and encourage the recycling of waste and water. There are a lot of potential and real threats that are particularly important to the organization of sports competitions organized in protected areas (especially the international ones in the class of the Olympic Games). Nowadays more and more sports competitions (even those intended for amateurs) take on the character of mass events, gathering hundreds or even thousands of participants. The organization of sports competitions in a space with special natural qualities therefore requires the coordination of many planning and logistics activities, as well as significant knowledge (including the aspect of minimizing the adverse impact of these projects on the environment). As the presence of athletes and fans always leaves a significant environmental footprint, sporting events can have an extremely negative impact on the natural environment.

The importance of strong interactions and dependencies between ecology and sport was first observed several decades ago. In 1994, the natural environment was incorporated into the Olympic Charter. Since then, it has been considered the third pillar of Olympism, in addition to sport and culture. The International Olympic Committee has created a special unit dealing with the relationship between the natural environment and sport. The main goals of its operations are to promote the integration of environmental principles in sport, to use the popularity of sport to promote environmental awareness and respect for the environment by the society, to promote the development of environmentally friendly sport facilities, and to produce environmentally friendly sports equipment [20,21].

In Poland, an example of a popular sporting event organized in the national park area is the “Forest Run”, which takes place in Wielkopolski National Park. The event attracts several hundred participants, including many tourists. The organizers of the run believe that running close to nature is the best and healthiest way to run. Similar statements can be found in scientific papers. Running outside the urban agglomeration allows for contact with nature, which favors the regeneration of psychophysical forces and stress reduction. According to Bodin and Hartig, researchers dealing with the influence of the type of external environment on the psychological benefits of physical exercise, runners prefer running in parks away from the urban environment because they perceive them as more conducive to mental regeneration [22]. Brymer and Gray have added that athletes often create an intimate and mutual relationship with the natural world [23,24]. Moreover, some runners are afraid to take part in races organized in polluted cities due to the possibility of a decrease in lung performance [25]. Traffic-related air pollution may contribute to cardiovascular morbidity. In urban areas, exposure during physical activity is of interest due to increased breathing rates and close proximity to vehicle emissions. Exposure to traffic pollution may contribute to acute changes in blood pressure, autonomic, and microvascular function in women. Regional air pollution concentrations may modify the impact of these exposures on autonomic function [26]. In Poland, Poznan and Cracow are big urban agglomerations where every year one of the largest and most important running events is organized in both the autumn and winter seasons. Poznan and Cracow are cities that have occupied high rankings on the infamous list of the most polluted European cities for several years. Specifically, the problem is smog in the autumn and winter seasons. This is why runners in anti-smog masks are

increasingly seen on the streets of Polish cities. Some of them also decide to train outside the city limits, which increases the level of anthropopressure on the natural environment (Wielkopolski National Park is situated close to Poznan). Running events organized in natural areas are sometimes also more intimate: Not all runners like massive and prestigious big street runs. In addition, running on the hard ground of the street can cause injury, and therefore many runners prefer to run on soft ground.

Valuable natural areas—areas of national parks or forest areas—are generally open and available to everyone, and are a magnet for attracting tourists due to their natural values, serenity, and clean air. Nowadays, people managing these areas, for example foresters, must not only deal with natural protection, but increasingly must meet growing tourism needs. Both park authorities and scientists have argued for years that it is worth being active not only in local city neighborhoods, but mainly in forest and rural areas. It is in these natural areas that the quickest physical and mental recovery takes place, as natural areas are good for the oxygenation of the body, as well as the improvement of circulation and heart rhythm. Physical activity is much better done in close contact with nature than in a concrete jungle or using artificial sports infrastructure. Modern humans live under stress, often leading to an unhygienic lifestyle, and environmental pollution negatively affects their health. Therefore, physical activity undertaken in urban development is less often recommended than in areas with valuable natural qualities, especially since nowadays it is more difficult to find a landscape that is in no way changed and managed by people. Rapid development of urban agglomerations is taking place, which increases the distance between places of residence and recreation areas. There is also the problem of free time, or rather its rational and conscious expenditure, because the potential recreational person has more and more of it. The issue of leisure and free time ceases to be unknown to the rural population as well. At the same time, the number of recreational places is decreasing. Forests have a particularly positive relationship with health protection. They are characterized by aligned temperatures in the diurnal and annual cycle, increased humidity, and lower amplitudes during the day. Forest air contains natural substances such as essential oils secreted by plants that have anti-stress, soothing, calming, relaxing, anti-inflammatory, and bactericidal properties. Forest areas create infinite possibilities for spending free time [27–29]. The most common forms of using forests for recreational purposes in Poland and Slovakia include running, cycling, and fast marches and walks. However, the forest offers an abundance of activities far beyond those select few. Birdwatching, Nordic walking, orienteering, survival, and horse riding are just a handful of the many activities one can use as a means of enjoying the benefits of nature. Forests are a natural place for recreation and relaxation, especially important for residents of large cities. They fulfill an important social function, which manifests in a soothing effect on health. The forest is a special place, and the well-used space of forest areas provides a utilitarian influence on people staying in their area, positively affecting the body and mind. Forestry in Poland and in Slovakia for over half a century has lost its economic significance for the growth of social significance. This phenomenon is an important premise for forestry to be multifunctional and seek sources of income outside the production of wood, including the marketization of at least some public services, among them recreational goods. This is favored by the current period of human development, called the “era of leisure”.

The sustainable development of sports tourism in forest areas is indispensable. There are many real and potential threats that one should be aware of, particularly when organizing activities set in a forest environment. Orienteering is currently becoming more and more popular. The most common forms of this activity, and the most often organized, are bicycle orienteering and ski orienteering. Some sporting events take the form of mass events and gather thousands of participants at the start. The organization of competitions in sport orientation requires the coordination of many planning and logistical activities, as well as significant knowledge, for example on how to minimize the negative impact of these projects on the forest environment. The presence of athletes and fans always causes an environmental footprint, and thus sporting events can have a very negative impact on the natural environment. Therefore, sports authorities are trying to counteract this through preventive behavior and raising the awareness of private organizers of sporting events. Numerous cyclical sporting

events are organized in Polish and Slovak forests, including running marathons, cycling marathons, orienteering races, and massive Nordic walking marches. Events of this type gather many enthusiasts of the trend to be active in the forest every year.

A “Forest Run” is an example of a run that takes place in an area where special natural protection regulations apply. In such cases, both organizers of the sporting events and forest authorities must on the one hand be particularly sensitive to the changing needs of a society focused on physical culture, but on the other hand to the limited possibilities of doing physical activity in national parks due to the sustainable development of sports tourism in areas with special natural qualities. The number of people willing to organize such events in protected areas is increasing (due to the greater attractiveness of the event resulting from its special location). However, it must be remembered that sport is not the primary goal of national park operation. Therefore, the authorities of national parks must take into account not only the needs of athletes, but also the needs of those who want to admire nature in silence and tranquility and not be disturbed by the crowds of runners on the trails. For this reason, among others, in Bieszczady National Park (BNP) in Poland tensions have recently grown between park authorities and organizers of running events such as the “Butcher’s Race”. The Butcher’s Race is one of the most beautiful, and at the same time, most difficult running events in Poland. For several years it has been associated with the Bieszczady Mountains and Bieszczady National Park, where the idea of this extreme and already cult event was born. Running in the surroundings of this special landscape is certainly attractive, but these areas occupy a small percentage of the country (only 1%), so the runs can be held in many other places in Poland without damaging wildlife. In 2016, BNP did not approve the organization of a running event in its area. The media reported that the deciding argument was that tourists going on a day trip to a mountain, expecting peace and contact with wild nature, would encounter contestants running and passing them on narrow paths, which many would find inhibiting and unacceptable. In addition, runners generally pay less attention to the surface of the trail and its surroundings, and the fee for tickets was not enough to compensate for the damage done by runners in the park. Instead of offering runs, Polish parks would like to encourage tourists to take peaceful walks along designated paths, to explore natural landscapes while mindfully observing nature. Although there is no official running ban in the park’s regulations, the destruction caused by running should be limited. The park should not be used as a place for practicing sports. Mass running events can cause serious damage to the natural environment. According to authorities of the park, one runner will not do any harm to nature, but if the number of runners practicing on the trails should increase, there may be a problem.

3. Winter Olympic Games and Olympic Sport Tourism in the Tatra Region

National parks are increasingly becoming the arenas for sports competition, including the Olympic Games. The fact that the event takes place in the park attracts sponsors and increased attention and subsequently increases the attractiveness of the event itself. In recent years, the pressure to organize big sporting events in areas that are protected in Poland and Slovakia (for example in the Tatra Mountains) has been growing. From the point of view of the national park, this phenomenon may be perceived as a threat. Some sporting events take the form of mass events and gather thousands of participants at the start: Athletes and sports fans. The organization of such competitions therefore requires coordination of many planning and logistics activities as well as significant knowledge (including on how to minimize the negative impact of these projects on the natural environment), because the presence of athletes and fans always causes an environmental footprint. The modern Olympic Games began in 1896 under the leadership of Pierre de Coubertin, who recognized that the Olympic Games offered the host community the chance to redevelop themselves if desired [30]. However, environmental protection was not an issue for many of the early Olympic Games, since they were seen as too small in scale to have any negative impact on the community or environment. The first Olympic Games to make significant considerations of environmental impacts were the 1994 Winter Games held in Lillehammer, Norway. Lillehammer’s Organizing Committee voluntarily took on environmental

initiatives, but editions of the Games that have followed Lillehammer have been required by the International Olympic Committee to address environmental initiatives in their bids for, and therefore in their management of, the Games [31].

For the first time, Poland applied for the organization of the Winter Olympic Games in Zakopane (an area of Tatra National Park) in 2006. Even then, environmentalists communicated the alarming threat that Tatra National Park and the World Biosphere Reserve would be under if Olympic infrastructure systems were to be constructed in the region. The Olympic boom is transitory, and holding the Olympic Games in harmony with nature conservation is a very demanding task. Poland also proposed Cracow as a candidate for the host of the Winter Olympic Games in 2022. This Olympic bid was supposed to be carried out together with the neighboring Tatra mountain region in Slovakia. In practice, this would mean a real threat to the small area of the Tatra Mountains and the wildlife of the whole region. According to environmentalists, the construction of sports infrastructure in the Tatra Mountains would have an adverse impact on protected animals, especially bears, chamois, and marmots. The joint organization of the Winter Olympic Games in Poland and Slovakia entered into the Carpathian strategy, the development plan of the region. For example, the Alps have such a program. Poles, however, did not agree to the games. The idea fell through. In 2013, Cracow was officially starting to compete for the games. The majority of ice competitions and the opening and closing ceremonies of the Games were to take place in the capital of Lesser Poland (Cracow). Meanwhile, alpine competitions would be played in Slovakia, and other competitions in Zakopane. Due to the fact that the idea did not appeal to urban activists, the “Cracow against the Olympics” initiative was created. The activists did not like the decision that was made without a democratic debate [32]. It was estimated that the cost of the Games would exceed 20 billion zlotys, and Cracovians were alarmed about possibly sharing the fate of Montreal residents who were saddled with debt for 30 years after hosting the Olympic Games [33,34]. In 2015, a local referendum took place in Cracow. The inhabitants were asked about the desire to organize the Winter Olympic Games. The voters spoke out against the idea. Attendance exceeded the required 30%. If Cracow had won, it would be the first Winter Olympic Games organized in two countries. Zakopane was indicated as the place where many winter Olympic events would take place. However, the region of Zakopane is of extreme natural value, located in Tatra National Park, and is noted for having areas of altitude of more than 1500 meters, which is very rare in Poland and by law subject to protection. All human interference in these areas means catastrophic consequences for the environment. Poland is not an Alpine country and, in the opinion of many ecologists, is not suitable for the role of hosting the Olympic Games. The balance of losses in the environment due to the organization of the Games, especially in an area of great natural value, would certainly be higher than the potential economic profits [35].

The experiences of protected areas in foreign countries that have hosted the Olympic Games in the past gives us food for thought (e.g., Cantelon & Letters 2000) [20]. The choice of Sochi National Park in Russia was a controversial decision because this area is a habitat for rare and protected species of animals. Admittedly, despite numerous concerns, the Olympic Games in Sochi proved to be a sporting success, due to great organization and modern, functional, and expensive sporting facilities built in a timely manner. The Russians are particularly proud of the expensive resort “Krasnaya Polyana”, a tourist winter sports resort, only 30 km from an international airport and the sea coast. In their opinion, it is part of a unique Olympic legacy. However, according to ecologists and journalists, sports infrastructure created in mountain areas is harmful to the natural environment. The clearing of large woodland areas has had an especially devastating impact on the natural environment. According to Russian experts, the Olympic village and skating complex, built for the needs of the Games, posed a great threat to the entire ecosystem. For example, an area of previously protected wetlands was covered with a thick layer of stones. The nature reserve that existed there before does not exist anymore. For example, some areas that were previously protected as natural wetland reserves were covered by a thick layer of stones and no longer exist. In the case of Sochi, it has been suggested that construction works have affected the circulation of underground “healing waters”. These healing waters are a viable

commodity for natural tourism in the area. In Sochi National Park, along the rivers, a high-speed railway and a highway were built. According to ecologists, the ecosystem of the river was disrupted. A new infrastructure was created in the park, but there was no monitoring or control regarding the impacts of the investments on animals living in this area. As a result, valuable natural habitats were destroyed and the migration corridors, among other things, of bears and West Caucasian turs that are threatened with extinction were intersected. At the same time, Russia rejected the protests of ecological organizations, including the WWF, which led to the weakening of the law on natural protection by introducing amendments allowing the organization of sports competitions previously prohibited in the areas of national parks. Nearly all prohibitions binding in the protected areas were violated. Additionally, the investment contractors were granted an exemption from the obligation to prepare an assessment of the investment's impact on the environment. The Olympic Games are supposed to be the world's sports festival of entertainment and mass nature, while the idea of creating protected areas is quite the opposite: To restrict, by means of specially set limits, the number of people visiting the area. The contrast of interests and two opposing goals in one complex on local ground is therefore impossible to mediate. In the case of the Winter Games, the problem of deforestation is particularly visible. Many trees are cut down in order to provide space for Olympic Games building infrastructure, which is not always fully used when the competitions are finished.

In their study on the establishment of "Environmental Policy" as the third pillar of Olympism, Cantelon and Letters (2000) [20] wrote that after the Albertville Games in 1992, the IOC (International Olympic Committee) was pressured into developing an environmental policy but had little understanding of how to address this global issue. That is when Lillehammer 1994 came in and Norway, with its long-standing and well-developed respect for nature, provided a good example, the result of which was that the local initiative of Lillehammer has become a global policy that all future Olympic Games organizing committees must follow if they are to win the bid to organize the games. To fight the negative effects of sport tourism, the "Green Games" held in 1994 in Lillehammer introduced many new pro-ecological methods in environmental management [36]. Since then, the plans for all major sports events should have taken into account the principles of sustainable development and environmental education. Even the organizers of the ancient Games had to face many ecological problems. The organization of the Games, however, creates an opportunity to start long-lasting positive changes in society and its attitudes, if authorities know what sustainability means. The Olympics are seen as a chance to initiate positive environmental changes and increase ecological awareness (with proper organization and event management). In 1999, the International Olympic Committee signed the document "Agenda 21 for Sport and Environment", which is a set of sustainable development principles for sport and the natural environment. For the sake of our planet, since the end of the 20th century the Olympic Games have been held under the slogan "sustainability through sport". The Olympic Games are also an opportunity to implement sustainable tourism. Sustainable development is also one of the most important items of the "Olympic Agenda 2020", a document setting out the future of the International Olympic Movement, the Olympic set of rules and good practices.

4. Methods and Aim of the Study

The purpose of the study was to recognize the attitude of Polish and Slovak national park authorities toward the organization of mass sports events in protected areas. Empirical research was carried out that examined the development of sports events in the national parks of Poland and Slovakia in 2016. A diagnostic survey was conducted using the method of interviews with the directors of Polish and Slovak national parks. The research covered a total of 14 (out of 23 total) Polish national parks (the research in Slovak national parks was carried out with the same method). The authorities of the remaining ones refused to answer the questions concerning the development of sports tourism in protected areas (information about these parks was taken from the parks' official websites).

A written request was sent to the authorities of Polish national parks in January 2017 to answer the following questions: Did you grant permission to organize sports events in the park in 2016? If so, why? What were the main arguments for organizing these events in the park area? If the answer was negative, what were the premises for that? They were also asked to provide information on sports events that took place in the park in the past year (discipline, size, nature of the event, etc.). The analysis of the development of sports tourism in Polish national parks based on the results of the research is presented below.

5. Sports Tourism in Polish National Parks: Results of Empirical Research

5.1. Pieniny National Park (PNP)

The park's authorities gave permission for canoeing, but did not give permission for running events or for rafting in the period when the waterway was not available. Canoeing trips in the park were admitted on the basis of the Protection Plan for Pieniny National Park of 1 July 2014 (Journal of Laws 2014, item 1010). The Dunajec River Gorge is a widely available waterway in part designated by the park's director. Rafting can be organized with traditional rafting boats and other floating nonmechanical equipment in the period from 1 April to 31 October, without the right to shore (ordinance No. 2/2014 of the Director of the PNP of 14 January 2014 on tourist routes, reservoirs, and ski slopes made available for tourism). The park's authorities indicated that the main task of the national park was to preserve a unique landscape, biological and geological diversity, cultural values, as well as to develop better attitudes and proper respect. The organization of runs in the protected area is therefore in contradiction with the mission and tasks of the national park. Runners do not sightsee and do not get to know the landscape and natural values of the national park, and their only goal is to cover the designated route in the shortest possible time (making it a purely athletic activity). The park's position on the runs was also shared by the PNP Scientific Council, which gave a negative opinion on the organization of all mass sporting events, including running competitions (Resolution No. 136/15 of the PNP Scientific Council of 11 December 2015). Moreover, according to the above-mentioned ordinance, the PNP does not give consent for canoeing trips outside the period of water route availability at the Dunajec River Gorge. On the other hand, six canoeing trips were organized within the allotted time. These were the Tadeusz Pilarski 75th Jubilee International Canoeing Trip on the Dunajec River, the 23rd Polish Championships in the Canoe Descent, rafting organized by AKTK "Bystrze" from Cracow rafting organized by TKKF Carlina from Rabka Zdrój, rafting organized by WAKK Habazie from Warsaw, and rafting organized by pontoon companies that have a permit to run a business in the area of PNP.

5.2. Świętokrzyski National Park (SNP)

In 2016, several sports events took place in the area of SNP. These consisted of three mass runs and a Nordic walking march, "Dymarki", on 6–7 August 2016 on the blue trail (Nowa Słupia—Św. Krzyż), red trail (Św. Krzyż—Trzcianka), and along the educational path (Huta Szklana—Św. Krzyż). As emphasized by the director, the statutory tasks of the national park include providing the grounds on the basis of Art. 8b,e, paragraph 1, and Art. 15 in connection with Art. 12, subparagraph 1, of the Act of 16 April 2004 on Nature Conservation (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 2134, as amended), Ordinance of the Minister of the Environment of 18 March 2013 on national parks or some of their areas, where entrance fees are charged (Journal of Laws of 2013, item 400); and Regulation No. 2/2017 of the Director of Świętokrzyski National Park, based in Bodzentyn, dated 4 January 2017, regarding access to Świętokrzyski National Park for scientific, educational, cultural, tourist, recreational, sports, filming, and photographing purposes.

5.3. Magura National Park (MNP)

In MNP in 2016, several sporting events took place. However, according to the park authorities, they did not have such a mass character as to burden the Park: The number of participants could not exceed 500 people. The races took place along available routes and during the day. The park authorities emphasized that sporting events also promote the MNP, as well as physical activity and a healthy lifestyle. The following sports events were organized: the Cyklokarpaty.pl Bicycle Marathon (in which 223 contestants took part) and mountain runs (the 2nd Ultramarathon Magurski (220 participants), the 1st Beskidnik Run (280 participants), and the Łemkowyna Ultra Trail (430 participants)).

5.4. Roztocze National Park (RNP)

In 2016, the Park did not organize or co-organize any sporting event. In addition, no such initiative has been reported to the park management.

5.5. Tatra National Park (TNP)

In 2016, several sports events took place at TNP. This is permitted by the Act of 16 April 2004 on Nature Conservation, Art. 12., stating that the area of the national park can be made available in such a way that will not adversely affect the wildlife in the national park: In the plan of protection of the national park, and by the time of its preparation, with protective tasks, the places that can be accessed and the maximum number of persons that may stay in these places at the same time shall be determined. The Nature Conservation Plan is an indication of the areas made available for scientific, educational, tourist, recreational, amateur fishing, and other purposes, and the determination of the ways of using these areas. In addition, according to the TNP Directorate, the main objective of the national park is natural protection, but it also prioritizes various forms of activity, provided they do not harm the wildlife. The events that took place in TNP were mainly alpine skiing disciplines: The Strzelecki Memorial, Malinowski Memorial, and Oppenheim Cup; as well as the running events the Sokoła Run, Marduła Run, Running Festival, Tatras Ridge Run, the run uphill on Kasprowy Wierch, as well as the end of Hard's triathlon. In total, there were 10 sporting events, with a maximum of 350 people per event, and a cumulative yearly maximum of 2500 participants.

5.6. Kampinos National Park (KNP)

In 2016, about 40 sporting and recreational events were organized at KNP, including bike rallies, running events, marathons, and walking rallies. However, only a fraction of them were associated with pure competition. Kampinos National Park, on the basis of the act on nature protection dated 16 April 2004 (consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2015, item 1651), in accordance with ordinance No. 5/2012 of the Director of Kampinos National Park dated 16 February 2012 regarding the availability of KNP, is made available for scientific, educational, tourist, recreational, sporting, filming, and photographic purposes, as well as for commercial purposes in a way that does not adversely affect the wildlife in the Park. Making the park available is one of the basic tasks of national parks, and its scope is imposed by the act on nature protection. The available areas are indicated in the protection plan for the national park, and in the absence of it, in the protection tasks for the park. However, if the organization of sporting events is to proceed, arrangements need to be made with park authorities that include obtaining written consent from the park director. Due to the location of KNP, which is in the vicinity of Warsaw, and the appropriate terrain conditions for the organization of various rallies, marathons, runs, etc. (a multitude of trails, varied terrain, beautiful nature, easy access), the interest in organizing events in the park is very large. Taking into account the potential negative impacts that events could have on the area, the KNP director agrees upon only selected events, with a limited number of permits being issued to events where sports competition is the main purpose. Sporting events in the area of KNP are primarily of a recreational nature and family oriented. The biggest sporting events organized in KNP in 2016 included: the Bieg Łosia (Elk's Run),

the Ultra Marathon of the Kampinos Forest, the Kampinos Marathon, the 1st Run “AliRun—Run with Father Ali”, the 9th Strawberry Run, the 3rd Run of Remembrance of Soldiers of the Home Army Kampinos Group as part of the running and historical event “cross with history in the background”, the Kampinos Bicycle Rally, and the 43rd Andrzej Zboński Walking Marathon.

5.7. *Ujście Warty (Warta Mouth) National Park (UWNP)*

Due to the popularization of healthy lifestyles and the promotion of natural science and educational programs, park authorities have become more receptive to permitting events. Simultaneously, the idea of “park for the people” is promoted. It is also a good way to improve cooperation with the local community. In NP “Ujście Warty”, fishing competitions organized by the local fishing clubs took place. In 2016, four applications were filed with the park director for permission to organize sports competitions, and all of them were granted permission. In the same year, the first fishing competition organized by the National Park “Ujście Warty” took place.

5.8. *Ojców National Park (ONP)*

Sporting events were allowed at ONP due to the fact that these events (including runs) took place along existing tourist routes on dates that did not interfere with tourist traffic. Tourists had the opportunity to participate in marathon and half-marathon runs, i.e., Perła Małopolski, Koniczynka Marathon, Pozytywka (the run celebrating Father’s Day), and Niepodległościowa Jedenastka held on Independence Day.

5.9. *Babia Góra National Park (BGNP)*

Sporting events were held in BGNP because, as the authorities emphasized, the definition of the National Park shows that it was created for the purposes of nature conservation, as well as scientific and tourism provision. In Babia Góra National Park, in 2016, seven running events of a sport and recreational nature were held. These were the Snow Panther Run, Wojtek Kozub’s Run, Little Poland’s Pearl Run, Mammut—Ultra Sky Marathon 6xBabia, the Carpathian Ultra Marathon, the Beskid Extreme Triathlon, and Chaszczok.

5.10. *Wigry National Park (WNP)*

Sports events took place in the Sports Center (WPN) because the park possesses properly prepared hiking trails with high landscape values. In addition, the organization of sports and recreational events is part of the statutory task of the park. The events held included the Wigry Marathon (in which 235 competitors took part), Pogoń za Bobrem/the Pursuit of Beaver (257 participants), and the Run of Lovers of Wigry National Park (76 participants).

5.11. *Biebrza National Park (BNP)*

In Biebrza NP, the following events were organized, among others: Biebrzańskie Sianokosy/Biebrza’s Haymaking and fishing competitions. In 2016 there were 10 of them (the organizer was PZW Fishing Clubs). There are four forest running paths in the park (6.2 km, 5.3 km, 4.8 km, and 3.2 km). Nobody, however, applied for permission to organize running events.

5.12. *Drawa National Park (DNP)*

The park authorities did not give permission for the organization of sporting events, because no one applied for permission to organize them.

5.13. Słowiński National Park (SNP)

The organization of tourist and sports and recreation events in SNP requires written consent from the park director. However, no event took place because no such consent was requested. Instead, there were various educational rallies organized.

5.14. Wolin National Park (WNP)

WNP is the originator and organizer of the fishing competition “Wolińska Belona”. The authorities are in favor of this type of action, as it concentrates tourist traffic. The designation of places for doing sports, in this case places for fishing, prevents excessive and uncontrolled anthropopression. In addition, the education of society is also important: Such events promote alternative, sustainable forms of tourism. Participation in such events also gives rise to shared responsibility for the environment.

The WNP authorities, however, indicated that they are not in favor of practicing every form of tourism in the park area. In the opinion of the authorities, the mass scale and seasonality of some forms of sports tourism—for example participation in mass sporting events—poses a threat to the environment, such as exceeding the receptivity of the area, land degradation, the trampling of plants, scaring away the animals, and people entering prohibited zones. Therefore, according to the authorities, major mass sporting events should take place outside the territory of the national park.

The following is a list of Polish national parks that did not participate in the study. The information provided comes from the official websites of the parks.

5.15. Wielkopolski National Park

The largest sporting event was the Forest Run, which was described earlier. The park is open for running events, Nordic walking, and cross-country skiing (in designated places and with a certain number of participants). On the official website of the park, the authorities encourage runners to practice daily in the park. In their park strategy, the authorities write that they make the park available for sports purposes in a way that will not adversely affect nature.

5.16. Bieszczady National Park

No sports events can be organized without the consent of the director. A ban on the organization of the cult running event described earlier in the article was issued.

5.17. Poleski National Park

In this park, there were educational marches on orientation for children.

5.18. Białowieża National Park

Fishing competitions took place in the park.

5.19. Gorce National Park

Areas are available for running lovers and paragliding enthusiasts (with permission).

5.20. Bory Tucholskie National Park

Fishing competitions took place in the park.

5.21. Narwiański National Park

In this park, there were small walking and cycling events.

5.22. Stołowe Mountains National Park

Stołowe Mountains Winter Half Marathon and other marathons, ultramarathons, and triathlons took place in the park.

5.23. Karkonosze National Park

This park organized large sporting events, the Karkonosze Winter Ultramarathon and the PZU Karkonosze Marathon (one of the most famous running events in Poland).

6. Sports Tourism in Slovak National Parks: Results of Empirical Research

Similarly, a written request was sent to the directories of the nine Slovak national parks, to provide a list of sporting events that took place with granted permission throughout the year 2016. If permission for a certain event was not granted, a follow-up question would ask for explanation. The responses were collected and systematically analyzed.

The year 2016 was a busy year for sports tourism, mainly for the two largest and most visited Slovak national parks, the National Park of Tatras (TANAP) and the National Park of Low Tatras (NAPANT). The biggest and most commercially interesting sports event took place in March 2016 in the outskirts of the Low Tatras mountain ridge: The Audi Fis Ski World cup Jasná 2016, which was an irregular addition to the program of the Fis Ski World Cup slalom events. The event took place in the ski center Jasná, in Demänovská Dolina, parts of which fall into protected areas, attracting tens of thousands of spectators. The ski center Jasná is, however, widely visited by tourists and skiers throughout the year.

6.1. National Park of (High) Tatras

The oldest national park in Slovakia covers most of the High Tatra mountain range (its southern part), which contains some of Slovakia's highest peaks. The northern part of the mountain range lies in Poland and is also part of the protected areas. In the Slovak part of the High Tatras, there are around 15 skiing centers, some of them larger and with bigger historical sporting significance (the skiing center at Štrbské Pleso hosted the 1970 Skiing World Cup, and in 1987 and 2015, also the World Winter University Games). Besides the winter skiing season, in the year 2016, 20 sporting events were organized in the National Park of High Tatras, most of them organized by local municipalities, hiking clubs, or mountain rescue services. The administration of the national park restricts sporting events only to tourist paths (mass hikes or mountain runs) or to areas designed for sporting activities (sport centers in inhabited areas). Out of the 20 sporting events, 8 were running or hiking events, 4 were mountain cycling events, 2 were skiing or ski alpinism events, and the rest were either triathlon, duathlon, horse races, or races organized for mountain rescue services.

6.2. National Park of Low Tatras

The largest national park in Slovakia (728 km²) is usually also the location of the most sporting and cultural events. In the year 2016, 41 event organizers approached the park administration to host their events in protected areas. Out of these, two events were rejected (a dog sleigh race in Šachtický and a franchised obstacle race), one altered its tracks based on criticism from the park, and four would classify as cultural events. Overall, 31 sporting events took place within the protected area of the mountain range and 23 in the national park area. There are also two of the largest Slovak skiing centers located in the mountain range of Low Tatras (the Donovaly and Jasná centers), besides many other smaller centers). Both are privately owned and host numerous sport events throughout the season. The majority of the events that took place in the Low Tatras were running, hiking, or cycling competitions, but there were also specialized events for paragliders, mountain climbers, and dog sleigh races.

Cross-cycling, running, and hiking events are among the most organized sporting events in the other Slovak national parks as well, although on a much smaller scale.

6.3. National Park Slovenský Raj

In the National Park Slovenský Raj, 16 sporting events took place in the year 2016, 4 cycling events, 4 running and hiking events, 1 archery event, as well as 1 fishery event. Most of them were organized by local municipalities, sports clubs, and occasionally also private entrepreneurs. The only event that was not granted permission was a commercially organized abseiling event.

6.4. Malá Fatra National Park

In Malá Fatra National Park, there were officially nine sporting events organized throughout the year. Even though permission was granted to all those who applied, the park administration highlighted the regulations that had to be followed by the organizers. Since there is a big skiing resort, Vrátna, in the Malá Fatra Mountains, there were two skiing and ski alpinism events hosted at the site. The remaining events were either hiking, running, mountain biking, or even army training.

There were five sporting events officially organized at Pieniny National Park, of which only two took place in the national park area and three in the local protected area.

A separate chapter would be traditional sports or farming activities that are turned into sports, which are a popular sporting activity. These are, for example, races on old farming sleighs called “Krňačky” or a race of farmers or reeves (in Slovak, “furman”) with horses and farming carriages. Some events, even if they do not consist of historic or traditional sports, take on the names of historic or popular figures from national culture. There are many Jánošík races, Oravamans, or monk Cypriáns in Pieniny.

In the remaining four national parks, the number of officially organized sporting events was rather scarce (or the information obtained about these events). One of the reasons was that national parks such as Muránska Planina or Slovenský Kras are located in the parts of the country that are not interconnected by highways and main train corridors, and therefore are not as visited by tourists as other national parks. While in Muránska Planina there were two events, one traditional sleigh race and one Enduro motorcycle race, in Slovenský Kras there was one running event and one speleo climbing event. In the Veľká Fatra national park, the administration generally allows mostly the organization of running or hiking events organized by local municipalities, sports clubs, or NGOs. However, in 2016 it refused the organization of a sporting event that was supposed to take part in the area with the highest protection. We have not received any information about the sporting events that took place in Poloniny National Park.

7. Discussion and Final Conclusions

Intensified urbanization has led to more populated cities and fewer green spaces that are vital to community health, well-being, and conservation [37]. Understanding the effects of forest management strategies is especially important to avoid ecosystem degradation. The need for effective policies to ensure that socioeconomic benefits to local communities are maximized and national interests are sustained is visible in protected areas all over the world [38]. The growing importance of participatory and collaborative approaches in resource management has resulted in an increased emphasis on identifying the complex relationship between natural national parks and neighboring communities as well [39]. In our study, we tried to answer a rather tricky question: Is it “sporting events or nature protection” that public authorities should set as their priority, when dealing with tourism in popular natural localities? Phrased like this, it seems obvious that nature protection should play the main role, but as we presented in this paper, there were many examples of sporting events when the public concern was better backed by sports lobbyists than by natural conservationists.

The philosophical paradox is that in both cases the public is concerned with a healthy environment, be it healthy and sportsmanlike bodies or healthy nature. It would seem that when these two incentives meet, they automatically get into a conflict where one has to lose.

Since there are already numerous arguments and counterarguments for the organization of athletic events, it is hard to imagine a more “invasive” form of sport tourism taking place in the mountain regions of Slovakia and Poland than the Olympics. The next debates on organizing the Winter Games in this part of Europe will definitely rehash the environmental aspect of sports in protected areas, especially as these are part of public concern.

The principle of providing Polish national parks for tourism is included in the definition of a park, adopted in 1969. Parks are open to the public for educational, recreational, and cultural purposes. In contrast to nature reserves in national parks, it is not possible to apply a universal model of adapting parks for tourism. This is due to the significant diversity of the natural environment in parks; the size of parks; their location in relation to the communication network, settlement network, and tourist traffic zones; and the harmful effects of various external factors. However, there is a group of rules that can be implemented in all 23 parks. This mainly applies to dissemination and education activities in the field of nature conservation to large numbers of tourists, adjusting tourists’ attendance to tourist absorption, providing tourists with a park through a network of marked trails, organizing zones for recreational sports, and locating important elements of parks outside of parks (accommodations, service, and communication). The development of tourism in the areas of national parks has consequences regarding the need to adapt them to this function, both in terms of spatial development as well as administratively and legally.

Our comparative study showed that in the attempt to meet the expectations of the public in the field of tourism culture, park authorities were forced to walk a delicate line. While nature conservation and wildlife protection are the main focus, the national park authorities’ most frequently provided argument for the organization of sports events in protected areas was that although the main purpose of the national park is nature conservation, they also value sharing the scenery for different forms of activity, providing it does not harm the wildlife. Park authorities are trying to direct tourist traffic by designating places to practice sports, which prevents excessive and uncontrolled anthropopression. It was also acknowledged that sporting events have importance, as they promote healthy leisurely activities while simultaneously addressing cultural and social needs, such as “park for the people”. If the local community is involved in organizing such events, and thus these are not “outsourced” to external stakeholders, it may also become a good way to improve cooperation and political involvement of locals, who in the end also get affected by the organization of such events. On this note, it is worth stating that, more and more often, parks not only give consent to the organization of events, but they become their organizers or co-organizers themselves. Park authorities are trying to ensure that sports events do not have such mass character as to burden a given park. Therefore, mass running events are a very good option for mass sporting events organized in protected areas, as these runs usually take place on the existing trails, routes that are made available and adapted for this purpose. They usually do not interfere with tourist traffic (although it should be noted that in terms of the number of visitors, individual parks may differ). The authorities of national parks in Poland and Slovakia also emphasized that sporting events promote the parks themselves and their ideas, as well as physical activity and a healthy lifestyle in Polish and Slovak society.

The most frequently quoted counterarguments were statements that the organization of runs in protected areas are in contradiction to the mission and tasks of the national park. Runners do not sightsee and do not get to know the landscape and natural values of the national park, and their only goal is to cover the designated route in the shortest possible time (therefore, these events prioritize a purely athletic performance). The authorities do not grant permission to every sporting event requested. Taking into consideration the potentially negative impact on the wildlife and the conflicts of users, issuing permits for events with the main purpose of sports competition is limited. The authorities of some parks prefer to host events of primarily a recreational and family nature.

In some cases, the authorities do not approve of every form of tourism in national parks. In their opinion, the mass scale and seasonality of some forms of sports tourism, such as participation in mass sporting events, poses a threat to the environment by exceeding the receptivity of the area, causing land degradation, increasing the trampling of plants, scaring away animals, and emboldening tourists to sometimes enter prohibited zones. Therefore, according to the authorities, major mass sporting events should take place outside the territory of the national park.

With the growth and promotion of sports tourism, “running” tourism, and Olympic tourism, many cities have attracted greater numbers of people, which has had a negative effect, referred to as “overtourism”. This has raised concerns with residents due to issues of traffic paralysis, construction, inappropriate fan behavior, etc. Moreover, it has a direct impact on important cultural sites and rich cultural heritage. The interest of tourists in participating in sporting events, especially running events, taking place in areas with special natural values in Poland and Slovakia, is constantly growing. Therefore, it has become necessary to develop sustainable methods of sport and sports tourism management in the areas of national parks.

The current state of sporting events to be held in protected areas is under the consideration of regional authorities, which, depending on prevailing opinions, can either permit or prohibit events. One main effect may be the financial and sporting discipline limitations for an event. However, in both Poland and Slovakia, a common model of sustainable development has not yet been developed. In strategic documents of the parks, there are designated areas where, among other things, sporting events are allowed. These documents also sometimes determine the maximum number of people allowed to be in these areas at a given time. However, they should also include content that would more specifically regulate the issue, for example by defining the dates of making the place available, frequency and rules, as well as technical and organizational conditions. Undoubtedly, it would help public concerns if political representatives together with park authorities developed a policy for the organization of sporting events in protected areas that followed the concerns of various stakeholders involved, including the park authorities, the sponsors and organizers of events, as well as the local community. The current problem is that each national park has its own rules and specifications on issues such as whether a given event is already at mass or not, as well as whether it is classified as a sporting or leisure event. All of this is interpreted differently on a park-to-park basis.

A clear framework for the organization of events and competitions in the area of the parks needs to be set. It is possible by making appropriate entries in security plans or in protection tasks. The fact is, however, that establishing protection plans for national parks is a long-term, difficult procedure, and almost every park has problems with it. However, where there are no plans, the operation of the national park is regulated primarily on the basis of annual protection tasks. Another aspect of this issue is that according to ecologists, no environmental impact assessment is carried out in Poland and Slovakia for annual protection tasks. The current major threat is the rising number and accumulation of sporting events scheduled during one season. The organization of the Winter Olympic Games in Poland and Slovakia would certainly require the unification of regulations regarding the development of sport and tourism in common protected areas. As long as a common policy is not set, there are suggestions that any plan to organize a “transnational” megasport event will fail based on public disapproval. Since the Olympic Movement might sooner or later deal with the decentralization of the Olympic Games (especially the Winter Games), Poland and Slovakia might serve as a good example on how to approach this issue. With many examples from Europe and North America, where cities and referendums have said no to the organization of the Winter Olympics, there is a clear mandate for the Olympic authorities to stand behind shared policies of environmental protection between nation states and international political units such as the European Union. With shared political and environmental measures, shared bids such as Cracow and Jasná for 2022 could become a bigger part of the Olympic bidding process.

Currently, there is a lack of a strategic approach to the development of sports tourism in national parks, not only in Poland and Slovakia. The answers given in the interviews create an image

that indicates a differentiated approach to the issue of permitting the organization of events and competitions in the areas of national parks. It turns out that the practices in these areas are different in individual parks. We should also ask ourselves a question of whether or not we want to have national parks, or whether we want to have sports (even Olympic) competitions that last only a few days and can leave irreversible consequences that affect wildlife. In other words, do we want to protect national parks for sport lovers, or protect national parks from sport lovers?

In summary, it is necessary to start consultations between the authorities of national parks in Poland and Slovakia, and in the case of the desire to organize megasporting events, it will be necessary to harmonize regulations between countries in order to protect the biodiversity of the Karpaty region. The diagnosis of the state of tourism development of sporting events in these countries, which appeared very patchy, indicates the necessity to take practical action because currently the authorities of individual parks have different interpretations of the meaning of the word “sustainably”. Just like the network of the host cities of the Olympic Games [40], it seems necessary to create a network of protected areas that host the biggest sporting events in the world. Countries such as Poland and Slovakia, which are still thinking about organizing the games, should be able to draw on knowledge and experience from previous hosts. The conclusion of the research is the priority of making a spatial plan with the same conditions for national parks: The monitoring of sports activities, addressing the negative and destructive impacts on nature and facilities, the promotion of responsible tourism, and the management of the principle of sustainable development. Currently, sustainable development does not mean the same thing for all the directors of national parks in this part of Europe.

It is extremely important to educate sports tourists in the field of responsible use of the common good of national parks. We must remember that the environment in which we play sports does not only affect us, but we also affect it.

8. Limitations of the Study and Future Directions of the Research

From the scientific point of view, this article confirmed the assumption that the authorities of national parks in Poland and Slovakia are not keeping up with the dynamically changing preferences of society in the field of physical culture. The number of sporting events of various scales has increased dynamically, which causes a huge threat of anthropopressure in the 21st century. In addition, there is growing willingness to engage in physical activity in natural and outdoor areas, and these are common goods. The diagnosis presented in the article indicates that it is necessary to undertake interdisciplinary and international research among environmentalists, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, and physical culture specialists in order to develop methods for measuring the impact of sporting events on natural areas. It is also necessary to develop research in the field of medicine and health promotion on the impact of the location of physical activity on the human organism. Whether we undertake physical activity in a place of residence, in another city, or in a national park will probably have long-term effects not only on our organism, but also on the entire ecosystem.

The management of national parks presents many diverse challenges all over the world. One effective mitigation strategy is understanding and improving the connections between environmental awareness and responsible behavior and intentions [41], so it is also necessary to take steps to investigate the motivation of athletes who train in protected areas, attitudes toward nature, ecological awareness, as well as the analysis of running preferences in cities and natural areas. Our article is the diagnosis of the situation in Poland and Slovakia and a prelude for interdisciplinary research on this topic.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization—E.M.-M., methodology—E.M.-M., formal Analysis—E.M.-M. and Z.B., investigation—E.M.-M. and Z.B., resources—E.M.-M., Z.B., and J.P., data curation—E.M.-M. and Z.B., writing—original draft preparation—E.M.-M. and Z.B., writing—review and editing—E.M.-M., Z.B., and J.P., visualization—E.M.-M., supervision—E.M.-M., project administration—E.M.-M.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Maressa Calthorpe Croft and Christopher Ward for proofreading the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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