

Article

Sport Event Tourism in Bucharest. UEFA EURO 2020 Case Study

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Abstract: Mega sport events were among the very few types of events still attracting tourists during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and represented an exceptionally attractive tourism opportunity for Bucharest through the matches scheduled for the UEFA 2020 championship. Motivated by the novelty of the event which was organized for the first time in the Romanian capital city and motivated by the exceptionally restrictive context imposed by the sanitary crisis, the aim of this study was to analyze domestic tourist participation in and satisfaction with this event. An extended survey focusing on the autochthonous participants was applied to gather data and then further computed using SPSS software through crosstabulations and associated statistical analysis adapted for nominal and ordinal variables. The main results emphasize a large participation of Romanian football supporters who came specifically for the event. Most of them expressed dissatisfaction with souvenir, food and drink products sold within the stadium area but were satisfied with the COVID-19 measures and their costs. Supporters coming from rural areas opted for VFR accommodations while retirees and elderly supporters preferred hotels. Occupation and age were the main variables determining accommodation preferences as well as satisfaction with souvenir prices. These options may be valuable input for future adapted marketing strategies for sport event tourism in Romania. Lacking important urban tourist attractions and competing with other mature European urban destinations, mega sport events may represent an opportunity for autochthonous large cities to increase tourist attractiveness and maintain leisure travel even during periods of travel restrictions.

Keywords: sport event; domestic tourism; UEFA 2020; Romanian supporters; Bucharest; COVID-19



Citation: Lequeux-Dincă, A.-I.; Sava, A.-A.; Teodorescu, C.; Gheorghilaş, A.; Clius, M. Sport Event Tourism in Bucharest. UEFA EURO 2020 Case Study. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 14543. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114543>

Academic Editors: Alejandro Vega-Muñoz, Orlando Llanos Contreras, Miguel Angel García-Gordillo, Jesús Morenas Martín and José Carmelo Adsuar Sala

Received: 30 September 2022

Accepted: 2 November 2022

Published: 5 November 2022

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1. Introduction

Event tourism represents a travel domain that displays various spatiotemporal dimensions and may consolidate in a sustainable way the social, cultural and economic development of a region as a sometimes constant element overlapping a country or a city. Events may attract visitors coming from nearby locations, or they may trigger worldwide tourism flows. According to Gholipour et al. [1], a mega sport event's potential to generate tourist attractiveness has been a topic of high interest for researchers during the last years allowing authorities to better plan, manage and market such destinations. Studies emphasized the influence of sport mega-events in increasing tourist arrivals [2] and consequently promoting a destination's image and even contributing to enhancing national branding opportunities [3–5]. However certain researchers agreed that economic effects from mega-events remain difficult to determine [6] while others also emphasized economic efforts connected to mega-event organization [7].

This is why certain researchers emphasize the “psychic income” that sport mega-events bring and their social effects in relation to residents and local host communities [8,9], while more recent studies mention the terms “sustainability” and “sustainable development” as an associated future paradigm for future international major sporting competitions [7]. Seraphin et al. [10] also showed the fact that event tourism may have a positive socio-cultural impact not only through the self-development it stimulates for visitors but also through the cultural benefits brought to the host community.

In this context, event tourism has developed greatly in recent years. This includes several segments among which sport tourism represents an important part of attracting a continuously growing number of participants and encouraging cities and governments to compete in order to attract hallmark tourist events.

In 2020, when the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared, some of the sectors most affected by mass gatherings and traveling were sporting events and tourism [11], as “countries scrambled to return travelers home” while “the framing of the global tourism system moved from overtourism to non-tourism” (p. 2, Reference [12]).

Safety and health concerns after the coronavirus pandemic outbreak played an essential role in tourism development and destination marketing and led to the study and application of industry-specific practices [13]. Traveling for events meant particular attention from authorities who were particularly concerned with the limitation of the public health risk of mass gatherings and who made notable efforts in this respect, “given the networked nature of the global sport industry and its associated events programme” (p. 79, Reference [14]). Particular attention was paid to mega sport events that were postponed because of the pandemic lockdown periods and were still organized under particular circumstances such as EURO 2020, which revealed the fear of infection and health concerns as important symptoms of the recent COVID-19 pandemic [15].

Despite severe lockdown periods and restrictions imposed by the SARS COV-2 pandemic, sports mega-events were among the very few leisure segments organized during the first relaxation measures after the first pandemic peaks. The UEFA EURO 2020 championship, hosted by eleven stadiums, was located in different European countries. The event in Bucharest’s National Arena stadium was also rescheduled because of the sanitary crisis and finally took place in 2021, highlighting the attendance of spectators in stadiums compared to other sport competitions [16].

On the other hand, the pandemic period was an “opportunity” for different countries to stimulate domestic demand for tourism activities, as was the case in Portugal [17]. Restricted by lockdown periods in the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism dominated international arrivals, even in famous inbound destinations [18].

Hosting mega sports events is believed to be a valuable opportunity to dramatically enhance a region’s reputation as an established international tourism destination [19]. Romania is a young’s destination on the event tourism map and makes great efforts to host events. Mega sports events, in particular, are supposed to increase tourist demand and add important value to the brand while fighting the stereotypes and labelization so often applied to post-communist destinations [20,21].

Given the lack of knowledge about participants of international mega-events held on the autochthonous premises in Romania and the particular context of the pandemic, our empirical study aimed for an exploratory perspective on the satisfaction of domestic visitors of the sports mega-event UEFA 2020, which was also hosted exceptionally also in Bucharest in June 2021. The perspective is an original one, considering that many studies attempt to surpass the international dimension of sports events. Moreover, a case study perspective on such a topic has not, to the best of our knowledge, been explored by scientific literature. The number and satisfaction of incoming visitors are considered central elements in increasing economic impact [1] as the study of the economic effects of large sports events remains a dominant research paradigm [22]. Satisfaction, considered the connection “between expectations and experiences”, is a key variable influencing tourist behavior and destination competitiveness [23].

This was particularly relevant to sports events organized during the COVID-19 pandemic, with concerns about health risks determining “changes in individual behaviour and business activity” [24]. While the study of Polcsik et al. [15] showed that fear of coronavirus influenced the perceptions of certain groups of local residents before the start of EURO 2020 in Budapest, our research intentionally focused on the domestic tourists and residents who attended matches scheduled in Bucharest within the EURO 2020 framework in an

attempt to evidenciate the autochthonous attendees' perception and satisfaction with the event which was exceptionally surpassed in the particular pandemic context.

If considering the event's sustainability and Bucharest's potential to attract the same or similar sport competitions in the future, even in the case of recurrent or different crises, as well as the potential demand for such events from domestic supporters, the results of the present research may be of real interest to multiple stakeholders. They constitute a starting point for further research and policies destined to attract similar sports events in Bucharest and to develop leisure tourism in the region. Residents' perceptions play an important role in "understanding the development mechanism and process of sustainable tourism" (p. 2, Reference [25]) and developing policies and sustainable tourism infrastructure projects [26]. This could therefore be considered a key element in developing sports tourism in large Romanian cities.

The mega sport event UEFA EURO 2020, organized in Bucharest, represented a novelty from multiple perspectives. The event was co-hosted by the Romanian capital city for the first time and was attractive to autochthonous football fans. At the same time, it was the first time the event was postponed because of the pandemic restrictions. It was successfully organized despite the sanitary crisis under obvious limitations imposed by the global context. Discovering and outlining the attitude, perception and satisfaction of autochthonous football supporters toward the event in a highly restrictive context was the main challenge and, at the same time, the main motivation of the present study and may represent a departure point for further studies or strategies aiming at sport event tourism in the region.

In the above-described context, considering the topic's novelty through its case study and in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the present research adopted an exploratory approach [27] analyzing the demographic profile and the satisfaction of domestic visitors and tourists participating in the sports mega-event UEFA 2020 in Bucharest.

Surpassing the profile of domestic demand on such events during particularly restrictive periods was an opportunity to test event attractiveness toward the autochthonous target public that is generally less treated by studies often focusing on sport mega-events and mainly on their international attractiveness. At the same time, satisfaction with the event's major associated products and the event held during the COVID-19 pandemic was another element of interest. Romania represents a potential high-demand market for international sports events. Domestic tourists and visitors are not to be neglected by possible future scenarios for international competitions with restrictive conditions limiting international travel and encouraging staycations.

The specific research questions (RQs) the present study attempted to answer were built around its aim and are as follows:

RQ1. Who were the domestic visitors/sports tourists participating in UEFA 2020?

RQ2. What was the level of satisfaction of domestic visitors with Bucharest UEFA 2020 main products, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

To answer the above-formulated research questions, this paper is structured as follows: First, we present a comprehensive overview of the literature and the theoretical context on events and sports events as tourism attractors. Displaying obvious multilevel positive impact on destinations, we emphasize in the literature review the reasons for which they interest Romania and Bucharest. Then, we describe the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sports tourism and the UEFA 2020 competition, which was exceptionally hosted by the Romanian capital within this particularly restrictive context. Further on, we detail our study methodology before presenting results and discussing the main findings and their possible implications. In its last part, the paper presents the study's main limitations and conclusions.

2. Literature Review and Case Study Background

2.1. Events and Sports Events as Tourism Attractors with a Multilevel Impact. Romania's Case

Sports tourism may boost the economic impact of tourism through increased consumption during the event and was explicitly problematized as a very comprehensive but sometimes confusing term [28]. A phenomenon in itself, meaning more than a simple combination of sport and tourism, sports tourism involves sports events and performances outside the attendees' usual environment which represent important tourism attractors. Obviously, sports tourists would be much more attracted by the events with increased significance and promoted worldwide [29]. Positive effects are displayed in the city where the event takes place as tourists animate the area during their stay. Sports tourists sometimes get involved in leisure and cultural activities as they are interested in various activities such as tasting local food and visiting museums of the destination that hosts their target event. These multiple opportunities associated with core products [19], such as sports events, should be emphasized by organizers. They could also be a key strategic element in tourist planning strategies for large Romanian cities. Besides the economic and development stimuli for host populations, the particular event atmosphere enhances the positive social perception toward sports tourism. Consequently, the evaluation and accentuation of the impact of sport tourism can be of real support "in the formulation of policies aimed at social cohesion and local development" [30].

Sporting mega-events in particular have been a part of city and national government development strategies since the mid-1980s, following the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, for which significant economic impact was evident [31]. Kelly and Fairley [32] emphasized, however, that the effects of leveraging strategies vary with event size, and despite efforts to leverage tourism gains for mega-events, not all large-scale events are successful from this point of view, especially when there is no collaboration among stakeholders. A motivating factor for destinations competing to host mega sports events is the fact that they contribute to the dissemination of positive destination images through media broadcasts [33], which are used as stimuli for city rebranding [34], particularly to improve elements of labelization and stereotypes for locations that want to improve their image, such as in the case of Bucharest [21]. Justbring [35] also proved the process of encoding destination messages in the media coverage of an international sport event through the involvement of destination marketing organization (DMO), clearly emphasizing the strategic management, destination branding and marketing objectives as reasons for destinations to engage in bidding for sport event marketing.

When analyzing sport events specifically in Bucharest, one may identify (according to Gibson's classification [36]) two types of sport tourism in the capital city of Romania. One is active sport tourism where tourists also participate as competitors in the events (e.g., tennis tournaments), and the second is sport event tourism, where tourists are simply attendees, as in the case of football matches.

No matter their nature and type, events play an important role in offering direct and indirect information about certain destinations and in attracting a certain number of supporters. The participants may play an active role in the event through their direct involvement or may just attend it passively. The organization of events represents a costly, effort-based activity in which various stakeholders share costs; therefore, their identity is of great importance, as Freitas and Correia [37] emphasized in the case of cultural events organized by hotels.

The more numerous the participants and organizers involved, including local authorities or international institutions, the greater the attractiveness of an event. Important factors that represent advantages for different events are safety and security (especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of the war in Ukraine), their continuity and regularity and their impact and performance indicators. An example in this respect is represented by musical events, which are considered amongst the most important event tourism attractors in Romania, especially in the case of Bucharest (George Enescu festival, Christmas concerts, etc.). This also applies to other big cities in Romania (Untold—Cluj

Napoca in Transylvania, Neversea—Constanța by the Romanian Black Sea, etc.). The George Enescu festival, for instance, was first organized in 1958 and has occurred annually since 1990 increasing its number of participants each year, improving the public security and satisfaction level and representing a touchstone musical event for Romania. Musical events are numerous in Bucharest, and the pandemic context affected recent events to a great extent (e.g., SAGA Festival).

In the case of sports mega-competitions, Bucharest has huge underdeveloped potential, as remarked on by different stakeholders who reported it as “an underdog destination” with an impressive growth in international arrivals in the period before COVID-19 (https://bucharest2night.com/euro_2020_in_bucharest_in_2021/, accessed on 10 September 2022).

The organization of a sports mega-event was also an important boost for autochthonous football, involving the development of a national dedicated infrastructure and attracting high demand from domestic visitors and tourists.

2.2. Multiple Positive Effects of Sports Events on Destinations

Negative consequences of the events at the National Arena during this major tournament included increased traffic congestion, noise and other types of environmental pollution. The worldwide sanitary crisis also imposed restrictions on traveling and participation in the event. Nevertheless, the UEFA 2020 in Bucharest was mainly praised by the media and, in the end, proved to be “a success story for Romanian football” (<https://www.uefa.com/news/026a-1282db10be4e-ceb54bd86f5e-1000--uefa-euro-2020-a-success-story-for-romanian-football/>, accessed on 10 September 2022).

Sport events may have remarkably positive effects on the place where they occur, and Romania’s capital city is an illustrative example. The positive effects may be analyzed from multiple points of view:

- Economic effects;
- Investment and development effects with more sustainable results, which give the possibility of enhancing the capacity of organized sports events and also improving the city’s image;
- Effects on the performance level of local sportspeople through the development of sports infrastructure.

An important effect that sports events have is the economic benefit which, according to Zhang et al. [9], is a psychical stimulus for the local population as increased income expectations influence their attitude toward hosting them. Overall, sports stimulate national economies through the great influx of supporters who represent visitors for the cities, enhancing local income through accommodation, catering and leisure facilities. Bucharest is an illustrative example in this respect, having attracted several sports events in the last few years, relevant at a European and global level, which could increase Romania’s international visibility [38]. Consequently, this international recognition might increase revenues in the local economy through the future hosting of events.

At the same time, fundraising opportunities through sports events represent an important element, stimulating local economies and involving associated stakeholders such as third-party fundraisers [39]. The organization of sports events is supported to a great extent by sponsorship [40] which might take the form of financial donations and equipment or marketing and branding services [41]. For amplified economic effects, marketing policies should focus on creating complex tourism packages, combining multiple products and services, from catering and food products to souvenirs connected to the event. According to Kong and Chang [42], souvenir shopping is an indivisible part of one’s travel experience representing an important proportion of travel expenditure. The attractiveness of tourist destinations and also of tourist events might grow in this way [43].

As far as investment effects are concerned, Getz [44] argued that by building and rehabilitating certain stadiums for hosting important events at an international level, a city may benefit from these sports arenas for future events, further accelerating the building of tourist accommodation or catering units. In the case of Bucharest, certain important

stadiums were rehabilitated or rebuilt to host EURO 2020 matches and several of them such as Ghencea and Giulești stadiums were selected to host matches for EURO U21 in 2023 when Romania and Georgia will collaborate in organizing the event. Lertwachara et al. [45] argued that host countries experienced beneficial effects due to foreign investments in hosting sports events.

If analyzing the effects of the performance of local sport performers, Gholipour et al. [1] suggested that a better nation's sport performance leads to the formation of a positive tourist image increasing international tourist demand for that destination. Although this growth is obvious for economically developed countries that show outstanding sport performances, other states can also benefit from this economic stimulus, and consequently, Romanian cities can also exploit this opportunity.

2.3. Sport Tourism during SARS and COVID-19 Pandemics and Beyond—Bucharest's Case

The entire tourism market, including event tourism, suffered great losses between 2020 and 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, considered one of the most severe "states of emergency since the Second World War" also inducing a global economic crisis and unprecedented "tangible impacts on the sport and football industry" (p. 172, Reference [46]). The football industry was significantly affected across many of its components and events. At the beginning of the year 2020, most national leagues in Europe interrupted their domestic match programs under the threat of viral spread, avoiding "large gatherings and the potential risks associated with travel activities" [47].

Online attendance and organization uncertainties greatly affected sporting events and, as an obvious result, sport tourism. Watching sport competitions online was an alternative to in-person attendance at sporting events, but despite audience interest in sports broadcasting, the on-site event experience and the festive atmosphere common to mega-events remain important motivational factors for attendance and travel to events [48]. Chang et al. [49] remarked that the quality of sport broadcasting, as well as the degree of online supporter involvement, did not meet the public's expectations, and as such, there is great demand for future technological improvements in order to facilitate the relationship between supporters and sport performers.

Radmann and Karlén [50] clearly demonstrated that when there is no direct connection between sport performers and their audience, enthusiasm considerably decreases on both sides. This is explained by cultural sociology concepts which indicate that the interactions between sport performers and spectators during an event display elements of emotional attachment and feelings of topophilia. Live events are an experience in themselves for spectators and generate the movement of mass audiences to different places. Ultimately, this explains the emergence of sport tourism and the competition among different geographic destinations in hosting such events. According to Hammerschmidt et al. (p. 1, Reference [51]) "Football is the kind of sports with the greatest participation, impact, and income worldwide which influences not only the field of sports but also the social area, economics, and even cultural sectors".

Many sporting events were canceled or postponed in 2020 and rescheduled for 2021 when sanitary conditions forced their organizations to forgo the physical attendance of spectators.

EURO 2020 was the first mass sport event to occur in 2021 across Europe that permitted spectators to attend all matches live in stadiums. This provided, according to the study of researchers Cuschieri, Grech and Cuschieri (p. 1, Reference [16]), important insights into the potential effects of live events during pandemic conditions. In the case of sport competitions, risk management techniques become very important and are emphasized by the specificity of these events, which exist in a complex, multi-relational context [52]. Mirehie and Cho [53] underlined in their study exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sport tourism that "reactive response", "resilience planning" and proactive risk management plans should be favored instead of sustainability planning in the case of sport events with multiple stakeholders.

In the post-COVID-19 era, the resumption of event organization required the development of risk management plans, as well as the introduction of control measures for spectators to minimize the possibilities of the spread of the virus.

A major challenge, specific to football matches organized during the COVID-19 pandemic within the UEFA 2020 season, refers not only to mass gatherings in stadiums but also to mass gatherings in bars, squares and streets, which encourage viral spread among non-vaccinated youth [16]. These side events occurred in all of the organizing cities, especially in the evenings following the scheduled matches. Football supporters, strongly connected with alcohol and beer consumption [54], were only offered alcohol-free beer for in-stadium consumption during the matches scheduled at the National Arena stadium in Bucharest (<https://www.digisport.ro/fotbal/euro-2020/cat-costa-un-pahar-de-bere-si-un-sandwich-la-meciurile-de-pe-arena-nationala-de-la-euro-2020-1146993>, accessed on 10 September 2022). Both international and domestic football supporters, as well as sport and leisure consumers and physical sporting event attendance, become obvious leisure practices in need of re-affirmation in a restrictive context [55].

Cho et al. (p. 566, Reference [11]) clearly emphasized in their study that in the case of large-scale sporting events, and particularly in the case of the postponed UEFA 2020 championship, “the optimism bias has a significant influence on potential sport tourists’ intentions” dominating over the perception of COVID-19 which “interestingly...did not have a significant effect on negative anticipated emotion”.

This was clearly visible in practice through the important numbers of incoming visitors coming to Romania to support their national teams. Besides being dedicated football fans, the foreign attendees also discovered the lesser-known Romanian capital city, organizing parties in the old city center pubs and restaurants before and after the matches for which they came (e.g., Ukraine vs. North Macedonia; Ukraine vs. Austria) (<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/sport/fotbal/euro-2020-sute-de-suporteri-au-facut-spectacol-in-centrul-vechi-inaintea-meciului-ucraina-macedonia-de-nord-1566875>; <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/sport/fotbal/euro-2020-centrul-vechi-luat-cu-asalt-inaintea-meciului-ucraina-austria-sute-de-suporteri-canta-si-danseaza-1570575>, accessed on 10 September 2022).

Despite the COVID-19 context, UEFA 2020 in Bucharest was advertised as an attractive tourism event, inviting supporters to discover this major Eastern European city, its local culture and gastronomy and its attractions and night life (https://bucharest2night.com/euro_2020_in_bucharest_in_2021/; <https://visitbucharest.today/uefa-euro-2020-romania-bucharest/>, accessed on 10 September 2022).

Romanian football fans, in addition to sharing the same optimism bias as the incoming visitors, were also animated by the fact that they could participate in a rare event in a financially and geographically tangible destination, during a time of global sanitary restrictions while, in contrast, experiencing the psychological distress and fatigue generally observed during COVID-19 lockdown periods and restrictions especially among young adults [56,57].

The novelty and the need for the present study is perfectly underlined through the novelty of the topic in the local and the global context. UEFA 2020 was exceptionally organized within Bucharest, in conjunction with 10 other organizing European cities, in an exceptionally restrictive context imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Studying the tourism attractiveness and target public satisfaction of the event was an imperative opportunity, in light of present tourism development policies making efforts to advertise Bucharest as an interesting leisure destination [21]. The exceptional organization of UEFA 2020 was also remarked upon as an important research topic by other recent studies, which focused on the local residents’ risk perception induced by the coronavirus context [15]. The attractiveness of the event for autochthonous supporters physically attending the scheduled matches has not yet been studied in the scientific literature, in light of the novelty of the event for the region but also of the exceptionally restrictive context imposed by the health crisis, to the best of our knowledge. This study brings an original research approach within the given context.

2.4. UEFA 2020 Particularities and Bucharest Case Study

The sport event UEFA Euro 2020, officially denominated the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship, was Europe's 16th international men's football championship organized by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). UEFA EURO 2020, involving some of the best football players in the world and with an over 60 years long history, kept millions of supporters focused during the event's final four weeks. Moreover, this competition proved the importance of football for the European nations reaching a record audience and demonstrating, according to UEFA's official site, "the enormous global appeal of the competition" (<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro-2020/>, accessed on 10 September 2022).

This was enhanced and may also be explained by the difficult period endured because of unprecedented lockdowns registered all over the globe during the recent COVID-19 pandemic affecting the young adult population to a large extent [50]. In this context, the UEFA 2020 competition, postponed because of the health crisis and preceding another disruptive moment with crucial regional and global significance, namely the Russian invasion of Ukraine starting at the end of February 2022, could be underlined as an important moment based on solidarity and unity values.

This competition registered a series of unique elements both from sports and organization perspectives. To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the European Championship, the competition was exceptionally hosted by 11 countries along the European continent, among which an important number of them had never hosted a UEFA championship match before (e.g., Azerbaijan, Denmark, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Scotland).

It was "the first time in UEFA history" the European Championship was "hosted across various venues around the continent", with the event having only been co-hosted in the past, such as in 2012, for instance, when it was organized by Ukraine and Poland (<https://www.football.london/premier-league/countries-hosting-euro-2020-games-20774472>, accessed on 10 September 2022).

Besides symbolizing European unity, the event also aimed to value and develop sports infrastructure among the 11 selected stadiums; only two had already hosted matches within the European Championship (Stadio olimpico in Rome in 1968 and 1980 and Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam in 2000). It was also the first time that matches in this tournament were assisted by the video assistant referee (VAR).

A unique characteristic of the event was the particular context imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic which postponed its organization because of the sanitary restrictions from the initially planned period of 12 June–12 July 2020 to 11 June–11 July 2021 while preserving its initial name UEFA Euro 2020 and maintaining the list of the host countries.

The main concerns with the event were connected to the physical attendance of supporters. They generated several changes, such as the dropping of Dublin, which could not offer guarantees in this respect, and the replacement of Bilbao with Seville as a host venue to comply with regional differences that existed for sanitary restrictions (<https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/mediaservices/mediareleases/news/0268-121bc78c82d5-1ba16401b4f0-1000/>, accessed on 10 September 2022).

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organizers asked for a spectator plan on behalf of each host venue, created together with local/national authorities and public health authorities. Differences in the manner of restrictions by host venues were reflected in differences in the capacity to host matches. Each country established initial percentages of stadium occupation (<https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/football/8672099/euro-venues-fans-stadium-host-cities/>, accessed on 10 September 2022) subjected to increase according to the evolution of the pandemic and also according to the packages destined for the final stages of the competition when a growing interest from supporters was estimated. In this way, important discrepancies appeared between venue bids and the real physical capacity of stadiums. Big stadiums such as Wembley (90,000 places), Munchen or Rome (both with 70,000 places) received considerably fewer spectators (an average of 20,000 supporters for group stages) compared to stadiums with lower capacity such as Parken Stadium in

Copenhagen (cca 38,065 places) and National Arena stadium in Bucharest (55,600 places) which effectively hosted 25,000 spectators in the group stages. Puskás Aréna stadium in Budapest was the only stadium that received approval to host matches at full capacity on the condition that spectators fulfill certain conditions to enter the stadium. For stadiums in Eastern Europe, such as Baku and Saint Petersburg, an initial capacity of 50%, approximately 35,000 places, was established. For Baku, no foreign spectators were allowed other than citizens of participating teams. For other host venues at the group stage, the allowed capacity for UEFA 2020 oscillated between 20% at Munchen and 40% at Copenhagen. Most stadiums announced a percentage between 25% and 30% for the groups' stages. This was also the case with Bucharest, which hosted approximately 13,000 supporters at each of the three matches during the group stage (Figure 1).

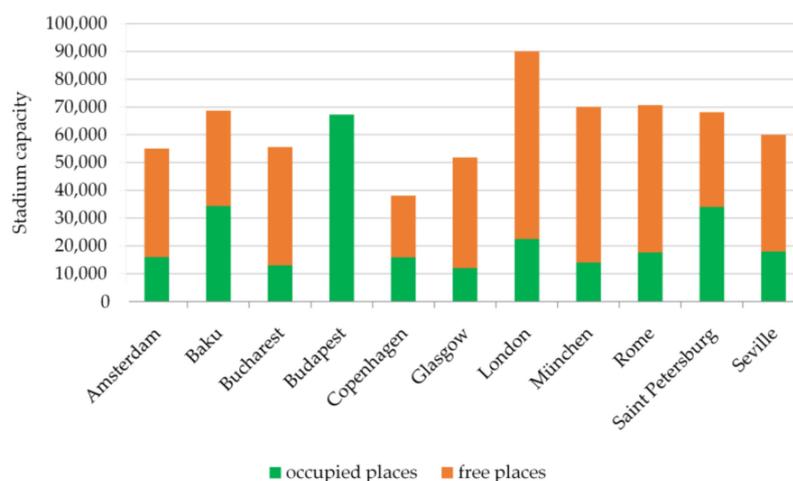


Figure 1. Allowed stadium capacities (no. of places) for UEFA 2020—group stage. (Source: Computed by authors. Data source: <https://www.uefa.com>, accessed on 20 July 2022).

For superior stages, capacity increases were allowed. Wembley Stadium, for instance, increased its permitted capacity from 25% (approximately 22,500 places) in the group stage and for the first match in round 16, to 50% (approximately 45,000 places) for the second match in round 16 and to 67% (approximately 15,900 places) for the semi-final and final stages. Copenhagen also increased its permitted capacity from 40% (approximately 15,900 places) for the first match in the group stage to 67% (approximately 25,000 places) for the other two matches in the group stage and the match in round 16. Bucharest also benefited from the increase in permitted capacity from 25% (approximately 13,000 places) in the group stage to 50% (approximately 25,000 places) for the match in round 16 between France and Switzerland (Figure 2).

UEFA 2020 particularities were also marked by the campaign against all forms of discrimination, during which both footballers and supporters were invited to express their support by signing up on the platform <https://www.equalgame.com/>. The campaign was launched during the 2017–2018 football season and “raised awareness of how football can play a frontline role in breaking down social barriers and building communities” (<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro/history/news/026b-12b0b4d59773-f10b54560843-1000--equal-game-all-you-need-to-know/>, accessed on 10 September 2022). Equal Game is part of the UEFA’s Respect program launched ahead of UEFA EURO 2008 and unites all UEFA’s initiatives and programs connected with human rights and the environment.

Another interesting element of the UEFA 2020 tournament was the Uniforia official EURO 2020 match ball, whose name symbolized “unity and the euphoria that top-level national-team competition can bring” while also celebrating the inclusiveness of a competition that took place across 11 European countries (<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro/history/news/025e-0fc6971c8220-0ceba795a115-1000--every-euro-match-ball/>, accessed on 10 September 2022). Its design, using black brush-stroke lines running across the ball,

reflected the competition’s recent transcontinental format symbolizing the fading borders among countries and the unity of cultural diversity, represented through the flashes of bright light colors. These symbols were maybe more important than ever in light of the events to come afterward, particularly the escalating conflict in Ukraine, which “poses an immediate and growing threat to the lives and well-being of the 7.5 million children in the country” (p. 1, Reference [58]), inducing devastating effects on youth health and annihilating any current chance for sports and leisure to return to the region.

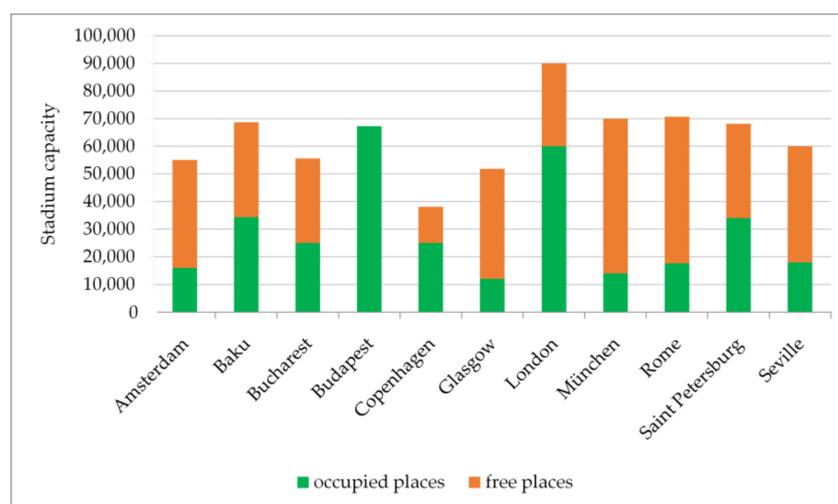


Figure 2. Allowed stadium capacities (no. of places) for UEFA 2020—superior stages. (Source: Computed by authors. Data source: <https://www.uefa.com>, accessed on 20 July 2022).

2.5. Study Case Background

Bucharest is the most important urban area and, at the same time, the most significant transport hub in the country. Consequently, the city is increasingly attractive for business tourism [21] as well as event tourism, which benefited to a great extent from its geographic, demographic and logistic potential. It is one of the biggest cities in the EU, hosting complex economic activities and tourism services at a European level. Considering the diversity of events it attracts each year, Bucharest is one of the most attractive cities for main events in Romania, determining the establishment of a local service market for this purpose [59].

Bucharest is remarkable for its great variety of events such as cultural, musical, artistic and, last but not least, sports competitions which constantly generate tourist demand for the capital city of Romania. Among the last category, one may cite as reference points the 2012 UEFA Europa League Final, the professional tennis tournament BRD Bucharest Open established in 2014 and the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship. As a future projected sports mega-event, the European Under-21 Championship 2023 could be mentioned. For Euro 2020, four matches were scheduled in Bucharest’s National Arena stadium: three matches in the group stage for group C and one match in round 16. This event was expected to have a great impact on the image of the city and to generate an “urban agglomeration” during the sport event period [60], but the COVID-19 pandemic imposed a limited number of visitors and unavoidable restrictions.

Despite limitations imposed by the sanitary conditions, the 2020 UEFA enjoyed great popularity among supporters all over the country as it was one of the most important events hosted by Romania, and its attractiveness remained very important. According to Google Trends (2021) (<https://trends.google.com/trends/yis/2021/RO/>, accessed on 10 September 2022), the most popular term searched on Google in Romania among all possible topics on a computer and on mobile phones in 2021 was EURO 2020. This shows the popularity of this particular sports event and its virtual attractiveness at the national level. The online popularity is explained, on the one hand, by the importance of the

event but also by the particular sanitary context, which prevented many supporters from traveling to the capital city.

Citizens in Bucharest were not ranked in the first places either for the web searches of the topic “EURO 2020”, for which inhabitants of Cluj and Mureş counties occupied the first places, or according to searches of the topic “EURO 2020” on YouTube for which Harghita and Olt counties ranked in the first position. At the global level, Romania ranked in the 11th position cumulating 36% of web searches for the topic “EURO 2020” during the 12 months between January and December 2021. This rank obviously shows the great impact of organizing this event on the domestic specific market which stands out as a very important one if considering the fact that the Romanian football team was not participating in the event. For the period when tournament matches were scheduled in Romania, the greatest number of searches on the topic “EURO 2020” by Romanian internet users manifested around 28.06.2021 when the match in the round 16 between France and Switzerland took place.

The present study aimed to show the sports event attractiveness of Bucharest and to underline the specific consumer’s behavior toward this particular event regardless of the pandemic restrictions. The capital city of Romania has an important infrastructure and logistics potential to host sports mega-events as it has an important number of accommodation and catering units that could satisfy various tastes for both autochthonous and foreign travelers. Moreover, sports and transport infrastructure is continuously modernized and may support other similar mega-events in the future. The results of our study associated with all these elements may orient policymakers and event organizers to consider Bucharest a reliable destination on the short list of mega sports event hosting cities in the future.

3. Method

3.1. Research Methods

To answer the research questions mentioned above, the present study adopted an empirical methodological approach broadly used for other studies aiming for interpretative results connected to social phenomena [7], which we also found particularly suitable for the exploratory character of our research. Empirical investigations were found particularly important for studying visitors’ intentions and behaviors by researchers who approached the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sports tourism [53].

Therefore, the present study used a mix of research methods and techniques following the logic of its research questions with an obvious exploratory character and taking into consideration its social issue, on the one hand, and the environmental and phenomenological frame of its analysis, namely the UEFA 2020 sport mega-event organized in the Bucharest premises, on the other hand.

To draw a general picture of the autochthonous public and its satisfaction with the UEFA 2020 event, we utilized a synthetic questionnaire as a largely used quantitative method to collect data and carry out the research [61], also employed by certain exploratory studies [27]. Although considered a quantitative technique, the survey also had a qualitative dimension, trying to answer questions “who” and “which” rather than “how many” as also employed by other qualitative studies aiming for empirical analysis and interpretivism in order to explain social reality and phenomena [7]. Mixing different methods and incorporating quantitative approaches such as crosstabulation of data in qualitative surveys has already been applied in other scientific studies focusing on satisfaction and perception [62] and is not new, describing, according to Alasuutari et al. (p. 2, Reference [63]), a “new paradigmatic situation” in which methodology is not longer divided “into opposing camps”. In the present paper, we applied crosstabulations and chi-square tests with a level of significance ($p < 0.05$) broadly used for SPSS analysis of social, psychological or medical statistics [64,65]. They are perfectly fitting analyses of nominal and categorical data for studies in perception and satisfaction on different issues [62,66] and for a low number of variables such as the one used in our study.

Besides verifying the association between the independent and dependent variables considered in our study, we further utilized crosstabs statistics available in the SPSS software package and particularly adapted for nominal data such as the Phi, Cramer's V and contingency coefficients to measure the strength of the relationships between the tested variables. These kinds of tests are part of the nonparametric statistical analyses that are primarily applied to nominal and ordinal data [67] and represent an adequate approach for the available data in our research (low number of variables) and the exploratory approach of our study on the research topic.

Recent studies focus on modeling frameworks, statistical models [68], geospatial analysis [69] and structural equation modeling [25] as more innovative and complex methods to analyze surveys and questionnaires, including those concerning residents' opinions and perceptions in light of sustainable tourism policy design. These methods may provide the opportunity to analyze tourism phenomena in a more complex way, including traveling related to sports events in Romania, and should be considered for future complementary studies and research on the topic. Next to the survey method, the documentation was a distinctive part of our methodologic exploratory approach and helped us understand and complement the interpretation of survey data outputs. Documentation is a recognized necessary methodological approach for research based on case studies within a typical regional cultural context and can reveal details with important implications for the studied phenomenon [63]. Other scientific papers based on qualitative exploratory approaches report as well documentation, document collection and analysis or as methodological issues the use of both qualitative and quantitative data for an exploratory case study approach [70] and for studying social events and phenomena such as sports events (e.g., the case of PyeongChang Olympic Games [7]).

For the present study, responding to the key research questions required a thorough analysis of internet sites dedicated to the UEFA 2020 event (e.g., www.uefa.com (accessed on 1 November 2022) was the main site of the event) but also to sports media journal pages (e.g., <https://www.digisport.ro> (accessed on 1 November 2022); <https://www.digi24.ro> (accessed on 1 November 2022); <https://sports.ndtv.com> (accessed on 1 November 2022)) and the online platforms of Bucharest's local authorities and tourism stakeholders, containing press releases and newsletters dedicated to the event (e.g., <https://bucharest2night.com> (accessed on 1 November 2022)).

Section 4.1 on results entitled UEFA 2020 in Bucharest Facts and Records presents important elements which resulted from the documentation phase as a distinctive part of our methodological approach. Data analysis and illustration on the stadium's limited capacities because of the pandemic context and important records for the competition registered by the matches and the teams that played in Bucharest are facts inscribed in the history of this international tournament and represent important references for football supporters that particularly longed for live competitions during this sanitary crisis period [50].

3.2. Data Collection, Computing and Analysis

According to research objectives, the study focused the target population on autochthonous attendees at the UEFA 2020 event in Bucharest. Considering the limited time and human resources, a concise survey with an inductive approach addressed both respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and key terms about their satisfaction with prices related to the main tourist products of UEFA2020 in Bucharest and the event in the particular COVID-19 context. To verify the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pre-survey testing phase was designed on a limited test sample group of supporters between the 3rd and the 4th match scheduled at the National Arena stadium in Bucharest. This enabled us to remove difficult wording and simplify the questionnaire enough to make its application possible both on-site (very limited because of COVID-19 restrictions and the context of the event itself) and online immediately after the fourth match scheduled in Bucharest.

The survey was therefore partially administered on-site immediately after the fourth match scheduled at the National Arena stadium as one of the study's authors involved in data collection also attended the match. This was, in fact, the first match in round 16 between France and Switzerland and took place on Monday, 28 June, registering an important percentage of Romanian supporters physically attending the matches. Following the logic of asking which matches the domestic visitors attended, this was also the most convenient moment among the four matches programmed in Bucharest to start the survey.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic sanitary crisis and the field conditions (not many respondents could have been intercepted during the event), a large amount of data collection took place after the event in the June–July 2021 period through online methods. To ensure a high response rate in a limited period, the survey was applied through multiple channels, namely Facebook, Instagram and Google forms. A snowballing technique based on chain referrals was employed [54] through which respondents were already contacted within the stadium premises. Those contacted online were also asked to send the survey form further. In this way, the sampling, which began with a few supporters fulfilling the research criteria (domestic visitors and tourists over 18 years old) became large enough to allow us to perform our analysis.

The survey lasted around 5 min and was conducted in the Romanian language being fluid and rapid to ensure a high response rate. From a total of 384 survey answers obtained from randomly selected effective respondents, in the end, 310 questionnaires were validated and constitute the object of this study. Because of the real-time conditions for on-site surveys and lack of control for the online filled-in forms, a number of the respondents did not answer all questions and were eliminated.

The manner of the survey application, time reasons and the exploratory character of the study also obliged for a concise questionnaire comprising 15 questions. The survey had a first part which included 6 questions addressing sociodemographic variables. Respondents were asked to state their age, gender, occupation, the highest level of education, their current residential environment (urban/rural) and if they were living in Bucharest. The second part of the survey contained 9 questions. It addressed domestic visitors'/sports tourists' participation in UEFA 2020 (five questions) (the number and name of matches in which they participated, if they were accompanied or not and by whom, if they opted for accommodation and a means of transport) and the satisfaction of domestic visitors regarding the Bucharest UEFA 2020 event in the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic (four questions) (prices in the souvenir shops; prices for in-stadium food and drink products, the satisfaction with the protection measures against COVID-19 and prices for validating COVID-19 safety ticket or for COVID-19 rapid tests). The satisfaction variable on all questions was assessed using a five-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 1—very dissatisfied to 5—very satisfied.

The answers were further coded into nominal and ordinal data. SPSS 20.0 was used to analyze data through descriptive statistics, crosstabulations and different measures of associations between sociodemographic variables, proven by other studies [71] to influence the perceived social impact of hosting large-scale sport tourism events, on the one hand, and the answers in the second set of questions focusing on the objectives of the study, on the other hand. In this way, this study attempted to offer certain empirical quantitative outputs to generate qualitative interpretative results addressing its research questions.

Data collection and analysis involved searching and using information from reference sites about the UEFA 2020 event (e.g., uefa.com accessed on 10 September 2022) or from autochthonous media sites reporting facts about the matches in Bucharest. This research phase helped to depict symbolic images and important details in terms of sport competition and performance underlined by different stakeholders or reference reports for the event and to get a more in-depth understanding of certain survey data.

For cartographic representations, QGIS was used, version 2.18 Las Palmas and the geo-spatial.org platform from where data were extracted.

4. Results

4.1. UEFA 2020 in Bucharest Facts and Records

The documentation phase and the analysis of information about the matches programmed in Bucharest, namely three in the group stage—Group C: Austria–North Macedonia, Sunday 13 June, Ukraine–North Macedonia, Thursday 18 June, and Ukraine–Austria, Monday 21 June—and the first match in round 16, France–Switzerland, Monday 28 June, revealed certain facts and records contributing to the general atmosphere and the history of the event recognized by different studies to represent an important factor for the football fans' motivation to travel for mega sport competitions [5,48].

In fact, according to supporters voting on UEFA's official site, the match between France and Switzerland scheduled in Bucharest that ended with a penalty shoot-out moment was ranked second in the best matches of the 2020 competition (<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro-2020/news/026b-12b7057be4fc-c514361cb6d5-1000--were-these-the-best-games-at-uefa-euro-2020/> accessed on 10 September 2022). During this match, several records were broken: Switzerland won an eliminatory match for the first time since the World Cup in 1938; the French team, for the first time in 61 years, scored three goals in an eliminatory match at EURO; Switzerland's team won for the first time in a penalty shoot-out stage; and the 800th goal in EURO history was scored by the Swiss striker Haris Seferović.

The playing teams and their performance track record, as well as the interactions between players and supporters, created unique moments during the matches held at the National Arena stadium in Bucharest, reconfirming the audiences as part of the football drama with a potential influence on what could happen on the pitch [72].

The North Macedonian football team played twice in the Romanian capital during UEFA 2020. Despite the fact that the team lost all three matches played at EURO 2020, the team's performance was the greatest in the history of North Macedonia, which "reached their first major tournament as an independent nation by qualifying for Euro 2020" (<https://www.dw.com/en/euro-2020-ambitious-debutants-north-macedonia-want-to-go-all-the-way/a-57766953> accessed on 10 September 2022). The tournament coincided with another important moment for supporters of this national team namely the retirement of the 37-year-old captain and veteran striker Goran Pandev.

The first match the North Macedonian team played in a major tournament was on the 13th of June with Austria, and most supporters predicted on UEFA's site a victory for the Austrian team. However, the atmosphere in the tribunes, considered in the scientific literature a "crucial ingredient of the match day experience" (p. 82, Reference [72]), was remarked by coach Igor Angelovski who apologized to supporters for the result, "I feel sorry for the supporters, I'm speechless about the atmosphere they've created, I hope we will reward them" (<https://sports.ndtv.com/euro-2020/uefa-euro-2020-austria-thrash-north-macedonia-3-1-in-group-c-clash-2463099> accessed on 10 September 2022).

The second match scheduled in Bucharest was between Ukraine and North Macedonia on the 17th of June and confirmed again the prediction of supporters that foresaw Ukraine as a winner. The atmosphere created by supporters was also unique, especially because many Ukrainians came to support their national team taking advantage of the fact that they could arrive by car in the neighboring country that hosted the match.

They also came in a great number for the third match scheduled at the National Arena stadium, which was between Ukraine and Austria on the 21st of June. Despite supporters' positive predictions for the score and their numerical superiority over supporters of the adversary team, Austria won the match. However, as part of its own records list, UEFA 2020 was also an important moment for the Ukrainian national football team that qualified for the tournament as a top winner of their qualifying group and reached for the first time its quarter-finals proving, therefore, a better performance compared to their 2012 and 2016 championships.

The fourth and last match scheduled by UEFA 2020 in Bucharest was between France and Switzerland and was marked by Switzerland's surprising victory on penalties against the world's champion. Moreover, Switzerland marked its first victory against

France's national team, and the captain Granit Xhaka, crowned star of the match, declared in his interview that his team wrote history for Swiss football on Monday evening in Bucharest (<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro/history/news/026a-12a254887b50-4f0bbd0d1caf-1000--switzerland-s-most-beautiful-night/> accessed on 10 September 2022). The result was a worldwide surprise as according to UEFA 2020 predictor, supporters declared in a proportion of 83% against 17% that France would win the match and would reach the quarter-finals (<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro-2020/news/026a-129ca935f67c-c01dfbe6d2fd-1000--france-vs-switzerland-uefa-euro-2020-preview-where-to-watch-tv-/> accessed on 10 September 2022).

All these facts are part of the competition history and often represent topics for discussions among football fans as performances nurture the cultural heritage of sports records [73]. Details and performance track records are part of the competition's history. They remain in the memory of both players and supporters, which often register through affective impressions and topophilia feelings connected to the arenas in which performances took place [50]. That is why the documentation and presentation of these facts seem important for the present study, and they could represent a valuable intangible element contributing to the overall supporters' (dis)satisfaction with an event.

4.2. Domestic Visitors' and Tourists' Participation at Bucharest UEFA 2020

To answer the first research question addressing the profile of the domestic population attending UEFA 2020 matches scheduled in Bucharest, the first step was the descriptive analysis of the target sample which resulted after the random selection of respondents according to the exploratory objectives of the present study.

Therefore, in terms of sociodemographics, one should remark a sample dominated as expected by people living in Bucharest who got easier and cheaper access to the event as they were living in the place (Table 1). However, the percentage of non-residents reaching 43.2%, even if lower than the one for residents, is a high one demonstrating the important attractiveness of the UEFA 2020 mega-event for the domestic sport tourist demand despite the expenses associated with traveling for the event and the COVID-19 context involving a certain risk for the participants in mass gatherings.

Table 1. Respondents' sociodemographic profile.

	%	No.		%	No.
Age			Gender		
18–30	39	121	male	181	58.4
31–50	46.5	144	female	129	41.6
over 50	14.5	45	Occupation		
Education			employee	47.7	148
faculty	53.9	167	retired	9.4	29
high school	43.2	134	student	26.5	82
vocational school	2.9	9	unemployed	16.5	51
Origin			Resident		
rural	21.3	66	no	43.2	134
urban	78.7	244	yes	56.8	176

Source: Computed by authors.

In terms of age, the sample is dominated by adults and young adults, with respondents between 18 and 50 years overpassing 85% of the total and men with a little less than 60% (Table 1). Considering the education criterion, the sample is balanced between those with high education who graduated from a faculty (53.9%) and those with middle-level studies (46.1%). The latter category also includes the graduates of vocational schools focusing on job-specific training. In terms of occupation, employees form almost half of the sample (47.7%), but high percentages of the sample are represented by respondents who are students (26.5%) and unemployed (16.5%).

An important difference that could be made is between domestic visitors (residents of Bucharest) and domestic tourists leaving their home residence city or village for more than 24h and who needed accommodation in Bucharest.

This main division has important consequences on the connectivity regarding the groups of supporters attending matches and their accommodation options during their stay in Bucharest. Studies such as the one of Andersson et al. [5] confirm the social function of sports events, particularly football matches, as besides the event itself, associated activities, the influence of social media platforms and internal push factors motivate sports tourism. In the case of domestic attendees of UEFA 2020 in Bucharest, almost all (99.7%) came accompanied at matches they physically attended at the National Arena stadium. Obviously, sports tourists traveling to Bucharest were accompanied more than residents by friends and family members, many associating the sporting event with leisure activities and consequently with pleasant moments and time spent with their friends.

A great percentage of non-residents (91.8%) opted for accommodation during their stay for matches they attended in Bucharest. Very few non-residents opted to return to their home residences on the evening of the match. Many took advantage of being accommodated by their family or friends (67.9%), while 23.1% opted for a hotel unit. This percentage emphasizes a clear potential for sports tourism represented by such mega-events as UEFA 2020 for Bucharest in terms of domestic demand, even during restrictive periods such as the COVID-19 pandemic that marked the organization and venues of the event. The crosstabulation between origin and accommodation method shows that supporters from urban environments opted more for hotel accommodation (30.9%) than those from rural settlements (15.2%). Over half of both categories of supporters chose to stay with friends and relatives at their venue in Bucharest. Still, the percentage was more important in the case of sports tourists coming from the rural environment (77.3%), possibly connected to both personal and financial reasons. Besides participating in UEFA 2020 matches, which were the main attractor for the supporters, they took advantage of visiting close persons with whom they also physically attended the event or simply socialized after severe lockdown periods that marked the ongoing pandemics at that moment.

Crosstabulation results that could be outlined are between occupation and accommodation and show that retired persons have a clear preference for hotel units (over three-quarters of respondents within this category). Rather balanced but much less important percentages for those opting for a hotel, ranging between 16.7% and 18% within their category, could be outlined for employees, students and the unemployed. Students and the unemployed were also the ones to opt in the highest proportion for VFR in terms of accommodation (77.8% and 75%, respectively), underlining financial reasons but also stressing the social function of this sport tourism event. The crosstabulation between age and accommodation reiterates the above results showing a preference for the age category of old adults and the elderly (over 50) for hotels units and a clear dominance of VFR in terms of accommodation for both adults (74.6%) and young adults (75%). If the last two groups are compared, adults opted in a higher percentage within their group for a hotel stay and a lower proportion for no accommodation during their travel to Bucharest than young adults.

These two abovementioned crosstabulations show a clear connection between variables rejecting the null hypothesis. For the one between occupation and accommodation chi-square test shows a significant result of $\chi^2(2) = 25.945$, $p = 0.002$. In contrast, for the one between age and accommodation, there is a significant result of $\chi^2(2) = 31.147$, $p = 0.000$. If further testing the strength of the relationship for each of the above variables, a significant value showing a moderate strength could be emphasized for both the relationship between occupation and accommodation and the relationship between age and accommodation. The latter shows a stronger connection (Table 2).

Table 2. Measures of strength of relationships between tested variables.

Symmetric Measures Occupation/Accommodation				Symmetric Measures Age/Accommodation			
Nominal	Phi	0.440	0.002	Nominal	Phi	0.482	0.000
by Nominal	Cramer's V	0.254	0.002	by Nominal	Cramer's V	0.341	0.000
	Contingency Coefficient	0.403	0.002		Contingency Coefficient	0.434	0.000
N of Valid Cases		134		N of Valid Cases		134	

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis. b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis. Source: Computed by authors.

Regarding how they chose to get to the stadium, most respondents used public transport (63.2%), encouraged by the fact that the public transport company STB allowed supporters to travel to UEFA 2020 stadium for free and the fact that the Bucharest metro company distributed a 24 h transport card for football match attendees in specially designated locations. The agglomeration also provides socialization opportunities for larger groups of supporters, and the fact that the stadium is not far from the city center (Figure 3) encouraged some supporters to walk to the stadium (27.4%). Traffic congestion and the lack of parking opportunities around the stadium which was inaugurated in 2012 without appropriate dimensions for these facilities and, consequently, the delays because of transport agglomeration discouraged many supporters from choosing the car as a means of transport. Consequently, only 2.2% of Romanian supporters opted for their car, while 11.9% chose a taxi or a ride-sharing system. The closest parking area was the Mega Mall commercial center, which was very agglomerated, showing long entry queues on days matches were scheduled. Foreign supporters also chose the taxi to get to the stadium.

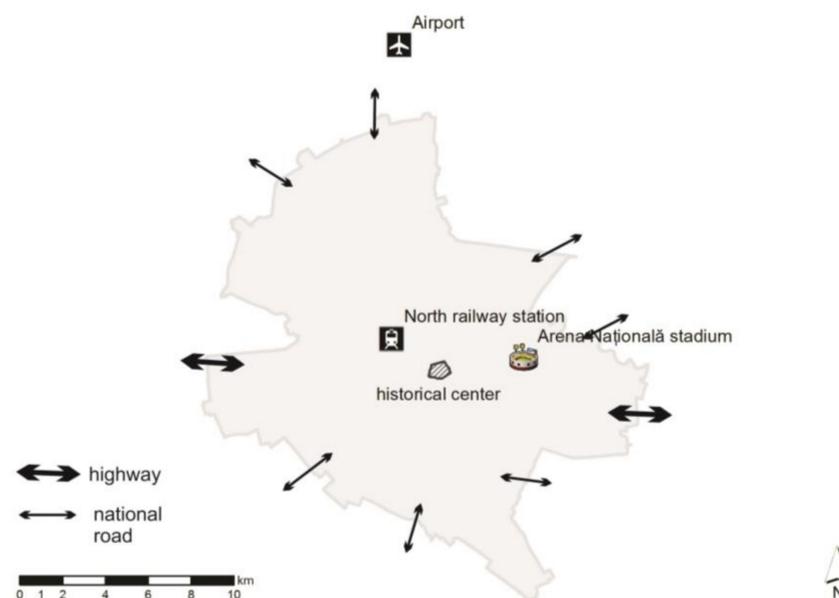


Figure 3. The position of National Arena stadium and of the main ways of access within Bucharest municipality. Source: Geospatial data computed by authors in QGIS 2.18.

In terms of match participation, most Romanian supporters physically attended the match between France and Switzerland (over 90% of sample respondents) and benefited from the increase in the stadium capacity according to COVID-19 rules, being attracted by the presence of the world champion team including international football stars such as Mbappe, Pogba or Benzema. The attractiveness of famous football players could also explain the higher presence of autochthonous supporters in the matches of Austria that included worldwide known performers such as Alaba. The first and the third match, in which the Austrian team was matched with the ones of North Macedonia and Ukraine, recorded over 70% of the sample answers. In contrast, the second match between Ukraine and

North Macedonia accumulated only 60% of the answers. Therefore, the event attractiveness fluctuated depending on the matches played at the National Arena stadium, with Romanian supporters being attracted not only by the importance of the match or of the teams that were playing but also by the preferred players whose fans they were. UEFA 2020 was a mega-event with an important power of attraction for residents and sports tourists coming from other regions to Bucharest, as 64% of Bucharest residents and 36% of non-residents in the study sample attended all four matches. In the overall sample, an impressive percentage of 59% of respondents attended all four matches, another 10% attended three matches, and 9% attended two matches, emphasizing the need of football fans to consume sports events despite the restrictive period imposed by the sanitary crisis.

4.3. Satisfaction of Domestic Visitors with Bucharest UEFA 2020

Satisfaction with the event's major associated products and the event held in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was another major element of interest in our research.

Regarding souvenir shops located inside and outside the National Arena stadium, most respondents (over 85%, from which almost 30% were very dissatisfied) expressed their dissatisfaction with them and their prices. Comparing the online store dedicated to the event, supporters remarked a much lower variety of products. The number of stores around the stadium was very low, and there were large queues in front of them made by Romanians and foreign supporters who attended this competition in great numbers. That is why stock shortages for certain highly demanded and commonly bought products (e.g., T-shirts, scarves, bracelets) appeared.

The percentages are quite balanced in terms of age and gender, not showing important discrepancies compared to the general descriptive frequencies. However, old adults and the elderly, as well as women, have slightly higher percentages than other age groups, respectively, compared to male respondents for the satisfied and very satisfied respondents. However, these categories of answers remain very low for respondents in general and all individual separate groups in terms of age and gender in particular.

Respondents from rural and urban environments and Bucharest residents compared to non-residents showed similar percentages in satisfaction with souvenir shops and their prices without displaying a significant connection between the dependent and independent variables. Yet, supporters from rural settlements were very dissatisfied and dissatisfied to a higher extent with souvenir shops around the National Arena stadium in Bucharest than those living in cities showing a higher diversity of answers and not necessarily a dominant trend according to this criterion.

According to occupation, the unemployed and retired categories have the most important percentages of very dissatisfied respondents with souvenir prices (52.9% and 34.5%, respectively). At the same time, students and the unemployed declared themselves dissatisfied in the most important proportions (69.5% and 43.1%, respectively).

The crosstabulation between education and satisfaction with souvenir prices shows higher proportions of very dissatisfied respondents who graduated from vocational schools (over 44%), often connected to lower-paid jobs or socially vulnerable groups. The least important percentage for very dissatisfied is remarked for faculty graduates, with the highest percentage of neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and of satisfied respondents with souvenirs.

Both crosstabulations between occupation or education (last graduated institution) and satisfaction with souvenir prices are associated with the two variables. Pearson Chi-square test for both has a significant result rejecting the null hypothesis (Table 3).

Regarding the opinion of Romanian respondents on food and drink variety and prices, most declared themselves dissatisfied (54.2%) and very dissatisfied (30%) with them. The stands organized within the National Arena stadium offered very few food and drink products from which one could choose. Moreover, for many Romanian supporters, prices were higher than expected as merchands raised their prices for the international event.

Table 3. Chi-square test results for occupation and satisfaction with souvenir prices crosstabulation and for education and satisfaction with souvenir prices crosstabulation.

Occupation/Satisfaction with Souvenir Prices				Education/Satisfaction with Souvenir Prices			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.506 ^a	12	0.013	Pearson Chi-Square	23.377 ^a	68	0.003
Likelihood Ratio	26.749	12	0.008	Likelihood Ratio	18.099	8	0.020
N of Valid Cases	310			N of Valid Cases	310		
a. 9 cells (45.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19.				a. 8 cells (53.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is, 6.			

Source: Computed by authors.

The crosstabulations between age as an independent variable and satisfaction with food and drink prices show important percentages of dissatisfied and very dissatisfied for all age groups, with some very low percentages of satisfied and very satisfied (2.5% of each category) for the age groups of young supporters. Over 80% of women and men were dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with prices for food and drink at the National Arena stadium during the event. Still, men declared themselves in a higher proportion very dissatisfied.

The association between occupation and satisfaction with price variety for food and drinks showed very high percentages of very dissatisfied groups of respondents for the unemployed (51%), retired (37.9%) and employees (28.4%). In contrast, the dissatisfied category is the most important of all categories, especially for students (67.1%). The chi-square test shows a significant relationship between the two nominal variables (Table 4).

Table 4. Chi-square test results for occupation and satisfaction with prices for food and drink products crosstabulation.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.013 ^a	12	0.020
Likelihood Ratio	26.382	12	0.009
N of Valid Cases	310		

^a 9 cells (45.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is, 47. Source: Computed by authors.

According to the origin, the percentages seem very balanced. They do not register important differences between respondents from a rural or urban environment, Bucharest or other settlements in the country on all categories of answers considered for the dependent variable. Even if slightly higher than non-residents, the percentage of satisfied and very satisfied respondents living in Bucharest with prices of food and drink at the National Arena stadium during the UEFA 2020 matches stays very low (2.3% in each category). These figures reiterate the general trend and possibly show higher revenues and higher availability to pay higher costs for a small category of participants living in the capital city.

If analyzing satisfaction with the protection measures against COVID-19, one should notice that Romanian visitors and tourists attending matches at the National Arena stadium were satisfied and very satisfied in a very important proportion (over 40% in each category) with them (Table 5). These figures are even more accentuated by the fact that the remaining percentage until 100% is occupied only by the neither satisfied nor dissatisfied category.

Table 5. Satisfaction with protection measures against COVID-19.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	49	15.8	15.8
	satisfied	132	42.6	42.6
	very satisfied	129	41.6	41.6
	total	310	100.0	100.0

Source: Computed by authors.

These measures included the criteria on which different categories of persons could have attended the EURO 2020 matches on the stands at the National Arena in Bucharest and which included, according to the national legislation, several categories of participants, namely: persons with an access bracelet wristband confirming a negative antigen or PCR test within 72 h before the match start time, persons that were vaccinated against the SARS-CoV-2 virus and for whom 10 days had elapsed since the completion of the complete vaccination schedule and immunized persons between the 15th and 90th day after confirmation of SARS-CoV-2 infection. The fourth category of persons included those presenting the negative result certified by a medical unit of a rapid antigen test not older than 24 h before the start of the match and allowed more flexibility for supporters to attend matches (<https://www.frf.ro/en/the-access-procedure-on-the-national-arena-for-the-uefa-euro-2020-matches-rapid-tests-are-carried-out-24h-before-the-gates-open/> accessed on 10 September 2022). Safety conditions to enter the stadium also imposed the wearing of a face mask within the National Arena area.

The crosstabulation between independent variables and satisfaction with protection measures against COVID-19 show significant results if considering the criteria of age $\chi^2(2) = 11,785, p = 0.019$, but also of origin $\chi^2(2) = 4824, p = 0.090$, and if living in Bucharest $\chi^2(2) = 12,530, p = 0.002$, rejecting for each of these cases the null hypothesis. The relation for each pair of variables is, however, rather weak according to contingency tests. In terms of age, young adults declared themselves very satisfied in a higher proportion (46.3%) with protection measures against COVID-19 compared to the groups of adults and old adults. The respondents in the group of over 50, more vulnerable to pandemic risks, declared themselves, however, satisfied in a dominant percentage (55.6%) with protection measures against COVID-19. In terms of attendees' origin, those coming from the urban environment declared themselves in a higher proportion neither satisfied nor satisfied with protection measures against COVID-19. Over half of respondents living in rural areas were satisfied with these measures during the matches they attended in the National Arena. If considering Bucharest residents, they are in a more important percentage neither satisfied nor satisfied with protection measures against COVID-19 (22.2%). Non-residents are, in contrast, satisfied (45.5%) and very satisfied (47%) with these measures in a greater proportion than Bucharest inhabitants (Table 6).

If looking at gender differences, men expressed in a higher percentage that they are very satisfied with measures against COVID-19 than women who were, to a higher extent, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with them. In terms of occupation, students showed the highest percentage of very satisfied respondents with protection measures against COVID-19 (48.8%). In comparison, retired people showed themselves in a higher proportion than other categories satisfied with them (51.7%).

Prices for validating COVID-19 safety ticket or for COVID-19 rapid tests was another dependent variable analyzed in relation to the independent elements of the respondent sociodemographic profile. The question clearly emphasized the economic factor compared to the previous one and underlined safety aspects. It referred to document validation (RON 5 equivalent to EUR 1) and the cost of the rapid test (RON 40 equivalent to EUR 8), to which certain attendees appealed to get a wristband access bracelet for the stadium area. Taking into consideration the prices for these facilities, most respondents considered them moderate (85.8%), while a percentage of 12.6% considered them cheap.

Table 6. Crosstabulation between participants' residence and satisfaction with protection measures against COVID-19.

			Satisfaction for Protection against COVID-19			Total
			Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	
Bucharest Resident	no	Count	10	61	63	134
		% within Resident	7.5%	45.5%	47.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	3.2%	19.7%	20.3%	43.2%
	yes	Count	39	71	66	176
		% within Resident	22.2%	40.3%	37.5%	100.0%
		% of Total	12.6%	22.9%	21.3%	56.8%
Total	Count	49	132	129	310	
	% within Resident	15.8%	42.6%	41.6%	100.0%	
	% of Total	15.8%	42.6%	41.6%	100.0%	

Source: Computed by authors.

An interesting fact is that the association of independent variables with this one regarding prices for validating COVID-19 safety tickets shows mostly significant results, sometimes emphasizing a moderate strength in the case of certain bivariate correlations.

If age is considered, one should remark a high percentage of supporters in the group of over 50 that declared prices for COVID-19 safety ticket validation cheap (42.2%). An important subgroup of old adults and elderly considered these prices moderate (57.8%) as well as a great part of young respondents (88.4%) and adults (92%).

The chi-square test for the crosstabulation between age and satisfaction with prices for COVID-19 safety ticket validation rejects the null hypothesis $\chi^2(2) = 45,422, p = 0.000$, showing that they are correlated (Table 7), while tests also show weak-to-moderate strength for this association with a significant value of Phi of 0.383 (Approx. Sig. 0.000) and a significant value of the contingency coefficient of 0.357 (Approx. Sig. 0.000). Another correlation with statistical significance rejecting the null hypothesis for the satisfaction with COVID-19 safety validation prices was the one of occupation $\chi^2(2) = 29,106, p = 0.000$, with a significant Phi test value of 0.306 (Approx. Sig. 0.000). These results also validate the previous discussed association with age, as almost all categories according to the occupation criterion identified in a very high percentage the price for COVID-19 safety ticket validation as moderate (students—90.2%, employees—89.9% and unemployed—82.4%) except for retired respondents who chose this answer in a much lower proportion (58.6%) but declared in a dominant percentage (41.1%) compared to other groups these particular price facilities as cheap.

Table 7. Chi-square tests for crosstabulation between age and satisfaction with prices for COVID-19 safety ticket validation and for crosstabulation between occupation and satisfaction with prices for COVID-19 safety ticket validation.

Age/Satisfaction with Prices for COVID-19 Safety Ticket Validation				Occupation/Satisfaction with Prices for COVID-19 Safety Ticket Validation			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)		Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	45.422 ^a	4	0.000	Pearson Chi-Square	29.106 ^a	6	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	35.237	4	0.000	Likelihood Ratio	24.328	6	0.000
N of Valid Cases	310			N of Valid Cases	310		
a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is, 73.				a. 5 cells (41.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is, 47.			

Source: Computed by authors.

The crosstabulation between the last graduated institution and prices for COVID-19 safety ticket validation shows a high percentage of respondents who graduated from

vocational schools who consider this price category cheap (55.6%). Graduates of theoretical studies, either middle level (high school) and high level (university), mostly considered COVID-19 safety ticket validation products as having moderate prices. The relation is described by a significant Pearson's chi-square value of 17,083 with a $p = 0.002$.

The bivariate correlation between origin and the perception of prices for safety ticket validation shows a higher percentage of inhabitants of rural areas who consider these prices cheap (24.2%) compared to urban inhabitants who chose the same answer in a lower proportion (9.4%). The association between these variables shows a significant result $X^2(2) = 11,781, p = 0.003$, as also in the case of crosstabulation between the place of residence and price for safety ticket validation $X^2(2) = 10,831, p = 0.004$. The latter crosstabulation also shows a greater percentage of respondents who do not live in Bucharest that consider the prices for validating COVID-19 safety tickets to be cheap compared to respondents living in Bucharest, consequently reiterating the above-mentioned percentages for correlations in the case of respondents' origin.

5. Discussion

UEFA 2020 remains a memorable event at the international level and for Romanian supporters in particular, as it was the first time it was organized in Bucharest. Besides this aspect, which prompted to a great extent autochthonous football fans to attend UEFA 2020, even though their national team was not qualified for the competition, the event was also marked by a series of unique elements. For the first time, the championship was hosted across 11 countries around the continent. This was a very ambitious challenge, and it may be considered a real success in light of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also determined the one-year postponement of the event.

The COVID-19 pandemic induced important shocks for both the sport and tourism industries imposing total and partial lockdown periods in almost all regions around the globe. It continues to generate effects in many countries displaying much more intense and long-lasting consequences than other historical epidemics [74] and producing real concerns from institutions and researchers who publish an increasing amount of studies on the economic effects of the lockdowns [75].

Because of the important effects on business activities overall and particularly obvious on tourism activities and other associated services, measures against COVID-19 negative effects were included in the Recovery Plan for Europe, considered the largest stimulus pack ever (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en accessed on 10 September 2022). Within the European framework, Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan includes an ambitious agenda of reforms and investment to mitigate the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733641](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)733641) accessed on 10 September 2022).

All destinations were affected, and sports events were among the very few to be held in the absence of the public and with important limitations once the relaxation measures appeared after the first peak waves. In this context, the safe organization of such an exceptional mega sport event in Bucharest seemed particularly important. This event imposed particular sanitary measures because of the high risk of contamination amplified in the case of mass gatherings such as the ones involving large groups of supporters for international matches. Interviewed in August 2021 to evaluate the UEFA 2020 Bucharest event, Florin Șari, the Romanian Football Federation (RFF) project manager for UEFA 2020 tournament, declared that there were "zero contamination cases generated of supporters' attendance to matches" (<https://www.playsport.ro/interviu-exclusiv-euro-2020-a-trecut-cu-ce-ne-am-ales-florin-sari-manager-de-proiect-in-premiera-despre-culisele-si-efectele-turneului-59754> accessed on 10 September 2022).

Mass gatherings, traveling involving a large number of participants and especially supporter crowds attending sporting competitions remain important risk elements for virus and disease transmission. According to Carmody et al. [76], these risks should be coped with and effectively managed in the post-COVID-19 era under the WHO guidance, given

the complex and multiple benefits of professional sports events. Evaluating and developing the potential of local infrastructure, including health care facilities, while considering their geographical position at the local scale for great urban areas such as Bucharest [77] when organizing mega-events could be an important point for the future planning of great sporting competitions in the post-COVID-19 era. This was demonstrated in the case of Rio de Janeiro [78] but also in the case of the matches hosted for the UEFA 2020 event by the National Arena stadium in Bucharest, obviously emphasizing the need for parking facilities in the area (<https://b365.ro/parcare-libera-pentru-soferi-pe-arena-nationala-incepand-din-septembrie-467626/> accessed on 10 September 2022).

The importance of the above issues, such as safety and support infrastructure for mega sport events, is even more accentuated by the fact that sports event tourism remains one of the leisure domains that could be associated with sustainable tourism and economic development goals by Romania and Bucharest in particular, individualized by reference studies as “the most important political, economic, financial-banking, commercial, cultural-scientific, educational, transport, informational, sports, and tourist center in the country” (p. 8, Reference [79]).

Stakeholder interrelations and decisions, their power to adapt, act in critical situations and preview risk and proactive resilience plans are considered key elements for the sustainability of the future sport tourism and sports mega-events sector.

With many countries still making efforts to fight against COVID-19 and its multiple variants rapidly proliferating and spreading from one country to another while people travel but also taking into consideration other possible sanitary threats for global tourism, such as the monkeypox [80], it is obvious that “sport and tourism would look different from what they used to be before the pandemic” (p. 558, Reference [11]). According to Cho et al. [11], it is the responsibility of the organizers in the future to take measures concerning participants’ safety and enforce their optimism and, therefore, their intention to participate in sporting events.

Despite the fact that the UEFA 2020 European Championship was very much limited by the pandemic context, Bucharest had a lot to win from hosting it, proving the uncontested attractiveness for football fans of this mega-event. In 2019, one year before the event was scheduled, a concert and gaming events presenting FIFA matches were organized in Bucharest to celebrate football and EURO 2020. These stands offering a high variety of souvenirs for supporters were eliminated with the SARS-COV-2 pandemic outburst to respect the social distancing rules and sanitary limits, and they were very much missed by supporters.

Lockdown periods and restrictions in Romania induced important negative effects on event tourism as important events were postponed or canceled. This was the case with the Saga Festival, which was greatly impacted by the pandemic that postponed its organization for one year. For consecrated events, COVID-19 had a more limited effect, such as in the case of the George Enescu festival, which was organized online. The effects on the sport mega-event UEFA 2020, even if organized in a limited capacity, were consequently increased by the general cancellation or postponement of other events in the pandemic context.

According to Florin Şari, the Romanian Football Federation project manager for the UEFA 2020 tournament in Bucharest, if considering the matches in group stages scheduled in Bucharest, most attendees (over 60%) came from abroad. Still, important percentages of non-resident Romanian supporters coming outside Bucharest were also noticed (<https://www.playsport.ro/interviu-exclusiv-euro-2020-a-trecut-cu-ce-ne-am-ales-florin-sari-manager-de-proiect-in-premiera-despre-culisele-si-efectele-turneului-59754> accessed on 10 September 2022). For the match in round 16, there was an important request from Romanian supporters to buy tickets. They formed the majority of attendees at this match, determining tickets supplementing for it (<https://sport.hotnews.ro/stiri-fotbal-24851163-euro-2020-arena-nationala-spectatori-straini-tribune-frf-uefa.htm/amp> accessed on 10 September 2022).

In this context, identifying who comes to such an event from the perspective of autochthonous consumers and evaluating their satisfaction level for the event and its different products might offer supportive elements for sustainable and adaptive planning of similar sporting competitions in the future for which, as shown, local demand is undoubtedly important.

According to the main results of our study, the UEFA 2020 Bucharest event emphasized the economy-, development- and infrastructure-enhancing functions of organizing such mega sports competitions but also underlined clearly associated social and tourism elements despite the stressing pandemic context, which limited both mass leisure events and social contacts.

An important number of domestic tourists traveled to Bucharest to watch the spectacle performed on the pitch by famous international footballers in this renowned tournament, including this city on the list of organizers. They traveled accompanied by friends or were hosted by friends and family members (almost two-thirds of non-resident respondents) with whom they physically attended matches contributing to the memorable atmosphere often mentioned as being an exceptional one by both sports performers and organizers (e.g., Florin Şari, RFF project manager for UEFA2020). Almost a quarter of non-resident respondents, mostly retired, over 50 years, chose to stay at hotels, possibly emphasizing sport event tourism as a viable silver tourism product for Romania in the future [18].

Prices for souvenirs and food and drink products disappointed most Romanian supporters who found very few stands around the National Arena stadium, offering a low variety of products with higher prices than expected, also adapted for incoming international tourists and disadvantaging autochthonous consumers.

If analyzing satisfaction with the protection measures against COVID-19, particularly analyzed in the context of the competition in 2021, Romanian supporters declared themselves satisfied to a great extent with them. Greater percentages for satisfied respondents with measures against COVID-19 for matches at the National Arena stadium belonged to non-resident supporters from rural areas and old adults and retired attendees over 50 years old. This is particularly important in the pandemic context, which revealed “a particular vulnerability of older adults (aged 65 and older) who present a greater risk of severe illness, hospitalization or death if diagnosed with COVID-19” (p. 33, Reference [18]). The context was even more aggravated by the fact that Romania was among the least vaccinated EU states, reporting at the end of 2021 record-high COVID-19 deaths and lagging behind other European states mostly because of distrust and misinformation campaigns (<https://www.euractiv.com/section/health-consumers/news/least-vaccinated-eu-states-bulgaria-romania-report-record-high-covid-19-deaths/> accessed on 10 September 2022). A large percentage of respondents overlapping rural areas and old adults considered prices for COVID-19 safety ticket validation as being cheap. These results are encouraging if considering the sustainability of the sport-event organization in Bucharest also under exceptional circumstances such as the ones induced by the sanitary crisis.

These results might offer valuable input to planning strategies and policies for this domain or possible future studies focusing on supporters' satisfaction with sports events and their associated products in the region.

A limitation of the study from the methodological point of view was that modeling techniques were not included as part of the data analysis, as they could have generated more complex results and findings. Both limited time and human resources, as well as the type of respondents and the context (e.g., football fans found on-site or online after the fourth match scheduled on EURO 2020 frameworks in Bucharest), made us reduce the time needed to fill in a survey to obtain the highest possible response rate. This goal also reduced the number of variables to be optimally considered for modeling techniques which could be an interesting option to take into consideration for further in-depth future studies on the topic.

Another possible limitation that might be considered for this study would be that its focus entirely overlapped only Romanian supporters. A comparison between the

opinions of Romanian and foreign supporters would have ideally completed the image of supporters' satisfaction with the UEFA 2020 tournament in Bucharest. Besides the limited human and time resources that did not allow us to endeavor such a research perspective, scientific reasons also related to the aim of the present study indicated the exclusive focus on autochthonous supporters as the best study perspective. A study of satisfaction for foreign supporters could have offered biased results by revealing international travelers' attitudes toward a more off-the-beaten-path destination, outlining different perspectives according to their origins and subjective feelings according to the results of the matches for which they supported their national teams.

6. Conclusions

The UEFA 2020 European Championship represented the most important mega sport tourism event organized in the last years in Bucharest, fortunately still held but exceptionally postponed because of the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Motivated by the novelty of the event, organized for the first time in the Romanian capital city within the exceptionally restrictive context imposed by the pandemic, the aim of this study was to analyze domestic tourists' participation in and satisfaction with this event.

Despite the restrictive travel conditions, the safety measures and the diminished venue capacity for the National Arena host stadium, supplemented for the match in round 16, both international supporters of their national teams and Romanian football fans from residents and outside Bucharest were very much attracted by the event. The most popular match for Romanian attendees who did not have the chance to support their national team in the competition was the fourth one scheduled at the National Arena between France and Switzerland. The attractiveness of UEFA EURO 2020 was increased by both the teams' popularity and the players. Many domestic supporters traveled to physically attend matches, opting for hotel accommodation to assist the event.

When asked about their opinion on this competition, many supporters expressed their satisfaction with the measures against COVID-19 and prices for validating safety tickets while being rather disappointed with prices and product variety for souvenirs and food and drinks. If the products determined by the pandemic context are exceptional, the last categories should be more carefully considered by organizers as part of the sports event industry representing real costs for attendees and discouraging certain categories of autochthonous fans from participating.

The UEFA 2020 tournament was an important mega sport event that encouraged tourism consumption for the city of Bucharest in a period displaying obvious important traveling restrictions and risks. The capital city of Romania has important facilities, services and types of infrastructure, including those for leisure and tourism purposes. It needs to accentuate its tourism function, which was maybe less developed in the last decades compared to other domains (e.g., administration, health services, education, etc.). The postponement and organization of the UEFA 2020 competition in 2021 within Bucharest premises next to other important European urban tourism destinations offered the chance to demonstrate the extent to which football supporters were interested in the live event. In the case of Bucharest, they were rather satisfied with the COVID-19 safety measures and their costs than were disturbed by them. Despite the fact that the Romanian national team did not qualify for the competition, autochthonous football supporters obviously manifested a high interest in the matches scheduled at the National Arena stadium within the framework of the international tournament. They took the risk to attend the event despite the dangers represented by the pandemic and the very low vaccination rate displayed at that time in the country.

The present study might therefore be considered very useful in the actual context still affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but also in the long term if considering sustainable and resilient planning of sport events in the region, a domain with real opportunities which may benefit from the high local demand and which preoccupies various stakeholders from sports institutions to local administration and tourism entrepreneurs.

Lacking important urban tourist-attracting events and competing with other mature European urban destinations, mega sports events may represent an opportunity for large autochthonous cities such as Bucharest to increase tourist attractiveness and maintain leisure traveling even during periods of travel restrictions. The present study might encourage stakeholders such as sport event organizers, tourism institutions or local authorities to consider this domain a priority for developing the leisure tourism sector in Bucharest and other large cities in Romania in the future.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S. and C.T.; methodology, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S. and C.T.; software, A.-I.L.-D. and A.-A.S.; validation, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S., C.T., A.G. and M.C.; formal analysis, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S., C.T., A.G. and M.C.; investigation, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S. and A.G.; data curation, A.-I.L.-D. and A.-A.S.; writing—original draft preparation, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S., C.T. and A.G.; writing—review and editing, A.-I.L.-D., A.-A.S., C.T., A.G. and M.C.; supervision, A.-I.L.-D., C.T. and A.G.; project administration, M.C.; funding acquisition, C.T., A.G. and M.C. All authors have contributed equally to this research study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: The publication of this research study has been funded by the University of Bucharest, Romania.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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

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