

Article

The Mediating Role of Major Sport Events in Visitors' Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Intention to Revisit a Destination

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Abstract: Sport events represent a popular motive for travel and can bring a huge influx of visitors with multiple benefits for a destination. The purpose of this article is to analyze the effect of previous experience with the destination on future behavior in the form of intention to visit/revisit it and to shed more light on the relationship between visitors' satisfaction and their future revisit intentions depending on their previous experience with the destination and the sporting event. The research setting was EuroBasket 2015, Zagreb, Croatia (EB), the largest and the most important basketball competition for national teams in Europe. A face-to-face survey with visitors of each of the 15 played games was conducted on site. In total, 765 questionnaires were collected. For the purpose of this paper, only foreign visitors (461 questionnaires) were included in the analysis. The connection between past experience and future intention to visit was tested with Pearson's chi-squared test, differences in satisfaction levels—using the *t*-test for independent samples. In the next step of the analysis, we performed an analysis of impact asymmetry (IA) and of impact range (IR). The necessary input data were obtained through an OLS regression model with binary-coded dummy variables. The results showed that repeat visitors are more likely to express an intention to revisit the destination than first-time visitors, but the level of total satisfaction with EB was the same for both groups (first-time visitors and repeat visitors). The most influential event attributes for overall satisfaction were organization of EB in general, layout of the arena, and preparation of the city for the event. The study expanded the theoretical understanding of the visitors' satisfaction with sporting event attributes as well their intention to revisit the destination.

Keywords: sport events; intention to revisit the destination; EuroBasket 2015; Zagreb; Croatia



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1. Introduction

A sporting event can be described as a “social gathering that brings together a large number of people and activities on the occasion of a competition” [1] (p. 280). Sporting events are an integral and important part of the tourism industry. Their importance for tourism dates back to ancient times when places (sanctuaries) where sports competitions were held “became also the main ‘tourist’ centres of ancient Greece” [2] (p. 149). Depending mostly on their “scale of impacts” [3] (p. 152) including attendance, media, profile, infrastructure, costs, and benefits, various classifications of sporting events can be made [1,4,5].

Possible benefits, especially economic ones, are mostly used as a justification for staging an event. In that sense, long-term benefits to tourism [6] and from tourism [7] seem to be the most mentioned ones. This was confirmed by the research of Lohman et al. [8] indicating that from the perspective of both the Brazilian and foreign visitors of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, the stimulus to tourism and the possibility of increasing the visibility of the destination are seen as the main positive aspects to host the event. Although

Zawadzki [9] (p. 38) found that it is “difficult to indicate unambiguously positive, tangible effects gained by the organization of mega sporting events” regarding increase in tourism inflow seven years before and seven years after the event, a number of researchers confirmed sporting event visitors’ intention to revisit the destination in the future [10–13]. Events are therefore regarded as catalysts for driving tourism [7], destination promotion [14,15], and local development [5], mostly through the expansion of the visitor economy, especially in developing countries [13].

However, for a destination to fully benefit from returning visitors, decisionmakers need to understand why people return to the place of their initial visit. According to Som and Badarneh [16], a number of factors influence repeat visitation. Satisfaction seems to be one of the commonly researched factors, whether in connection with repeat visitation directly [17–21] or as a mediator [16] between some determinants and revisit intention. Authors in the field of sporting event tourism have focused on the relationship between satisfaction among event visitors [10,11,22–27] or active event participants [28–32] and intentions to return to the destination where the event was held, or even to the event itself [33–35]. Prior experience with an event or the destination where the event is held has proven to have a significant effect on intentions to return [19,27,29,36], which can be attributed to the fact that visitors are familiar with the destination and their decision about a future visit is less prone to risk [22,27].

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, the goal was to analyze the effect of previous experience with a destination on future behavior in the form of intention to visit it. Secondly, this study aimed to shed more light on the relationship between visitors’ satisfaction with different event attributes and their future revisit intentions. The research was conducted at EuroBasket 2015, Zagreb, Croatia (EuroBasket 2015). Zagreb is the capital of Croatia and has hosted (for example, 2021 World Rally Cup, group phase of EuroBasket 2015, 2010 Men’s European Water Polo Championship, etc.) or co-hosted (for example, 2018 European Men’s Handball Championship, 2016 European University Games, 2009 World Men’s Handball Championship, etc.) several major sporting events. Studies researching possible effects of these and other events held in Zagreb or Croatia are scarce. Pranić, Petrić, and Cetinić [37] studied the residents’ perception of social impacts from co-hosting the 2009 World Men’s Handball Championship, but in the town of Split, and Perić [38] assessed economic and social benefits and costs of the 2018 European Men’s Handball Championship. According to Perić [38] (p. 10) the respondents highlighted the improved image of the hosting community as one of the most significant positive impacts, but suggested that “there could be other direct and indirect effects, foremost in tourism, like attracting more visitors to host cities”. Although sporting events have been largely used for tourism promotion purposes [39], according to our knowledge, the real effect of these activities has not been evaluated. In that sense, this paper contributes to better understanding of the role of major sporting events in tourism development. The goal was to understand whether sporting events (namely, group phase of the EuroBasket 2015 competition) contribute to future tourist visits (do visitors of this event intend to return to Zagreb and Croatia) and if so, whether satisfaction and what attributes play an important role in their expressed intention to return.

2. Literature Review

Sporting events have been a popular motive for travel since ancient times [2], and nowadays, they represent an integral part of the (sport) tourism industry. Participation at a certain sporting event can be in the form of active or passive participation [40–43], including both athletes or active participants and spectators. A sporting event can be described as a “social gathering that brings together a large number of people and activities on the occasion of a competition” [1] (p. 280). They are “organized throughout the world for able and disabled bodied men and/or women of all ages. There are single and multi-sport formats, some of which are universally available and others that are specific to only one region of one country. In a time dimension there are various competition formats from one-

day tournaments to year round championships. In a socio-economic dimension there are amateur and professional events and those that are spectator or participant led" [7] (p. 13).

They can range from very small local events viewed mostly by the players' families to events encompassing several sports and a large number of athletes from different countries, such as Olympic Games. It is therefore quite clear that various classifications of sporting events can be made [1,4,5]. Of interest for this paper are major sporting events, which, according to the OECD [5] (p. 11), are events with a significant proportion of international participants, include significant international audience and media coverage, and have national impacts. This market is constantly growing both in terms of the number of sporting events [44] or the tickets sold for professional sporting events and purchased via the Internet [45]. The only exception is year 2020, due to COVID-19 [45,46], but the market is expected to recover rather quickly.

Organizing any sporting event, and particularly a major or a mega one, is a very complex task [47], especially if the host aims to maximize the positive legacy [48] or achieve any of the possible benefits [49]. Nevertheless, the most commonly mentioned benefits are economic ones, especially "from attendees and participants coming to the host destination and spending money" [50] (p. 592). Tourism benefits are therefore seen as "a key aspect of economic impact" [7] (p. 80) and can be expected before, during, and after [51] the event in the form of image formation, increase in the number of visitors, infrastructure development, etc. Actually, attracting more tourists to the destination in the period after the event has been held is often the main reason for staging an event [26].

Although a decision to revisit a destination depends on many factors [16], tourists' satisfaction is often researched, implying that a satisfied tourist will return, i.e., high customer satisfaction is a prerequisite for retaining customers [52]. Satisfaction represents "the degree to which one believes that an experience evokes positive feeling" [24] (p. 943). It is "a judgement that a product, or service feature, or product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption—related fulfilment, including levels of under or over fulfilment" [53] (p. 44) and it is "one of the key judgements that consumers make" [54] (p. 297). It means that consumers compare between expectations and performances of a product or service. Nevertheless, even if a product provides a relatively good performance, unsatisfactory consumption experience is possible [55] due to the fact that it refers to an emotional state of mind after exposure [56], meaning that it has both a cognitive and an emotional component [54]. Its importance for revisiting has been widely researched in tourism and positive connection with overall [17,19–21] or attribute satisfaction [19] as well as with the number of previous visits [17] has been confirmed. It should be noted that, according to Jang and Feng's [18] research, satisfaction has no direct influence on mid-term or long-term revisit intention, indicating that it is not significant in developing long-term business retention unless it is continuous.

Researchers in the field of sport event tourism have studied the connection between satisfaction of both active event participants [28–32] and event spectators [10,11,22–27] and future intentions to revisit, with somewhat different results. Studies including active sporting event participants mostly aim to find connection between satisfaction with the event and future intention to revisit the same event or other events in the same sport. From the management point of view, this is understandable. Since event quality has proven to be an antecedent of event satisfaction [24,34,57–59], understanding the connection between satisfaction and future intentions in the form of a repeat visit would ease future planning of such events. This is especially the case when not just overall satisfaction, but also specific attributes of events are researched. The majority of the research confirms that satisfaction positively influences intention to return to the event [30–32].

Since events are inextricably linked to the cities that host them [60], of interest for this paper are spectators and their satisfaction and intentions to return to the destination where the event was held. Customer satisfaction in the case of sporting event spectators has been defined as a "pleasurable, fulfilment response to the entertainment of a sport competition and/or ancillary services provided during a game" [35] (p. 340). The aim is to determine if

past experience with the destination affects future behavior. In other words, does the fact that EuroBasket 2015 spectators visited Zagreb, Croatia for the first time during this event (first-time visitors) or they are repeat visitors affect their future intention to visit Croatia for a purpose other than attending the event. Looking into differences between first-time and repeat visitors is helpful for destinations since it is harder and more costly to attract new visitors [24], and researchers agree that repeat visitors are more likely to return to the destination [16,17,19,27,29,36,61]. This is explained by the fact that these visitors are more familiar with the destination, so their future decision to return is less prone to risk [22,27]. Furthermore, an unsatisfactory experience has a “slightly less negative effect on a possible future visit than for first timer” [27] (p. 34). Therefore, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Repeat visitors are more likely to express an intention to revisit the destination than first-time visitors.*

However, destinations should not forget about first-time visitors and must find ways, first, to attract a (first-time) visitor to the destination and, secondly, to make both first-time and repeat visitors want to come back. Destinations are, therefore, always looking for ways to enrich their offer and have recognized the role of events in this process [5], making them an integral part of their tourism development strategies. Sporting events are helpful in attracting new, first-time visitors, but for them to return, as discussed previously, they need to be satisfied with their experience. In other words, “in the case of sport tourism, success is an attribute of satisfied customers who intend to return to both the sporting event and the destination” [57]. Since repeat visitors already have an experience with the destination, their expectations are higher [23] the second time around and, consequently, their satisfaction might be lower if those expectations are not met. Furthermore, although there is a lack of consensus on who is more receptive to satisfaction [23], which is mostly explained by different settings in which studies have been conducted, satisfaction plays a more important role in leading to loyalty (repeat visitation) for first-timers than for repeat visitors [19,26]. This is especially the case if they are satisfied with the event and have had no chance to visit the city where the event was held, so they express a desire to return and experience the city as well [26] (p. 82). Therefore, even though it is more difficult and expensive to attract first-time visitors, if they come to the destination for some other reason (e.g., to attend a sporting event) and are satisfied with the event, they are more inclined to return to the event itself or to the destination where the event was held. According to Brown et al. [22], event experience does not have a direct influence on intentions to revisit the host city, but there is a positive relationship between event satisfaction and intention to watch these types of events in the future. This is not in line with Elahi et al. [33], Tzetzis et al. [34], and Yoshida and James [35] research findings that confirm the effect of spectators’ satisfaction and their intention to return to the same or similar event. Studies have been conducted concerning the question of intention to return to the destination where the event was held as well. George et al. [11], Li et al. [26], and Osti et al. [27] research confirm the importance of spectators’ satisfaction with events and their intentions to revisit the destination. These conclusions imply that higher levels of satisfaction generate repeat visits either to the event or to the destination where the event was held. Additionally, the research of Del Chiappa et al. [23] showed higher levels of satisfaction for every event attribute as well as of overall satisfaction with the event for first-time visitors, but these differences were not statistically significant. This study thus aims to analyze if there are significant differences in satisfaction levels between first-time and repeat visitors. The expectation is that the repeat visitors’ previous experience with the destination will result in higher expectations when they come back, and if those expectations are not met, their satisfaction will be lower. This yielded the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *First-time visitors express higher total satisfaction with an event than repeat visitors.*

However, the majority of the presented studies researched overall satisfaction levels with an event or the destination ignoring specific event attributes. Osti et al. [27] considered satisfaction with 12 event attributes but, using a factor analysis, a three-factor solution was produced, including services (staff performance, atmosphere, and catering), price (of entry tickets, food, and drinks), and accessibility (parking facilities and shuttle bus service). The results indicate a positive connection between the satisfaction with event services and prices and the willingness to return to the destination hosting the event. Del Chiappa et al. [23] also studied satisfaction with different event and destination attributes (in total, 12 attributes and overall satisfaction with the event were measured), and their findings indicate that although the repeat visitors were somewhat less satisfied than the first-time visitors, their intention to return was higher. The aim of this paper was to determine which event and destination attributes influence satisfaction, as well as to see if attributes act as satisfiers or dissatisfiers. The following hypothesis was developed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Some event attributes have a larger potential to create dissatisfaction than satisfaction, and vice versa.*

Therefore, the research model presented in Figure 1 was followed. The mediating role of satisfaction on the intention to return was not tested but assumed.

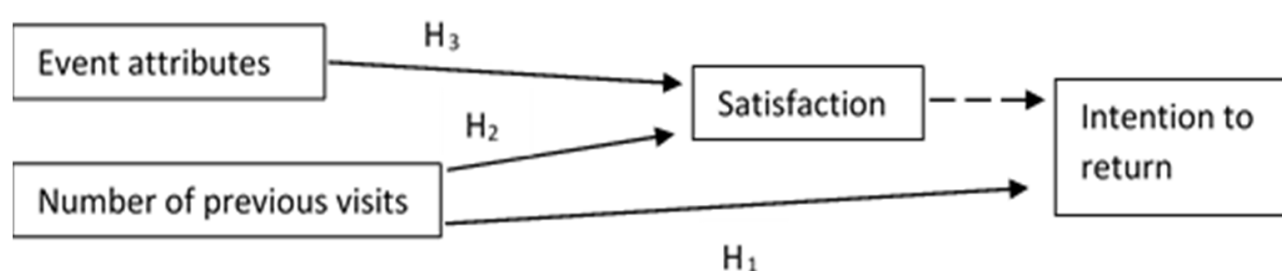


Figure 1. Proposed research model.

3. Materials and Methods

The research was conducted during five days of the group phase of EuroBasket 2015, Zagreb, Croatia. EuroBasket (EB) is the biggest and the most important basketball competition of national teams in Europe. In 2015, twenty-four countries participated in the competition and for the first time in the history of EB, cities in four countries were elected to host the event (Zagreb, Croatia; Berlin, Germany; Montpellier, France; and Riga, Latvia hosted the group phases of the EB, and Lille, France, hosted the finals). During five days of competition, in total, fifteen games were played in only one venue called Arena Zagreb. This facilitated data collection which was conducted on-site by eleven students of the Faculty of Kinesiology placed just outside the hall. The survey method used was a questionnaire which was developed based on the analysis of costs and gains of EuroBasket 2013 held in Slovenia [62] due to possible comparison reasons. The questionnaire consisted of eighteen questions (eight were open-ended) and in total, 765 questionnaires were collected during five days of competition. The questionnaire can be found in the Supplemental Materials.

The first day was the most productive one, mostly due to the fact that the most attractive game between Croatia and neighboring Slovenia was played, and the tickets for this match were sold out. Out of the 765 collected questionnaires, 761 were eligible for analysis. Quota sampling was employed with control variables being individual matches and place of residence (domestic/foreign visitors). The aim was to cover all matches in Zagreb as well as to interview at least 50% foreign visitors (more than 50% was achieved in the end).

Based on a premise that “the economic impact of the Games is very dependent on the number of foreign tourists because they bring fresh money into the city and region” [6]

(p. 51), the research included only foreign visitors, who accounted for 64.3% of all the survey respondents (492). After eliminating those who did not answer the mandatory questions needed for this analysis (“Is this your first visit to Croatia?”; “Do you plan to visit Croatia again?”) and/or rate their satisfaction with any of the items, a total of 461 questionnaires entered the data analysis.

The interviewees were asked to rate their satisfaction with twelve different attributes items using a 5-point scale (1 being “completely unsatisfied” and 5 being “completely satisfied”), with an option to choose “not familiar.” Ten attributes referred to the event itself, and two—to the destination where the event was held (“Preparation of the city for the event” and “Total satisfaction with the stay in Zagreb”). Their past experience was investigated with a simple yes/no question, as well as the future intention. Due to the fact that the neighboring country has a somewhat similar language, both English and Croatian versions of the questionnaire were used.

The connection between past experience and a future intention to visit was tested with Pearson’s chi-squared test, differences in satisfaction levels—using the *t*-test for independent samples. In the next step of the analysis, we performed an analysis of impact asymmetry (IA) and impact range (IR) based on the methodology by Mikulić and Prebežac [63]. To perform the analysis, attribute satisfaction scores were used to create two sets of dummy variables, i.e., one to assess the impact on the overall satisfaction of the visitor when the attribute has very low performance (penalty index; p_i) and another set to assess the impact on the overall satisfaction when the attribute has very high performance (reward index; r_i). The goal of the analysis is then to detect the most influential attributes impacting overall visitor satisfaction, on the one hand, and to explore whether the attributes have a larger, smaller, or equal potential to generate dissatisfaction (dissatisfaction-generating potential; DGP) than satisfaction (satisfaction-generating potential; SGP), on the other hand.

The necessary input data are obtained through an OLS regression model with binary-coded penalty and reward scores as independent variables and scores of overall visitor satisfaction (global satisfaction score) as a dependent variable. In this study, the penalty dummy sets were obtained by coding scores of 1 and 2 as 1, whereas all other scores were coded zero. The reward dummy sets were obtained by coding only the highest scores as 1 (i.e., 5) and all other scores as zero (i.e., 1, 2, 3, and 4). The model yields two regression coefficients for each satisfaction attribute, i.e., a penalty (p) and a reward index I . These can be easily translated into DGP and SGP scores, which in turn facilitate intuitive identification of potential asymmetries in the impact of individual attributes on the global satisfaction of a sporting event visitor (overall visitor satisfaction; OVS). Moreover, the impact asymmetry index (IAI) can be calculated which denotes the degree of impact asymmetry of each attribute, possibly ranging from -1 , meaning the attribute has only DGP (a completely dissatisfying attribute—frustrator), to $+1$, meaning the attribute has only SGP (a completely satisfying attribute—delighter). The following equations are used [63]:

$$SGP_i = \frac{r_i}{RIOCS_i} \quad (1)$$

$$DGP_i = \frac{|p_i|}{RIOCS_i} \quad (2)$$

$$IAindex_i = SGP_i - DGP_i \quad (3)$$

where r_i = reward index for attribute i ; p_i = penalty index for attribute i ; $RIOCS_i = |p_i| + r_i$ = range of impact on overall visitor satisfaction; and $SGP_i + DGP_i = 1$.

4. Results

Out of the 461 interviewees, for the majority, 56.2% (259), this was not the first visit to Croatia. Almost 80% of all the interviewees planned to visit Croatia again (79.6%). About 63% of the first-time visitors stated their intention to return to the destination where the event was held, while just under 93% of the repeat visitors said the same (Table 1). The

results of Pearson's chi-squared test (62,056; $p = 0.00$) confirmed that repeat visitors were more likely to express the intention to return confirming the first hypothesis (H_1).

Table 1. Crosstabulation of variable intention to visit the destination.

		Intention to Visit the Destination		Total
		Yes	No	
First-Time Visitors	Number	127	75	202
	Yes			
	% among first-time visitors	62.87%	37.2%	100.00%
	% of those intending to visit	34.60%	79.79%	43.82%
No	Number	240	19	259
	% among first-time visitors	92.66%	7.34%	100.00%
	% of those intending to visit	65.40%	20.21%	56.18%
Total	Number	367	94	461
	% among first-time visitors	79.61%	20.39%	100.00%
	% of those intending to visit	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

The results on satisfaction levels with different event and destination attributes for the first-time and repeat visitors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Satisfaction with different event and destination attributes.

Attributes	First-Time Visitors			Repeat Visitors			t-Test
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	
1. Schedule and time of the games	4.38	0.929	199	4.27	1.000	251	1.163
2. Ticket prices	4.22	1.005	194	4.20	0.917	253	0.207
3. Availability of the tickets	4.35	0.950	194	4.19	1.041	246	1.700
4. Security	4.32	0.985	195	4.37	0.869	243	−0.591
5. Layout of the arena	4.38	0.905	200	4.58	0.786	258	−2.495
6. Atmosphere at the games	4.17	0.959	181	4.33	0.899	243	−1.738
7. Parking and directions to the arena	4.17	0.992	172	4.05	1.092	238	1.164
8. Promotion	3.86	1.027	175	3.64	1.211	231	1.940
9. Organization of the EB in general	4.15	0.940	194	4.11	0.873	245	0.452
10. Preparation of the city for the event	4.03	0.955	185	3.88	1.077	238	1.493
11. Total satisfaction with the stay in Zagreb	4.40	0.840	195	4.39	0.792	233	0.065
12. Total satisfaction with the EB	4.38	0.883	196	4.38	0.739	253	−0.025

The first-time visitors presented a slightly higher level of satisfaction with eight attributes ("Schedule and time of the games"; "Ticket prices"; "Availability of the tickets"; "Parking and directions to the arena"; "Promotion"; "Organization of the EB in general"; "Preparation of the city for the event"; and "Total satisfaction with the stay in Zagreb"). Interestingly, both groups expressed the same level of total satisfaction with the EB, leading to the rejection of the second hypothesis (H_2). A statistically significant difference in satisfaction levels between the two groups was found only for the attribute "Layout of the arena" (the satisfaction level of the repeat visitors was statistically significantly higher than in the case of the first-time visitors).

The results of the IA analysis are presented in Table 3 and Figure 2.

When looking at the range of impact on the overall visitor satisfaction (RIOS), "Organization of the EB in general" emerges as the most influential attribute ($RIOS_9 = 1.554$), followed by the "Layout of the arena" ($RIOS_5 = 1.393$) and "Preparation of the city for the event" ($RIOS_{10} = 1.318$). Moreover, two attributes seem not to influence global visitor satisfaction, with both statistically insignificant penalty and reward scores and subsequently low RIOS scores, "Parking and directions to the arena" and "Promotion."

The results further reveal that most of the analyzed event attributes have a larger potential to generate dissatisfaction than satisfaction. Seven out of the ten attributes were classified as dissatisfiers or even frustrators (attributes 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9). Conversely, only two attributes showed a positive asymmetrical impact on global satisfaction, i.e., "Se-

curity" and "Promotion." As stated earlier, the latter attribute did, however, not exhibit a statistically significant impact on global visitor satisfaction. Finally, one attribute was classified as a hybrid attribute, meaning the attribute has similar potentials to generate dissatisfaction and satisfaction, i.e., "Preparation of the city for the event."

Table 3. The results of the IA analysis.

Attributes	p_i	r_i	RIOS	DGP	SGP	IAI	Class
1. Schedule and time of the games	−0.782 ***	0.233 **	1.015	−77.04%	22.96%	−0.54	Frustrator
2. Ticket prices	−0.665 ***	0.082 (ns)	0.747	−89.02%	10.98%	−0.78	Frustrator
3. Availability of the tickets	−0.402 **	0.076 (ns)	0.478	−84.10%	15.90%	−0.68	Frustrator
4. Security	−0.008 ns	0.242 **	0.25	−3.20%	96.80%	0.94	Delighter
5. Layout of the arena	−0.936 ***	0.457 ***	1.393	−67.19%	32.81%	−0.34	Dissatisfier
6. Atmosphere at the games	−0.646 ***	0.082 (ns)	0.728	−88.74%	11.26%	−0.77	Frustrator
7. Parking and directions to the arena	−0.091 (ns)	0.043 (ns)	0.134	−67.91%	32.09%	−0.36	Dissatisfier
8. Promotion	−0.018 (ns)	0.048 (ns)	0.066	−27.27%	72.73%	0.45	Satisfier
9. Organization of the EB in general	−1.149 ***	0.405 ***	1.554	−73.94%	26.06%	−0.48	Dissatisfier
10. Preparation of the city for the event	−0.719 ***	0.599 ***	1.318	−54.55%	45.45%	−0.09	Hybrid

Note: Penalty and reward scores are unstandardized regression coefficients [64]. The classification of attributes was made according to the following impact asymmetry index (IAI) thresholds: frustrators ($IAI < -0.5$); dissatisfiers ($-0.5 < IAI < -0.1$); hybrids ($-0.1 < IAI < 0.1$); satisfiers ($0.1 < IAI < 0.5$); delighters ($0.5 < IAI$). $R^2 = 0.691$. *** $p = 0.01$; ** $p = 0.05$. ns = not significant.

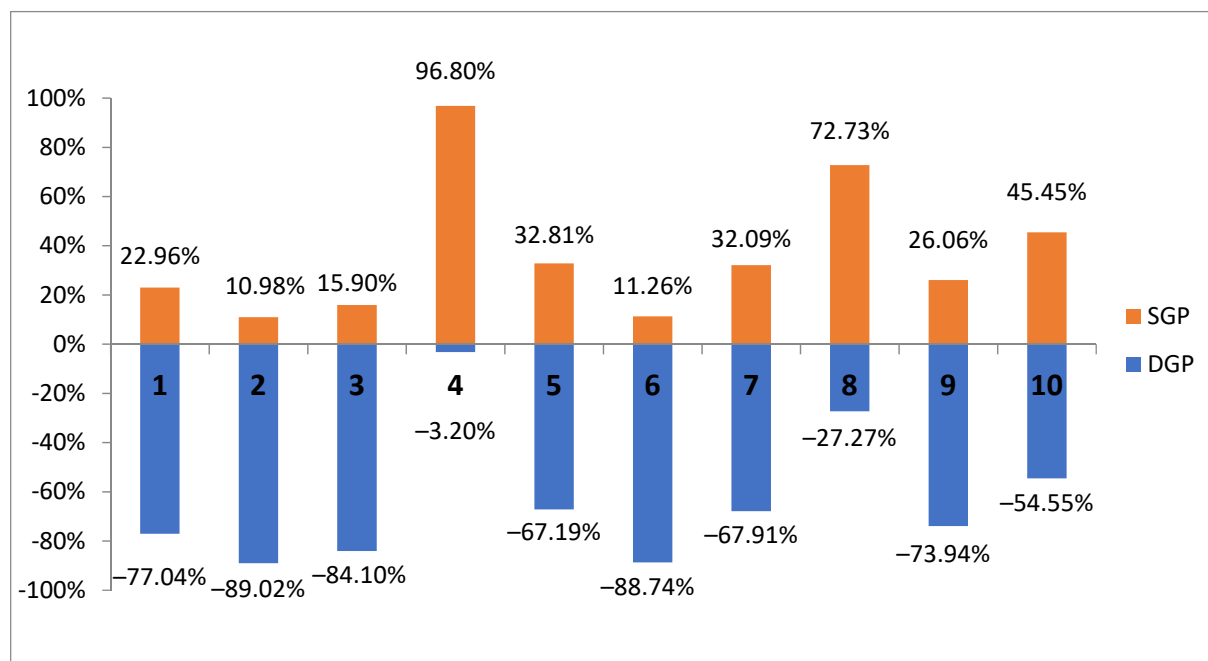


Figure 2. Satisfaction- and dissatisfaction-generating potentials of event attributes. Numbers 1–10 on the bar charts refer to the attributes as stated in Tables 2 and 3.

5. Discussion

This study confirmed that repeat visitors are more likely to express an intention to revisit the destination (H_1 was confirmed) which is in line with conclusions of previous studies [19,23,27]. With all mean scores higher than 3.5, both first-time and repeat visitors were satisfied with all the event and destination attributes. The lowest score was for the attribute "Promotion" with an average mean of 3.86 for the first-time visitors and a slightly

lower mean for the repeat visitors (3.64). The results seem to be in line with the findings of Barišić et al. [65] who evaluated the overall promotional campaign of the group phase part of the EB competition in Zagreb with an average grade of 3. The highest satisfaction the first-time visitors expressed with was the “Total satisfaction with the stay in Zagreb” ($M = 4.40$), followed by three attributes scoring the same average grade, 4.38 (“Total satisfaction with the EB”; “Layout of the arena”; “Schedule and time of the games”). A somewhat higher level of satisfaction with the total stay in Zagreb could be explained by lower expectations and the fact that first-time visitors tend to participate more in activities such as shopping, dining, classic tourism activities, and parks and gardens [66]. This might result in a more fulfilling experience with the destination playing an important role [67]. Repeat visitors were especially satisfied with the “Layout of the arena” ($M = 4.58$), followed by the “Total satisfaction with the stay in Zagreb” ($M = 4.39$), “Total satisfaction with the EB” ($M = 4.38$), and the “Security” ($M = 4.37$). Although the top three attributes scored higher with the repeat visitors, the first-time visitors reported higher satisfaction with eight attributes. This might be due to higher expectations of repeat visitors due to their previous experience with the destination as reported by Del Chiappa et al. [23] as well. Nevertheless, the “Layout of the arena” was the only attribute for which a statistically significant difference between the two groups was observed, whilst the “Total satisfaction with the event” scored the same in both groups ($M = 4.38$), thus rejecting H_2 . Del Chiappa et al. [23] arrived at somewhat different results. In their research, the first-time spectators reported higher satisfaction with all the event attributes as well as higher overall satisfaction with the event. They were especially satisfied with the atmosphere, general appearance of the event, and safety. The same three attributes were the most highly ranked by the repeat visitors as well, with general appearance receiving the highest grade, followed by safety and atmosphere. However, similarly to the present study, no statistically significant differences between the two groups were found. Osti et al. [27] did not present their findings on satisfaction levels separately for the two groups, but the highest satisfaction level was for atmosphere as was the case with the research of Del Chiappa et al. [23] as well. In the case of the EB competition in Zagreb, the atmosphere at the games and security were the attributes that received rather high average scores in both groups but did not reach the levels of the top attributes. This was especially the case with the first-time visitors since their satisfaction level for these two attributes was lower than in the case of the repeat visitors. Barišić et al. [65] rated atmospheric elements of the promotional campaign for the EB in Zagreb with an average grade of 3, and it seems that visitors experienced it similarly. According to Chi [19], both overall satisfaction and attribute satisfaction directly influence destination loyalty in the case of first-time visitors, and only overall satisfaction does so in the case of repeat visitors. Since more than 60% of the EB’s first-time visitors did express an intention to return to the destination and at the same time were more satisfied with eight out of the twelve event attributes, a conclusion that the destination of Zagreb (and Croatia) can expect benefits in the form of repeat visits from the first-time visitors could be drawn. Nevertheless, a more detailed analysis of each attribute is needed to understand if they had a positive or maybe negative effect on the overall satisfaction.

The results of the IA analysis show that the most influential factors/attributes for the overall satisfaction (with the event and stay in Zagreb) were “Organization of the EB in general,” “Layout of the arena,” and “Preparation of the city for the event.” The results are in line with the findings of Teixeira et al. [68] who confirmed the importance of satisfaction with the quality of organization for the overall satisfaction. The importance of the physical environment, venues, and their appearance for satisfaction of basketball spectators was confirmed in the research of Theodorakis et al. [58] and of Kim et al. [59]. However, the first two attributes are found to have a larger potential to generate dissatisfaction than satisfaction, and the last one is considered hybrid (has similar potentials to generate satisfaction and dissatisfaction). This is of utmost importance for event managers, indicating that even a minor decrease in satisfaction levels with these attributes can result in a significant decrease in the overall satisfaction. The fact that the “Preparation of the city

for the event” was found to be hybrid might be explained by the fact that this was the only attribute not solely under the control of the organizers, but of the city’s decisionmakers as well and seems to be a value-added part of the customers’ experience making it an integral part of the destination’s network of suppliers. In that sense, the research results of Kaiser et al. [52] suggest a very high level of agreement (complete agreement) between all the interviewed parties (sport managers, destination managers, and politicians) with the statement that “according to the service value-added chain, there is a direct financial connection between extraordinary service experiences, customer retention and financial success (profit and growth).” Since this is an attribute identified as one of the most influential ones, the recommendation would go towards organizers of the events establishing (excellent) lines of communication with the host destination’s management. Activities need to be well-coordinated, which seemed to be a problem with EuroBasket 2015 and the city of Zagreb since the visitors rated the level of satisfaction with this attribute low (second from the bottom). Understanding that sport tourists differ from other tourists [69] and knowing their characteristics would ease the decision-making process. It would enable better preparation of the city since it would be possible to conduct targeted promotion of activities and places of interest for that specific audience.

At the same time, two attributes (“Parking and directions to the arena” and “Promotion”) did not influence the visitors’ global satisfaction. This is not in line with the findings of Teixeira et al. [68] who found promotion to influence tourist satisfaction, but only for one of the four researched non-sports festivals. The first attribute (“Parking and directions to the arena”) was found to be a dissatisfier, but the second one (“Promotion”) emerged as a satisfier. The same category was yielded for the attribute “Security,” which was also found not to have a statistically significant potential to create dissatisfaction, only satisfaction (it is considered a delighter). This means that higher satisfaction with these attributes positively impacts the visitors’ overall satisfaction. The same was stated in the research of George [11] indicating that “as tourists’ safety-risk perceptions of Rio de Janeiro declined, the more likely they were to feel satisfied with their decision to travel to the host destination for the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup™” (p. 255). This implies that if they are more satisfied with safety (i.e., have a lower safety risk perception), they present higher levels of the overall satisfaction with the host destination. Security was rated rather high in Zagreb, especially by the repeat visitors, indicating no major issues with this attribute, and no incidents were reported. As one more value-added factor (it is a delighter), security issues are of great importance, and cooperation with experts in this field is recommended. Although the majority of safety issues relate to crime risk, the COVID-19 pandemic is found to have a significant impact on sporting events’ safety and security policies [70]. Although it has been found that the respondents’ perception of the importance of safety-related protective measures at sporting events differ in the observed countries (Croatia, Slovenia, and Iran) [71], it is expected that future research on safety satisfaction will include measures pertaining to decreasing the risk of COVID-19 spread.

Interestingly, seven out of the ten attributes were found to have a larger potential to generate dissatisfaction than satisfaction. Four of them are even frustrators (“Schedule and time of the games,” “Ticket prices,” “Ticket availability,” and “Atmosphere”), implying that dissatisfaction with these attributes generates a significant decrease in overall satisfaction. Ticket sales in the case of EuroBasket 2015 in Zagreb were sold by Eventim and fans could purchase them online or at Eventim offices, which might have created problems for those deciding to attend a game at the last moment. Additionally, there were some restrictions regarding the number of tickets an individual could buy, and at the beginning of sales in February 2015, only a package including tickets to all the games of one nation could be bought. After about a month, it became possible to buy tickets for a specific game. Although ticket prices were promoted as the lowest than in any other town hosting EuroBasket 2015, a number of issues was reported with ticket sales. For example, the Eventim’s webpage did not work properly, at some sale points one could not choose which seats to book, sales for some games were shut down at certain points, tickets for the most

attractive game, Croatia vs. Slovenia, were sold out and lot of fans lost the opportunity to attend it, etc. It is evident that there was no clear strategy concerning ticket sales, increasing the need for haste and last-minute decision-making. Better planning as well as a clearer strategy based on the set goals is needed. Atmosphere has proven to be of great importance for the basketball consumers' experience [72], and special attention needs to be paid to creating an atmosphere that will yield satisfied spectators, especially since the results confirm that its influence might be negative as it is found to have a larger potential to generate dissatisfaction. The situation with atmosphere in Zagreb was rather problematic "mostly due to a lack of information about the competition in public, so the atmosphere was missing not just in Zagreb as the host city, but in the entire Croatia as well" [65] (p. 15).

6. Conclusions

This study expanded the knowledge about the visitors' satisfaction with different sporting event attributes, as well about the intention to revisit the destination among the EuroBasket 2015 international first-time and repeat visitors. The proposed framework is useful in explaining the mediating role of a major sporting event in attracting international visitors to a destination. This study provides guidance on how sporting event and destination managers should use different sporting event and destination attributes to increase satisfaction among first-time and repeat visitors. Furthermore, first-time visitors expressed higher levels of satisfaction with eight out of the twelve different (event) attributes, but it seems that visitors' satisfaction with an event is not influenced by the fact whether they are first-time or repeat visitors. Although about 63% of the first-time visitors expressed their intention to return to the destination based solely on their experience with this event, the results of the research confirm that repeat visitors are more likely to express an intention to revisit the destination than first-time visitors.

The study provides theoretical implications for both sports and tourism literature by enhancing the sporting event and destination management knowledge about the concept of visitors' satisfaction with events. First, the study confirmed the conceptualization of sporting events as attractors of both first-time and repeat visitors to a destination. Second, the results support a complex nature of consumer behavior and the multidimensional structure of visitors' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with different event and destination attributes. Lastly, the findings provide the importance of managing first-time and repeat visitors in different ways since their level of satisfaction with event and destination attributes differs.

Implications for sporting event managers concern creating an event which is well-organized in cooperation with city decisionmakers including tourism and sports facility managers. All involved parties need to determine the optimal ticket prices which are tailored to the standard and purchasing power of most visitors, while special attention should be paid to the atmosphere to achieve greater visitors' satisfaction.

Limitations of this study relate to the limited generalizability of the results. While these results apply to visitors of international basketball games in Croatia, this might not be the case for other countries, or even spectators at events in different sports. Since sport tourists do differ from other tourists [69], Katsoni and Vrondou [73] caution about the lack of sport profiling which they find to be even more evident in the sporting events spectrum. More research in different environments and including events in different sports are needed.

Future studies should include researching sporting event visitors' characteristics as this is a starting point for decisions regarding promotion of the event as well as preparation of the city (destination) since events are an integral part of a city's offer and are inevitably linked to it [60], whether they are mega or major.

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