

## THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF SPORTS TO TOURISM IN THE CASE OF GREECE

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### **Abstract**

*Tourism as a sector is a very important one globally. Regarding Greece, it is an even more important sector since it represents nearly 20% of its GDP. However, in recent years it has been observed a reduction in per tourist income that generates the question if there is a way or another sector that may contribute positively to the increase of this income. Moreover, if this contribution can exist within the framework of sustainability and have a positive impact to its three pillars of economy, society and environment.*

*The present paper investigates the impact the inclusion of sports events within the touristic package has to the overall tourism footprint of a region. Specifically, the main concern of the research is to highlight the close relationship between sports and tourism as well as whether there are benefits from this relationship to the investigated region or not from a sustainability perspective. Finally, the most important question this research seeks to find is if there is a significant economic impact to a regions tourism when sports events take place.*

*For the needs of the research a special questionnaire was formed. The replies of the accumulative 1503 respondents in 2024, show clearly that there is a great relationship between sports and tourism. Also, the multilateral impact of sports to tourism is being highlighted from the perspective of the tourist in Greece. Finally, the three major findings are that sports may be the means and the motive for a tourist to extend his vacations, to consider the overall touristic experience more attractive as well as to spend more money per day.*

**Key words:** *sports tourism, sustainable sports, tourist expenditure, economic impact*

### **Introduction**

Tourism is an activity having its roots in ancient times and has evolved into one of the most powerful industries in the world. Since World War II, tourism has experienced explosive growth, with mass tourism dominating. Modern tourism and its aspects are the subject of many scientific concerns, as it influences but also influenced by social, economic, technological and environmental parameters being a pivotal economic sector worldwide, contributing substantially to GDP, employment, and cultural exchange. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the importance of tourism while examines the issues of declining tourist spending and seasonality, exploring ways alternative tourism can enhance the appeal of mainland Greece. All proposed solutions are considered within the framework of sustainable development, ensuring positive impacts on the economy, society, and the environment.

Some of the most important issues that concern the international scientific community are overtourism, climate change and others. Regarding Sustainability and Overtourism (Dodds and Butler 2019, Butler and Dodds 2022), mass tourism in popular destinations has caused environmental and social issues (Anuar et al. 2019, Koens et al. 2018, Mihalic 2020). The excessive concentration of tourists causes pressure on local infrastructure, leading to

environmental degradation (loss of natural landscapes, pollution, increased waste). It disrupts local communities, increasing the cost of living and creating social tensions (Slyusarevskyy et al. 2021, Thelen 1969). It requires the adoption of management policies, such as imposing visitor caps, diversifying tourism products and strengthening sustainable tourism (Hardy et al. 2002, Weaver 2006, Panagiotopoulos et al. 2022a, Panagiotopoulos et al. 2022b). Climate Change also affects tourism directly due to the rising temperatures, extreme weather conditions and rising of sea levels. Some destinations face significant challenges due to changing climate conditions, while the need for resilient and adaptive strategies, such as diversifying tourism products and shifting to alternative forms of tourism, is increasing.

In the case of Greece, the tourism industry is one of the most important sectors of the economy, with its contribution to GDP (nearly 18%) being particularly high (Statista 2025) while supporting various industries. It provides employment to nearly 946,000 individuals, making it a pillar of economic stability with the major economic and touristic activity to be seen mainly in coastal towns, islands, and cultural heritage sites. Most visitors come from Europe (UNWTO 2025, INSETE 2024a) and show growing numbers over the latest years but decreasing numbers in overnight stays. Overall, the level of tourist satisfaction is 9,1/10 (INSETE 2024b).

However, there are several concerns and challenges regarding tourism in the country, both at an economic, social and environmental level, with overtourism and its environmental impacts being the most prevalent. Such conditions are the cause for overcrowded places of interest (mainly some islands), reaching the touristic and environmental threshold (if not transcend it), diminishing the environment enhancing pollution having as a result the significant degradation in visitors' and residents' experience. Other challenges, such as the reduction in income per tourist and seasonality with most visitors arriving between June and September, have raised concerns about the sector's long-term sustainability despite increasing tourist arrivals in absolute numbers. Specifically, in 2021 the average spending was 702€ per day for 8,9 nights, in 2022 was 620€ for 7,8 nights, in 2023 was 603€ for 7,0 nights and finally in 2024 the average daily spending per tourist was 590€ while staying for less than 7 nights, at least in the first semester of the year (INSETE 2024a).

Greece is facing intense overtourism phenomena, especially in popular destinations such as Santorini, Mykonos and Rhodes (Lagarias et al. 2023, Sarantakou and Terkenli 2021, Panousi and Petrakos 2021). The main problems that arise are, a) the excessive burden on infrastructure, as the available facilities (roads, sewage systems, hospitals) cannot serve the huge number of visitors, especially in the summer months, b) the destruction of the natural environment, such as excessive water and energy consumption on the islands, coastal erosion and the accumulation of waste and c) the increase in the cost of living for permanent residents, as the large tourist development leads to a surge in the prices of real estate and basic goods. In addition to these, its rich cultural heritage is being compromised through the degradation of archaeological sites due to mass tourism (e.g., Acropolis, Delphi, Knossos). The main reason is the commercialization of Greek cultural identity and the imbalance between tourism development and the preservation of cultural monuments.

Some solutions that have been proposed in recent years to halt these phenomena are the implementation of visitor caps in certain destinations, the promotion of sustainable tourism practices (e.g., reduction of plastic waste, use of renewable energy sources) and the decentralization of tourism development to lesser-known destinations in order to reduce pressure on the islands (Lagarias et al. 2023, Sarantakou and Terkenli 2021, Panousi and Petrakos 2021). Other solutions could be developing winter tourism by investing in ski resorts, thermal spas, and mountain retreats to attract visitors in colder months and fight seasonality. Promoting conference and business tourism by hosting international conventions, exhibitions, and corporate retreats all year or enhancing accessibility to off-peak destinations by

strengthening transportation links to less-visited areas and advertising its potential to encourage balanced tourism distribution. Finally, another way to increase tourism income and promote stable tourism is by encouraging digital nomad tourism (Zerva et al. 2023) by attracting remote workers who can contribute to the economy throughout the year by offering long-term stays in significant scenic locations. These proposals may be able to combat the seasonality that characterizes tourism in Greece as well as the regional imbalance in the tourism economy.

### **The importance of sports tourism**

The Greek tourism industry is mainly based on summer tourism, which creates economic imbalances with high dependence on the summer period (June-September) as well as increased needs for seasonal work and unstable employment conditions. Solutions proposed by studies (Dalir 2024, Alshuqaiqi 2019) are a) the development of alternative forms of tourism (agritourism, conference tourism, cultural tourism) in order to strengthen tourist traffic outside the summer season, while simultaneously strengthening winter tourism (mountain tourism, skiing, ecotourism), b) creating incentives for tourism development in less developed areas and c) extending tourist period by developing several events at the start or the end of that period. Mainland Greece holds vast tourism potential that remains largely unexploited. Alternative tourism such as sport tourism (including adventure tourism, and wellness retreats), eco-tourism, agrotourism and other forms can make inland destinations significantly more attractive (Moradi et al. 2023, Moularde and Weaver 2018, Moradi et al. 2025). Offering authentic cultural immersive experiences beyond traditional tourist hotspots, enhancing Greece's competitiveness by differentiating from neighboring countries through niche tourism offerings and promoting local gastronomy and wine tourism by highlighting regional cuisine and wine-making traditions as key tourism attractions are three ways to benefit mainland regions. However, sport tourism may be the key form of alternative tourism in order to deal with all of the problems and peculiarities mentioned above. Sports activities and events play a crucial role in enhancing tourism, contributing significantly to both the economy and the sustainable development of various regions. Sporting events, both large and small (Panagiotopoulos 2024, Cave and Leader 2003, Gibson, et al. 2003), attract visitors, boost local economies, and create opportunities for sustainable development.

The problems of tourism in Greece mentioned above seem to be addressable through alternative ways of tourism and efforts to increase the preference for agrotourism, ecotourism and motives for tourists to travel to less crowded destinations. Another way to address those problems, may be the development of new tourism models, such as "digital nomadism" (Zerva et al. 2023), where workers combine teleworking and tourism. It is mainly needed a shift in demand from traditional mass tourism and traditional overcrowded destinations towards more personalized experiences and specialized forms of tourism, with sports tourism being one of the most important sectors of alternative tourism. Sport Tourism, globally consists almost 10% of total tourism according to UNWTO (<https://www.unwto.org/sport-tourism>), aims to different target groups, is a form of sustainable way of tourism (Panagiotopoulos et al. 2022b), contributes to all 3 pillars of sustainable development (Panagiotopoulos et al. 2022a), tends to bring more money per tourist compared to conventional tourism and there are several sports both summer and winter to cover all 12 months in demand. From purely economic perspective, sports tourism already contributes to more than 2% to European GDP (E.C. 2017). Sports tourism combines the movement of people along with sports activities and has developed into a dynamic sector with economic, social and environmental impacts (Sudarmanto et al. 2025, Panagiotopoulos et al. 2022b) being a form of sustainable tourism that satisfies current needs without compromising future

tourism potential. The concept of sports tourism emerged in the 1970s, when the connection between tourism and sports began to be studied systematically. Gammon and Robinson (1997) highlight five main reasons for the development of sports tourism:

1. The increase in the popularity of sporting events.
2. The importance of sports activity for health.
3. The recognition of sport as a tool for cultural and diplomatic connection between countries.
4. Improving the organization and management of sporting events at a global level.
5. The facilitation of movement due to technological progress.

Sports tourism contributes significantly to a country's economy, generating income from tickets, accommodation, catering and local businesses (Rossini et al. 2024). At the same time, it strengthens social cohesion (Çiftci 2025, Moustakas 2023, Hudelist et al. 2025), promotes a healthy lifestyle (Campillo-Sánchez et al. 2025) and facilitates cultural exchange (Sudarmanto et al. 2025). Therefore, sports tourism is a lever for promoting sustainability, contributing 12,5% positively to all 3 pillars of sustainable development, specifically in 12 out of 96 U.N. indicators of 2007 (Panagiotopoulos 2022a). Modern trends in tourism reveal the need for sports activities during the tourism period, with respect for the natural environment, such as hiking, cycling, eco-friendly water sports and others. In addition, the ever-increasing use of renewable energy sources in sports facilities and the trend to reduce the environmental footprint of sports events, contribute to the long-term preservation of the touristic product, characterizing it as sustainable. The contribution of tourism to global GDP (10%) is remarkable (WTTC 2024), with countries such as Greece (18% of GDP) relying on it as a key economic pillar while major sporting events attract visitors, create jobs and influence investments in infrastructure (Rossini et al. 2024). Similarly, on a social level, the promotion of sports as part of tourism activities enhances the quality of life of citizens (Li and Ling 2025, Vlassas 2025) and is often a tool for social integration and cultural exchange. This, along with many other interesting facts, are pinpointed by an empirical research conducted on a random sample of 1503 tourists in Greece analyzed below.

## **The research**

In order to determine the degree of active sports participation of tourists during their holidays and whether they include exercise in their tourism habits as well as the factors that shape an attractive tourist destination according to them, an empirical survey was conducted among tourists in Greece. Among other things, main questions concern economic trends, cultural aspects as parallel actions and environmental concerns in tourism. Data collection involved surveys assessing tourists' travel motivations, participation in sports, and spending patterns. The results were analyzed using statistical methods (SPSS) to identify significant correlations, shifts in preferences and shaping tourism consumer profiles. The research concerns the triptych sports-tourism-sustainable development and the correlation among them, particularly how travelers perceive and engage with sports activities while visiting destinations. The findings aim to provide insights into how sports tourism contributes to economic growth, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. For this reason, a specially designed structured questionnaire concerning tourists of Greece was designed consisted of 31 questions and 69 variables. The analysis showed very good reliability with Cronbach's  $A > 0,81$ .

From the sample of 1503 respondents, 51% were men and 49% were women. The 78% declared their place of residence as Greece, while 22% live abroad. The 58% of the respondents were in the age groups from 23 to 40 years, while a 74,9% were graduates of higher education and holders of a master's degree. Regarding their income, 49.4% declared an

annual income from 8,000€ to 25 thousand euros. The specific percentages regarding the demographic characteristics of the sample are shown on the figures below.



Travel and Tourism Preferences

During tourism in Greece, 37.3% of respondents stay for 5 to 7 days, while regarding the frequency of trips, 41.4% of respondents answered with a moderate frequency and an average of 3.07 for a mean value of 3. The main reason for their trip, and for the 64.2% of them, is relaxation and recreation. However, in terms of average duration per purpose of travel, a significant correlation appears ( $F=25.372$  with  $p\text{-value}<0.01$ ), with business reasons (3,54), sports activities (3,32) and visiting monuments (3,25) showing the highest averages and greater than the mean value of 3, as shown in the image below (Figure 1).

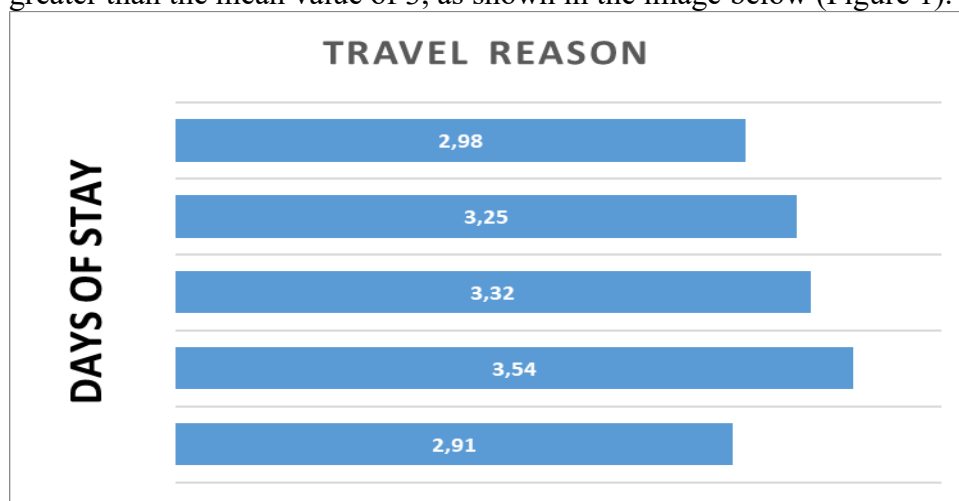


Figure 1 Main reason for travel

The respondents stated that tourist destinations should provide, as a priority, an unaltered natural environment (67%), sports opportunities (57%), the possibility of visiting museums- temples-monuments (55.7%), cultural activities (43%) and nightlife (37.4%). The respondents stated that during their holidays they most often visit seaside resorts and beaches (Av. 4.21) and quiet places of natural beauty (Av. 3.71). Regarding the behavior of the respondents during their holidays, their attitude was positive in all the variables of the question, with their interest increasing more or less in all 6 variables with a stronger tendency in contact with the environment (Av. 4,80), in the quality of food (Av. 4,74) and visiting museums/monuments (Av. 4,56) (Figure 2). It is noted that 79.4% of respondents stated that there is a high probability of them visiting a place again if they have had a previous satisfactory experience.

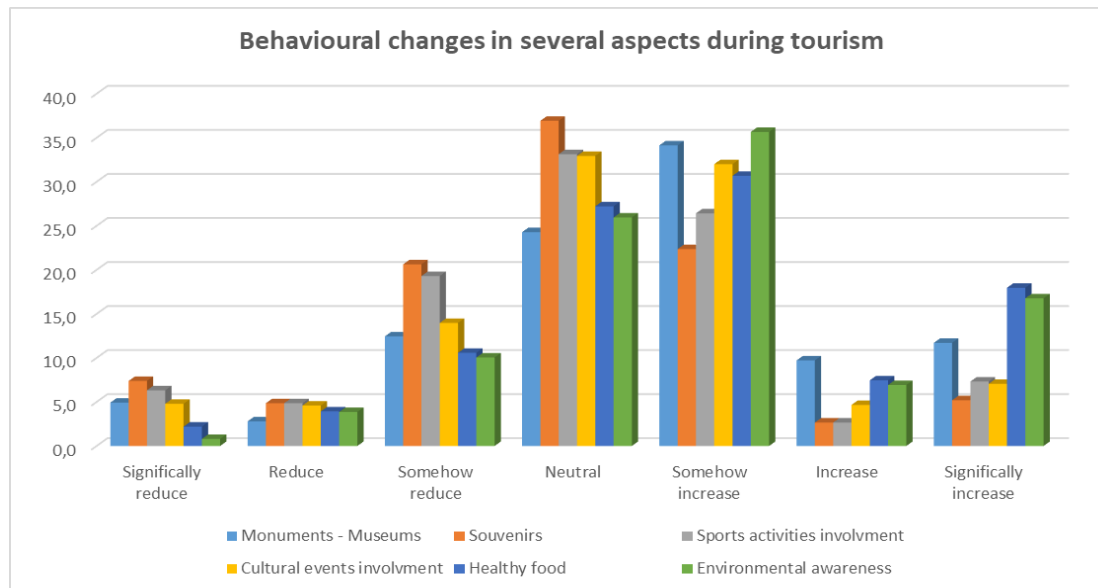


Figure 2 Behavioral changes in several aspects during tourism

### Tourism in Greece

Regarding tourism in Greece, the vast majority of respondents (56%) stated that they prefer the island regions. For the 15th question regarding the duration of tourism in Greece, 45.7% of respondents stay in Greece for at least 8 days, 37.3% stay 5 to 7 days and 17% up to 4 days (Figure3). Regarding the sectors that should be changed and resources should be provided in order to increase the potential of Greece as a tourist destination, their attitude is particularly positive (answers quite a lot) for all sectors. Recreational activities and nature stand out with an average of 4.10 and the exploitation of the country's monuments and museums with 3.93, followed by the remaining sectors with averages ranging from 3.74 to 3.83.

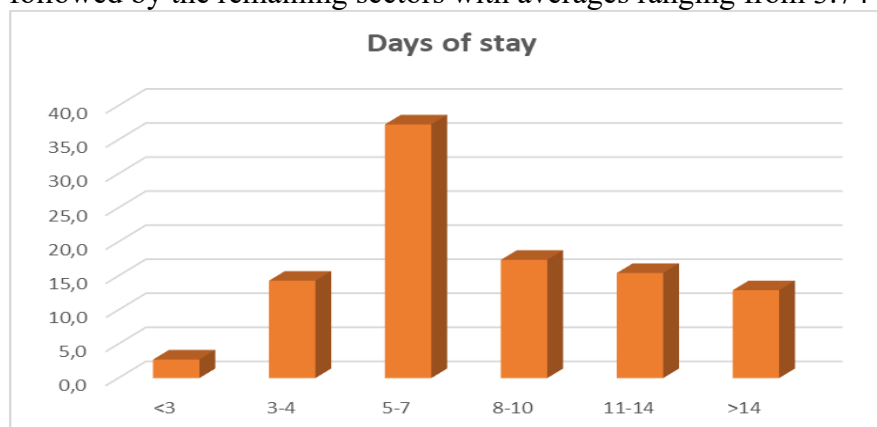


Figure 3 Average days tourism in Greece last

An important element is the relationship between the time respondents spend on tourism and certain variables, thus outlining the profile of this group of respondents. Specifically, a significant correlation ( $P < 0.01$ ) is shown with a) the frequency of travel (P.C. 0,214), b) their interest in food quality and healthy eating (P.C. 0,135), c) the perception that sports related to tourism (P.C. 0,132), d) the interest in sports activities during their vacations (P.C. 0,089) and e) visiting a place again (P.C. 0,097). At the same time, it is related to age, income and education.

Tourism and Sports

Regarding the respondents' involvement in sports life and sports in general, 74% of respondents stated that they are involved in sports as athletes or at least as sports fans. The attendance of sports matches moderately to daily concerns the 34.1% while the 56.2% (values 0 to 4) does not attending sports matches often. In the question "What sports do you attend sports matches for?", 41.1% of respondents attend everything, with 27.3% preferring football and basketball, 12.7% other team sports and 18,9% individual sports.

Regarding the relationship of respondents with sports and tourism activities, there are the following findings. Respondents participate in sports activities during their travels at a rate of 42.3% with moderate to high frequency and 57.6% a little or not at all (options 1 and 2). The 65.2% are interested in the existence of the possibility of participating in sports activities while 34.8% are not interested at all or are minimally interested (options 1 and 2) (Figure4). By correlating these 2 variables, it is clearly observed that the more frequently respondents participate in a sports activity during their travels, the more interested they are in being provided with the opportunity to participate in sports activities during them. The frequency of respondents' participation in sports activities, even as spectators, during their travels, is related to the intensity of their interest in participation. There is a clear positive correlation between interest and participation (Pearson  $r = 0.490$  with  $p\text{-value} = 0.00$ ).

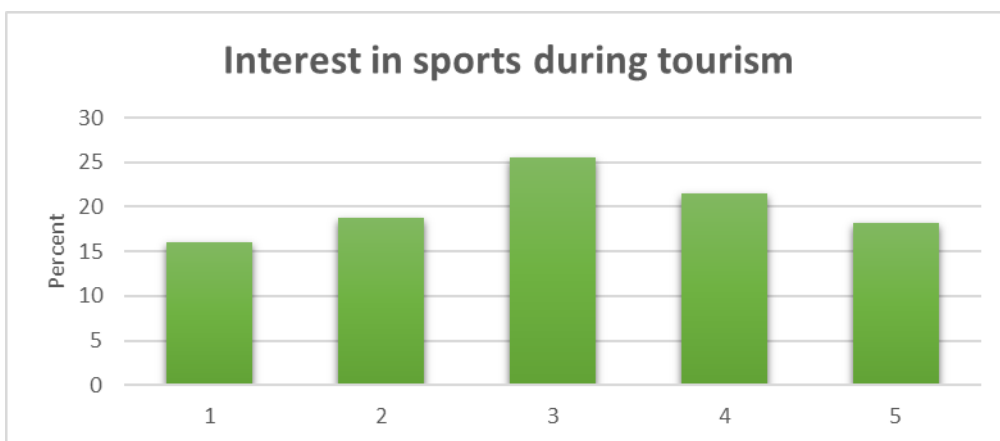


Figure 4 Interest in sports activities during tourism

The 46% of respondents stated that they had attended a sporting event during their vacation in the last 3 years, while 54% had not. The correlation between the frequency of respondents' participation in sporting activities, even as spectators, during their travels and their statement that they had actually attended a sporting event during their vacation in the last 3 years (Pearson  $X^2 = 129.639$  with  $p\text{-value} < 0.01$ ). The form of the correlation is depicted in the image below (Figure 5).

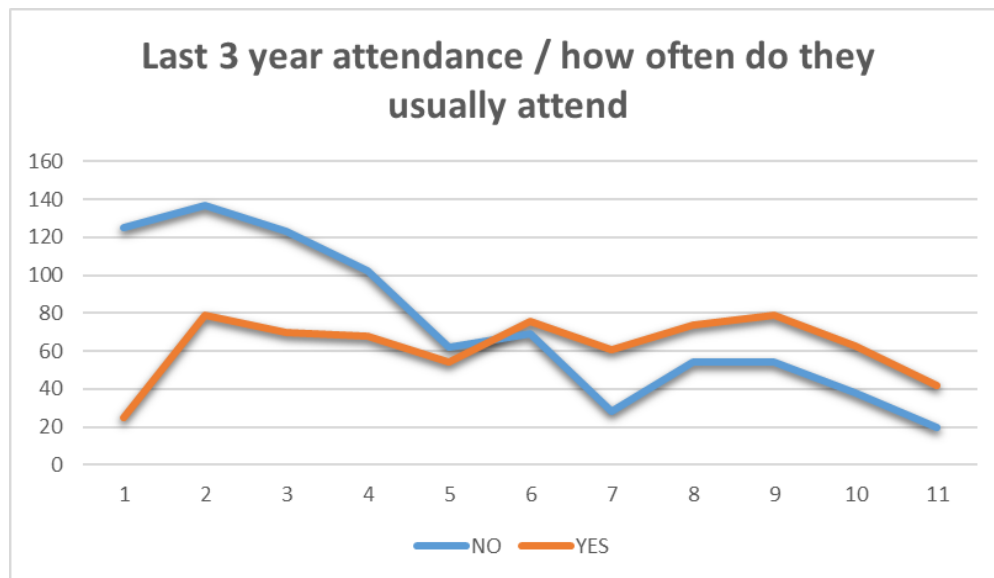


Figure 5 Last 3-year attendance compared to how often do they usually attend

The profile of those who have attended a sporting event during their vacation in the last 3 years, which differentiates them from those who have not had this experience, is summarized as: a) they travel more frequently, b) watch sports matches more often, c) are more interested in and participate in sports activities during their trips more often, d) choose their tourist destination by giving importance to the inclusion of sports facilities in the tourist package, e) would visit a country on the occasion of watching a major sports event, f) consider sports as a motivation for holidays in Greece, g) believe that sports provide a more attractive package for choosing a country as a destination, h) participate more in cultural events during their holidays, i) are more interested in having organized sports activities in the area they visit, j) believe that tourism is combined with sports activity, k) state that they would visit a place again if they had already had a satisfactory experience, l) are willing to spend more money in a hotel that is suitable for sports activities and m) have linked exercise with tourism to a greater extent. At the same time, male residents abroad with higher incomes appear to have higher averages without particularly significant differences.

Regarding the degree of connection between tourism and sports, 16.7% answered not at all, 30.7% a little, 30.1% found a moderate connection and 22.6% a positive connection (16.5% a lot and 6.0% an absolute connection). 80.2% of respondents believe that sports in any form contribute to the development of a place, compared to 0.9% who disagree.

The results of the two questions above document the relevance of the connection between sports and tourism with the belief that sports contribute to the development of a place (Pearson correlation =0.264 with p-value =0.00), in contrast to those who do not know whether sports contribute positively to the development of a place. It is necessary to outline the profile of those who believe that sports contribute to the development of a place and account for the 83.3% of the sample. It is noted that this audience is a "target" and most of the associations recorded in this group appear to similarly associated with the group analyzed earlier and concerns those who participated in sports activities during their travels within the last 3 years. In summary, those who state that sports contribute to the development of a place compared to the group that answered "I don't know" since only 14 respondents answered "no", it appears that: a) they travel more frequently, b) watch sports matches more often, c) participate in sports activities during their travels more often and are more interested in having the opportunity to participate, d) choose their tourist destination by giving importance to the inclusion of sports facilities in the tourist package, e) would visit a country on the

occasion of watching a major sports event, f ) consider sports as a motivation during their holidays in Greece, g) believe that sports provide a more attractive package for choosing a country as a destination, h) participate more in cultural events and visit monuments during their holidays, i) are more interested in having organized sports activities in the area they visit, j) believe that tourism is combined with sports activity, k ) state that they would visit a place again if they had already had a satisfactory experience, l ) are willing to spend more money in a hotel that is suitable for sports activities, m ) have linked exercise with tourism to a greater extent and n ) their interest in souvenir shopping, visiting museums, engaging in activities, healthy eating and contact with the environment during their vacations increases significantly. At the same time, regarding the demographic characteristics of this group, the profile with a significance of  $P < 0.01$  fits a man, aged 32 to 40, of higher educational level without income being a criterion, although the class 35,001€ - 45,000€ presents a lower average compared to the others.

A significant percentage of 87.0% (Figure 6) would spend more money to stay near a facility that is suitable for exercise or a sports experience, while 13.0% would not, with the dominant choice being "up to €7" and "up to €21" with the percentage of 17.9% and 17% of the sample respectively. A significant correlation is found between this specific question and the ones below, as shown in Figure 7.

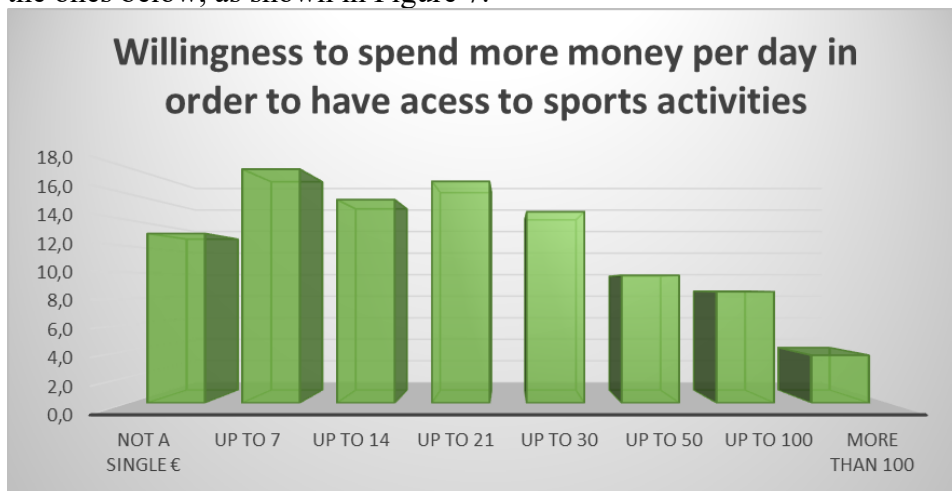


Figure 6 More money spending for a facility that is suitable for exercise or a sports experience

The profile of those who are willing to spend more money in a hotel (per stay / per day), if this is appropriate for exercise or a sports experience, is related to a positive tendency for the following: a) to travel more frequently, b) to attend sports competitions, c) to participate in sports activities during their travels and to be more interested in having the opportunity to participate, d) to give importance to sports benefits in the tourist package, e) to visit a country on the occasion of attending a major sports event, f ) to consider sports as a motivation during their holidays in Greece, g) to believe that sports provide a more attractive package for choosing a country as a destination, h) to participate more in cultural events during their holidays, i) to be more interested in the existence of organized sports activities in the area they visit, j) to state that they would visit a place again if they had already had a satisfactory experience, k ) to associate sports with tourism to a greater extent and l ) their interest in engaging in sports activities and buying increases. At the same time, as the intention to spend more increases, their annual family income and educational level seem to increase accordingly.

How much more money would you spend on a hotel (per stay / per day) if it was suitable for exercise or a sports experience?		
	Pearson Co	P value
How often do you travel?	0,174	0,000
How often do you watch sports matches?	0,167	0,000
How often do you participate as an athlete or even as a spectator in a sporting activity during your travels, even if only by chance?	0,185	0,000
In the destination you visit, to what extent are you interested in being given the opportunity to participate in a sporting activity?	0,207	0,000
How important are sports facilities in your holiday package for you when choosing a tourist destination?	0,275	0,000
To what extent would you visit a country with the aim of watching a major sporting	0,234	0,000
When you travel to Greece, do you consider sports/exercise to be a motivation for you?	0,269	0,000
Do you believe that sports provide a more attractive tourist package for choosing a country as a destination?	0,229	0,000
18.4 Cultural events and events	0,116	0,000
19.3 Sports facilities and sports facilities	0,196	0,000
How interested would you be in having organized sports activities in the wider area of the place you are visiting?	0,327	0,000
Do the facilities for exercise and sports in Greece meet your needs as a tourist?	0,082	0,002
How likely is it for you to visit a place again if you are satisfied?	0,174	0,000
To what extent have you linked tourism activity with sports (or sports and exercise with tourism)?	0,319	0,000
Is there an increasing interest in visiting museums?	-0,081	0,002
Is there an increasing interest in shopping?	0,081	0,002
Is there an increasing interest in engaging in sports activities?	0,147	0,000
Is there an increasing interest in eating healthy?	-0,056	0,000
Is there an increasing interest in caring for and interacting with nature?	-0,067	0,006
What is the range of your total annual family income in €?	0,216	0,000
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	0,094	0,000

Figure 7 The profile of those who are willing to spend more money in a hotel (per stay / per day), if this is appropriate for exercise or a sports experience

Important findings that were not presented individually are the following questions of the questionnaire that are presented briefly. Sports services within the holiday package regarding the choice of tourist destination are an important factor for 27.1%, 22.5% consider them to be of moderate importance, while 26.5 consider them to be of minor importance and 23,8% not at all an important factor in the choice. A major sports event could be a reason for traveling to another country for 41.8% of the sample, while 21.6% maintain a neutral attitude towards this factor, with 36.5% stating that it is not a reason for traveling (definitely not 17.6% and probably not 18.9%). Sports/exercise is a strong motivation for 18.8% of the sample when traveling to Greece, 31.3% maintain a neutral attitude answering the median while the 29,6% consider it a minimal motivation and the 20,2% of respondents have a negative attitude. Through sports, a more attractive tourist package is provided for choosing a country as a destination according to 39.5% of the sample (quite a lot 25.3%, absolutely 14.2%), to a moderate extent according to 30%, and slightly the 20.3%, while 10.2% do not believe the above statement at all. An important element regarding the tourists' willingness to do sports is presented in question 20 where 79.4% of the sample has a particular interest in the existence of organized sports activities in the wider area of the place they are visiting (Figure 8). The last question, which was not presented individually, relates to the satisfaction or not of tourists

with the existed state of the facilities for exercise and sports in Greece. 8.5% of the sample stated that they were not at all satisfied, 25.3% a little, while 42% described moderate satisfaction. On the contrary, 17,1% of respondents seemed quite satisfied and 7.1% expressed absolute satisfaction.

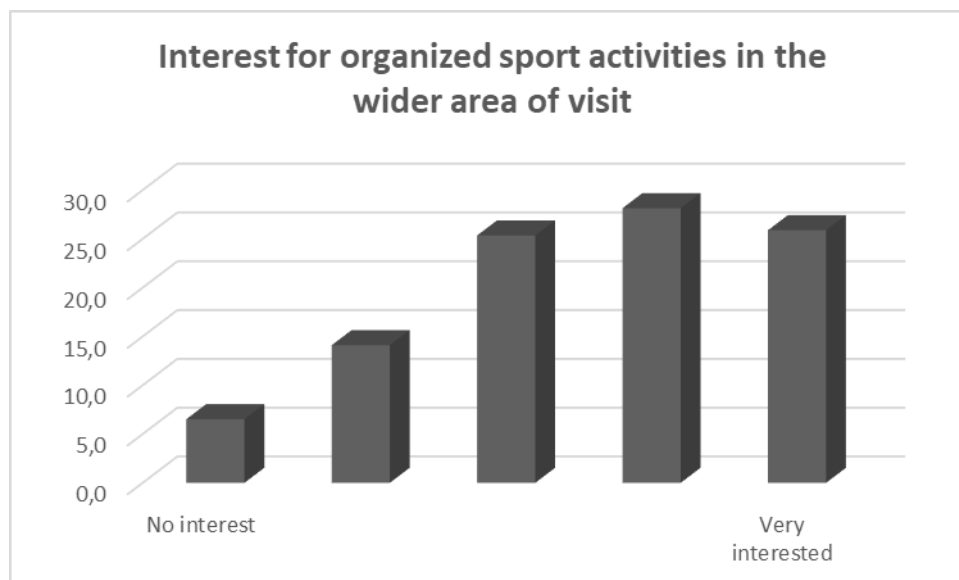


Figure 8 Interest for organized sports activities in the wider area of the place of visit

Finally, a significant correlation of great importance is the finding that the more often tourists travel the more often they tend to watch sports matches, the more interested they are in having the opportunity to participate in sports activities. Also, sports are a motivation for them when they travel to Greece. The more often they travel, the longer their vacations last, etc. Additionally, there are five significant tourist profiles that can be outlined:

- Those taking longer vacations ( $P < 0.05$ ), show a significant correlation with:
  - a) the frequency they travel, b) their interest in sports activities on their vacations, c) their interest in food quality and healthy eating
- Those who have attended a sporting event during their travels within the last three years ( $P < 0.05$ ):
  - a) travel more often, b) participate in sports activities during their trips more often, c) would visit a country on the occasion of watching a major sporting event, d) consider sports as a motivation for holidays in Greece, e) participate more in cultural events during their holidays. Male residents from abroad with higher income.
- Those who believe that sport contributes to the development of a place (80,2%) they tend more often to:
  - a) watch sports, b) participate in sports activities during their travels and are interested in the possibility of participating, c) visit a country for the purpose of watching a major sporting event. The profile with significance  $P < 0.05$  fits to a man, aged 32 to 40, of higher educational level.
- Those who would spend more money on accommodation suitable for a sports experience (87%):
  - a) participate in sports activities during their travels b) visit a country to watch a major sporting event, c) consider sports as a motivation during their holidays in Greece, d) would visit a place again if they had already had a satisfactory experience, etc.
- Those traveling for relaxation and recreation (64.2%):

They are highly likely to revisit a place they are satisfied with, they have an increased interest in organized sports activities at the place of visit, they would visit a country in order to attend a major sports event and they believe that sports provide a more attractive tourist holiday package.

### **Summarized findings and other correlations**

The overall impact of sport to tourism seems to be great with significant contribution in several aspects. Most important finding consist the fact that sports indeed have a major impact on tourism concerning economic, social and environmental aspects. Regarding the economy, the research showed that it can contribute positively since 87% of respondents are willing to spend more money in order to stay in an accommodation that is suitable for sports activities, while they consider exercise as a motivation for travel and at the same time show a strong interest in sports facilities and a general tendency to participate in organized sports activities. Also, a major sports event is by itself a motivation for tourism in another country for more and more tourists (63,5% moderate to high), which constitutes a statement that major sports events may stimulate the economy through an increase of incoming tourism. An important element of this statement is that it is significantly related to special interest groups such as those who travel for relaxation and recreation (>50%), groups with higher incomes, residents of abroad, and people who travel more frequently.

In addition to the above, it also appeared that sports may contribute to the social aspect of tourism by spreading culture, exchanging customs and traditions of people as well as shaping education. The research showed that tourists who are more interested in sports activities and sports facilities during their trip tend to travel more and have a particular interest in attending cultural events and visiting monuments and museums in the place they visit. Also, these groups tend to be of a higher income class and spend more money on sports facilities, which makes them a target group from the perspective of tourism. However, in addition to the above, these categories of tourists are also more interested in healthy nutrition and environmental protection. Most of the respondents said that what they seek from a tourist destination is the unaltered natural environment, which they seem to have the intention to protect, something that indicate the potential contribution of sports to the environment, its safeguarding and protection. In addition, there is an increase in tourists' interest during their travels to contact with nature and caring for the environment, for the quality of food, for visiting monuments and museums, attending cultural events, buying souvenirs and engaging in sports activities. They also believe that a tourist destination should have an unaltered natural environment, opportunities for sports as well as cultural attractions such as monuments and museums. It is therefore concluded that there is a contribution of sports to tourism, concerning all three pillars of sustainable development, the economy, society and the environment.

Some significant summarized findings are:

- The tourism-sports relationship has a greater connection in the consciousness of younger age groups and higher educational levels.
- The more sports/exercise is a motivation for the respondents to take a vacation, the more the amounts they are willing to spend on an accommodation suitable for sports activities.
- Tourists are increasingly prioritizing destinations that offer structured sports experiences while seeking destinations that provide safe, outdoor sporting opportunities.
- Tourists show an increased interest in destinations that offer eco-friendly sports activities and maintain natural environments.

- The tendency for health-conscious and active vacations has significantly increased.
- Participation in sports activities during tourism concerns more than 65%.
- Through sports, a more attractive tourist package is provided for 69,5%, while the 79,4% shows interest in the existence of organized sports activities in the wider area of the place they are visiting.
- Those who participate in sports activities during tourism in parts of Greece plan long-term vacations and spend more money in order to be close to facilities that provide sports opportunities.

## **Conclusions and Perspectives**

Sports tourism is a dynamic and growing sector of tourism, with significant economic, social and environmental impacts. Its exploitation as a strategic tool for economic and regional development is crucial, especially for countries with a rich sporting and cultural tradition, such as Greece. The development of structured, targeted and frequent promotion of Greece's tourism products in alternative destinations as well as the integration of sustainable practices are essential elements for the strengthening of sports tourism and the preservation of the Greek tourism industry in the future through the creation of sustainable and attractive tourist destinations suitable for sporting activities.

The prospects for sports tourism are extremely positive, as the global demand for sports and physical activity during holidays is constantly increasing (Li and Ling 2025, Vlassas 2025). Countries that invest in the development of sports facilities, in improving infrastructure and in promoting special sports tourism packages tend to benefit both economically and socially (Panagiotopoulos 2022b). Finally, the integration of sustainable practices in sports tourism and tourism in general ensures long-term benefits and income, while protecting the natural and cultural environment of tourist destinations.

Specifically, the impact of sports to tourism is of paramount importance with:

- **Contribution to the economy:** 87% are willing to spend more money to stay in accommodation suitable for sports activities, show a general tendency to participate, and consider exercise as a motivation for travel.
- **Contribution to culture:** Those who are more interested in sporting activities on their trips travel more and tend to show interest in cultural events and visiting monuments and museums.
- **Contribution to the environment:** Those who are most interested in sports activities are also interested in healthy eating, environmental protection and contact with nature.

According to all the above, there is a suggestion for tourism stakeholders to design of tourist packages combined with sports activities, as a pole of attraction for incoming tourism who is willing to extend their vacations as well as their financial expenses. Providing a higher quality tourism product, focused on sports activities, may encourage travelers to return to the same destination. The great desire of tourists for sporting activities during their holidays and travels could be a springboard to exploit the potential of Greece's individual areas that are suitable for various sporting activities aiming to seasonality reduction. Finally, it may be a good investment in various sports such as motorsports or mountain sports that attract specific target groups who are willing to spend more per day for such experiences in order to maximize the income from tourism while maintaining the incoming tourist numbers. This study highlights the need for destinations to invest in high-quality sports facilities, organize competitive sporting events, and adopt eco-friendly tourism initiatives. Tourism development strategies should consider the rising demand for sports-related experiences, integrating them with environmental sustainability in order to achieve sustainable regional development.

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