

DESTINATION IMAGE, SPORT EVENT QUALITY, AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS: THE CASES OF THREE WORLD SAMBO CHAMPIONSHIPS

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This research tested the interactions among destination image, destination quality, sport event quality, and behavioral intentions in the context of small-scale sport events. The study included elite sambo athletes ($N = 350$) who participated in the World Sambo Championships, which were organized in Novi Sad (Serbia) in 2017 and 2018. The destination image was measured with the affective and cognitive dimensions, while the event quality was measured with the core, tangible and supporting dimensions. The results supported the measurement and structural models. They further indicated that the core aspect of the event quality directly influences participants' behavioral intentions, while the destination quality partially mediates the relationship between destination image and participant behavioral intentions. The event quality was shown to have a direct relationship with the development of destination loyalty. The theoretical and applied value of these results are discussed.

KEYWORDS: *sport tourism development; purchase intentions; service quality; marketing; event destination*

Sport has a significant sociocultural role in the postmodern world. Tourism is also a rapidly developing branch of the economy (Gonzales-Garsia, Ano-Sanz, Alguacil, Perez-Campos, 2018; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Konecke & Kwiatkowski, 2016; Ma & Kaplanidou, 2017; Nunkoo, Gursoy, & Juwaheer, 2010).¹ The role of sport in the development of tourism has been academically significant since the mid-1990s. The development of sport tourism as a branch

of the economy has been characterized by the accelerated development of professional and commercial sports, which significantly contribute to the growth of (inter)national GDP.² According to The World Travel & Tourism Council Annual Report (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018), it is estimated that 25% to 30% of world tourist economy is sport related. Standing together, as two pillars of the contemporary entertainment industry, sport and tourism exist in every society that could be used for “building bridges and barriers between cultures, influencing national and international political decisions” (Malchrowicz-Mosko & Poczta, 2018, p. 4289). The driver of this growth has been the popularity of sport events. It demands monitoring different stakeholders’ “pulse” (Popovic, 2017) of an intensive organizational, bureaucratic, sometimes political lobbying, the attention of mass media, sponsors, and participants, who play the role of tourists.

Success in the organization of sport events is equally significant for sports organizations and event destinations. For the supply side the key factor is economic development, while for the demand side the most important factors are the psychological and social characteristics of participants (Kaplanidou, Kerwin, & Karadakis, 2013). An insight into the published literature showed the discrepancy with regard to the emphasis on the analysis of mega-sport events, tourists’/visitors’ behavior, hosts’ satisfaction, and economic impact on one hand and the limited research on the small-scale sport events and how they affect the host destination. It should be kept in mind that the difference between small-scale and mega-sport events is not only related to the size of the event. It is also related to regular season games, which “do not tax the resources of the host city in the same manner as hosting mega event” (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2003, p. 182). Consequently, the current research focuses on small-scale sport events. Since the beginning of the 2000s, many countries’ representatives have recognized the tourism potential of small-scale sport events (Daniels & Norman, 2003, Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). Some authors even claimed that there is more tourism development potential in small-scale sport events, especially recurring ones (Gillett & Kelly, 2006), than in mega-sport events. This is because small-scale sport events represent a good opportunity for organizers to present the host city, together with local people and other resources, as a desirable tourist attraction (S. K. Koo, Byon, & Baker, 2014; Malchrowicz-Mosko & Poczta, 2018). Unlike mega-sport events, small-scale sport events require much less resources in terms of funds, infrastructures, and managing the crowd and congestion. However, the competition among potential organizers is still intense because of the fact that community leaders are primarily motivated to gain the economic impact from event patrons, sponsorship deals and television (broadcasting) rights. It is also recognized today that sport events can significantly build the destination image (Konecke & Kwiatkowski, 2016; Malchrowicz-Mosko & Poczta, 2018). Organizing small-scale sport events could increase cooperation within one region, as well as among several regions, which could have long-term positive implications for respective residents.

Hence, the stakeholders of the host city, which include the organizer of the sport competition, representatives of the hospitality sector and tourist organizations have a significant role and responsibility to present their city in a positive way, in order to enable the development of the destination image and potential positive visitors' behavioral intentions. Consequently, the destination image can be influenced by the quality of the organization of the sports event (Li & Kaplanidou, 2013; Preuss & Alfs, 2011).

The tourism literature is to some extent compatible with the sports tourism literature. However, sports tourism has its own specifics, which is why destination image should be observed more carefully, together with tourist behavioral intentions to revisit destination and with special attention paid to latent dimensions of the investigated phenomena. This is because of the fact that the quality of sport events could not be the only predictor of competitors and spectator's intention to revisit the destination. It means that participants may separately evaluate the sport event and the destination itself. This is also why those three constructs have to be under the research scope as three parts of the same entity. This is at the same time the starting research aim from which the authors of this article began research. More specifically, the article aimed to examine whether or not the destination image and the event quality influence participants'/athletes' decision to revisit the destination.

The research was based on the three World Sambo Championships. These events were chosen because sambo is a rapidly progressing sport in 120 countries on all continents. The sport has been granted temporary recognition by the International Olympic Committee in 2018. Those competitive sport events took place in Novi Sad (Serbia) in 2017 and 2018, a city proclaimed as the Youth Capital of Europe in 2019 and the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2021. The city has also been recognized as the second most important congress destination in Serbia (Dragičević, Armenski, & Jovičić, 2009; Dragičević, Stankov, Armenski, & Štetić, 2011). No research had been conducted before in such a setting in Serbia. Although this research methodologically represents a case study in a specific cultural context, this research used and tested a theoretical framework, which included three theoretical constructs (event service quality, destination image quality, and repeated destination visit). The development of this framework was based on the literature review. Furthermore, the research was based on a new and developing sport (sambo), which is about to become an Olympic sport. Finally, it was conducted at the city of Novi Sad, which is a developing destination and whose tourist potential has been recognized internationally.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Destination Image, Destination Quality, Service Quality, Behavioral Intentions, and Their Interrelationships

The concept of destination image became important in tourism literature during early 1970s. More than 40 years later it became clear that destination image

is important for both academics and industry professionals (Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). A review of literature related to destination image indicate the complexity of the concept. Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that there are numerous definitions that address destination image. Broadly speaking, there are two different groups of theoretical approaches to destination image: one group (central processing, piecemeal-based processing, high-involvement theories) emphasize cognitive component of consumers' perception of destination (Gartner, 1986; Keaveney & Hunt, 1992; Poiesz, 1989; Sirgy & Su, 2000). This means that the consumer is a logical thinker, who critically evaluates objects and activities one by one. The other group of theories (peripheral processing, category-based processing, low-involvement theories) emphasize affective component of visitors' perception (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1996).

So far, there has been no comprehensive definition of destination image, in which all the components are equally presented. Numerous researchers have addressed different topics related to destination image, such as its conceptualization, assessment, and measurement, changes in the destination image over time, destination image management, and its effect on tourists' behavior (Baloglu & McCleary 1999; Gartner, 1994; S. S. Kim & Morrison, 2005; Pike, 2009; Reilly, 1990). Nevertheless, there are three main components of destination image that should be depicted—cognitive, affective, and conative. These three components help researches to understand and explain the destination image: what we know about an object is cognitive element, how persons feel about the information is affective component, and how they act on the information is conative component. Still, cognitive and affective components are crucial for understanding the concept of destination image. Cognition represents persons' logical processing of the gained information "thinking about something, paying attention, remembering, understanding, interpreting, evaluating" (Tasci et al., 2007, p. 199). Affective component includes positive or negative emotions about the information, with varying intensity from love to anger, through satisfaction and frustration, boredom and relaxation, or simply liking and disliking of objects, events, people (Tasci et al., 2007, p. 199). Although being specific in their characteristics, the cognitive and affective components of the personality are compatible. Having this in mind, some authors claimed that cognition about some object might cause increase in affective component toward the same object (Anand, Holbrook, & Stephens, 1988). It leads to the assumption that between the knowledge and feelings toward an object or event, persons make holistic image of the mentioned object/events.

Destination quality may be defined as tourists/visitors' "perception or evaluation on the standard of tourism products at the destination that meet the requirement or expectations of tourists" (Sangpikul, 2017, p. 425). A destination's quality is influenced by numerous factors related to a city's infrastructure, tourism and support services, accessibility, public transportation, security, friendliness of local people, availability of tourism information, and cleanliness of the city (do Valle, Mendes, Guerreiro, & Silva, 2011; Vajčnerová, Žiaran, Ryglová,

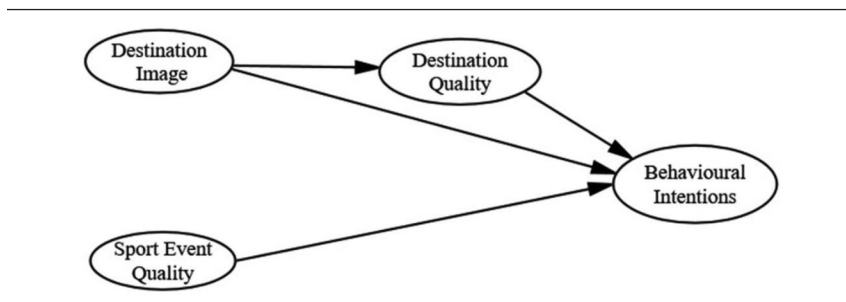
& Andráško, 2014). The perception of destination quality is subjective since it depends on visitors' sociodemographics characteristics, travel experiences, and the purpose of the visit (Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015). It refers to the conclusion that the destination quality influences the visitors' satisfaction and their intentions to revisit the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Li & Kaplanidou, 2013; Moon, Ko, Connaughton, & Lee, 2013; Preuss & Alfs, 2011; Vajčnerova et al., 2014).

The organization of sport events can be considered today as a "tool" for developing a destination's image (Maksimović & Raič, 2012). The quality of the event is not only a key but also a challenging issue (Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005). There are several multidimensional models for measuring service quality. One of the most used models to measure service quality has been the SERVQUAL model developed originally by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994, 1998). This model proposed five dimensions: empathy, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and tangibles. More recently, Chelladurai and Chang (2000) proposed a three-dimensional model which included the physical environment, interpersonal attributes and core services dimensions. Furthermore, Brady and Cronin (2001) divided service quality into three dimensions: interaction, outcome and physical environment quality, similar to Y. G. Koo, Andrew, and Kim (2008). Adjusted to a sport tourism context, Shonk and Chelladurai (2008) proposed the Sport Tourism Quality model with four primary dimensions: accommodation, venue, contest and access. Likewise, Alexandris, Theodorakis, Kaplanidou and Papadimitriou (2017) used an adapted version of Brady and Cronin's (2001) model, including the physical environment quality (facilities and routes for runners), outcome quality (what the runners receive as outcome) and interaction quality (including the behavior of personnel).

Behavioral intentions are tourist's/visitor's intention to revisit the destination in the future, as well as to recommend it to other people. This has been a key dependent variable in a wide range of studies in the tourism literature and consumer behavior studies (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). More specifically, indicators of behavioral intentions in tourism context are related to attitudes toward visiting destination, destination image, satisfaction with the destination, and past behavior (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Petrick, 2004). Based on the previous research related to behavioral intentions in sport tourism, it is clear that the attitudes toward event participation mediated the impact of satisfaction and destination image on intention (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Popa, Yusof, & Kim Geok, 2017). This suggests that attitudes and satisfaction are significant predictors of a participant's intention to revisit some event again.

The interrelationship of destination image, destination quality, sport event quality, and behavioral intentions is of practical and theoretical importance for sport tourism. It is of theoretical importance because testing their interrelationships can help researchers understand how participants (athletes) and visitors (spectators) make decisions in choosing specific sport event to participate

Figure 1
Proposed Hypothesized Model



and visit. Research in this area can also improve authors understanding of the role that the two dimensions of destination image (cognitive and affective) play in hosting and managing a sport event. Testing the interrelationships among the above-mentioned constructs holds also practical importance in the contexts of small-scale sport events, since it can show policymakers, tourism development officers, and sport event managers which elements are important to achieve athletes' and spectators' satisfaction and build loyalty in terms of repeated behavior.

Proposed Hypothesized Model and Study Hypotheses

Based on Kaplanidou and Vogt's (2007) study, which was conducted in the context of a small-scale sport event, a three-dimensional model of service quality was used in the current study: *Core*, *Tangibles*, and *Supporting*. Furthermore, the cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image were used (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). The research objectives were (1) to test if the destination image has a direct impact on behavioral intentions (and word-of-mouth communications), or whether their relationships are mediated by the destination quality and (2) to examine the influence of event quality (environment, interaction, and outcome quality) on behavioral intentions. As briefly discussed above, a hypothesized model was constructed based on the literature review, (Figure 1) and the following hypotheses were set:

- Hypothesis 1₀:** The destination image has no direct relationship with behavioral intentions.
- Hypothesis 1_a:** The destination image has a positive direct relationship with behavioral intentions.
- Hypothesis 2₀:** The destination quality does not mediate the relationship between destination image and behavioral intentions.
- Hypothesis 2_a:** The destination quality mediates the relationship between destination image and behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis 3₀: The event quality has no direct relationship with behavioral intentions.

Hypothesis 3_a: The event quality has a positive direct relationship with behavioral intentions.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data were collected using onsite survey of elite sambo athletes who participated in three World Sambo Championships that took place in Novi Sad, Serbia, in 2017 and 2018. These three events were The World Sambo Championships for Youth and Juniors in 2017, The World Sambo Championship for cadets in 2018, and The World Cup for seniors in 2018. The events took place in SPENS (Sport and Business Centre Vojvodina) sports center, multifunctional sports and business complex, and also one of Novi Sad's most recognizable landmarks. Being a place with a longstanding tradition of large-scale sport events that have been taking place there for over 39 years so far, SPENS has become the most significant sports facility and a "Serbian sporting event tourist offer" (Petrović, Jovičić, Marinković, & Marković, 2013, p. 7).

Study Sample

Aiming to cover all the different types of athletes, three subsamples were included cadets ($N = 99$), youth and juniors ($N = 200$), and seniors ($N = 51$). Males were the majority in the sample (63.1%), as opposed to 36.9% of females. Most of them respondents (88.0%) came from Russian-speaking regions (Armenia, Belorussia, Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Moldavia, Kazakhstan, and others). Other nationalities represented in the sample were from Netherlands (4.6%), Greece (2.3%), France (2.0%), and the United States (0.6%).

The Research Instruments

The final questionnaire included five sets of questions. The first part included basic sociodemographic information and questions related to the economic impact of the events (money spent in accommodation/hotel, food and drink outside the hotel, shopping and souvenirs, and visits to museums/attractions, etc.). The second part included questions about the athletes' attitudes toward Novi Sad as a tourist destination. The third part included questions related to organizational and management of the sport event. In the fourth part respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on different aspects of the event. Finally, in the fifth questions related to future intentions to revisit the sport tourism event destination were included. So, the following measurement scales were used:

Destination image was measured with two dimensions: affective and cognitive (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). The affective dimension consisted of seven items (e.g., destination of sport event is exciting, friendly, relaxing, etc.), while the cognitive consisted of five items (e.g., sport event destination is modern, historical, explorative, etc.).

Sport event quality was measured using three dimensions: *core*, *tangibles*, and *supporting* (Alexandris et al., 2017). The first dimension *core* contained six items related to competition, opening ceremony, organization, schedule, and so on. The *tangibles* dimension measured three aspects (volunteers/personnel, place of event/sport hall and facilities), while the *supporting* dimension measured also three elements (socials, communication with organizing committee, and promotion materials).

Destination quality was measured with 10 items (Alexandris et al., 2017), which covered various aspects of tourism services in the city (i.e., accommodations, restaurants, tourist information, safety, museums/attractions, price of food and drink, etc.).

Behavioral intentions were measured with three items related to athletes' intentions to revisit the destination and developing positive word-of-mouth (Alexandris et al., 2017).

All scales were measured with 5-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 = *very much unlikely* to 5 = *very much likely*.

Data Analysis

Structural equation modeling with AMOS 24.0 was used to test the proposed model. To test the model and the paths among the variables a number of fit indices were used—root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and nonnormed fit index (NNFI). Subsequently, the internal fit indices with factor loadings and the interitem reliability of the aforementioned constructs were tested using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) as proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999). The two destination image dimensions and the three sport event quality dimensions were set as independent variables and the behavioral intentions dimension was set as a dependent variable. Furthermore, the destination quality dimension was tested as a mediator between destination image and behavioral intentions. The mediation analysis (Judd & Kenny, 2010; Pearl, 2014) was tested using Sobel test ($p < .001$).

RESULTS

The findings of the research are classified in three parts: (1) descriptive statistics, (2) confirmatory factor analysis, and (3) structural equation modeling. Firstly, descriptive statistics showed that during the sport event less than half of athletes (30.9%) participated in museum visits and other attractions during the designation event. On the other hand, more than two thirds of respondents (69.1%) did not take advantage of this opportunity. Perceptions before visiting

Table 1
Means (*M*), Standard Deviations (*SD*), Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliabilities (*CR*), Average Variance Extracted (*AVE*), and Correlations for Behavioral Athletes' Intentions, Destination Image, Service Quality Dimensions, and Behavioral Intentions

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>r</i>					
						1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Affective	3.67	1.14	0.93	0.95	0.71						
2. Cognitive	3.58	1.17	0.91	0.93	0.68	0.81 ^a					
3. Tangibles	4.30	0.77	0.75	0.77	0.52	0.38 ^a	0.44 ^a				
4. Core	4.27	0.78	0.87	0.88	0.55	0.32 ^a	0.35 ^a	0.81 ^a			
5. Supporting	4.15	0.82	0.77	0.78	0.54	0.33 ^a	0.37 ^a	0.80 ^a	0.79 ^a		
6. Behavioral intentions	3.89	0.99	0.90	0.90	0.75	0.39 ^a	0.43 ^a	0.63 ^a	0.64 ^a	0.64 ^a	
7. Destination quality	3.97	0.97	0.91	0.91	0.52	0.54	0.61	0.70	0.64	0.66	0.75

^a $p < .001$.

the destination showed that 81.2% of respondents had a positive preconception, while 11.2% were neutral and about 7.6% admitted they had negative perceptions. Around 4% of participants improved their opinion of the destination after the visit, which resulted in approximately 85.2% of respondents with positive opinions. Furthermore, a decrease in negative opinions of respondents was reported for 2.2% (total of 5.4%) and in neutral opinion for 1.4% (total of 9.8%).

Analyzing the descriptive indicators of the economic impact of these events, the number of booked nights in hotels varied from 1 to 12, with an average of 3.67 nights. The average money spent in accommodation and registration fees were reported to be 380 euros. For shopping in city, the range of money spent was between 50 to 400 euros, with the average amount being approximately 150 euros. Finally, the athletes reported that they spent between 50 and 200 euros on food and drink, with the average participant spending about 100 euros.

The results of the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, correlations, reliability estimates, and AVE values) for destination image, sport event quality, destination quality, and behavioral intentions are presented in Table 1. The mean scores of sport event quality (*tangibles* $M = 4.30$, *core* $M = 4.27$, and *supporting* $M = 4.15$) were relatively higher than those of the destination image (*affective* $M = 3.67$, *cognitive* $M = 3.58$), *behavioral intentions* ($M = 3.89$), and *destination quality* ($M = 3.97$). The highest means were reported in the *place—sport hall* ($M = 4.38$) and *facilities* ($M = 4.43$) dimensions.

A confirmatory factor analysis was run to establish the factorial validity of the scales, hence the reliability and validity of the measurement model. It is presented in Table 1.

The reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach's alpha values were acceptable ($>.75$), as recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Also, the indicators of CR were shown to be in good levels, in accordance with the suggestions of Bagozzi and Yi (1988) to be greater than 0.60 (>0.77), while the AVE fulfils the criteria greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), with the lowest values being above 0.52. As seen in Table 2, the measurement model showed acceptable fit: $\chi^2 = 2496.74$, $df=644$, $\chi^2/df = 3.88$, CFI = 0.92, NNFI= 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.07. The values of NNFI and CFI contributed to excellent fitting the model (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The value of RMSEA fits within the range from 0.05 to 0.10, which was proposed by Byrne (2000) and Steiger (2007). It is clear that all factor loadings were higher than the criterion value of 0.4, based on the suggestion of Kaiser (1974). All indicators of the dimensions were acceptable, which means that the measurement model fit well with the empirical data. Thirdly, the structural model was tested (Figure 1 and Table 2). The overall fit indices were calculated: $\chi^2 = 8205$, $df = 1980$, $\chi^2/df = 4.14$, CFI = 0.92, NFI= 0.91, and RMSEA = 0.07. They showed good fit of the data, according to the criterion for CFI being above 0.9 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), NFI being above 0.9 (Byrne, 2001) and moderate fit for the RMSEA indices (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

In Table 3, a summary of the results is presented, explaining the paths among the variables. So significant direct effects were revealed in the following paths: *core event quality* $\rightarrow$ *behavioral intentions*, *destination quality* $\rightarrow$ *behavioral intentions*, *cognitive destination image* $\rightarrow$ *behavioral intentions* and significant indirect effects were revealed in the following paths: *affective destination image* $\rightarrow$ *destination quality* $\rightarrow$ *behavioral intentions* (Sobel test, $Z = 2.38$, $p < .00$).

In terms of the structural model as shown in Figure 2, the results showed direct effects from the *cognitive dimension of destination image* to *behavioral intentions* in all groups of athletes ($\beta = 0.20$, for cadets, $\beta = 0.22$ for youth and juniors, and $\beta = 0.32$, for seniors, all significant at the level $p < .01$), which partially supports the H1_a. On the other hand, the results showed that the *destination quality* mediates the relationship between the *affective dimension of destination image* and *behavioral intentions* in all groups of athletes (supporting H2). These results partially supports H2_a. Last, the standardized path coefficients showed positive direct effects from the *core dimension of service quality* to *behavioral intentions* in all groups of athletes ($\beta = 0.41$ for cadets, $\beta = 0.42$ for youth and juniors, and $\beta = 0.33$ for seniors, all significant at the level $p < .01$), which supports H3_a.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine whether or not the destination image, the destination quality and the sport event quality influence the decision taken by athletes to revisit the destination. The results showed a positive significant direct effect of the core dimension of sport event quality on behavioral

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and CFA Item Statistics

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis	Factor loading	Error term	SMCs
Behavioral intentions								
Visit Novi Sad again	3.74	1.02		-0.61	0.28	0.93	0.03	0.87
Visit country again	3.96	0.97	28.25	-0.62	-0.26	0.95	0.04	0.91
Encourage others	3.97	1.01	28.60	-0.73	-0.06	0.92	0.04	0.85
Destination quality								
The Hotel	3.89	1.02		-0.98	0.59	0.84	0.05	0.71
Novi Sad as tourism destination	3.92	0.98	21.13	-0.77	0.37	0.92	0.06	0.85
City restaurants	4.13	0.86	13.86	-1.18	1.76	0.76	0.06	0.57
City tourist information	3.84	0.98	18.67	-0.77	0.32	0.88	0.05	0.77
Entertaining opportunities	3.93	0.96	18.50	-0.97	1.03	0.88	0.07	0.76
Safety in the city	3.97	1.00	18.05	-0.84	0.37	0.86	0.06	0.75
Museums/attractions	3.78	1.00	20.96	-0.60	-0.04	0.92	0.05	0.84
Prices of food and drinks	4.07	0.93	12.09	-0.91	0.63	0.70	0.08	0.48
Value for money	4.09	0.96	17.56	-1.02	0.78	0.85	0.06	0.73
Cleanliness in the city	4.05	1.01	12.25	-1.07	0.62	0.70	0.08	0.49
Destination image								
Affective								
Exciting	3.68	1.19		-0.60	-0.60	0.77	0.07	0.59
Joyful	3.57	1.10	16.50	-0.35	-0.61	0.88	0.07	0.77
Fun	3.55	1.17	18.02	-0.40	-0.68	0.92	0.07	0.85
Friendly	3.93	1.14	12.61	-0.91	-0.19	0.75	0.08	0.56
Relaxing	3.54	1.12	14.63	-0.36	-0.58	0.82	0.07	0.68
Beautiful	3.75	1.14	15.96	-0.54	-0.63	0.86	0.07	0.75
Interesting	3.68	1.13	14.84	-0.51	-0.68	0.83	0.08	0.69
Cognitive								
Original	3.57	1.16		-0.55	-0.45	0.84	0.07	0.71
Safe	3.80	1.13	12.81	-0.67	-0.51	0.77	0.07	0.59
Historical	3.54	1.22	12.78	-0.36	-0.90	0.76	0.07	0.59
Modern	3.51	1.15	17.22	-0.33	-0.67	0.92	0.06	0.85
Explorative	3.56	1.13	15.95	-0.32	-0.72	0.88	0.06	0.77
Clean	3.53	1.19	13.21	-0.31	-0.93	0.78	0.07	0.61
Service quality								
Tangibles								
Volunteers/personnel	4.11	0.89	6.92	-1.23	1.89	0.92	0.06	0.29
Place (sport hall)	4.38	0.72	8.70	-1.09	1.11	0.75	0.05	0.56
Facilities	4.43	0.70		-1.27	1.91	0.64	0.05	0.85
Supporting								
Socials	4.07	0.82		-0.72	0.66	0.62	0.05	0.38
Communication	4.22	0.79	7.50	-0.71	-0.24	0.65	0.14	0.42
Promotion material	4.16	0.84	7.11	-0.70	-0.18	0.92	0.21	0.84
Core								
Competition	4.23	0.82		-1.14	1.50	0.82	0.09	0.53
Opening ceremony	4.26	0.83	6.49	-0.95	0.49	0.65	0.09	0.21
Organization	4.23	0.75	11.69	-0.71	0.22	0.72	0.09	0.69
Time schedule	4.32	0.73	12.01	-0.70	-0.52	0.74	0.08	0.55
Medal ceremonies	4.27	0.82	14.38	-1.25	1.99	0.83	0.09	0.69
Games atmosphere	4.31	0.73	14.23	-0.92	0.72	0.83	0.07	0.68

Note: CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; *SD* = standard deviation; SMC = squared multiple correlation.

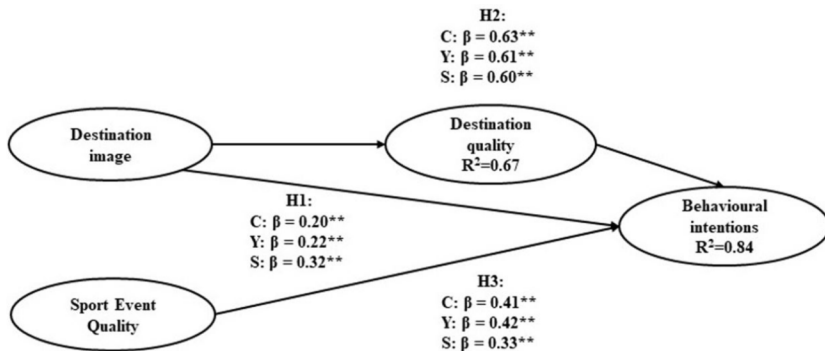
Table 3
Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Destination Image and Sport Event Quality Dimensions on Behavioral Intentions

		Destination Image		Sport Event Quality			Destination Quality
		Cognitive	Affective	Core	Tangibles	Supporting	
Effects	Type of Athletes	β					
Direct effect	Cadets	0.20**	-0.06	0.41**	-0.18	-0.13	0.83**
	Youth	0.22**	-0.12	0.42**	0.12	-0.49	0.75**
	Seniors	0.32**	-0.18	0.33**	0.20	-0.39	0.47**
Indirect	Cadets	-0.25	0.63**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Youth	-0.14	0.61**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Seniors	-0.12	0.60**	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total effects	Cadets	-0.27	0.57**	0.41**	-0.18	-0.13	0.83
	Youth	0.01	0.49**	0.42**	0.12	-0.49	0.75
	Seniors	-0.34	0.62**	0.43**	0.20	-0.39	0.47
Destination quality $R^2 = 0.67$, Behavioral intentions $R^2 = 0.84$							

Note: β = standardized path of coefficients.

** $p < .01$.

Figure 2
The Results of Proposed Hypothesized Model: Direct and Indirect Impact of Destination Image and Sport Event Quality Dimensions on Behavioral Intentions



Notes:

Type of athletes: C – cadets, Y – youth, S – seniors
 β – standardized path of coefficients, ** $p < 0.01$

Note: Type of athletes: C = cadets, Y = youth, S = seniors; β = standardized path of coefficients.

** $p < .01$.

intentions. Subsequently, the core dimension of event quality is an important factor during the organizational process, and it should be given a high level of attention by sports managers. However, the link between the rest of event quality (supporting and tangibles) and destination loyalty was not shown to be strong, which is in line with what has been reported by Alexandris et al. (2017). This is a finding that might relate to the sample of the study (athletes) and the type of the event (competitive). These results once again emphasize the important role of the event quality in developing destination loyalty. They also show that professional organization and management of sport events is a key factor for the development of positive athletes' attitudes.

The results of descriptive statistics showed high mean scores among athletes with regard to the sporting venue. The facilities, where the events took place, played an important role on the overall service quality perceptions. In support of this, many sport events during the past 3 years, especially in martial arts, were held in Novi Sad (European Wrestling Championship 2017, European Senior Karate Championship 2017, World Sambo Championships for Youth and Juniors 2017, World Sambo Championship among cadets 2018, and World Senior Sambo Championship 2018). It is clear that cities which invest in sporting infrastructure are more likely to attract sport events and build their image (Tasci, Hahm, & Breiter-Terry, 2018). Such kind of investments can therefore contribute to the local tourism development. Previous research (Alexandris et al., 2017; Kaplanidou et al., 2013) recognized that successfully organized sport events are a leading factor in the development of a tourism destination, which was confirmed by this research.

Commenting on the descriptive results related to the destination quality, it can be argued that Novi Sad satisfies many criteria of being a good destination for organizing sport events. Novi Sad boasts superior athletic infrastructure and facilities, which are required for an event, and excellent tourist capacities and potential. Therefore, this research is in line with the results by Matic, Karagiorgos, Maksimovic, Alexandris, Drid, and Bujkovic (2018), according to which Novi Sad is a desirable destination for sport event managers. It took into consideration the high-quality of sport events, alongside opportunities for ensuring the overall satisfaction of event participants (spectators) as well as the positive effect that athlete contentment has on the overall success of the event (Theodorakis, Kaplanidou, & Karabaxoglou, 2015). In previous research, the content quality together with access and venue quality dimension were proposed as predictors of spectators' satisfaction (Tzetzis, Alexandris, & Kapsampeli, 2014). Hence, these dimensions are closely related to outcome quality. Similar findings in small-scale event as reported by S. K. Koo et al. (2014) confirmed the positive effect of event image and satisfaction on behavioral intentions.

Regarding the relationship between destination image and behavioral intentions, the study revealed that the cognitive dimension of destination image had a direct influence on behavioral intentions, while the affective one had an indirect one through the destination quality. The direct relationships between cognitive

image and event loyalty can be explained with the results of the descriptive statistics also showed that the average length of stay among athletes in the event destination was between 3 and 4 days. This shows that athletes probably had enough time to form a full cognitive picture of the destination, which was a good strategic plan on behalf of the organizers. The indirect relationship with the affective dimension of destination image and event loyalty can be understood as athletes' positive feelings about Novi Sad as a city that provides opportunities for entertainment, relaxation, and leisure. The effect of affective characteristics can be analyzed through the quality of the range of accommodation, restaurants, prices, tourist assistance that the destination has on offer. In summarizing, and despite the indirect relationships revealed, these results support the value of hosting sport events in destinations, which cover the main requirements of a typical tourist. Such requirements relate to both the core and support tourism services. These results can be useful for sport event managers, policymakers, and tourism officers in developing strategic plans for local tourism development. Strategies should be taken into consideration the formation of a positive affective and cognitive image of hosting destinations such as Novi Sad, in combination with the organization of a good technically sport event (core aspect of service quality).

Future Research and Limitations

There are certain study limitations that should be noted, which provide the directions for future research. First of all, the research is based on a case study; events of the same sports which were conducted in a particular city. Subsequently, even though providing some evidence for the interactions among the theoretical constructs, the results should not be generalized. They have to be tested in different contexts (e.g., other destinations) and in the events of different sports. Sambo is an international sport with Russian origin and tradition spanning over 80 years. It is practiced mostly by an elite cadre of athletes that tend to come from Eastern European countries. Therefore, the results presented in the article represented the attitudes of a specific sample (elite athletes). The cultural element of the study participants should also be pointed out. As discussed before, the majority of those who participated in the study were Russian-speaking athletes, who are expected to have similar cultures. Based on that, the model proposed in the present study should be tested on other types of respondents that represent a more diverse array of sport and that have a broader geographical background. It would be also interesting to test the model in a more recreational type of event, among participants who are considered as more leisure oriented. Examples of such events could be running marathons, cycling events and show-off sport events. The more leisure-oriented participants might perceive differently the value of the destination image, for example, than the more competitive ones (athletes). The accompanying persons are one more group that was not included in the present study. Considering that these people are also sport tourists, it would be interesting to include them in future studies.

Consequently, future research should include more information about athletes' perceptions and expectations of event quality, destination image, and destination quality, as well as common point of these constructs' interrelationship, which can have positive consequences in two parallel fields: in terms of science, theoretical understanding of the constructs would be expanded. In terms of sport tourism, it could affect improving the quality of small-scale events and tourist offer by the organizer. In this manner, athletes would give significantly important feedback to the organizers of sport events, on one hand and to the scientific researches, on the other. That would be their (athletes') contribution to the improvement of sports event quality and scientific perspective on such topics.

Conclusion

This article aimed to test the interactions of destination image, event quality, and behavioral intentions, included all of them in an integrated model. Such a model has not been tested before in the setting of small-scale sports events. The results of the study provided evidence that the event quality, and especially its core element, is a key variable since directly predicts participants behavioral intentions. It, however, has to be emphasized that the results should be interpreted within the framework of the specific nature of the event and the sample. The study was conducted in a competitive sport event, using a sample of elite sambo athletes, who typically highly value the competition aspect of the event, which was included within the element of core quality. The results of the study also provided evidence that the destination image is a variable that should not be overlooked by policymakers when deciding where events should be planned. It was shown that the destination image influences both, directly and indirectly, the development of behavioral intentions, which was measured by athletes' intentions to visit the destination in the future and develop positive word of mouth.

The last note relates to the context of the study. This study was conducted in three small-scale sport events, and the results are based on samples of elite sambo athletes in three age categories: cadets, juniors, and seniors. These three events took place in the same hosting city. The results of the study provided evidence for the value of doing research in constructs such as destination image, event quality, and event destination since they all contribute to the development of participants' behavioral intentions. The authors emphasize the importance of researching whether the destination image and small-scale sport event quality influence the decision taken by athletes to revisit the destination. The authors have also pointed out why is it important to analyze those seemingly independent constructs as compatible. The fact is that those three constructs have been seen as autonomous in scientific literature, which is an indisputable fact. However, authors emphasize that small-scale sport events in real life context is "merging point" of those three constructs. In a way, those sport events are *social laboratories*, in which the manifestation of the mentioned constructs is visible.

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NOTES

1. In 2018, the Louvre Museum in Paris was visited by 10,000,000 tourists, breaking the world record in visits to a museum. This data illustrates the thesis about the expansion of tourism as an economic branch. Consequently, 7.7 million football fans visited FIFA Fan Fest during Russia 2018.

2. Although not all sports are equally developed in the professional–commercial sphere, there is an obvious primacy of football, basketball and tennis over sports that do not have such a large circulation of financial capital.

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