

# Analysis of the Potential of the Events for Turning the Winter Resorts of Bulgaria into Year-Round Tourist Destinations

Stella Dimitrova\*

## Summary

Events have become increasingly important for the tourism sector. They can have a strong influence on the formation of the image of the host destination, leading to a favorable perception of the tourist region as a desirable destination for a visit. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism, tourism in Bulgaria during the winter season develops dynamically. Ski vacations attract a significant number of organized foreign tourists and generate the major part of the income from mountain tourism in the country. Without exaggeration, we can say that Bulgaria has a lot of assets that favor the development of ski tourism. Among the favorable natural conditions can be listed the mild winters with heavy snowfalls and thick snow cover, held until the end of spring, as well as the lack of danger of avalanches on the ski slopes. On the other hand, there are many problems related to ski tourism. This is the most sensitive sector in terms of deepening climate change and global warming as well as environmental protection. The purpose of the article is to identify: the main reasons for visiting the mountain regions outside the peak season; types of events that would be of interest for visiting outside the season; reasons for extending tourists' stay.

**Key words:** winter resorts, events, seasonality

**JEL classification:** I11, F23, L83, O14

## Introduction

The natural features, the unique combination of mild winters and enough snow cover, held until the end of spring, determine the favorable opportunities for mountain tourism and winter sports in Bulgaria. Over the last decade there has been a very rapid development of ski resorts in terms of increasing the number of accommodation facilities, as well as the number and quality of ski slopes, equipment and services.

Many people prefer to visit mountain regions outside the winter season. The opportunities for recreation during the summer months are an attractive condition for an increasing number of tourists, also the facilities in the mountainous regions and the possibility of organizing different events is a precondition for attracting tourists out of the peak season and providing unique experiences. **The purpose** of the article is to identify, through empirical research, the main reasons for tourists to extend their stay in our winter resorts, and are thus a precondition for overcoming seasonal tourism in mountainous areas. The object of the survey is the Bulgarian winter resorts, and the **subjects** are the various types of event tourism. **The significance** of the topic is determined by the economic importance of organizing events outside the peak season, and **the topicality** raises the need to determine the opportunities of event tourism to attract customers and reduce seasonality in tourism. In the article we try to determine the significance of event tourism for the Bulgarian

\* PhD Student, University of National and World Economy, Osmi dekemvri str, Studentski grad, 1700, Sofia, Bulgaria

mountain resorts, and in order to achieve this, we have studied the consumer preferences for the events, which could be a precondition for the extension of the tourist season.

Our choice of the topic is related to clarifying the possible reasons that our winter resorts could turn into a year-round tourist destination. The experience so far has shown that effective marketing strategies for quality and destination awareness, media attention and information about the destination are not enough to clarify the impact of organizing events to extend the tourist season. In Bulgarian literature there are no surveys dedicated to the winter season and the statistics show that Bulgaria is forming a second season, except the winter one in September – November and March – April.

Planning and performing special events has become an essential element of the strategies for development of towns and regions. The aim is to attract visitors and investments, providing tourism development and turning it into a basic factor, which improves the competitiveness of the destination (Velikova, 2016, p. 83).

Bulgaria has recently become one of Europe's most visited winter sport destinations and there are many reasons for this success. The country boasts the highest mountains between the Alps and the Caucasus, ensuring a reliable snow cover throughout most of the season. And with a variety of quality ski resorts to choose from, the stiff competition ensures the best value for the money on the continent.

### Discussion of the relevant literature

Planned events are temporary phenomena with a predetermined start and end. Each organized event is unique, resulting from the combination of management, program, and participants. By definition, the event can be defined as a gathering of people, usually lasting from several hours to several days, and is intended to celebrate certain human endeavors. Goldblatt has such a definition,

namely, "the event is a unique moment in time that is celebrated with a ceremony or a ritual to meet specific needs" (Goldblatt, J., 2002). Getz, on the other hand, gives two definitions of the events, each from a different point of view:

- The event is one time or rarely occurring occasion outside the normal daily activities
- For the client or the guest, the event is a recreational, social or cultural experience beyond the normal routine activity (Getz, D., 1997).

The word "eventful" implies something important or memorable and many people associate it with the word "special". Goldblatt and Nelson (Goldblatt, J., 2002) set special events as a "unique moment and a ceremony which meets specific needs". It would not be possible to give a universal and standard definition nor a classification of what makes the events "special".

*We think that events can be defined as a planned moment which takes a special place in the daily life of the people, it is organized to celebrate a special occasion and provides the participants with a unique experience.*

In recent decades the impact of globalization on global tourism has led to increased competition between destinations in the search for optimal positioning (Tsvetkova, St., 2014, p. 123). Events have become an important element in the tourist development of destinations, attracting a large number of visitors, encouraging investment, improving the image and helping the local economy. The events have both economic and social advantages for tourism, in case they are well-planned for providing permanent unique and nice experience for the visitors (Velikova, 2016, p. 89).

Various authors define the promotion of events as measures for economic development, national construction and marketing for destinations. Non-governmental organizations also see events as key elements for marketing and promoting their products.

The host community, social groups and individuals are of great importance and show an interest in the cause of some significant events (Allen et al. 2011, 5).

It is widespread that events have the potential to be partly responsible for improving society. As a result, events become one of the most popular methods used to attract visitors to the regions. According to Grosbois (Grosbois, 2009), "events are widely recognized to generate numerous impacts on the host communities and other stakeholders." (Grosbois et. Al, 2009, Modeling survival at multi-population scales using mark-recapture data).

On the other hand, Bowdin (Bowdin, 2006) determines events to "have a direct impact on their participants. Negative impacts on communities must be minimized and measured against the benefits that tourism brings." (Bowdin, Glenn A.J., 2006, Events management). According to him, "in the events industry today the type of events can be classified according to their size and scale, and are usually done in the following way: Mega Events, Hallmark Events, Major Events, Cultural Events, and Business Events. However, events can also be classified according to their purpose and the motivation behind either holding or attending the event, not to the particular sector to which they belong".

According to Boo and Busser (2006), "developing new festivals is considered as a new strategy to lengthen the life cycle of destinations." (Boo, S., Busser, J., 2006, Impact analysis of a tourism festival on tourist destination images, article in Event Management). Other authors like Matheson (2006) think that "significant intangible benefits of events is national and international acknowledgement. Supporters of the event might enjoy their visit to the city and return later increasing tourism revenue in the future". (Matheson, V., 2006, Mega-events: The effect

of the world's biggest sporting events on local, regional, and national economies).

We think that events can be a significant factor in overcoming seasonality in tourism in the Bulgarian mountain regions. Similar to the statements to other authors that events could be used as a strategy and method for lengthening the tourist season in the tourist destination, we consider the events as a powerful implement for attracting visitors outside the peak season. Unlike other countries, however, the mountain regions in Bulgaria are not big enough and their carrying capacity is not high enough for the country to be a host of organizing some mega events. Furthermore, it has the potential to attract visitors out of the peak season with its climate diversity and opportunities for organizing some festivals, hallmark events, special events etc.

The positive flow of revenue in the region should not be the only factor in determining the success of an event. The negative social impacts of an event can be detrimental to its future and its host region, and environmental impacts may be the cause of the event's premature termination. Events provide the participants with an unforgettable experience, require long and careful implementation of the planning strategy and require cooperation from many stakeholders. Events have an important advantage in reducing the impact of seasonality, thus benefiting natural attractions in the out-of-peak season. If the season is high in winter, summer activities can be a source of revenue.

### Impacts of the events on tourism

When we determine the impacts of events, we most often focus on the social, economic and environmental impacts. For example, social and cultural benefits play a vital role in calculating the overall impact of an event.

Every event that takes place in a community usually has direct social and cultural influences on the participants. These effects can be simple experiences in the

form of shared entertainment such as sport events or concerts. The events have the ability to boost the pride of the community, but sometimes they can lead to undesirable consequences. They can be substance abuse, bad behavior from the crowd and increased criminal activities. Events can also affect social life and community structures in different ways. We can point the movement of cars, which can obstruct the access to the homes of the local citizens, the inflation of goods and services, which may have an impact on the groups with limited income.

In the management of each event, the government policies have an important role in achieving the goal of the event. Policies must be taken into consideration before planning and organizing different events. There are regulations in accordance with which public order must be respected. Recently, politicians have realized the ability of events to increase their authority and attract media attention while at the same time attracting visitors to increase the economic benefits and job opportunities.

Hall points out that "politics is of primary importance to the events. They change the timeframe and respond to the possibility of something new and better. In this context, events can change political priorities in the short term and political ideologies and socio-cultural reality in the long run." (Allen, J., O'Toole, W., Harris, R. & McDonnell, I., 2011).

The main driving force behind the event tourism and the development of tourism are the economic benefits. Although it is easier to identify international tourism than the domestic one, there are often economic benefits associated with both categories, depending on the size and nature of the event. Events affect the host community through various means, examples of which may be currency gains, incomes and job opportunities. Tourists' cost may be as large as those of any other consumption and international travel costs can be considered as exports from the host community.

Event tourism has turned into one of the most important aspects amongst the kind of tourism in the tourist industry. It is also considered as a motivating marketing tool, which is used for the destinations advertising. The tourists would like to take part in the planned activities and at same time to get knowledge about the destination. In this relation event tourism is a kind of assistant for providing tourist destinations and their popularization (Velikova, 2016, p. 85).

### Methodological framework of the study

We believe the positive impact of the event and the determination of its return can be measured, first of all, by the total attendance and the cost of the event's users. Particular attention should be paid to the macroeconomic benefits of the host area and an assessment of the alternative costs of realizing the investments. In short and long term, a comparison of material and non-material costs should be made.

Many event organizers and regional and local tourism organizations consider or wish to consider the "economic impact" or the macroeconomic benefits of their event by assessing the direct and secondary benefits of organization. This approach is often used in business or consumer surveys, as well as the multiplier or the econometric model. Other types are concerned with determining the macroeconomic impacts of the event at destination level (not at cost and benefit level, profit and loss, or return on investment from events). *We think that a number of complex factors such as benefits to the region and the local population, attracting tourists outside the peak season, return on investment from the event should be used for the success of an event.*

The benefits of organizing events serve as a basis for further analysis and reflection in this regard. The season of winter resorts in Bulgaria is connected with a number of issues. This is the most sensitive sector in terms of deepening climate change, global warming and environmental protection.

Planning for space management in tourist areas is inadequate (overbuilding, presence of construction activities in the peak of the season). Therefore, the lack of an empirical basis on which to determine the possibilities of events to extend the season or to make our winter resorts year-round destinations stimulates us to conduct specific field studies.

By analyzing the winter resorts in Bulgaria and their opportunities to attract tourists during the summer months of the year, **we can emphasize a number of strengths**, namely: good strategic location, good tourist infrastructure (for skiing and mountain tourism, eco paths), unique and preserved natural environment and climate, existence of protected areas, rich natural and cultural heritage, popular local lifestyle and culinary products, strategic location of the country, low density of population and developing a material and technical base to take on a large capacity of incoming tourists.

Along with the strengths that Bulgarian mountain regions can offer, there are also **a number of weak points** to which attention should be focused, namely: delays in the development of the technical infrastructure compared to the pace of construction of the new tourist areas, underdeveloped transport infrastructure, lack of a unified marketing approach and a complex tourist product to popularize the whole territory, lack of access to services in small towns - health, social, information, communication, and last but not least, the manifest seasonality.

Namely, *as a result of conducting research in Bulgarian mountain regions, this article highlights the opportunities to turn summer tourism in mountainous areas into a sustainable industry based on organizing events.* The results also show the event potential that our country can offer. Through the development of the accompanying tourism activities and services and the attraction

of tourists in the out-of-season period of the year, the consequences of the financial and economic crisis for the territory can be overcome. In this way our winter resorts can develop sustainable year-round tourism.

Some things should be taken into consideration when we talk about sustainable industry based on organizing events. As suggested by N. Dimitrov. "the state intervention must be limited to what is necessary to protect the public interest and prosperity, sustainable development, consumer protection and economic and social cohesion" (Dimitrov, N., 2018).

To achieve the goal of this article, we use a set of methods. The structured interview method is used to conduct qualitative research. It is a quantitative method of research and the responses can be summarized and compared both within the different groups of respondents and at different study periods. 200 tourists were interviewed - Bulgarians and foreigners aged between 18 and 60, who chose to rest in the Bulgarian mountain regions in the summer of 2016. Refugees in mountain regions travel for various reasons, namely by purpose of recreation, entertainment, travel with a healing purpose, practicing alternative tourism, participating in different types of events. Using the structured interview as a qualitative research method, the aim is to compare the responses of the different target groups.

Questions are related to the main reasons for visiting the mountain regions outside the peak season, the types of events that would be of interest for visiting outside the season and the reasons for extending tourists' stay. The answers to the questions give us information about the competitive advantages of Bulgarian mountain regions outside the season and what type of activity tourists prefer as a form of entertainment. Summarizing the results is a prerequisite for overcoming the existing lack of information, while being a basis for targeted management decisions.

## Articles

### Empirical Sociological Study

Of two tourist sites of type "Hotel 4\*" in a mountain resort

Type of establishments participating in the survey	Hotels 4* in mountain regions
Category	4*
Research problem	Identify the impact of events on consumer's choice to extend the tourist season
Object of research	Guests who visited the facilities in the period from 01. 08 to 25.08.2016
Subject of the survey	The impact of different events on consumer's choice to visit the destination and extend the tourist season
Purpose	Identify the main reasons for visiting Bulgarian mountain regions outside the peak season, the types of events that may be of interest for visiting outside the season and the possible reasons for extending the tourist stay
Major research issues	<p>An inquiry was conducted involving 18 questions to determine the significance of the types of events that may be the reason for the extension of the stay</p> <p>Gender, age group, position at the labor market, monthly wages.</p> <p>What are the main reasons to visit the mountain region as a tourist destination:</p> <p>Holiday; entertainment; business trip; medical treatment; practicing alternative tourism; attending an event.</p> <p>Which of the following is an advantage of the region:</p> <p>Culture; environment/ nature; history; infrastructure; industry; geography; sport events; entertainment.</p> <p>What kind of event would be interesting for you to visit:</p> <p>Cultural event; musical event; sport event; festival/ carnival; art event; political event; environmental event.</p> <p>Choose one of the reasons for extending your stay:</p> <p>Holiday; attending an organized event which you are interested in; event for improving your business skills.</p> <p>Choose a reason to visit the destination one more time:</p> <p>Sightseeing; attending an organized event which is important and interesting to you; holiday; would not visit again.</p> <p>Which events organized in the region are familiar to you?</p>
Major research hypotheses	<p>Hypothesis 1: The significance of event tourism for the development of tourism in Bulgarian mountain regions is still too low</p> <p>Hypothesis 2: Optimizing the organizational and product structure of the events and their organization outside the peak season will create conditions and opportunities for overcoming the seasonality in tourism in the Bulgarian mountain regions</p>
Method and procedure of data collection	<p>Descriptive method – direct individual survey.</p> <p>A 18-question questionnaire was used to determine the types of events that allowed you to extend the tourist stay, including questions about the reasons for the visit, the types of events of interest to visit, and reasons for visiting the destination again. The survey was conducted on site, taking an average of 5 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. After collecting the survey cards, the data is processed with SPSS Statistics software.</p>
Target population	In each of the selected hotels, 100 guests were surveyed at the end of their stay. The hotels are selected by category "4 stars" in Borovets and Bansko. The survey was conducted between 01.08 and 25.08.2016.
Size of the sample	<p>There were randomly selected 200 guests visiting the hotels, i.e. there is a simple random sample. Every day the guests of the hotel are interviewed and the questionnaires are given at the end of the stay. In case of reluctance to fill in the inquiry card, the next guest is selected.</p> <p>The results from the survey were collected for 20 days with the kind support of the staff of the establishments. As a courtesy of the end of the survey, they will be provided with the results to help them draw conclusions in the future reconstruction and modernization of the hotels.</p>
Research product	Detailed presentation of the survey data and summarizing information on the importance of organizing events as a factor in overcoming seasonality in tourism and extending tourist stays in the Bulgarian mountain regions.

## Survey results

The trend in the length of stay is that tourists travel more often in shorter periods of time. Stimulating the length of stay can be done in several ways - lower price, entertainment, organizing some kind of event that would generate interest in visiting by a tourist. There is a decrease in the duration of the trips and an increase in their intensity. Tourists travel an average of 1 to 4 days for rest and recreation, but much more often. One of the factors behind these results is the improvement of road infrastructure, which makes travel much shorter in duration. Because of the fall in fuel prices, we see a much more intense travelling.

The main type of tourism that develops in mountain regions in Bulgaria is winter ski tourism. Interviewees gave the following reasons besides this type of tourism for visiting the mountain regions outside the season:

- Balneology and recreational tourism;
- Visiting cultural attractions;
- Culinary tourism with authentic cuisine;
- Hunting and fishing;
- Mountaineering;
- Visiting festivals and various organized events.

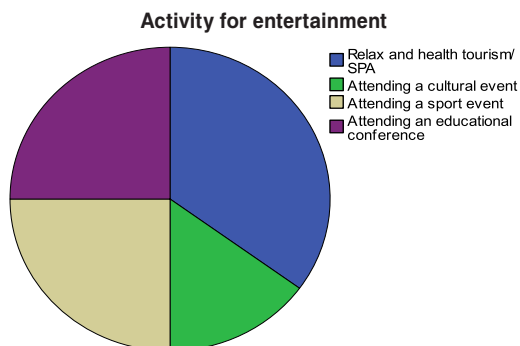
Contrary to expectations, many people prefer mountain areas to visit outside of the winter season. The opportunities for recreation during the summer months create the conditions for attracting more and more tourists and also the facilities in the mountainous regions and the possibility for organizing different events is a prerequisite for attracting tourists outside the peak season and providing unique experiences.

Interviewees point out a number of competitive advantages of the Bulgarian mountain regions outside the peak season, namely:

- Relatively low and competitive prices;
- Very accessible - close to international airports - Sofia and Plovdiv;

- Visiting eco paths, trekking and mountain climbing;
- The newly opened bike park in Borovets, which offers more than 20 km. routes for cycling tourism.

The question of length of stay leads us to what kind of activity tourists prefer as a form of entertainment. After the one-dimensional distribution following results:



**Figure 1:** A pie chart showing the preferred type of activity as a form of entertainment

Looking at the guests' preferences as a form of entertainment in the destination, we can claim that **relaxation and health tourism and spa tourism remain the most preferred form to rest**. Very close metrics include a visit to a cultural event, a sports event, and a conference for training purposes. This follows from the fact that more and more tourists prefer to visit a cultural or sport event during their holidays rather than a traditional holiday. Projections tend to grow more and the organization of events as a form of entertainment will gain more popularity to attract more and more tourists, especially in the off-season.

Visiting a sport event ranks second among the respondents' answers (56 of the participants mentioned that as a preferred form of entertainment, or 28% of all respondents). Adventure traveling and the search for authentic experiences grow among Bulgarian and international tourists. This type of travel is most preferred by people between

the age of 15 and 24. The group of tourists aged between 25 and 40 often prefer to relax in the mountains and those between 41 and 64 - a vacation in the nature combined with a visit to some sort of event.

The practice of walking tours is most popular among adolescents and tourists over 41, the same trend is observed when visiting a cultural event. Among the main factors in choosing a destination for "new" tourists is security.

The satisfaction of our holidaymakers is high and sustainable during the seasons. Tourists have no remarks about the majority of the holiday elements assessed. Mountain areas manage to meet most expectations and, as a result, generate attitudes to repeated visits.

In the case of foreign visitors, the factors that lead to the highest satisfaction are the natural resources, the relations with the local population, the accommodation, the local cuisine, the cultural and historical landmarks, and during the winter - the ski runs. Most important for the satisfaction of the holiday are the cleanliness, accommodation, service, attitude of the local population - characteristics whose improvement would lead to a growth in the country's estimates as a tourist destination.

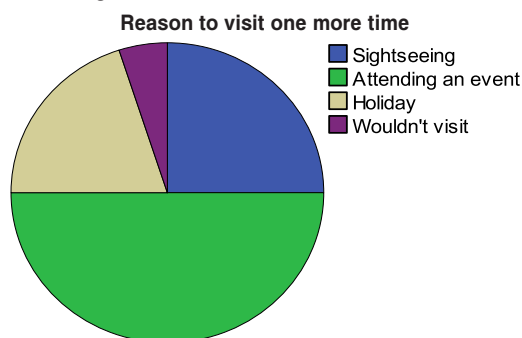
A source of frustration are the infrastructure and roads, high prices, poor service and attitudes, dirt, accessibility for people with disabilities, and during the winter the bad conditions for skiing and indoor sports are added to them. The lack of qualified staff, including management, is the hidden "underwater" for the tourist industry in Bulgaria, as it leads to problems with servicing, cleanliness and nutrition. Targeted and coordinated actions are needed at all levels to improve transport infrastructure. This topic has already been studied as it mentions that "over 840 million journeys were made in 2010 by different means of transport, with 79,86% of them being urban. About 65,05% of the passengers carried in recent years are

due to land transport, 64% of which – to the road transport and 4% - to the railway. Air transport provides 0,28% and the remaining over 34,65% falls to urban electric transport. A trend has been observed in recent years which increases the number of long-distance bus lines. The demand is mainly satisfied by bus services that are favored for shorter distances, and to a less extent, by railways that are preferred over long distances and by certain social groups, which have different benefits. Air transport is almost irrelevant to meeting the needs of domestic travel. There is an increase in the number of passengers transported by water transport from 80 thousand in 2006 to 166 thousand in 2010. International trips to and from Bulgaria are mainly served by car, bus and air transport" (Yordanov, D., 2014).

Gatovski has stated that "it should be emphasized that the built and functioning transport infrastructure does not have the necessary parameters and qualities in order to create the best conditions for transport services for tourism. The development and improvement of the road infrastructure are one of the main premises for integrating the national transport system with the European one. The effective implementation of the integration processes is inconceivable without the existence of certain road links, which should ensure the implementation of the internal and international transport. One of the main reasons for the slow and ineffective functioning of the reforms in Bulgaria is the "transport isolation" or the unsatisfactory condition of the transport links with the countries from the European Union. A crucial condition for overcoming this and acceleration of the economic processes is the development of the road infrastructure" (Gatovski, I., 2014).

*The motives that would stimulate foreigners are the low prices, the natural assets, the organization of different events. These are the elements that should be used in communication for Bulgaria as a tourist destination.*

The question concerning the reason for a second visit to the destination gives us the following results:



**Figure 2:** A pie chart showing the reasons for a second visit

It turns out that the visit to an organized event would be the main reason for the visit to the tourist destination. This answer is provided by 53% of the respondents. After that, the holiday is the reason for a second visit (23.5%) and the third is the more detailed examination of the region as a tourist destination (19%).

The next question pertains to the type of event that would be of interest to the respondents: "What kind of event would interest you to visit?" There may be more than one answer to this question.

After data analysis we get the following results:

**Table 1.** *Preferable type of event to visit*

\$Total Frequencies				
		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Event <sup>a</sup>	Cultural event	47	8.97%	8.97%
	Music event	125	23.85%	23.85%
	Sports Event	167	31.87%	31.87%
	Festival / carnival	133	25.38%	25.38%
	Event related to art	11	2.10%	2.10%
	Public and political event	15	2.86%	2.86%
	Natural event	26	4.96%	4.96%
Total		524	100.0%	524.0%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

It is clear from the table that the greatest interest in a visit would be the organization of a sports event (31.87%), followed by a festival / carnival (25.38%), a musical event (23.85%), a cultural event (8.97%), a natural event (4.96%), public and political (2.86%), and finally an art event (2.10%). The large percentage of interest in sporting events determines the need for organizing out-of-peak season to attract more tourists, which could overcome seasonality in tourism in Bulgarian mountain regions.

Regarding the musical events that rank third in the above mentioned answers, we can give as an example the folk fair "The Magic of Rila Mountain", which is held annually during the summer in Borovets and consists of folk performances, works of master craftsmen, applicants and creators, competition for authentic people, developed dances and Balkan dances, and a varied music program.

### Verification of statistical hypotheses

The statistical hypotheses refer to the characteristics of frequency distributions. They are the various types of mean (average arithmetic, median), scattering (range, mean arithmetic, mean square deviation, dispersion), asymmetry and excess.

When testing hypotheses using SPSS Statistics, it goes through the following steps:

- Determining the type of hypothesis check;
- Determination of the null and the alternative hypothesis;
- Defining the test variable and the grouping variable;
- Determining if the parameter is parametric (parameter test: if the test variable is measured on a strong scale and is normally distributed) or nonparametric (nonparametric test: if the tested variable is measured in a weak scale);
- Determining whether the sample is independent or it is related;
- The level of significance Sig level with error A is computed. If Sig level >A → with error

risk A is assumed the null hypothesis  $H_0$ . If the Sig level  $< \alpha \rightarrow$  with the risk of error A is assumed the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$ .

For this purpose we propose the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The significance of event tourism for tourism development in Bulgarian mountain regions is still too low.

Hypothesis 2: Optimizing the organizational and product structure of the events and their organization outside the peak season will create the conditions and opportunities for overcoming the seasonality in tourism in the Bulgarian mountain regions.

One of the questions in the questionnaire states: "Specify a possible reason for extending your stay." The task is to check whether it is possible to visit an organized event or an event to improve business skills to cause tourists to extend their tourist stay. We get the following output:

Test Statistics<sup>b</sup>

	Age group
Mann-Whitney U	10.000
Wilcoxon W	25.000
Z	-1.767
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.047
Exact Sig. [2* (1-tailed Sig.)]	.112 <sup>a</sup>

a. Not corrected for ties.

b. Grouping Variable: Possible reason for extending the tourist stay

Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0,047  $< \alpha = 0,05 \rightarrow H_1$  – based on data from this sample and with a 5% error risk, we have reason to reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative, i.e. the optimization of the organizational and product structure of the events and their organization outside the peak season will create conditions and opportunities for overcoming the seasonality on tourism in the Bulgarian mountain regions.

The two examined hypotheses are highlighted on the basis of the interrelationship

between seasonality and event tourism. Using the method of statistical analysis of the hypothesis, it was found that the organization of some kind of event would be of interest to the tourists and is a prerequisite for limiting and even overcoming the seasonality in the Bulgarian mountain regions. It should be stressed that the analysis of the results reveal not only the mutual relation between the two phenomena but also that the decrease in seasonality would have a positive impact on the local economy and in this sense the hypothesis is confirmed.

### Key findings, conclusions, development guidelines

The opportunities to turn Bulgarian mountain regions into visiting destinations throughout the seasons are good. The development of more unpopular specialized tourism types, including an event tourism is scarcely limited, mainly due to the lack of information. It would be good to look for options for organizing different events to build a vision of mountainous regions as a destination for "not massive" tourism. The most distinctive features that we can mention for an organized event are the opportunity to practice various sports in all seasons and by all age groups, the conditions for recreation in the area and the popularity of the product / service.

The survey results give us grounds to define sport events as a major opportunity to extend the season. This is because the possibilities that the mountain resorts can offer are unlimited and as an example we can give mountain tours, mountain bike or off road safari in Borovets, sport fishing, shooting or horseback riding, etc.

The conducted survey of consumer choice and attitudes of tourists was used to identify the opportunities for reducing seasonality and increasing tourist flow outside the active season. The results of the consumer attitudes analysis for the mountain resorts Bansko and Borovets give the following conclusions:

- Taking part in an event is a major reason for visiting the mountain region as a tourist destination, with most tourists traveling for leisure and preferring some kind of activity in addition to visiting the region;
- The strengths of the region are the main factors in choosing a tourist destination, nature and visit to sport events;
- There is a great interest in visiting a sports event or cultural event as a form of entertainment;
- There is a great interest in visiting a festival or some kind of musical event.

According to business, seasons affect tourists' visits to mountain areas. A major problem for hoteliers is the strong influence of seasonality during the summer season. Despite the fact that a significant number of them are studying the needs of tourists and the season they want to rest, as well as preferences for various entertainment programs, there is a lack of essential information from local authorities and communication between event organizers, tour operators and hoteliers. For a more complete use of the hoteliers' base, it is necessary to develop plans and programs for organizing some kind of events, mainly during the seasons with the least visitors. Most managers use tourist attractions and organize events in more than one season, but not all year round. Namely, through more in-depth analysis of the tourist market, the availability of investments and a good organizational structure can be ensured the year-round employment of tourist businesses in mountain areas.

It is important to reduce the impact of seasonality and increase visits by tourists outside the peak season by developing sample models to lay the foundation for it. Combining the traditional mass tourism with natural and climatic, historical and socio-cultural conditions allows the creation of a complex, resource-based product that will

best meet the needs of tourists and is crucial for overcoming seasonality in tourism.

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