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Table of Contents

1	The Essence of Green Participatory Budgeting Małgorzata SIEMIONEK-RUSKAŃ, Anna SIEMIONEK-LEPCZYŃSKA	601
2	Assessing Patterns of Tourism Seasonality in a Mixed Heritage Island Site Laura SHUMKA	608
3	Village-Based Waste Management System: The Study Case in Borobudur Sub-District, Indonesia Siti WAHYUNINGSIH, Tuti SUSILOWATI, Hadi ASHAR, Avry PRIBADI, Teguh SATYAJI, SUKAMSI, PURWATI, Dhanik ERNAWATI	616
4	Evidence of Climate Change Impact on Quantity of Rice-Planted Areas in Panama Ronny SUAREZ	626
5	Social, Cognitive and Traditional Motives in Christmas Market Tourism: A Case Study from Poland Anna MŁYNKOWIAK-STAWARZ, Robert BĘBEN	629
6	The Rise of Tennis Tourism: Motivations, Experiences, and Economic Impact of Traveling Fans Alexandru-Nicolae BANCIU, Irina-Valentina TUDOR, Cristina POPÎRLAN	640
7	The Potential for Sustainable Tourism Development in Small-Scale Regions: A Case Study of Sulejów Municipality Waldemar CUDNY, Justyna PALUCH	647
8	Economic Effects of Sports Events in Tourism. Case Study EURO 2024 Mădălina CONSTANTINESCU, Lorin UNGUREANU	664

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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an open access, peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences. The Journal publishes original research and seeks to cover a wide range of topics regarding environmental management and engineering, environmental management and health, environmental chemistry, environmental protection technologies (water, air, soil), pollution reduction at source and waste minimization, energy and environment, modelling, simulation and optimization for environmental protection; environmental biotechnology, environmental education and sustainable development, environmental strategies and policies.

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The Rise of Tennis Tourism: Motivations, Experiences, and Economic Impact of Traveling Fans

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Abstract: This study explores the rise of tennis tourism, examining the motivations, experiences, and economic impact of fans who travel to attend tennis events. Through a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, the study identifies three primary motivations for tennis tourism: the prestige of attending tournaments, emotional connections to prominent players, and the desire for cultural engagement in host cities. Results indicate that fans value not only the sport but also the unique atmosphere of the venues and opportunities for player interaction. Economic analysis reveals that tennis tourists contribute substantially to local economies through spending on accommodations, dining, and entertainment. This study highlights tennis tourism as a growing segment of the sports tourism industry and the unique characteristics of tennis fans, their travel patterns, and the economic implications of their participation in tennis events.

Keywords: sports tourism; tennis; survey; interview.

JEL Classification: C83; L83; Z32.

Introduction

The sports tourism industry has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, with sporting events attracting a significant number of travellers worldwide. Among the various sports that have gained popularity as a tourist attraction, tennis has emerged as a prominent contributor to this trend. Tennis events, such as ATP/WTA Tour events, have become magnets for dedicated fans who travel to witness the matches and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of these prestigious competitions (Fairley, 2009; Kanwal *et al.*, 2020).

Fans are attracted to attend the tennis events due to their desire to witness the highest level of tennis competition, featuring the world's best players. They often seek to experience the intensity and excitement of live matches, rather than relying solely on television or digital broadcasts (Brandão *et al.*, 2020). Tennis events offer a unique opportunity for cultural immersion and social interaction. Traveling fans can involve themselves in the host city's local culture, exploring its landmarks, cuisine, and entertainment offerings.

This paper aims to explore the rise of tennis tourism by examining the motivations that drive tennis fans to travel to these events, the unique experiences they seek and encounter, and the significant economic impact that this market has on host cities and countries. A combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews was applied to analyze the motivations, experiences, and economic impact of tennis tourism on traveling fans. Data collection will focus on two Romanian tennis events, particularly WTA 250 Transylvania Open Cluj-Napoca and

ATP 250 Tiriac Open Bucharest, as they attract significant numbers of international visitors and serve as prime examples of tennis tourism in Romania.

1. Literature Review

The phenomenon of sports tourism, particularly within niche markets such as tennis, has gained increasing attention from researchers over the past few decades. Tennis tourism, characterized by fans traveling to attend prestigious tennis tournaments and events, offers a unique blend of sporting entertainment, cultural engagement, and leisure activities.

Sports tourism has been broadly defined as the act of traveling to participate in or watch sports activities (Gibson, 1998). According to Weed and Bull (2009), sports tourism comprises both active participation (individuals engaged in sports activities) and passive participation (fans attending sporting events).

Higham and Hinch (2010) highlights that tennis tourism shares characteristics with other forms of sports tourism, particularly in terms of destination appeal, the influence of star athletes, and the timing of events. Tennis, as a global sport with a structured calendar of events, offers consistent travel opportunities that attract both casual and devoted fans (Preuss, 2007). Some countries have experienced as much as 25% of their tourism receipts from sports-related activities, emphasizing the substantial financial impact of this industry (Agrusa *et al.*, 2011). The expansion of professional and leisure sports leagues, as well as the increased popularity of active lifestyles, have contributed to the growth of sport tourism globally (Roche *et al.*, 2013).

Traveling tennis fans are a unique segment of the sports tourism market, with a strong attachment to the sport and a willingness to travel significant distances to attend events (Heydari *et al.*, 2021). The fans witness world-class tennis performances, experience the energy and atmosphere of the events, and potentially engage in tennis-related activities during their travels (Higham and Hinch, 2018), contributing to the substantial economic impact of tennis tourism on host cities and countries (Lee and Taylor, 2005). Chalip (2008) highlights that many tennis events are tied to local cultural experiences, allowing fans to engage with the destination beyond the sport.

Understanding the motivations (Wong and Tang, 2015) behind tennis tourism is essential for analyzing its appeal. Events, such as WTA 250 Transylvania Open Cluj-Napoca and ATP 250 Tiriac Open Bucharest, attract fans not only for the quality of the sport but also for the status associated with attending these high-profile events. Attending these tournaments is seen as an opportunity to experience the tradition and history of tennis firsthand (Getz, 2008). A significant motivational factor is the emotional connection that fans have with specific players (Peixoto and Sousa, 2021). Tennis is an individual sport, and many fans develop strong personal attachments to certain players, often leading them to travel across countries to support their favorite athletes. These emotional connections are reinforced by narratives of success and personal triumph, which are heavily promoted in media and marketing. Unlike in many team sports, tennis fans have closer interactions with players through autograph sessions, public practice courts, and media events. This direct interaction is often a significant part of the overall experience for traveling fans, contributing to a sense of personal connection with the sport and its stars.

Bazzanella *et al.* (2023) suggests that many fans travel to tennis events as part of a broader desire to explore new places, cultures, and experiences. Tournaments provide international tourists with the chance to combine tennis with sightseeing in a unique destination.

The literature on tennis tourism underscores the complex motivations of fans, their diverse experiences, and the significant economic impact of tennis events (Crompton, 1995; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Fans are motivated by prestige, emotional connection to players, and the desire for novel experiences, all of which shape their engagement with both the sport and the destination. Meanwhile, host cities stand to benefit economically from tennis tourism, particularly in terms of revenue generation and infrastructure development (Raisi *et al.*, 2020). However, further research is needed to explore how to maximize these benefits while ensuring equitable economic distribution across local communities (Perić *et al.*, 2019). The continued rise of tennis tourism, especially at iconic global events, indicates its growing significance within the broader sports tourism industry.

2. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to comprehensively analyze the motivations, experiences, and economic impact of tennis tourism on traveling fans (Pratt and Tolkach, 2018). This design allows for a nuanced understanding of both the motivations and experiences of tennis tourists, as well as the quantifiable economic contributions to host cities. Data collection will focus on tennis events, such as WTA 250 Transylvania Open Cluj-Napoca and ATP 250 Tiriac Open Bucharest, as these events attract significant numbers of international visitors and serve as examples of Romanian tennis tourism.

The Transylvania Open is a women's tennis tournament played on indoor hard courts that hosted around 7000 attendees per day on its fourth edition this year. Tiriac Open is a men's tennis tournament played on outdoor clay courts with about 3500 viewers per day.

The target population for this study is international and domestic tennis tourists who attended the two Romanian tournaments. We recruited participants who have travelled specifically to attend one of these events. To ensure a representative sample, recruitment focused on individuals from various demographic backgrounds, including age, gender, nationality, and frequency of attendance. The research was conducted in compliance with ethical guidelines for human subjects' research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of their right to withdraw at any time. All survey and interview data were anonymized to protect participants' privacy, and data were stored securely.

The sample included:

- Approximately 500 attendees surveyed at each of the events, resulting in a target total of 1000 responses for the survey.
- 50 individuals from the larger sample were selected for interviews based on their survey responses, capturing diverse motivations and experiences within tennis tourism.

Surveys were distributed on-site at the tournament's venues. The structured survey was administered to gather quantitative data on participants' motivations, travel behaviors, and economic contributions. They included:

- Demographic questions (age, gender, nationality);
- Travel motivations (emotional connection to players, novelty-seeking, interest in event prestige);
- Spending patterns (accommodation, dining, entertainment, shopping);
- Event experience satisfaction;
- Likelihood to repeat attendance at future tennis events.

A quantitative analysis was applied for the data collected through the survey. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify key motivational factors, spending patterns, and levels of event satisfaction. Factor analysis (Mulaik, 2010) was employed to group and interpret different motivations for attending tennis events, while regression analysis (Chicco *et al.*, 2021) was used to determine the relationships between fan demographics and spending behaviors.

Interviews lasted about 30 minutes, and were conducted on-site in a quiet setting area. Semi-structured interviews provided deeper insights into participants' personal experiences and emotional connections to tennis tourism. The interviews explored:

- Detailed motivations for travel;
- Favorite aspects of the event and any areas for improvement;
- Perceived cultural engagement with the host city;
- Comparison with other sports tourism experiences.

The qualitative analysis of the interview, using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019), was used to identify recurring themes related to motivations, emotional connections, and fan experiences. The qualitative data provided a rich contextual layer to the survey findings, highlighting individual nuances in fan experiences.

3. Results

A total of 1000 valid survey responses were collected from attendees across the WTA 250 Transylvania Open Cluj-Napoca and ATP 250 Tiriac Open Bucharest tournaments. Demographically, participants included 56% male, 43% female respondents and 1% prefer not to answer, with ages ranging from 18 to 65. 53% of the attendees were international travellers, with the largest group traveling from Europe (51%). Approximately 54% of respondents were repeat attendees, having visited other tennis tournaments in the past (35% attended one of the considered tennis tournaments).

Factor analysis conducted for the survey responses identified three primary motivations for tennis tourism:

- prestige of the event (35%): Attendees noted the significance of attending a tennis tournament as a motivating factor, with many associating it with a prestigious experience. The history, the tradition and the players participating in the tournament were cited frequently, especially among international attendees.
- emotional connection to players (41%): A significant portion of respondents highlighted their emotional connection to specific players as a motivation for travel. Fans of prominent athletes were willing to travel considerable distances to see them compete live.
- novelty and cultural experience (24%): Many attendees reported seeking the opportunity to combine tennis with local cultural experiences.

Survey results, represented in figure 1, showed high levels of satisfaction with the overall event experience, with 85% of participants rating their experience as *excellent* or *very good*. Thematic analysis of interviews revealed several recurring themes regarding the fan experience:

- event atmosphere: fans consistently described the atmosphere as electric and enjoyable, especially during high-stakes matches.
- access to players: many fans appreciated opportunities for closer interactions with players, such as autograph sessions and accessible practice courts. These experiences were frequently highlighted as unique aspects of tennis tourism that made their trips feel more personalized and memorable.
- cultural engagement: interviews and survey responses underscored fans' interest in engaging with the culture of the host city.

Figure 1. Tennis tourism survey results



Based on survey data, the study estimated economic impacts. Tennis tourists reported an average daily spending of approximately \$350, which includes accommodation, food, entertainment, and event-related purchases. International tourists, in particular, spent significantly more on accommodations and dining compared to local visitors. Data indicated a notable rise in hotel occupancy rates and restaurant revenue during tournament periods.

Interviews with fans revealed that many attendees intentionally extended their stays to explore more of the host city beyond the tournament, benefiting the local economy. Fans expressed that attending these events was not only a chance to watch tennis but also a way to experience the culture and landmarks of the host destination, amplifying the tourism impact of each event.

A substantial 62% of survey respondents indicated they would likely return to the same event in the future, highlighting tennis tourism's potential for long-term economic contributions. Fans who had attended multiple tennis tournaments over the years reported a strong loyalty to certain events and a sense of tradition. Interviewed fans explained that positive experiences encouraged them to revisit, particularly when the host city offered other attractions or cultural activities.

The results indicate that tennis tourism is driven primarily by event prestige, emotional connections to players, and the desire for cultural experiences. The economic impact analysis shows that tennis tourists make significant contributions to local economies, with substantial spending on accommodations, food, and other services. Furthermore, the high rate of repeat visits among tennis tourists highlights the enduring appeal of these events and the potential for sustained economic benefits in host cities.

The survey results indicate that the rise of tennis tourism is driven by a combination of factors, including the growing popularity of professional and leisure sports leagues, the increased interest in active lifestyles, and the unique characteristics of tennis fans as a distinct segment of the sports tourism market. These are briefly described in table 1.

Table 1. Tennis tourism - survey key findings

Finding	Description
Highly engaged and passionate tennis fans	Tennis fans who travel to attend tournaments are a highly engaged and passionate segment of the sports tourism market, driven by a strong attachment to the sport and a desire to witness world-class tennis performances, experience the energy and atmosphere of the events, and potentially engage in tennis-related activities during their travels.
Significant economic impact	The analysis of data and literature suggests that the global market for sports-related travel and tourism, including tennis tourism, has a significant financial impact on this industry, with some countries experiencing as much as 25% of their tourism receipts from sports-related activities.
Drivers of tennis tourism growth	The rise of tennis tourism can be attributed to the expanding popularity of professional and leisure sports leagues, the increased interest in active lifestyles, and the unique characteristics of tennis fans as a distinct segment of the sports tourism market.

As the demand for tennis-related travel continues to grow, host cities and event organizers will need to adapt their strategies to cater to the specific needs and preferences of this dedicated fan base, further enhancing the economic and cultural impact of tennis.

The research findings suggest that the growing popularity of tennis as a spectator sport, coupled with the allure of attending prestigious tournaments in iconic locations, has driven a significant increase in the number of travellers who are choosing to incorporate tennis events into their vacation plans. The data analyzed in this study indicates that tennis tourism is a rapidly expanding niche within the broader sports tourism industry, with far-reaching economic implications for host cities and countries.

Conclusions and Further Research

The study's reliance on self-reported spending data may lead to potential biases in economic impact estimates. Additionally, focusing on the Grand Slam tournaments may limit the establishment of findings to smaller tennis events. However, these limitations are addressed by triangulating self-reported data with official tourism statistics and selecting a diverse sample across multiple events.

This approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique characteristics and driving factors that contribute to the rise of tennis tourism, offering valuable insights for both academics and industry stakeholders.

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of tennis tourism, focusing on the motivations, experiences, and economic impacts associated with fan travel to major tennis events. The findings reveal that tennis tourism is driven by three primary factors: the prestige of attending iconic tournaments, emotional connections to athletes, and the desire for novel cultural experiences. Fans are not only motivated by the appeal of high-profile events but also by the unique, intimate atmosphere of tennis venues and the opportunities for direct interaction with players.

The experiences reported by tennis tourists highlight the importance of venue atmosphere, access to players, and the cultural offerings of host cities. Fans value not only the matches themselves but also the broader experience, including local cuisine, sightseeing, and cultural immersion. This demonstrates that host cities can enhance tourism value by emphasizing unique local attractions, which in turn can increase both visitor satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat visits.

From an economic perspective, tennis tourism provides substantial benefits to host cities, with fans contributing to local economies through spending on accommodations, dining, entertainment, and shopping. Additionally, the high percentage of repeat attendees underscores the long-term value of tennis tourism, as positive experiences often lead fans to return for future events, further amplifying the economic benefits.

These insights offer practical implications for both event organizers and host city tourism boards. To maximize the economic impact of tennis tourism, organizers can enhance fan experiences through improved player accessibility and memorable venue atmospheres. Host cities can complement these efforts by promoting local attractions and cultural experiences that enhance the overall value of attending a tennis event.

In conclusion, tennis tourism represents a growing and valuable segment of the sports tourism industry, one that brings economic growth and cultural exchange opportunities to host destinations. As international travel and sports tourism continue to grow, understanding and nurturing the unique motivations and experiences of tennis tourists will be essential for both event sustainability and broader tourism development. By leveraging the prestige and emotional connections of these internationally renowned tournaments, communities can unlock the full potential of tennis tourism to drive economic development and cultural exchange. This includes fostering a deep sense of tradition and loyalty among fans, who are eager to revisit the same events and explore the host destinations in-depth. Additionally, strategies that enhance the cultural value of these tournaments, such as

promoting local cuisine, landmarks, and other attractions, can amplify the overall tourism impact and create lasting memories for tennis enthusiasts. Ultimately, a multifaceted approach that caters to the diverse interests and expectations of tennis tourists can yield substantial and sustained benefits for the local economy and community. Future research could further explore tennis tourism's impact on smaller tournaments and consider strategies for balancing economic gains with equitable community benefits, ensuring that tennis tourism contributes positively to all facets of host communities by further integrating tennis events with broader tourism initiatives, attracting repeat visits, and amplifying the cultural value of these globally renowned tournaments.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Alexandru-Nicolae Banciu: Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Validation.

Irina-Valentina Tudor: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Data curation, Validation, Writing – review and editing, Visualization.

Cristina Popîrlan: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Validation, Writing – review and editing, Visualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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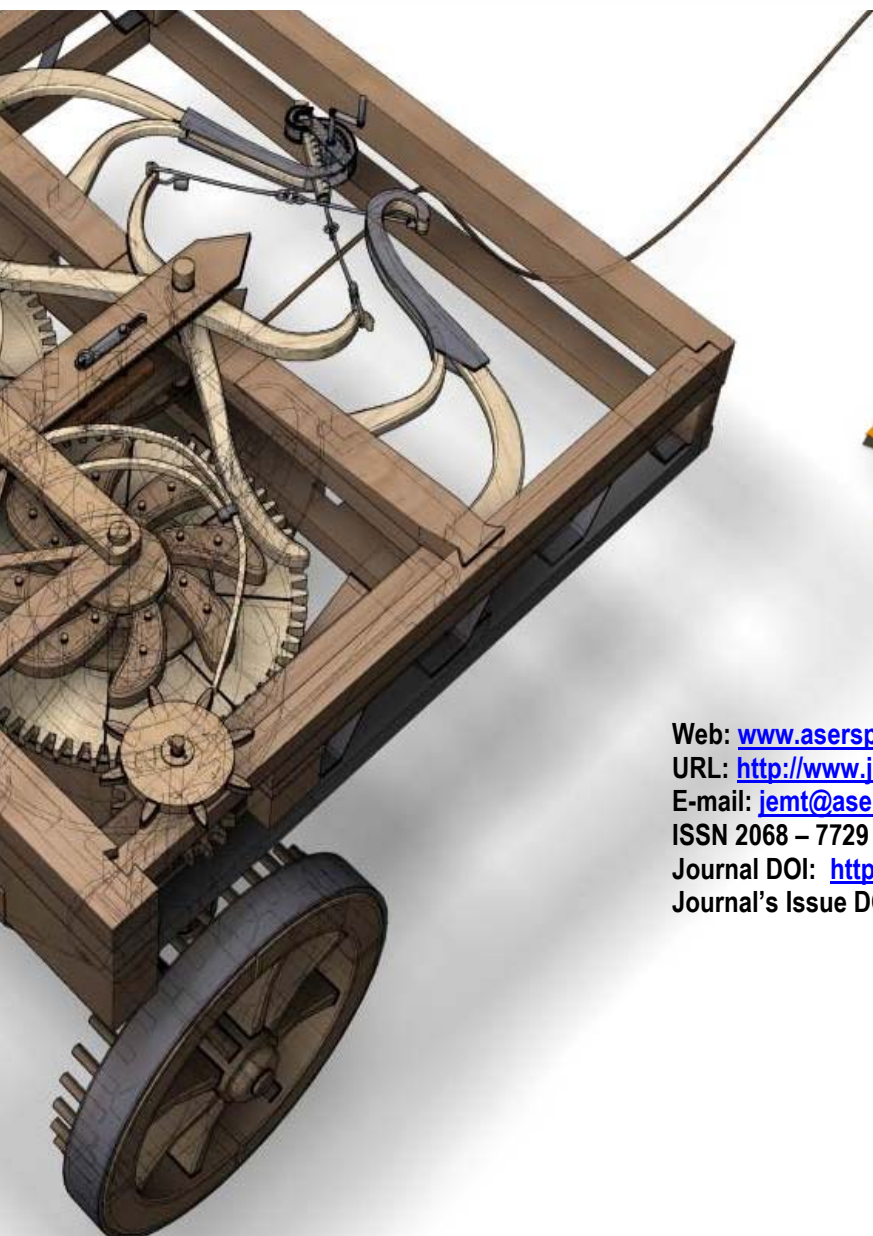
The authors declare that they have not used generative AI and AI-assisted technologies during the preparation of this work.

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