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## THE ROLE OF SPORTS TOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

*Aim.* The aim of the study was to analyze the role of sports tourism in the sustainable urban development of the city of Chisinau.

*Methods.* The subject of the research was the city of Chisinau, the priority urban destination in the development of sports tourism in the Republic of Moldova. The use of the method of analysis of specialized scientific and methodological literature, observation, induction and deduction allowed us to identify the role of sports tourism in sustainable urban development, the subsections on sustainable management regarding the preparation of the infrastructure of the city of Chisinau for hosting a large-scale sporting event, but also those functions of sustainable management of sports tourism at the level of urban areas (e.g.: the city of Chisinau). Thanks to the statistical-mathematical method, the number of international sporting events organized in Chisinau during 2021-2024 was highlighted, as well as the flow of tourists as a result of organizing these events.

*Results.* Due to the increasing attention of central and local authorities to the sustainable development of sports tourism, it has created the conditions for this form of tourism to have a substantial contribution to the number of international sports events organized, but also to the flow of participating tourists in the Chisinau urban area.

*Conclusions.* The application of evaluation tests on secondary school pupils in order to determine proactive and sedentary behavior, revealed significant differences in a repetitive way between 5th grade students and the rest of the pupils from 6th, 7th and 8th grade. Within the 7 tests used to evaluate the physical fitness. These significant differences appeared mostly due to age differences, the level of motricity but also because of somato-functional peculiarities.

*Keywords:* sports activities, socio-economic benefits, urban areas, sustainable development.

### Introduction

The concept of tourism has become more and more widespread in the tourism industry worldwide in recent years with their major sporting activities held in various locations both nationally and internationally. This fact is not a singular factor in the context in which sports tourism has recently registered, this time with the lessening of the effect of the pandemic, a significant increase, becoming more and more sought after among tourists willing to participate in sports events, or to practice a certain kind of sports (Mohammad et al., 2019). The current situation demonstrates that tourism activity has a special relationship with sport, sports tourism being one of the most remarkable forms of tourism currently growing, representing an essential part of the income from this sector globally (González-García et al., 2022). That is why, for the sustainable development of the tourism field and the strengthening of its contribution to society and the economy of urban areas, many cities, including Chisinau, have made sports tourism a priority in the approved policies and strategies, trying with the support of the state authorities, organizations non-governmental organizations, investors and development partners, to intervene in this regard to increase the contribution of sports tourism to the sustainable development of the city (Livandovschi, 2015). In this sense, it is important that sustainable urban development through sports tourism include a range of aspects that will be able to ensure this fact, such as: human resources, the economic and social potential of urban areas, the available sports infrastructure, etc. (Platon, 2016)

At the same time, the promotion of sport and sports tourism is currently a strategic objective of development at the local level in many countries, and the need to support and promote certain sports events that ensure the sustainable development of urban areas is a challenge for administration (Vargáné Csobán & Serra, 2014). In this sense, the sustainable development of urban areas involves various aspects of them, and the organization of sports events not only helps to stimulate urban development, but also effectively promotes the active participation of residents in the preparation, organization and conduct of the sports event (Xiang et al., 2023), ensuring an integrated development of the city based on the use of the available potential (Alexander & Cheremshanov, 2012).

### Objectives

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of sports tourism in the sustainable urban development of the city of Chisinau in the last four years.

Research objectives:

1. Analysis of the specialized scientific-methodical literature regarding the contribution of sports tourism in sustainable urban development.

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2. The role of sports events organized in the last four years in the urban development of the city of Chisinau.
3. Arguing the need to develop sports tourism for a sustainable urban development of the city of Chisinau.

### Materials and methods

To carry out the study, it was necessary to use the following research methods: the analysis of the specialized scientific-methodical literature, the observation method, the induction and deduction method, the statistical-mathematical, tabular and graphic analysis.

### Results

In recent years, while some cities are trying to reduce the flow of tourists due to excessive crowding and disrupting the way of life of the locals, others are establishing priority directions for the development of the tourism sector, emphasizing various forms of tourism, which will ensure a sustainable development of urban areas. In this sense, sports tourism, for some urban areas in recent years, has become a priority able to: rationally use the existing urban resources, offering the possibility of maintaining the ecology of the areas and preserving their natural habitats; preserve the socio-cultural values of urban communities; guarantees positive effects from an economic point of view, which facilitates sustainable urban development, thus ensuring jobs, obtaining financial benefits as a result of the organization of sports events, reducing poverty among the inhabitants of urban areas, developing tourist services, accommodation, transport and leisure etc. (Fig.1) This is why one of the directions for the sustainable development of urban areas has become the organization of large-scale sports events that can ensure the solution of the ecological, economic and social problems of the destinations that hold these events. The system of sustainable urban development includes a set of indicators, which highlight the development of cities after the organization of sports events, such as: the number of sports buildings built, the population practicing various sports events, economic development, etc. (Gureeva, 2019).

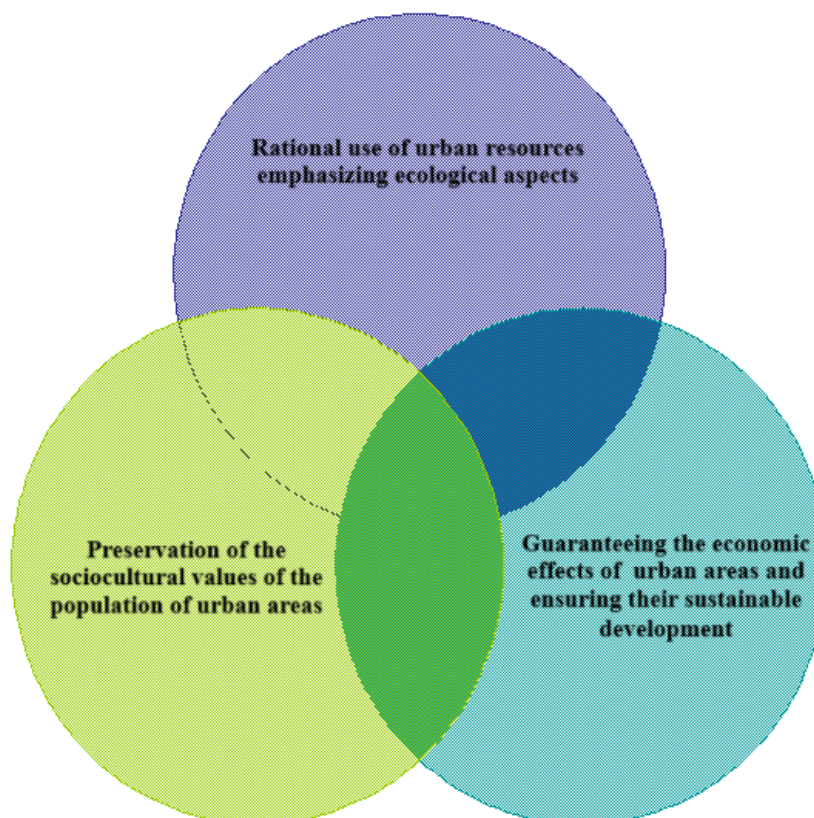


Figure 1. The role of sports tourism in sustainable urban development

In the last four years in the Republic of Moldova, but especially in the city of Chisinau, various sports events took place, which made a substantial contribution to its sustainable development. Thus, over the course of four years, various international events took place that included various type of sports: wrestling, canoeing, weightlifting, rhythmic gymnastics, rugby, football, etc. (Figure 2).

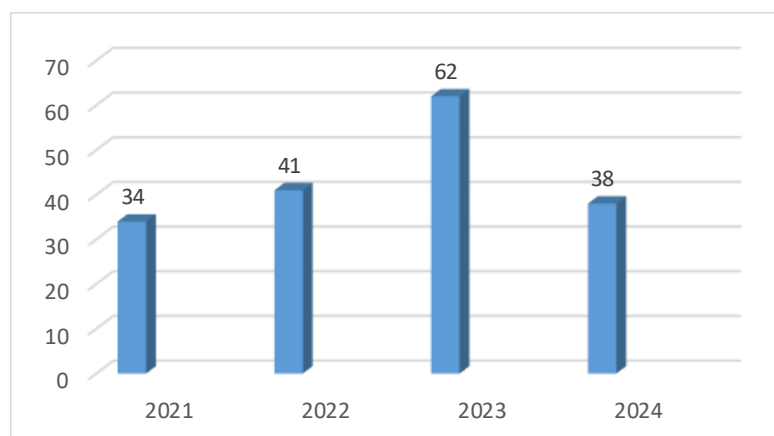


Figure 2. The number of international sports events organized in the city of Chisinau in the period 2021-2024

From figure 2 we can see that the number of international events organized in the city of Chisinau in the last four years is increasing except for the year 2024 when we have a decrease in them at the average level compared between the years 2021 and 2022. The effect is largely because of some international sporting events were large, and this situation required additional financial efforts, which led to their reduction.

All the international sports events organized in Chisinau in recent years led to an increase in the flow of tourists (Figure 3).

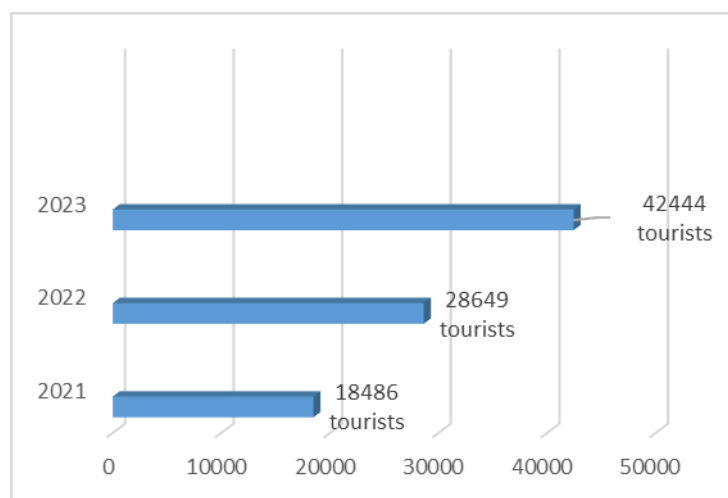


Figure 3. The flow of tourists in Chisinau in the period 2021-2023

Thus, it can be mentioned that the international sports events organized in Chisinau in recent years have influenced the total number of tourists in the receiving tourism from 18,486 in the year 2021 to 42,444 in the year 2023. This fact is due to the construction of the sports infrastructure (eg: Arena Chisinau; Beach soccer arena in Chisinau, etc.), which once completed could host large-scale sports events capable of ensuring the sustainable development of the city of Chisinau, ensuring a constant flow of tourists (athletes, coaches, technical staff, supporters, etc.). Image 1.



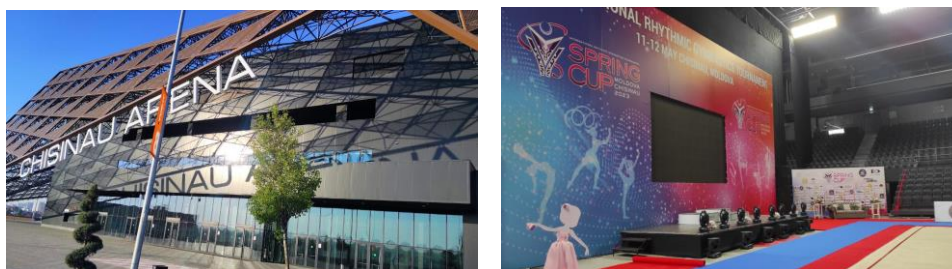


Image 1. The international rhythmic gymnastics tournament organized in Chisinau organized May 11-12, 2023, which brought together over 400 athletes from various countries

It is not to be neglected the annual organization of running races with various connotations in the city of Chisinau, in which athletes, amateurs and lovers of movement from the country and abroad participate, their number reaching 10,000 participants, who use public transport services, local gastronomy, accommodation services, etc. (Image 2).

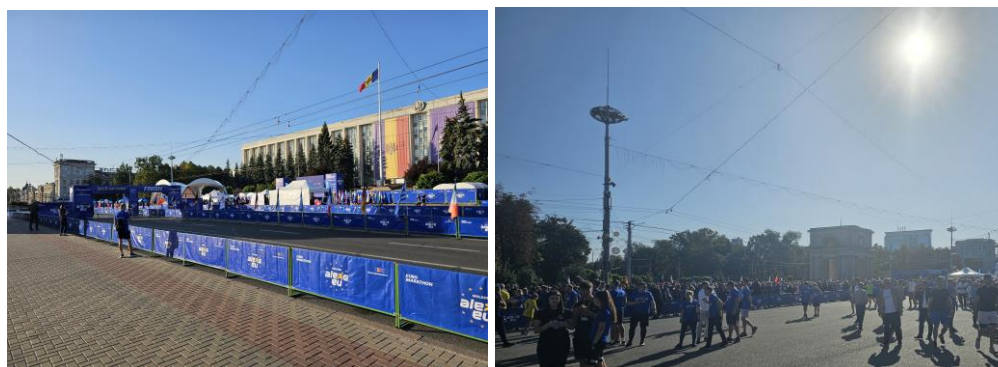


Image 2. Running races organized in the city of Chisinau

At the same time, in recent years, the Chisinau city hall pays special attention to the promotion, development and organization of sports events, which ensure the practice of sports by the city's inhabitants. In this context, the local authorities promote a healthy way of life and sports values within the "Sports Chisinau Festival", which attracts every year more and more people who want to practice various sports, such as: boxing, gymnastics, kayak-canoeing, karate, football, volleyball, basketball and various interactive activities with a sports aspect. Thus, the sustainable development of the city of Chisinau implies the improvement and development of the conditions for the development of sports activities, the elaboration of sports promotion programs in the context where at the present time in the municipality of Chisinau approximately 15-20% of the population practices sports.

Often, sports tourism on an international scale focuses more on national self-presentation than on the development of individual cities.

Carrying out large-scale sporting events in Chisinau is a rare opportunity in the life of the city to attract unprecedented private investment and funding from the state budget for city projects, launching long-term economic effects from invested funds, increasing employment and consumption, as well as the development of the tourism sector.

Organization of major sporting events in Chisinau is a unique opportunity to implement the city's strategic development plans and long-term future view in the shortest possible time. The sports and events marketing department is one of the most modern in marketing communication.

The municipality of Chisinau successfully uses event marketing, including various large-scale events in its economic development strategies. In implementing its marketing strategy, the municipality of Chisinau resorts to event marketing, the popularity of which is growing rapidly. After the successful implementation of a number of mass sports competitions, sports and event marketing is widely used.

Thanks to an effective management of the city authorities and the organizations that organize mass sports events, they become one of the most important tools for outlining the image of Chisinau as a sports city in Moldova. In order to form the desired image of the city, specialists from various fields are involved, especially in the field of management, marketing, sports, who are interested in the development of the Chisinau. Thus, for five years, the city has been hosting the annual Chisinau Marathon, the main objective of which is to position Chisinau as the "sports capital" - a city of sports, of active people.

Consequently, there is no way to guarantee that the sports events that have been successfully held in the city of Chisinau will have the same positive effect on another city in the Republic of Moldova.

Infrastructure can vary significantly by territory. Sometimes environmental changes as a result of sporting events etc. can have a major impact on the development of the city. Mass sports events affect various areas that are directly related to the infrastructural development of the city (Figure 4).

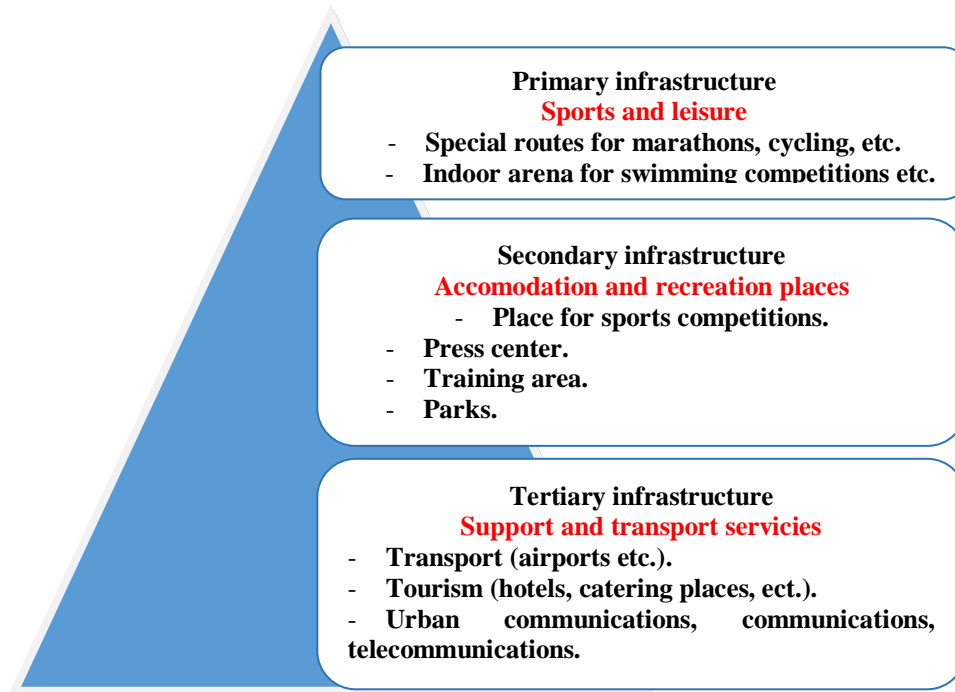


Figure 4. Subsections regarding the sustainable management of the infrastructure preparation of the Chisinau for hosting a large-scale sports event

### Discussions

Thus, the manifestation of sports tourism at the level of an urban area requires the city to fulfill four basic functions: housing/accommodation, work (the human resources that ensure the sports event), recreation and transport (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Functions of a sustainable management of sports tourism at the level of urban areas (eg. the city of Chisinau)

This is why in recent years the authorities of the Chisinau municipality have been paying special attention to the development of sports tourism for a sustainable urban development. Or, this fact implies the need to develop the existing accommodation infrastructure, attract labor to the sector, develop recreation and leisure areas and the city's transport network to facilitate the movement of athletes and those who accompany them.

Research shows that sports tourism in the urban area of Chisinau has registered significant progress in recent years, also valid for other urban destinations internationally according to the authors (Hritz & Ross, 2010), where this form of tourism represents one of the fastest growing market segments in the tourism industry. An example of this is Indianapolis, Indiana, where sports tourism has received increased attention for its social, environmental, and economic impact, as well as benefits to the city, such as increased cultural identity and opportunities for social interaction, also valid for the Chisinau urban area.

### Conclusions

The post-pandemic period has shown that sports tourism has recovered, and its role on sustainable urban development has become even more evident for some cities, which have established effective policies and strategies in this regard. Thus, in the last four years, the city of Chisinau has demonstrated that it can and is ready for sports tourism to become a form of tourism capable of influencing the local economy in the medium and long term, with an emphasis on preserving socio-cultural values, rationally using available resources and taking into account calculate the ecological aspects. In this sense, it is proven by the number of tourists that increased from 18,486 in 2021 to 42,444 in 2023, which makes me affirm that sports tourism also made a substantial contribution to this increase, a fact supported by the participation of an impressive number of athletes foreigners at various organized sports events, such as: international running races, international tournaments at various sports events, European championships, etc.

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