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A Novel Study on the Impact of a Small Scale Sport Event on Local Economy and Local Communities

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Abstract: Modern societies increasingly recognise the need to redefine development models by incorporating both social and economic dimensions to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth. This paper examines the intersection of sports tourism and regional economic development, presenting a case study of the Thanasis Stamopoulos Half-Marathon, an annual event held in the prefecture of Trikala, Greece. The study highlights the event's economic and cultural contributions, focusing on its ability to create and preserve jobs, promote local culture, and stimulate the consumption of regional products. The research methodology included focus groups with seven members of the organising committee, statistical analysis of event participation, and a review of relevant literature. Key findings revealed that the event, which attracts significant national

participation, has a measurable economic impact on the cities of Trikala and Kalambaka. In the most recent edition, 1,572 athletes completed the half-marathon, 1,313 participated in the 5 km race, and 95 athletes with disabilities took part, highlighting its inclusivity and broad appeal. This paper highlights the novelty of examining a small-scale, region-specific sports event as a driver of local development. The findings demonstrate that such events not only foster community cohesion and cultural identity but also serve as practical tools for economic revitalisation. The insights gained can inform policymakers, event organisers, and regional stakeholders in leveraging sports tourism to achieve sustainable regional growth.

Keywords: local economy, local communities, local development, sport event

Introduction

Increasingly, those who adopt the view that modern societies must redefine their approach to local development are creating and implementing a new development model (Goulas, 2020; Maennig, 2017; Vargáné Csobán and Serra, 2014). It is also crucial for this new model to touch both the social and economic dimensions. Sports tourism has become a powerful driver of both economic and social development. Small-scale sports events, often overlooked in comparison to mega-events like the Olympics, can have a significant impact on local economies and communities. These events provide opportunities for economic stimulation, community engagement, and social cohesion (Gibson et al., 2012; Gulak-Lipka & Jagielski, 2020; Müller, 2015). By examining the economic benefits, social impacts, and potential challenges, a clearer understanding of their value to local stakeholders emerges. This can be achieved by considering crucial tools for development, culture and sports activity, combined with the historical memory of different societies (Goulas et al., 2017). This paper presents the initial steps involved in developing a model that addresses the sport tourism sector and its connection to regional economic development. The creation of jobs, the preservation of existing jobs, the development of local culture, and the contribution to the consumption of local products are all factors that are inextricably linked to the positive effects of tourism at a global level. Sports tourism generates revenue by attracting participants and visitors who spend on accommodations, food, entertainment, local attractions, and local markets. This paper focuses on the opportunities offered by sports tourism for revitalising areas and the contribution of local sports events to the local economy.

Research Problem

This research paper examines the impact of sporting events organised in the prefecture of Trikala, with the cities of Kalampaka and Trikala involved, on both social and economic levels. The originality of this work lies in its focus on the social and economic impacts of smaller-scale sporting events in a specific destination. In contrast, international research primarily examines the economic impacts of major events in urban areas. In addition, the use of primary data from field research to clarify the views of the organising committee strengthens the originality. Moreover, the profile of the event participants is being analysed. The aim is to understand the social and economic impacts, as

these elements can help fill the gap that exists when it comes to hosting smaller-scale sporting events in smaller cities. The primary research problem to be explored in this study is the overall impact of a specific small-scale sports event on the local economy and society of the two municipalities involved.

Research Focus

The present research focuses on the organisation of the Thanasis Stamopoulos half-marathon in the prefecture of Trikala, Thessaly, Greece, which was held for its 15th year. The start of the race is located in the central square of the city of Kalambaka, and the finish is in the central square of the city of Trikala. Both cities are located in the central Greece, in the Region of Thessaly. The half marathon Th. Stamopoulos and the parallel races of 5 km and 1000 meters constitute an important sporting event with national scope and participation, having a significant impact on the economies of the two cities, Trikala primarily but also Kalambaka. To measure the impact of the specific sports event, focus groups were conducted with members of the organising committee to explore the factors that influenced the event's impact. Specifically, the focus groups involved the seven members of the organising committee to investigate the impact of the specific race on the two municipalities along the route. Also, the statistics of the half marathon and the 5 km parallel race were analysed and presented. Regarding the sample, in the half marathon, 1,572 athletes finished, and in the 5 km race, 1,313 athletes finished. Additionally, 95 athletes with disabilities completed the 5 km race. Additionally, a literature review was conducted. The research results from the specific match confirmed the multiple benefits for the two municipalities, Kalambaka and Trikala, both economically and culturally.

Research Aim and Questions

Based on the opinion that a small-scale sports event, such as the Thanasis Stamopoulos Half-Marathon, can be considered a new development model for the local economy and community, this research study aims to measure its impact. Can a small-scale sports event involving two cities become a crucial factor in creating a specific tourist flow? What is the impact of that specific event on the two cities, Kalampaka and Trikala?

Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of small-scale sports events on local economies and communities. By synthesising existing studies and theoretical perspectives, this review establishes the foundation for a novel investigation into the interplay between these events and their socioeconomic and cultural outcomes.

Small-scale sports events, often overshadowed by mega-events in scholarly research, offer unique opportunities for communities to harness their potential benefits while minimising the challenges associated with large-scale events. These events can stimulate economic activity through increased tourism, local spending, and job creation (Gibson, 2013). Simultaneously, they foster social cohesion, civic pride, and enhanced community identity, particularly when community engagement is prioritised (Misener & Mason, 2006). However, the extent and nature of these impacts

vary significantly depending on factors such as event size, type, location, and the level of community involvement (Smith & Costello, 2009).

Despite the growing body of literature, research in this area is often fragmented, with limited focus on the context-specific outcomes of small-scale events (Taks et al., 2013; Taks et al., 2014). Moreover, the balance between economic benefits and potential challenges, such as environmental degradation, resource allocation, or social disruption, remains underexplored (Higham & Hinch, 2018). This literature review aims to address these gaps by critically examining key findings and identifying trends, patterns, and areas for future research.

The ultimate objective is to inform the design and execution of the proposed novel study, ensuring it builds upon existing knowledge while offering fresh insights. By doing so, this research aims to contribute to the development of strategies that maximise the positive impacts of small-scale sports events on local economies and communities while addressing potential drawbacks. This review serves as a crucial step in framing the research questions, methodology, and theoretical framework for the study, ensuring its relevance and rigour in the broader field of event and community studies.

Small-scale sports events, such as marathons, half-marathons, trail running events, 10 K races, local football tournaments, or cycling races, play a significant role in stimulating local economies. Unlike mega-events, these events typically require lower investments and infrastructure development, making them accessible and financially viable for smaller towns and cities (Goulas et al., 2017).

For small-scale sports events, there are several economic contributions. Studies have shown that small-scale sports events contribute to local economies primarily through direct visitor spending on accommodation, dining, transportation, and retail. For instance, Agha and Taks (2019) highlighted that small-scale events often generate a higher return on investment for local communities because they are less resource-intensive than large-scale events. Moreover, such events encourage local participation, reducing the need for external funding.

The economic benefits of these events extend beyond immediate spending. The multiplier effect describes how an initial influx of money (e.g., from visitors) circulates through the local economy, benefiting various sectors. Gibson (2005) noted that small-scale events could amplify these effects when organised in partnership with local businesses, fostering sustainable economic growth.

While mega-events like the Olympics often attract international tourists and large-scale investments, their economic impact on local communities can be uneven. In contrast, small-scale events tend to focus on regional visitors, ensuring that benefits are more localised and inclusive (Higham, 2007).

Moreover, small-scale sports events have social implications for local communities and the citizens involved. It is a fact that these small-scale sports events foster a sense of identity, pride, and cohesion within the communities involved. Many researchers who studied the events from the

perspective of residents have recognised the importance of accepting the event and the participation of the local community in it (Cralk, 1998; Gursoy et al., 2004; Taks, 2013; Goulas et al., 2017). Chalip (2008) argued that sports events can strengthen community identity by providing residents with a shared experience. Hosting an event often leads to increased volunteerism and civic engagement, creating opportunities for residents to interact, network, and collaborate. According to Picard and Robinson (2006), a society or place is changed, shaped, and upgraded by the presence of an event and is naturally greatly affected. Another aspect is the social inclusion. Residents of host cities can benefit from small-scale sports events for other social purposes (Muiruri Njoroge et al., 2017). Small-scale sports events, according to Karkatsoulis et al. (2005), strengthen residents' sense of pride in their place, promoting the feeling of 'belonging', while at the same time, they contribute to the building of essential values within society, such as international trust, friendship, and cooperation.

Small-scale sports events, such as marathons, trail races, local football matches, and cycling tours, are increasingly recognised for their dual role in stimulating economic growth and fostering social cohesion. Unlike mega-events, these events are more accessible and cost-effective, requiring minimal infrastructure investments, which makes them particularly appealing to smaller towns and cities. There are numerous studies on sport tourism that focus on the economic and socio-economic impacts of events on tourism and local communities (Kwiatkowski & Konecke, 2017; Taks et al., 2011).

From an economic perspective, small-scale sports events drive direct spending in the local economy. According to Duglio and Beltramo (2017), small-scale sports events may have a positive impact on the host community in terms of both economic and social aspects. Participants and spectators contribute to local businesses through expenditures on accommodation, dining, transport, and retail. The multiplier effect ensures that this influx of funds benefits multiple sectors within the community, promoting long-term economic resilience. Recent studies emphasise that these events often generate a higher return on investment for local communities due to their resource-efficient nature. When partnered with local enterprises, such events amplify economic benefits while supporting sustainable growth models (Malchrowicz-Moško & Poczta, 2018; Moyle et al., 2018).

Socially, small-scale sports events play a crucial role in enhancing community pride, identity, and engagement. These events offer platforms for residents to interact and collaborate, thereby fostering a strong sense of belonging and connection. Active participation, whether as athletes or volunteers, encourages community involvement and strengthens social bonds, promoting a culture of active citizenship (Misener & Mason, 2006).

Such events can also become significant cultural highlights, reflecting local heritage while simultaneously offering a platform for fostering international trust and cooperation. By bringing together participants and spectators from diverse backgrounds, these events create opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, and they also provide benefits such as cultural pride and community cohesion (Goulas et al., 2017; McCartney, 2005; Ritchie and Smith, 1991). As a result, small-scale

sports events are not only crucial in the economic development of host cities but also in enhancing their social fabric, encouraging both local and international social integration and cooperation (Fernández-Martínez et al., 2022).

The integration of digital platforms has further enhanced the organisation, participation, and impact of small-scale events. Social media and digital marketing increase visibility and engagement, attracting participants from broader regions while maintaining a focus on local benefits. Many academics underline in their studies the relationship between the destination image and the behaviours of participants in sports events (Ninomiya et al., 2019). Moreover, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) claim that the existing literature suggests that event and destination images can influence sport tourism behaviours. The emphasis on sustainability in recent years has also shaped how these events are organised, encouraging environmentally friendly practices and reducing waste. As a result, small-scale sports events are evolving into holistic tools for regional development, addressing economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Goulas, 2020, 2024; Malchrowicz-Moško & Poczta, 2018).

Despite growing interest in small-scale sports events, key research gaps persist, highlighting the need for further exploration. Many existing studies focus on the economic impacts of these events, such as short-term boosts in local tourism, business activity, and employment (Goulas, 2020; Goulas et al., 2017; O'Brien & Chalip, 2008). However, there is a lack of research on their long-term economic effects, including sustained growth, business resilience, and equitable distribution of benefits among local stakeholders (Getz, 2008). Additionally, the indirect economic impacts, such as shifts in consumer behaviour and investments in infrastructure, remain underexplored. In addition, there is a great deal to learn about the importance of gastronomy in attracting tourists (Goulas et al., 2020).

On the social front, small-scale sports events are often credited with fostering community cohesion, enhancing local identity, and promoting volunteerism (Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012). However, these claims are primarily based on qualitative studies that may lack generalizability. There is also limited understanding of how social impacts differ across various groups within a community, such as youth, marginalised populations, or long-term residents versus newcomers (Fredline et al., 2003).

A significant gap exists at the intersection of economic and social outcomes. While studies occasionally acknowledge trade-offs—such as economic benefits leading to social disruption or inequity—there is a lack of systematic integrative research exploring these dynamics (Preuss, 2007). Furthermore, few studies consider how event size, type, or location moderates these impacts. This leaves unanswered questions about whether smaller events can consistently deliver positive outcomes without significant risks.

Ultimately, environmental impacts are primarily overlooked in discussions of small-scale sporting events. Although sustainability is a growing priority in event management, the environmental costs or benefits of such events—particularly in terms of resource consumption and waste generation—are rarely addressed (Collins et al., 2009). Research indicates that such events can

have significant adverse environmental effects, challenging the perception that they are inherently sustainable (Mchunu 2021). However, some studies suggest that small-scale events may offer environmental benefits compared to more significant events, as they often utilise existing infrastructure and resources more efficiently (Gibson et al., 2012). Additionally, the environmental sustainability of these events can be enhanced through strategic planning and management, such as implementing comprehensive event portfolios that consider environmental impacts (Lanzendorf & Margaryan, 2024). Furthermore, Lohana et al. (2023) underline the positive and significant relationship between the environment, culture, sports tourism and the economy.

This study seeks to fill these gaps by adopting a multidisciplinary approach to analyse the economic, social, and environmental impacts of small-scale sports events. By doing so, it aims to provide actionable insights for event organisers, policymakers, and community leaders.

Research Methodology

General Background

The Thanasis Stamopoulos Half Marathon is an annual running event organised in memory of the runner Thanasis Stamopoulos. It is one of the largest half marathons in Greece, attracting thousands of runners from Greece and abroad, including many elite Greek athletes. The main organiser of the event is the local runners' club, Trikala Runners Club. The first edition of the event was organised back in 2008, and since then, it gained recognition and massive participation. In the first edition, a total of 330 runners participated in the event. The second and third editions had approximately 200 participants (trikalahalfmarathon.org). Since then, every edition has featured two primary races: the half-marathon and the 5K race. These two races will be studied. Moreover, a 1000m race for kids is also organised, but the present research paper will not be studied or analysed. The 15th edition of the running event was held on March 10, 2023 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Th. Stamopoulos Half Marathon, Kalampaka – Trikala, Official Logo



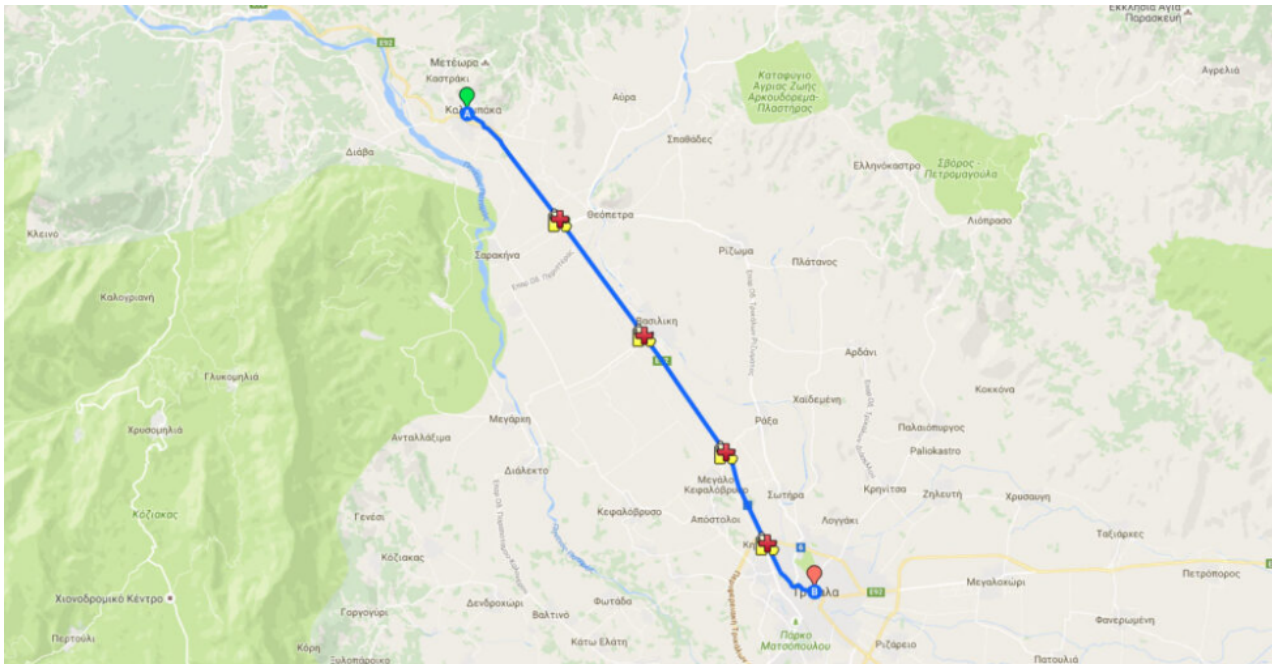
Source: Events official website <https://www.trikalahalfmarathon.org>

Participants

The Thanasis Stamopoulos Half Marathon features two primary races, as mentioned earlier. For the 15th edition of 2023, the half-marathon had 1,572 finishers, and the 5 km race had 1,313 finishers. Additionally, 95 disabled athletes completed the 5 km race. Those participants were studied, and focus groups with the organising committee were conducted. As already mentioned, the start of the half marathon is in the city of Kalampaka, and the finish is in the city of Trikala (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Th. Stamopoulos Half Marathon, Kalampaka – Trikala, the Rout of the Half Marathon



Source: Events official website <https://www.trikalahalfmarathon.org>.

Instrument and Procedure

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the impact of a small-scale sports event on the local economy and communities, a mixed-methods approach was employed. This approach combines qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to gain a deeper understanding of both the economic and social outcomes of the event. The two primary methods used were focus groups and participant analysis.

A focus group session was conducted with the seven members of the organising committee of the Th. Stamopoulos Half Marathon. This method was chosen to capture in-depth, qualitative insights about the planning, execution, and perceived outcomes of the event. The focus group aimed to explore the organisers' perspectives on the following key areas:

- The economic impact of the event on local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and retailers.
- Social outcomes, such as community engagement, volunteer involvement, and local pride.
- Challenges faced during event organisation, including resource allocation and stakeholder cooperation.
- Strategies employed to ensure long-term benefits for the community.

The focus group session was conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing participants to engage in open discussions while staying aligned with the research objectives. Notes were taken, and the session was recorded for later transcription and analysis. The results provided qualitative

data on the event's perceived contributions to the local economy and community dynamics, as well as areas for improvement.

The finishers of the running event were analysed according to the official results of the event. This method was used to collect key information about:

- Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, place of residence) to analyse patterns and trends.
- City of origin of the finishers.

The organising committee of the event also assisted with the profile of the event's finishers, hosting a special session regarding the data exported from the official results.

An external observational analysis was also performed on event-day activities. Observations focused on crowd dynamics, local business activity, and volunteer involvement. This method offered real-time insights into the tangible economic impact (e.g., crowded restaurants and local vendors' sales) and community engagement during the event.

By triangulating data from the organising committee, event participants, and direct observations, this study ensures a holistic understanding of the event's impact. This combined approach strengthens the reliability and validity of the findings while addressing both economic and social research objectives.

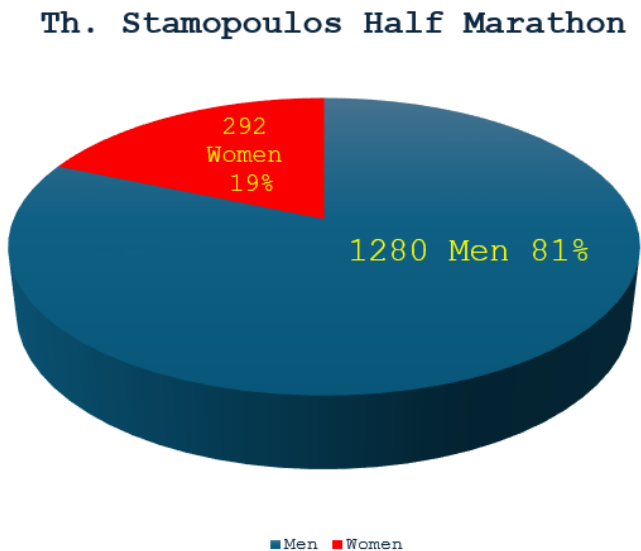
Results

For the present research, focus groups were conducted with the organisation committee to study and present the impact of the running event on the local economy and community—furthermore, the statistics of the 15th Th. The Stamopoulos half-marathon and the 5K race were analysed to understand the participants' profiles better.

First, the demographics of the two races will be presented. Figure 3 illustrates the demographics of the half marathon. On the half marathon, the majority of the finishers are men.

Figure 3

Demographics of the Half Marathon

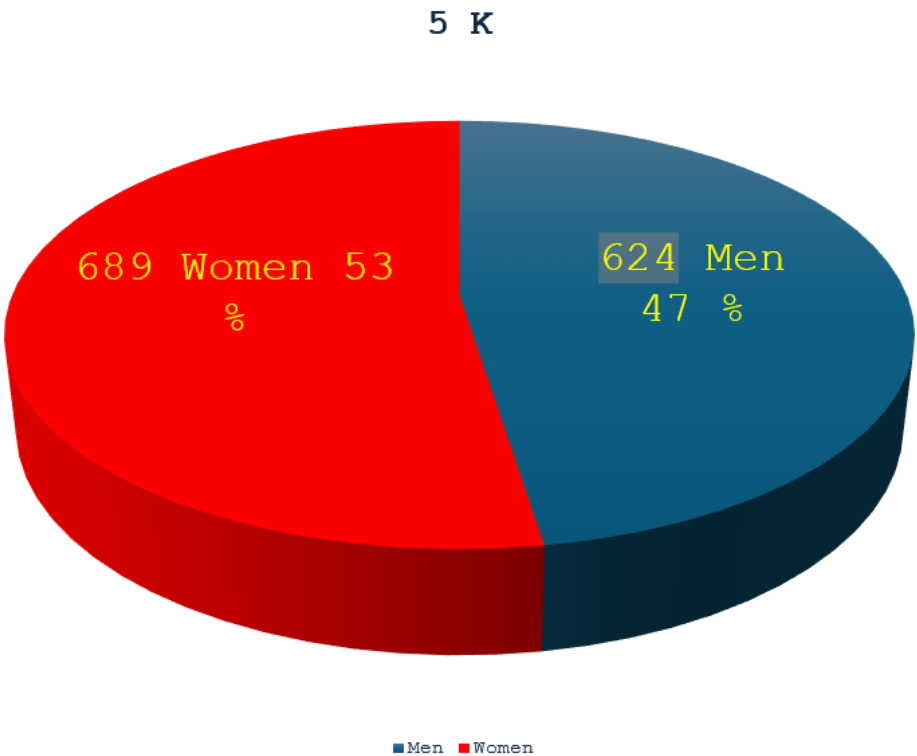


Source: Author's development.

Figure 4 presents the demographics of the 5-kilometre race. It is worth mentioning that women are the majority of that race.

Figure 4

Demographics of the Half Marathon

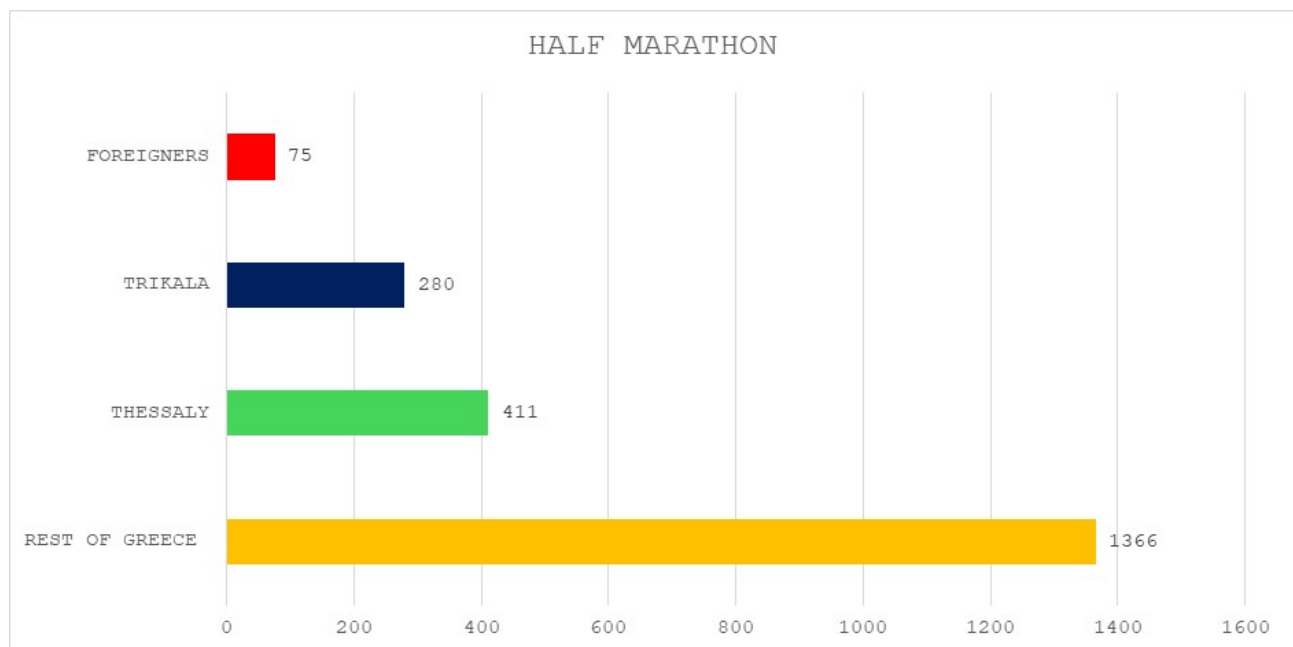


Source: Author's development.

Figure 5 presents the participants' geographical distribution in the half-marathon race. It is worth mentioning that the total number of half-marathon finishers was 2,132 athletes from Greece and abroad. Four hundred eleven athletes were from the Region of Thessaly, specifically from Larissa, Volos, and Karditsa. According to the organising committee of the event, the majority of athletes travelled on the same day to Kalampaka for the start of the race and then enjoyed a couple of hours in the city of Trikala after the race. The impact of the runners from Thessaly was mainly felt on the day of the event, Sunday, 10th of March. 1366 finishers were from the rest of Greece, which includes Athens, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Patras, Kavala, Kozani, etc. The majority of those runners, according to the organising committee, book a two-day or even three-day trip to Trikala and/or Kalampaka. Most of those runners came in groups or with families and booked a hotel in Trikala (favourably) or in Kalampaka. Those participants were the core of the event and provided a boost to the local economies of the two cities (Trikala and Kalampaka). The total number of foreign finishers was 75 athletes. Those athletes, organised by the organising committee, took a family trip, combining their participation in the event with tourism in Meteora, a unique place near Kalampaka, Trikala, and the surrounding areas. They add value to the event and give an international boost with their presence. Finally, a total of 280 athletes from the region of Trikala finished the race. Those runners are local runners, and their contribution to the local economy is essential, but it cannot be considered an external contribution that adds value.

Figure 5

Participants of the half marathon



Source: Author's development.

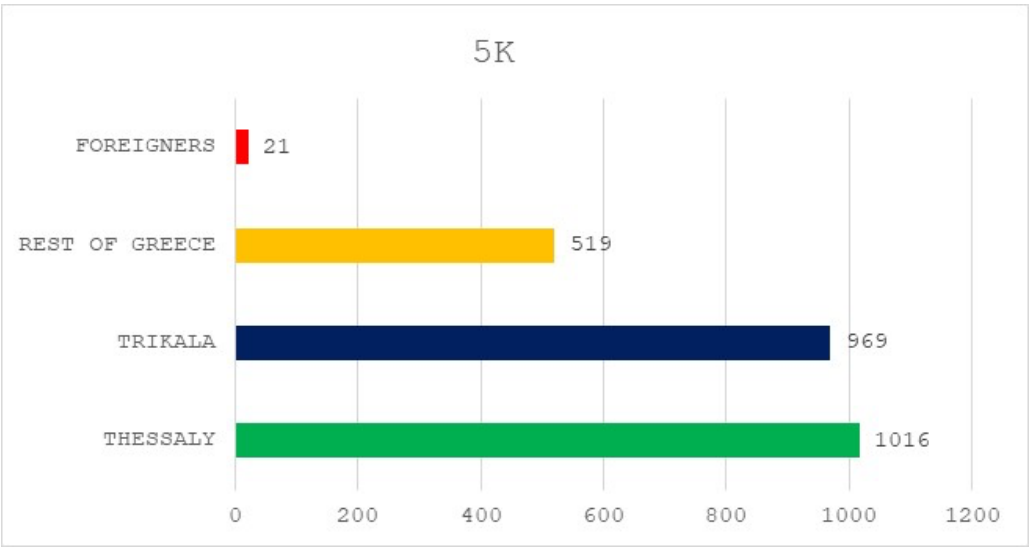
For the 5K event, the participant's geographical distribution is presented in Figure 6. For that event, which is considered an introductory event for runners, the total number of finishers reached 2,525. It is worth noting that 969 runners were from Trikala, and 1016 finishers were from the rest of Thessaly. Those runners from Thessaly travelled mainly on the same day of the event. A total of 519

finishers were from the rest of Greece, with a travel plan of two or three days, visiting either the city of Trikala or the city of Kalampaka. Finally, a total of 21 foreign runners finished the 5 K race.

It is worth mentioning that, according to the organising committee, approximately 60% of the runners who took part in the 5K race travelled to Trikala or Kalampaka with someone who ran in the half marathon.

Figure 6

Participants of the 5K



Source: Author's development.

Discussion

Sports tourism has emerged as a significant contributor to global economies and societal progress, offering both opportunities and challenges. Economically, it generates substantial revenue through event-related spending on accommodation, transportation, and services. This aligns with Preuss (2007), who found that mega sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, significantly boost local and national GDP through both direct and indirect expenditures. Mega-events often attract international tourists, generate global media exposure, and stimulate investment in infrastructure, leaving a lasting legacy that benefits future tourism and economic activity. However, these benefits are often concentrated in major urban centres or developed economies.

The findings of the present research paper further highlight that smaller regional events also provide significant economic benefits. This result expands upon Daniels and Norman's (2003) emphasis on the economic significance of recurring, smaller-scale events compared to one-off mega-events. Unlike mega-events, which often require extensive financial investment and infrastructure development, smaller events are generally more sustainable and accessible for local communities. They attract a steady flow of visitors, encouraging consistent revenue generation for local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation providers. Additionally, recurring regional events promote community engagement and facilitate the development of long-term tourism strategies tailored to local needs, as noted by Gibson (1998).

This focus on regional events also mitigates some of the risks associated with mega-events, such as economic over-reliance, underutilised infrastructure post-event, and inequitable distribution of benefits. Instead, regional events tend to yield a more equitable spread of economic gains across smaller businesses and local populations, contributing to sustainable tourism development. Therefore, while mega-events generate considerable short-term economic benefits, the findings here highlight the untapped potential of smaller events in promoting both economic stability and community cohesion.

Beyond economic impacts, sports tourism fosters cultural exchange, uniting diverse groups of people through a shared enthusiasm for sports. The present research confirms Gibson's (1998) observation that sports tourism facilitates cultural understanding and promotes social integration among participants and spectators. Additionally, the promotion of active volunteer participation observed in this study aligns with the conclusions of Misener and Mason (2006), who emphasised the role of volunteers in enhancing community engagement and fostering a sense of pride. The research findings of the present paper uniquely emphasise the long-term positive effects of volunteer involvement on local community development, expanding this discussion beyond short-term outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on a small-scale sports event within a specific locality. While the findings provide valuable insights into the event's economic and community impact, the limited scale restricts the ability to generalise these results to more extensive or different types of events. The dynamics and economic impacts of more significant events, or those held in urban or international settings, may differ significantly; moreover, the unique features of the Th. The Stamopoulos Half Marathon event, including its type, scale, and target audience, significantly influences the results. For example, a family-oriented event or a more significant sports event may have different social impacts compared to the case study presented in this paper.

To improve reliability, future research should employ a mixed-methods approach with triangulated data sources. Additionally, a questionnaire targeted at the participants and local businesses in the two cities should be administered to provide insights into the exact economic and community effects of the study.

Conclusions and Implications

In this research paper, a new model paradigm for local development in the prefecture of Trikala, based on a running event, is presented. The research focused on, studied, and analysed the Th. The Stamopoulos Half Marathon, an event organised by the local running club, involves two major cities in the region and attracts a vast number of runners and visitors to both cities, Kalampaka and Trikala. The half marathon primarily attracts over 3,000 runners, attendees, and visitors, having a significant impact on the local economy and essential social and cultural aspects as well. That specific race event creates the appropriate conditions for Kalampaka and Trikala to become a tourist destination for athletes from all over Greece and abroad. Th. The Stamopoulos Half Marathon

organisation committee claims to organise one of the most popular running events in Greece, which can transform their region into a sports tourism destination. This has economic, social, cultural, sporting, and tourism impacts for the two cities involved, as well as the citizens. In fact, with the sports event presented in the research paper, athletes and their families from all over Greece and abroad visit, consume, and stay in the cities of Kalampaka and/or Trikala. The participants at the event were allowed to visit Kalampaka and Trikala as a reward for their participation in the half marathon, and they gained valuable insights into the region's historical aspects. This creates a strong touristic image for both cities. In future research, the impact of running events on the creation of city branding will be analysed and presented.

Suggestions for Future Research

In future research, the running events in the Region of Thessaly will be studied to identify their impact on brand creation as a sports tourism destination. Furthermore, the importance of social media is a key factor for advertising events and the host cities. Can a running event establish a strong brand for the city and catalyse the local economy? Additionally, the negative aspects of organising such events will be studied in future research. Are those running events organised sustainably? Can those organisations contribute to sustainable development? Can they preserve the local character by becoming poles of development?

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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