

THE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC VALUE OF SPORTS EVENTS IN RURAL AREAS: MEDIA AND LEGAL CONTEXT

Vladimir Đorđević ¹, Goran Jeličić ²

¹ PhD candidate, Fakultet za Evropske Pravno - Političke studije, Beograd,

² PhD Independent researcher

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Corresponding: vladimirdjordjevic@gmail.com

Abstracts: The cultural and economic value of sports events in rural areas represents a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing local development, the preservation of cultural identity, and the strengthening of social cohesion. Research shows that sports manifestations in smaller communities contribute to economic activity through increased tourism spending, support for small and medium-sized enterprises, and the generation of seasonal employment. At the same time, they serve as a means of promoting cultural heritage and the local way of life, thus fostering a sense of belonging and community. The media context plays a crucial role in the visibility and sustainability of these events. Coverage in local and regional media enables better positioning of rural municipalities on the cultural and tourist map of the country and increases the potential to attract sponsors and investors. On the other hand, the legal framework governing the organization of sports events in rural areas must align with the principles of transparency, safety, and responsibility in order to ensure long-term benefits for the local community. Given all the above, an intersectoral approach is needed—one that integrates sports policy, cultural development, media strategy, and legal regulation. Only through such coordination can the full potential of sports events as a tool for integrated rural development be realized.

Keywords: sports events, rural development, cultural heritage, media, legal aspects

Introduction

Rural areas in Serbia have long been at the center of public policy efforts aimed at reducing regional disparities, demographic depopulation, and economic marginalization. Despite numerous strategic documents and incentive measures, many villages and smaller settlements continue to face structural problems such as youth outmigration, inadequate infrastructure, and weak cultural and tourism offerings (Cvijanović, Vujko, & Bojović, 2023). In this context, sports events are increasingly recognized as a potential driver for the multifunctional development of these areas—economically, culturally, touristically, and socially.

In rural communities, sport can be more than just a recreational activity—it becomes a tool for economic mobilization, the preservation of cultural identity, and the enhancement of media visibility. Studies indicate that sports events can directly contribute to tourism revenue growth, the creation of seasonal jobs, and the networking of local producers and hospitality providers. From a cultural perspective, sports manifestations in rural areas carry a strong identity-building character (Radaković & Marinković, 2021; Čolić et al., 2022). Their role in transmitting tra-

ditions, strengthening social solidarity, and affirming the local community is invaluable. These events enable young people to connect with the heritage of their ancestors while also facilitating intergenerational exchange of knowledge and values. In some cases, sport becomes a component of regional branding, which helps increase the recognition of rural areas both nationally and internationally.

Although sport carries positive economic and cultural implications, media support for sports events in rural areas is often insufficient or selective. Despite the shift in modern media toward digital, interactive, and locally oriented content, sports events in smaller communities receive limited attention, which in turn diminishes interest from sponsors and audiences (Durlević, Marković Obrenov, & Mihajlović, 2024). Media presence is essential not only for promotion but also for the legitimacy and institutional support of such events.

In addition to media, a critical component in organizing sports events in rural settings is legal regulation. The Sports Law of the Republic of Serbia defines the responsibilities of organizers, safety protocols, financial accountability, and the role of local government in supporting events

(Law on Sports, 2016). However, in practice, rural communities often lack the capacity to meet all legal requirements, which presents an obstacle to the planning of large-scale and sustainable sports events (Ivanović et al., 2020; Dašić, 2024).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the cultural and economic value of sports events in rural areas of Serbia through the lens of media visibility and the existing legal framework. Drawing from case studies and theoretical frameworks on rural development, the paper will highlight both the benefits and the limitations of using sports events as a tool for sustainable community development.

To improve the effectiveness of sports events as a development tool in rural areas, it is necessary to create integrated local strategies that link sport, tourism, culture, and media. Data from various studies show that intersectoral cooperation among local governments, sports clubs, tourism organizations, and media partners leads to better positioning of rural destinations and a higher social return on invested resources. Additionally, strengthening the capacity to implement legal regulations, including simplified administrative procedures and financial support for organizers in smaller communities, is a key precondition for the sustainabi-

lity of these initiatives. Therefore, improving the regulatory framework and empowering local stakeholders should be an integral part of comprehensive rural development policy (Stamenković, 2017; Dašić, 2021).

The Economic and Cultural Significance of Sports Events in Rural Areas

Sports events in rural regions of Serbia represent an important instrument for economic development, cultural heritage preservation, and the strengthening of social cohesion. These events contribute to increased tourism, the creation of new jobs, and the promotion of local products and services.

Beyond the economic dimension, sports manifestations play a vital role in preserving and promoting the cultural identity of rural communities. Through the organization of traditional sports competitions and accompanying cultural programs, these events strengthen social cohesion and facilitate the transmission of cultural values to younger generations. They also provide opportunities for youth to connect with the heritage of their ancestors and enable intergenerational exchange of knowledge and values (Dašić, 2016; Dašić, 2018).

The development of sports tourism in rural parts of Serbia holds potential for contributing to the sustainable development of these regions. Research shows that destinations in early development stages-particularly those in rural areas-possess significant potential for sports tourism, which can lead to both economic and social progress in these communities.

In short, sports events in rural Serbia have considerable potential for stimulating economic development, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering social cohesion. Through an integrated approach that encompasses economic, cultural, media, and legal aspects, a sustainable development model for rural communities through sports manifestations can be created (Kovačević & Dašić, 2022).

To fully realize this potential, it is necessary to enhance institutional support and develop local capacities for organizing and promoting sports events. It is particularly important to involve media and digital platforms in the promotion process to increase visibility and attract sponsors, visitors, and participants from a wider region. Furthermore, the legal and administrative framework should be adapted to the specific needs of rural areas, enabling easier access to financial and logistical resources. De-

velopment strategies for sports tourism must be grounded in the principles of sustainability, community inclusion, and cultural authenticity to ensure long-term and broadly distributed benefits (Jeličić & Vlajković, 2023; Dašić et al., 2024).

A concrete example illustrating the economic significance of sports events in rural Serbia is the "Marathon on the Fruška Gora Trails," held each spring within the territory of the Fruška Gora National Park. According to the Tourist Organization of the City of Novi Sad, this event attracts over 10,000 participants and visitors annually, generating direct tourism spending exceeding 25 million dinars in the local community (TO Novi Sad, 2022). Local caterers, accommodation providers, and producers of traditional goods report increased revenues during the event, while cultural and educational programs are organized in parallel, contributing to the cultural value of the event. This case study confirms that sports events can serve as a powerful catalyst for economic growth and the promotion of rural areas when strategically linked with local resources and cultural heritage.

The Role of Media in Promoting Sports Events in Rural Areas

Media play a crucial role in promoting sports events, particularly in rural areas where increased visibility is necessary to attract participants and audiences. In the modern digital age, the internet and social media have become the primary communication channels, enabling the rapid and efficient dissemination of event-related information.

Research shows that the use of digital media - such as the internet and social platforms - has significantly contributed to the promotion of cultural tourism in Vrnjačka Banja, suggesting strong potential for these tools in promoting sports events in rural regions. Additionally, media can influence greater youth participation in sports activities. A study on youth sports and recreational involvement in rural Serbia found that media promotion can motivate more young people to take part in sports events.

The role of media in promoting sports events in rural areas is multifaceted:

1. **Information and Education:** Media outlets provide information about upcoming events, participation rules, and the broader benefits of sports for health and social cohesion.
2. **Community Mobilization:** Through media coverage, local communities are encouraged to actively participate in organizing and attending events.
3. **Promotion and Marketing:** Digital media allow for targeted advertising and outreach to a wider audience, including potential sponsors and participants from other regions.

However, challenges persist regarding limited resources and underdeveloped technical infrastructure in rural areas, which can hinder the effectiveness of media promotion (Milačić, 2024; Zolak, 2024). Thus, investing in media literacy and technological capacity at the local level is necessary to fully leverage media potential in promoting sports events.

To strengthen the role of media in the development of sports events in rural settings, strategic partnerships must be established between local authorities, media organizations, and event organizers. Studies indicate that improving media visibility directly correlates with increases in participant numbers, tourism, and local economic activity. Moreover, the use of multimedia content - such as video reports, participant interviews, and live broadcasts - can sig-

nificantly enhance audience engagement, especially among younger generations. Therefore, it is essential for rural communities to build capacities for producing and distributing high-quality media content. This not only promotes individual events but also elevates the cultural and tourism profile of rural areas overall.

Legal Framework and Regulation of Sports Events in Rural Areas

The organization of sports events in rural areas of Serbia is governed by a series of legal and regulatory acts that define the conditions, criteria, and procedures for the planning, financing, and implementation of sports activities. These regulatory frameworks aim to ensure transparency, efficiency, and equity in the development of sports at the local level.

The Law on Sports is the fundamental legal document regulating the sports system in the Republic of Serbia. It defines the public interest in sports, encompassing activities of societal relevance such as health improvement, education, upbringing, and social inclusion. According to this law, local self-government units are obligated to adopt development prog-

rams for sports, outlining activities and financial plans for implementing sports initiatives within their territories (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2016).

The Rulebook on Approving and Financing Programs of Public Interest in the Field of Sports specifies the conditions and criteria for the allocation of budgetary funds. It stipulates that resources are distributed through public calls, with priority given to programs that promote sports development in rural areas, including the organization of sports events, construction and maintenance of sports infrastructure, and support to local sports organizations.

The Rulebook on Sports Disciplines of Special Importance for the Republic of Serbia identifies disciplines deemed nationally significant, such as Olympic sports, sports for persons with disabilities, and traditional sports. This rulebook enables additional financial and logistical support for events in these disciplines, which is particularly important for rural areas that preserve traditional sporting activities (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2011).

The Handbook for Developing Sports Development Programs in Local Self-Government Units, created by the Sports Sector of the Ministry of Youth

and Sports, provides guidelines for planning and implementing local-level sports programs. It highlights the importance of involving the local community in the planning process and stresses the need to tailor programs to the demographic, economic, and cultural specifics of rural areas (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2021).

For example, the Rulebook on Financing or Co-financing Citizens' Needs and Interests in the Field of Sports from the Municipal Budget of Sjenica (2019) is a local regulation that governs the financing of sports activities at the municipal level. It states that funding is awarded via public calls, with priority given to programs that enhance sports in the rural parts of the municipality, including the organization of events, infrastructure development, and support to sports associations.

Despite the existence of these normative frameworks, rural areas often face challenges in regulatory implementation, such as a lack of professional staff, limited financial resources, and insufficient awareness of procedures. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the capacities of local governments and sports organizations through training, technical assistance, and partnerships with relevant institutions.

In summary, the legal framework and regulation provide a foundation for

sports development in rural areas, but their effective implementation depends on the capacities and engagement of local stakeholders. An integrated approach - combining regulatory, institutional, and financial support - can foster an enabling environment for sports events that contribute to the economic, cultural, and social development of rural communities (Jović, et al., 2024).

To ensure more consistent application of legal regulation in practice, it is important to develop models of institutional cooperation between local governments, sports federations, and the civil sector. Research in public administration suggests that establishing partnership networks and local coordination bodies is one of the most effective ways to overcome capacity limitations and increase the functionality of sports programs on the ground (Spilanis et al., 2012). Additionally, introducing monitoring and evaluation systems for funded sports events can enhance transparency and promote more rational use of public funds, which is especially crucial in small and economically vulnerable communities. Clearly defined accountability mechanisms and opportunities for continuous education of local actors are key elements for realizing the full potential of sports events in rural areas.

Conclusion

Sports events in rural areas of Serbia represent a powerful instrument for stimulating economic development, preserving cultural identity, and strengthening social cohesion. An analysis of the economic, cultural, media, and legal aspects reveals that these events have significant potential to contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities.

The economic impact of sports events is reflected in increased tourism, the creation of new jobs, and the promotion of local products and services. Their cultural significance lies in the preservation and promotion of the cultural identity of rural communities. Through traditional sports games and accompanying cultural programs, these events contribute to intergenerational transmission of values and reinforcement of community cohesion. The media play a crucial role in promoting sports events, especially in rural areas where greater visibility is needed to attract participants and audiences. In the digital age, the internet and social media have become key communication channels, allowing rapid and efficient dissemination of event-related information.

The legal and regulatory framework provides a foundation for the develop-

ment of sports in rural areas. However, its effective implementation depends on the capacities and engagement of local stakeholders. With an integrated approach - encompassing legal, institutional, and financial support - it is possible to create a favorable environment for organizing sports events that contribute to the economic, cultural, and social development of rural communities.

To fully harness the potential of sports events in rural areas, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen the capacities of local self-governments through education and technical support in the planning and implementation of sports programs.
2. Develop infrastructure to enable the hosting of sports events and attract more participants and visitors.
3. Encourage media promotion through cooperation with local and national media, as well as the use of digital platforms for disseminating information.
4. Ensure financial support through public funding programs and partnerships with the private sector to finance sports activities.
5. Include youth and marginalized groups in sports activities to foster social inclusion and community development.

By implementing these recommendations, sports events becoming a driving force for the development of rural areas, contributing to economic progress, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the strengthening of social bonds within communities across Serbia.

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KULTURNA I EKONOMSKA VREDNOST SPORTSKIH MANIFESTACIJA U RURAČNIM SREDINAMA: MEDIJSKI I PRAVNI KONTEKST

Sažetak: Kulturna i ekonomska vrednost sportskih manifestacija u ruralnim sredinama predstavlja višedimenzionalan fenomen koji obuhvata lokalni razvoj, očuvanje kulturnog identiteta i jačanje socijalne kohezije. Istraživanja pokazuju da sportske manifestacije u manjim sredinama doprinose ekonomskoj aktivnosti kroz povećanje turističke potrošnje, podršku malim i srednjim preduzećima i generisanje sezonske zaposlenosti. Istovremeno, one služe kao sredstvo za promociju kulturnog nasleđa i lokalnog načina života, čime podstiču osećaj pripadnosti i zajedništva. Medijski kontekst igra ključnu ulogu u vidljivosti i održivosti ovih manifestacija. Prisustvo u lokalnim i regionalnim medijima omogućava bolje pozicioniranje ruralnih opština na kulturnoj i turističkoj mapi zemlje, ali i povećava potencijal za privlačenje sponzora i investitora. S druge strane, pravni okvir koji reguliše organizaciju sportskih događaja u ruralnim sredinama mora biti usklađen sa principima transparentnosti, bezbednosti i odgovornosti, kako bi se obezbedila dugoročna korist za lokalnu zajednicu. S obzirom na sve navedeno, potreban je intersektorski pristup koji objedinjuje sportsku politiku, kulturni razvoj, medijsku strategiju i pravnu regulativu. Samo tako se mogu maksimalno iskoristiti potencijali sportskih manifestacija kao alata za integralni ruralni razvoj.

Ključne reči: sportske manifestacije, ruralni razvoj, kulturno nasleđe, mediji, pravni aspekti