

Short term and long term motives for the internationalization of marathon events

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Abstract

The current study aims to answer the question of how the motives for internationalization of leisure sports companies can be understood through the example of international running events. We present the phenomenon of globalisation and internationalisation as a context of leisure sports, linking the conceptual frameworks of leisure sports and international business (IB). The paper highlights the characteristics of leisure sports companies in the process of internationalization. More specifically, we examined the global business trends of marathons, with particular attention of event organizers in the Central-Eastern European (CEE) region in our preparatory study. Data about experiences, entry fee, international communication and sponsorship were collected from the eight most significant CEE marathons and two semi-structured interviews were done with event organizers. Our main findings reveal that market seeking and strategic asset seeking motives are dominant in the case of CEE marathon organizers with a notable distinction between short term and long term perspectives.

Keywords: internationalization, marathon, Central-Eastern Europe, leisure sports services, motives for internationalisation

1.INTRODUCTION

Sports, and in particular leisure sports, play an increasingly important role in society and at the same time, its economic impact is becoming more significant. Furthermore, leisure sports potentially create value on the societal, economic and individual levels, as well as for companies that operate in the leisure sports industry or are otherwise linked to leisure sports. The competition between leisure sports events organizers for international consumers and sponsors is a key contextual factor of analysis because of its impact on tourism and the wider economy (Czeglédy et al., 2018).

Our preparatory study aims to fill the literature gap of examining leisure sports services from the aspect of internationalization. The literature of international business and sports management is extensive, and the intersection of them is also rich (Deitz et al., 2013; Healy and McDonagh 2013; Herrmann, Kacha and Debaix, 2016). These articles, however, focus on professional sport, while the internationalization of recreational sports is less addressed. With the processing of available literature and the conceptual description of running events, our aim is to establish a long-term research programme. This is only the first step; there will be further steps and research on this topic. In this paper, we show the key definitions and markets of the leisure sports industry. We focus on the internationalization of marathon events in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, with special attention to the market of consumers, sponsors and sports equipment suppliers.

Applying a mixed-method research approach we are seeking an answer to the main research question: How can the motives for internationalization be identified in case of international running events in the Central-Eastern European region? Based on primary and secondary analyses we examine the global and regional business trends of running events, especially the characteristics of the most important CEE marathons. Our interdisciplinary research focuses on a fast-growing industry in a developing region and aims to provide a foundation for researching leisure sports from selected aspects of international business.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.Definitions and concepts of leisure sports

The separation between leisure and professional sports first occurred in the 20th century for a variety of reasons. First, the amount of leisure time in society increased considerably. Second, as people became more health-conscious and began to recognize the importance of a healthy lifestyle, a new form of sports appeared where the main goal was simply to maintain or improve physical fitness. In this type of sport, the goals of competition and achievement disappeared entirely and were replaced by the goal of recreation. Leisure sports could become a branch of the service industry (Fóris and Bérces, 2005). The academic literature describes three general approaches to conceptualize leisure sports. The first states that the activity must take place during free time, must be voluntary and organized – passive participation is entirely excluded. The second approach excludes elements that apply to professional sports (working, earning money). The third approach lists various sporting activities and their effects (Szabó, 2012). The three general approaches to conceptualize leisure sports by academic literature, the motives of marathon runners and the expressions of “health sports” and “experience sports” mentioned in Waśkowski (2015a) which support the understanding of leisure sports business. In experience sports, the main objective is to gain experience and momentary well-being; leisure-time athletes tend to think in the short term (Zhou et al., 2000, cited by Min and Yin, 2010).

In our understanding, leisure sports can be any physical recreational activity done regularly or irregularly in our free time which goal is to maintain or restore health, recreation, amusement, or to achieve a feeling of physical and spiritual well-being, both during and after the exercise. We can identify the following prerequisites for the consumption of leisure sports (Budai, 1999): sufficient free time, adequate living standards, money, and the right attitude. In our opinion, the most important element is the right attitude. Meanwhile, research by Paár (2010) suggests that spending on sports is considered as luxury expenditure in Hungary. All in all, we can state that we can do sports in our free time easily if the economic and sociological surroundings are adequate for it. Leisure sport is not a basic need. Consumer-oriented services and satisfied customers could be key factors (Szabó, 2012).

In our paper, we focus on the running events, especially on the marathons. We make our analyses on a regional level and we concentrate on the Central and Eastern European marathons.

2.2. Leisure sports markets and business operations

Based on the models of Gratton and Taylor (2000) and Parks, Quarterman and Thibault (2007) and the works of András (2003, 2004) on professional sports markets, Szabó (2012, 2014) described the leisure sports markets. The consumer, sponsorship and merchandising markets are not only relevant to professional sports, but also in leisure sports. In addition, leisure sports include markets for sports equipment, sportswear and sports professionals (organizers, trainers, consultants). Leisure sports markets not only generate income for for-profit leisure sports providers, but they may also create revenue for non-profit providers of leisure sports.

The direct sources of income are the consumers, sponsors and merchandising markets. The sports equipment and sportswear markets usually do not yield income for the provider of sports, except for the case where there is a strategic partnership or agreement between the provider and the producer/distributor. An increase in consumer market would bring growth in the markets for sports equipment, sportswear, sports professionals, sponsorship and merchandising. Involving international consumers are a good opportunity to increase the consumer market.

The participants who create the demand part of the running market can be divided into three groups:

The first group is made of the participating runners. According to Miller and Kelli, over 8 million runners participate in marathons each year (Miller and Kelli, 2008.).

The second group is made up of people accompanying the participants, especially those who come from other areas. Research conducted by the Poznan University of Economics and Business on over 4 400 runners shows that in most cases the marathon runners travel with 1-2 people, whose presence is helpful especially at the start and finish lines (Wańkowski, 2014).

The third group, important for the attractiveness of an event, is made up of supporters that gather around the course. It is estimated that the world's biggest marathons (New York, Berlin, London, Paris) have around 1 to 2 millions of supporters (Wańkowski, 2015a).

2.3. Globalization, internationalization and the leisure sport

2.3.1. The general motives for internationalization

The most widely used conceptual framework for understanding the motives for the internationalization of companies was defined by Dunning (1988), approaching the issue from the aspect of competitive advantages. The framework can be understood either from the theoretical lens of transaction cost

economics or the resource-based view. According to Dunning (1988), there are four basic types of motives that drive companies to internationalise in their quest for developing and maintaining their competitive advantage in international markets.

Market-seeking motives aim the company getting access to additional foreign markets as potential sources of revenues. This is often the case when domestic and existing foreign markets are saturated, and the company seeks to leverage its competitive advantage in untapped foreign markets to expand its revenues base. Efficiency-seeking motives are relevant for firms that have already achieved some type of economies (of scale or scope etc.) and they aim to extend their competitive advantage by further increasing their exposure to potential economies. Resource seeking firms focus their internationalisation efforts on acquiring and exploiting scarce resources available in other markets. The fact that the availability of such valuable resources is limited, creates an opportunity for sustainable competitive advantage in international markets. Finally, the fourth motive is understood to aim to get access to strategic assets that may provide opportunities to improve the company's competitive advantage. Most typically, strategic assets comprise technical knowledge, learning experiences, management expertise, organizational competence, or a combination of those.

In the period when converging economies of Central-Eastern Europe reopened their markets to global competition, there was a tendency of major multinational firms to expand internationally for any of the above reasons. However, the role of strategic asset seeking gained ground increasingly, reflecting the tendency that the above mentioned knowledge-related sources of competitive advantage were seen to provide a more sustainable source of competitive advantage than other sources (Pearce and Papanastassiou, 1997; Dunning, 1998; Cantwell, Dunning and Janne, 2004). With regards to small and medium-sized enterprises in developed markets, analytical studies of the time highlighted the need for these firms to improve their organizational capacities and capabilities to strengthen their competitive edge in international markets (e.g. O'Gorman and McTiernan, 2000; c.f. Brouthers, 2002).

In his synthesising study based on a large-sample study of Suisse firms, Hollenstein (2005) drew the conclusion that the main drivers of internationalisation tend to appear fundamentally knowledge-based, irrespective of firm size and internationalisation strategy. However, the knowledge-based motives on which the competitive advantages of smaller firms were based were narrow: built on capabilities mainly related to incremental innovations, while major firms could rest their competitiveness on more far-reaching innovations. Any location advantages, especially wages and regulatory framework were understood to be more relevant for small firms, but knowledge-related advantages were dominant even in that class of companies.

In the early 2000s the attention of the researchers of international business turning towards the role of institutions in affecting the competitiveness of firms and the development strategies of countries (Sen, 1999; Williamson, 2000; Peng, 2001; Dunning, 2004 and 2006). This involved more awareness of, and more attention paid to a wider range of stakeholder considerations, reflecting issues like human rights, belief systems, social capital and the different aspects of freedom. This emphasis on institutions does not seem to abate even today, especially in the context of dynamic capabilities in a turbulent business environment (Dunning and Lundan, 2010).

The Central-Eastern-European region has been the subject of contextual studies in international business literature more recently. With regard to the motives of internationalization, one of the early works on enterprises in the region (Marinov and Marinova, 1999) highlighted the lack of proactive strategic approaches to internationalization resulting loss of competitive advantage. Another comparative study on internationalization motives (Tatoglu, Demirbag and Kaplan, 2003) noted that host country

considerations dominate firms' strategy, while domestic market conditions are less influential. In a large-sample, cross-country survey of small to medium-size enterprises' internationalization Svetlicic, Jaklic and Burger (2007) found that market seeking motives are widespread, while financial barriers and capacity problems hinder the companies' expansion abroad. In his study of the extant literature on multinational enterprises from Poland, Trapczynski (2016) noted that while previous findings in the context of Central and Eastern Europe emphasised the prevalence of market-seeking motives of internationalization, this was not directly supported at the level of firm declarations about their investment objectives. Nevertheless, market attractiveness was proven as a significant determinant of the companies' performance abroad.

2.3.2. International business considerations in leisure sports

While the international aspects of professional and leisure sports are popular subjects of academic publications, analytical frameworks of the international business discipline are seldom applied. In her synthesising work, Ratten (2011) identified the major topics of sports management literature all of which reveal apparently an international character. Sports are understood to support the development of cross-cultural exchanges, and mainly through the global proliferation of technology, sports are also a platform for promotion worldwide. Over the last four decades, business-related subjects of sports emerged, including new aspects in recruitment, the economic impact of events, sponsorship, corporate social responsibility, branding, sports law, sports tourism and the regional development of sport. Most of these categories were in line with Thibault's (2009) identification of issues arising from the globalization of sports.

One of the most significant of the above topics with far-reaching implications for leisure sports is analysing the impact of sport events especially in regards of the most visible and impactful event of sports globally, the Olympic Games. Tien, Lo and Ze (2011) performed the assessment of 24 Olympic Games to conclude that their economic impact was only significant in terms of GDP growth and unemployment, at least in the short term. Rosentraub and Swindell (2002) also warned of the unreasonable demand for public subsidy for developing sports facilities for events, while Chalip and Leyns (2002) urged local coordination of businesses to leverage the opportunities of sports events. More recently, some studies highlight the potential in smaller scale international events, as their economic and social impact is more visible, hence the justification of related public investment (Laczkó and Stocker, 2018). Meanwhile, Schulenkorf, Sherry and Rowe (2016) noted the increasing focus on social and educational outcomes from youth development, as key considerations in sports development, widening the scope of mostly economic analyses of the field, while also highlighting a trend of shifting academic interest in the foreseeable future. This is in line with findings from Paár and Laczkó (2018) and Laczkó and Paár (2018).

Meanwhile, some studies from the Central-Eastern European region applied analytical concepts and frameworks of international business to the field of professional sports. András, Havran and Jandó (2012) examined market entry methods and the internationalization process of services of professional sports companies, based on Czakó and Reszegi (2010). They highlighted that in the case of professional sports markets, patterns of the internationalization of services can be applied. According to their results, professional sports companies can be competitive at an international level by increasing the number of international consumers and sponsors. Kozma and András (2016) examined how league strength explains the observed differences between the international strategies of professional sports clubs in Hungary. In their conclusion, they noted that that strategic focus on improving service provision and sales is critical even if they receive windfall support from the government.

3.METHOD

In this paper, we concentrate on the international aims and motivations of marathon organizers. We seek an answer to the main research question:

How can the motives for internationalization be identified in case of international running events in the Central-Eastern European region?

To answer the main question, we identified 3 sub-questions (R 1-3), now we describe the used methods in case of the different research questions. Our work is a compilation of “separated smaller research projects” about this theme.

When designing the research process, we selected those qualitative methods described in international literature that matched the research topic best. As a first step, our objective was to study the international literature, focusing on leisure sports (markets and typology), internationalization, leisure sports and business. In the theoretical part of our paper, we provided a synthesis of the literature. We summarised the works of authors discussing this topic.

Based on secondary research, in the second step (chapter 4.1.), we aim to identify international trends in running. Additionally to receive the answer to the following question: R1 - How has the popularity and business of marathons changed internationally?

In the third step, we conducted a "desk" research (chapter 4.2.). Based on objective criteria's, we selected eight out of the 50 largest European marathons in Central and Eastern Europe. Five Polish (Marathon.Poznan, 2019; Mw.com, 2019; Pzumaratonwarwzawski, 2019; Cracoviamaraton, 2019; Orlenmarathon, 2019), a Czech (Pim.cz, 2019; Runczech, 2019), an Austrian (Vienna-marathon, 2019) and a Hungarian (Futanet, 2019; Marathon.runinbudapest, 2019) marathon were examined. In this context, primary data collection was carried out focusing on the eight selected competitions. The research aspects were as follows: organiser and their model, history of the competition – experiences, entry fee, international communication, and sponsorship (we collected sponsors and dedicated sponsors on start number, 2-4 sponsors per each competition).

We search for the answer to the following question: R2 - How can we evaluate the business characteristics and internalization of marathons in the CEE region?

In the fourth step, we made two semi-structured interviews with marathon organizers (chapter 4.3.). Five of the eight marathons are in Poland, so a researcher of the running business from the Poznan University of Economics and Business was involved in the research. In the case of Budapest Marathon, we interviewed the CEO and owner of Budapest Sports Office in 2018, and it lasted about one and a half hour (Budapest interview, 2018). Árpád Kocsis knows everything about the Hungarian and also about the international marathons, he and his company has been dealing with them for 30 years. In the case of Poland, we interviewed the manager of organisers of Poznan Marathon, in 2018, and it lasted also about one and a half hour (Poznan interview, 2018). Our research question in this part of the research is the following: R3 - What kind of foreign market goals can be identified in case of marathons in the CEE region? Our aim is to identify market seeking, research seeking and strategic asset seeking motives.

During the semi-structured interviews, we examined six key issues as follows: foreign owner, foreign sponsorship, foreign consumers, foreign subcontractors, international knowledge, and local specialities.

4.RESULTS

4.1.Global trends of running a business – a secondary analysis

We focus on running, an individual outdoor health sport, more specifically running events, marathons. Running could be a big business nowadays, because running is: (1) a global phenomenon, with double-digit annual growth considering participants globally; (2) a mass participatory sport taking place year-round; (3) one of the important revenue drivers of leisure sports industry (shoes, clothes, watches, etc.). Running (4) has the highest ratio of participant to viewers, and (5) there is increasing popularity of running events. Nowadays there are more than 500 marathons in Europe each year, while (6) marathon-tourism is on the rise, and high percentages of the marathon-tourists belong to the higher educated and upper-income segments (Hermann, 2012). Running events may have multiple stakeholders who have different requirements and benefits: runners, family and friends of runners (spectators), hosting country, hosting cities (local government, and citizens), race organizers, technical and strategic partners of the organizers (suppliers), sportswear industry, tourism industry, media, charity organizations, sponsors and volunteers (Hermann, 2012; Waśkowski, 2015b). Among these stakeholders, there could be also international ones.

According to Scheerder, Breedveld and Borgers (2015) 12% of the 15-80 years population run in the EU 28, which sums an altogether 49.9 million runners. Denmark and Germany are the best “running nations”, with 31% and 25% rate of the population, but 10% of the Hungarians also run. Expenses on running reach 9.6 billion euros in EU28 altogether Scheerder et al. ,2015

A research conducted in 2014 showed that around 30% of adult Poles practice running on a regular basis, spending 450 million euros a year on it (Waśkowski, 2017). According to Waśkowski (2017) ca. 90% of the participants do not live more than 100 km from the event venue, and only a small number of participants (1-2%) coming from abroad, and there is a high and still growing expectation of the runners. Based on Scheerder et al. (2015) the number of marathon events worldwide has increased close to 4000 and the number of finishers has grown to 1.6 million. The authors identified a significant growth rate in marathon finishers in developed countries since the 1970s and in other parts of the world in the 2000s.

We have to mention the results of commercialization and professionalization in leisure sports and also in running (Scheerder et al., 2015): for-profit providers meet needs of runners, more and more running events organizers, technological innovations such as online registrations, microchips, after race services, training advice, all in all, more differentiated package of services and customer-related marketing have occurred. Research also shows that the participants of the Frankfurt am Main marathon in 2014 spent over 2 million euros (Waśkowski, 2015a). Overall (R1), we can state that the popularity and commercialization of international running events have been increasing in developed countries. Globally, between 2016 and 2019 we can see a 13% decrease in the event participation but the growth continuous in Asia. The percentage of people travelling to a foreign country for a race has increased significantly. For marathons, from 1994 to 2018 it has increased from 0.2% to 3.5% (RunRepeat, 2019).

4.2.Marathons in the Central and Eastern European Region

Publications about Central-Eastern European marathons and leisure sports industry are very limited, but we highlight the trends in Poland and Hungary. We can find the intensive increasing of running events in Poland: the number of running events in Poland increased approximately from 500 to 4,000 between 2000 and 2018 (Waskowski 2017) but we see some decrease in 2019 (Maratony polskie, 2019). In Hungary, the number of participants at the Budapest Marathon event was 8,096 in 2008 and it increased

to 18,171 until 2012 (Perényi, 2015) and to 33,495 until 2018 (Futanet, 2019). Both cases support the fact that the running business has been growing steadily.

In the running events of RunCzech in Prague and two other cities in 2011 more than 80,000 people were attended. „All visitors together spent 215,560,000 CZK on accommodation, transport, food or other services and shopping in connection with RunCzech events” (Schwartzhoffová, 2015, p 255). Foreign visitors spent more than 138 million CZK so it is a benefit to the economy of the country

After the stagnation of 2016, the number of participants in European marathon races raised by 3% in 2017. Among the 50 biggest marathons in Europe, there were 8 marathons from the CEE-region in 2017 (Prague, Poznan, Vienna, Warsaw, Cracow, Orlen Warsaw, Budapest and Wroclaw), of which 5 were in Poland (Table 1). In 2013 there were 131 half marathons and 89 marathons in Poland (Waškowski, 2015b).

Table 1: Most significant marathons in CEE - based on the number of finishers:

<i>Rank 2017</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Finisher 2017</i>	<i>Rank 2011</i>	<i>Finisher 2011</i>
22	Prague Marathon	CZE	6510	24	5996
23	Poznan Marathon	POL	6362	27	4630
24	Vienna Marathon	AUT	6351	20	5942
29	Warsaw Marathon	POL	5646	31	4061
30	Cracow Marathon	POL	5615	36	3199
31	Orlen Warsaw Marathon	POL	5522		
32	Budapest Marathon	HUN	5415	37	2984
37	Wroclaw Marathon	POL	4631	41	2773
	Total		46052 (155%)		29585 (100%)

Source: Laufmarkt (2017)

In the followings, we examined the selected 8 marathons more detail. With the examination of the 8 selected CEE marathons (Table 2), we can see different types of marathon organizers: private (business), public (local government) and mixed/non-profit.

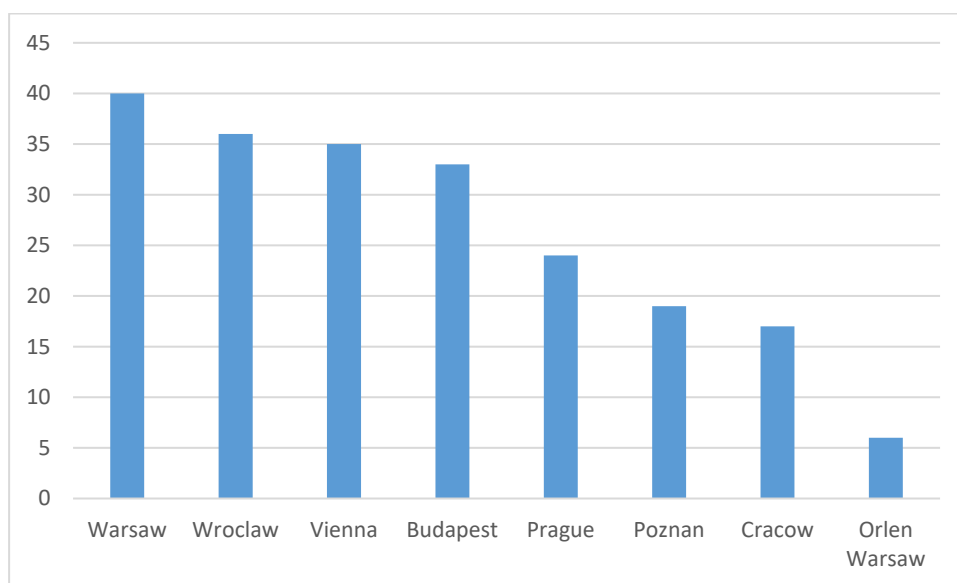
Table 2: Type of the organizer companies

<i>Marathon</i>	<i>Organizer</i>	<i>Ownership</i>
	Sport- und Leichtathletikclub Wien	
<i>Vienna</i>	Enterprise Sport Promotion GmbH	Private
<i>Prague</i>	Prague International Marathon, spol.s.r.o.	Private
<i>Budapest</i>	Budapest Sportiroda	Private
<i>Wroclaw</i>	Wroclaw city	Local government
	City of Poznań	
<i>Poznan</i>	Poznań Sports and Recreation Centres	Local government
<i>Warsaw</i>	Warsaw Marathon Foundation	Non-profit
	Municipality of Cracow – Sports Infrastructure	
<i>Cracow</i>	Management Board of Cracow	Local government
<i>Orlen Warsaw</i>	MyPlace	Private

Source: edited by the authors

Figure 1 shows the experiences and tradition of CEE marathons. Marathon of Vienna, Budapest, Warsaw and Wroclaw has been organized for more than 30 years so the history of CEE marathons goes back to the socialist system. Since 2013, two marathons have been organized in Warsaw every year.

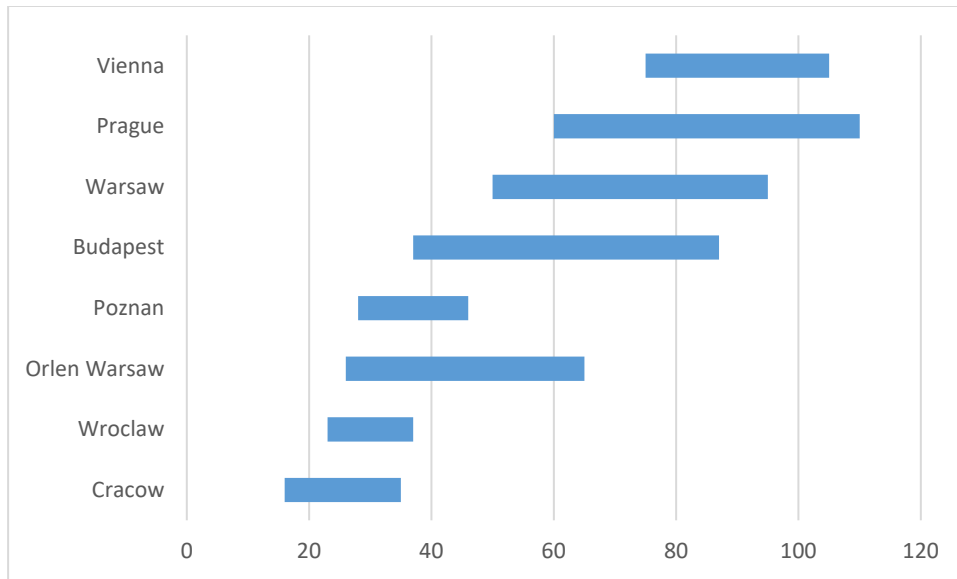
Figure 1: Experiences - the number of marathons until 2018, in the past more than 30 years



Source: edited by the authors

With regard to entry prices (Figure 2), Vienna and Prague stand out, followed by Warsaw and Budapest, while the other Polish competitions are considerably cheaper. This is consistent with the number of international runners.

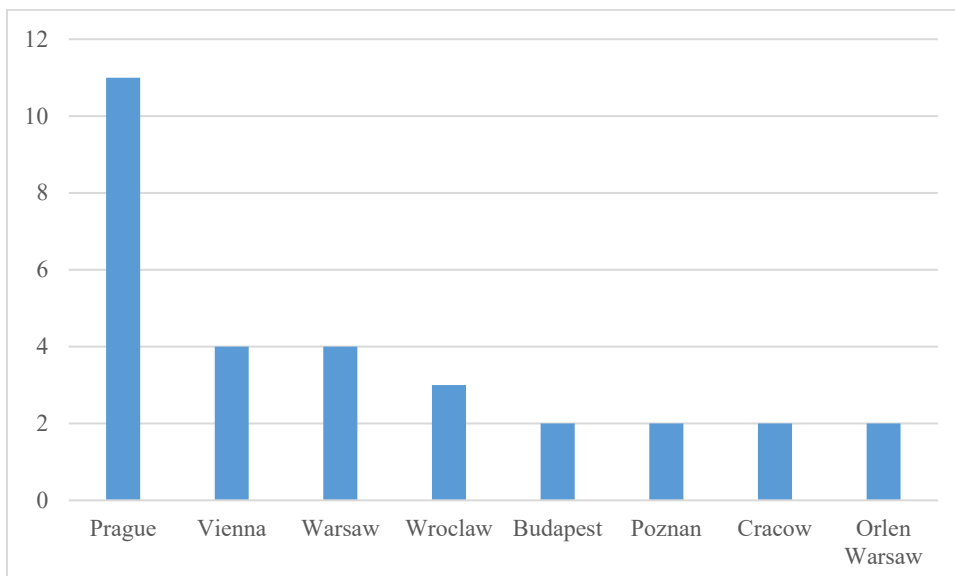
Figure 2: Entry fees in the examined marathons in 2018, data in euro



Source: edited by the authors

Figure 3 shows the number of languages in the web pages of CEE marathons. The result of the Prague Marathon is outstanding; runners can find the information in 10 different languages. Vienna and Warsaw use 3 different languages, the other marathons operate with two languages: the language of the host country and the English.

Figure 3: International nature of web pages: number of languages



Source: edited by the authors

In Table 3 we collected the main sponsors of the 8 marathons (2-4 companies in every case).
 Table 3: Sponsorship and scope of the sponsors

<i>Country</i>	<i>Sponsors' scope</i>	<i>Home country of the sponsor company</i>
<i>Czech Republic</i>	Global	Germany
<i>Hungary</i>	Global	Western-Europe
<i>Austria</i>	Regional	Austria
<i>Poland – 1st type</i>	Local	Poland
<i>Poland – 2nd type</i>	Regional/Global	Poland

Source: edited by the authors

With a similar population, in the Czech Republic and Hungary, there are Western European sponsors, while in Austria local companies. The post-socialist Poland dominated by domestic companies, due to the larger size of the country and the higher share of domestic competitors. In Poland, it is very interesting that two types can be identified: Wroclaw and Poznan build on the local audience, while in Warsaw and Cracow aim foreign runners too. The ratio of foreign runners in Cracow and Warsaw is about 8-10% and in other Polish cities is about 1-5% (Biegowe, 2017). This is in line with the number of international runners. Table 4 shows the name sponsors of the examined marathons.

Table 4: Name sponsors

<i>Race</i>	Vienna	Prague	Buda- pest	Wroclaw	Poznan	Warsaw	Cracow	Orsen Warsawa
<i>Name sponsor</i>	none	Volkswagen	Spar	PKO BP Bank	PKO BP Bank	PZU insurance	PZU insurance	Orlen oil company

Source: edited by the authors

Most important sponsors come from the following industries in the region (number of competitions in brackets): sportswear (5), finance (5), food (3), energy (2).

With the desk research, we compared the biggest marathons in CEE, and we highlighted the business characteristics and internationalization of CEE marathons. We can identify the relationship between the number of foreign runners and the appearance of sponsors with international market goals. In case of private organizers, we can find higher nomination fee and more foreign runners (R2).

For a better understanding of international operations in the next step, we made semi-structured interviews with two managers from the eight CEE marathon events.

4.3. The International Business aspects of marathons in Central-Eastern Europe

According to the desk research and our interviews, we can highlight, that looking through the lens of the International Business, the marathons and other running events in Central-Eastern Europe are mainly “market-seeking” motivated. For example, the Prague Marathon is owned by an Italian-Czech joint venture. The main reason for forming this joint venture was to unite the international experience of the Italian organizer and the awareness of the Czech one (Emil Zatopek). With a combination of this two, the Prague Marathon became the largest and most prestigious marathon in the region with a high number of international participants. Although building up a new race is very risky and difficult, there are several solutions to mitigate those risks. The main challenges of organizing a running event in a foreign country are that it requires too many resources (both material and immaterial), the knowledge about the local

market and the main environmental (i.e. political, social and legal) issues. Thus, foreign ownership is mainly done through franchises. One example is the Spartan Race which has fifteen races in the region and the franchise licence is owned by a Czech company, but they organize the races together with local partners. The main advantage of such race series that the participants' competing in it travels around the countries involved. Thus, the franchise is the best way of building international ownership in the running market.

Attracting *foreign consumers* is something which also stands at the centre of most of the organizers. However, races such as the Poznan marathon did not have this kind of intentions. The reason behind this – as we previously showed – is the evenly growing number of domestic runners and the fact that Poznan has only a little to offer for foreign participants. In case cities touristically interesting for foreigners – Prague, Budapest, Wien – they can build a good tourist image, thus able to attract foreign runners and create guest nights and spending. The high number of foreign runners is most important for the stakeholders other than the organizers and it creates a higher income through sponsors and governmental funding. While the CEE marathons did not see each other as main competitors, thus they recommend their runners to try different marathons in the region and vice versa. The reason behind this act is the consumer behaviour of the runners. Most runners only run one or two marathons a year and they wish to visit as many international venues as they can. Or they are locals, who are not willing to travel to distant competitions. This results in a high amount of cooperation among the organisers in the region.

As of the “resource-seeking” aspect, we can conclude that local subcontractors are always needed, while the local conditions may differ a lot from the ones in the owner's country. The owner of Budapest Sports Office has raised some Hungarian particularities, such as the music played before, during and after the event, the ways of involving the participants (speaking their names aloud, welcome the ones with a birthday, etc.). Also, an important strategy to contact the local subsidiaries of global companies which sponsor running events in the home country or in other countries. These tries are not always paid off. In the case of Budapest Marathon, the organisers failed to attract the sponsors of the Vienna Marathon although they had a local branch in the country. On the other side, the global company Mattoni (sponsor of the Prague Marathon) sponsored the event soon after the acquisition of the Hungarian Szentkirályi Aqua Company and its market-leading mineral water brand. We summarize the most important findings in Table 5.

Table 5: The main questions and findings of the interviews

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Main findings</i>	<i>Budapest interview</i>	<i>Poznan interview</i>
<i>Who are the most significant competitors of the organiser (represented by the interviewee) at domestic, regional and global level?</i>	- Local races (in the same country) - There is a great variety of races which creates a competition for human resource, especially experts.	There is NO real international competitor. “Most of the people run one or max. two marathon per year and foreigners try as many venues as they can”.	Local races in Poland: Warsaw Marathon (2 per year) Wrocław Marathon Cracow Marathon

<p><i>What does internationalisation mean for the event organiser?</i></p> <p><i>Apart from the runners, what other aspects of international operations can be identified?</i></p> <p><i>What is the motivation of the event organiser for internationalisation according to the different aspects?</i></p>	<p>- To attract as many runners from abroad as possible</p> <p>- Networking: to cooperate with other marathon organisers and to learn from each other</p> <p>- To learn the know-how</p>	<p>The higher number of international participants is important for the sponsors.</p> <p>e.g. Joint registration of the Prague and Budapest marathon.</p>	<p>“To be a part of the global running village.” For instance to have the IAAF Road Bronze Label.</p> <p>The main motivation is to achieve 10 000 participates in Poznan Marathon, including much more foreign runners than currently.</p>
<p><i>Do event organisers cooperate with foreign event organisers? With whom? Why do they cooperate?</i></p>	<p>- Provide better race conditions</p> <p>- Provide better services</p> <p>- Learn the new trends</p> <p>- Exchange information</p>	<p>The organisers of the Prague Marathon, International organizations.</p> <p>To exchange information</p>	<p>IAAF, AIMS, Run Czech, Running Ukraine – direct cooperation. Exchanging information, sometimes shared meetings.</p>
<p><i>How can event organisers learn „from abroad“? Who do they learn from? Who are the „market leaders“? How do you learn from others?</i></p>	<p>- To participate in other marathons</p> <p>- Follow the online presence of benchmark events</p> <p>- In Europe: Berlin, London, Paris, also: Frankfurt Marathon, Rome Marathon, Barcelona Marathon</p>	<p>Travelling around the market and participating in related Conferences.</p> <p>The importance of taking care of each runner individually and the music before, during and after the race.</p> <p>Mainly participating in “bigger” events than their own.</p>	<p>The benchmarks for Poznan Marathon are the three biggest marathons in Europe.</p> <p>The Director of Poznan Marathon travels all over the European running market, taking part as a participant in big European marathon runs, observes the best practice, the best organising solutions, for example concerning the organisation of the event office, start zone, route, finish zone etc.</p>
<p><i>Does the event have any foreign suppliers, subcontractors and/or partners (in fields like for example time-keeping, sports drinks, international, marketing, race alliances, etc)?</i></p>	<p>- Marathons in the region have regional and local partners.</p> <p>- Partners aim is to build their awareness and uses the events as PR opportunities.</p>	<p>Budapest Marathon organisers have local or domestic suppliers.</p>	<p>Poznan Marathon organisers have local or domestic suppliers.</p>
<p><i>Do the main sponsors have international aims with the supporting of the event? Are they focusing only on the local market, or they would like to reach</i></p>	<p>- Larger (in reputation, not in scale) marathons have global and regional sponsors, while the smaller ones usually have nation based regional or local ones.</p>	<p>The sponsors need either image or brand building or there is a direct connection between the product of the company and the runners (e.g.</p>	<p>The main titular sponsor is the Polish Bank PKO BP. This bank operates on the Polish market only.</p> <p>Their goal is to build an image and do PR activity.</p>

<i>regional or global consumers sponsorship?</i>	<i>with</i>	- The main goal of the sports equipment or nutritional supplement). The internalization is not an issue.
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Source: edited by the authors based on semi-structured interviews

As can be read in Table 5 that strategic asset seeking motives also seem to be significant, as gaining and integrating “*international knowledge*” is one of the most important issues of marathon organisers. We should point out that based on the interviews; marathon organisers are not seeing each other as rivals at an international level. On the contrary, they often cooperate with each other. They learn from another and give useful advice to other organisers. In order to do so, they try to participate as many regional and benchmark marathons as they can. They choose marathons “superior” to theirs because in this way they are able to learn the recent technological and consumer trends. The Hungarian organiser recalled a case where the organiser of the Milano marathon advised him to change the number of members of a team to four instead of three or five which led to the duplication of the number of teams next year. The use of a new chip technology was also a piece of advice from a fellow organiser (from the Rotterdam Marathon). They also participate in Conferences and Exhibitions organised around the new technologies, trends (e.g. new distances, pair races) and best practices (e.g. handling transport problems). As a result, we can conclude that running events and especially marathons gather an evenly growing attention and international participation which requires the implementation of best practices and technologies from foreign peer events. The main goal of these events is to increase the number of participants, to be part of the “of the global running village”, to form alliances with other event organisers and to utilize the synergy effects of other marathons in order to increase their revenues from participation, sponsorship and merchandising (R3).

5.DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

According to our research questions, we can state that (R1) the popularity and commercialization of international running events has been increasing in the developed countries.

We can also conclude (R2) that popularity of running events and the total revenue on the most important leisure sports markets (consumers, sponsors, sport equipment) has been increasing and getting more international in CEE. Data support that the running business has been growing steadily in the CEE region, especially in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, despite the setback of the global market. This is also true regarding the number of runners attending these events and the sum the different participating stakeholders – runners, supporters etc – spend on and during these events. We can also conclude that for international runners the touristic attractiveness of the organising city plays an important role and at the same time, we see the rise of entry prices, internalization approach and extended sponsorship deals as the number of foreign runners and the appearance of sponsors with international market goals could be identified.

While (R3) we can identify market seeking and strategic asset seeking motives in the case of marathon events in CEE. The market-seeking motivation can be first underlined with the case of the Prague marathon which, with the help of the international joint venture, was able to become the largest marathon in the CEE region. The second example is the evenly growing existence of marathon franchises in the region, while the third is the attraction of foreign runners as one the most important goal for different stakeholders as they expenditure is way exceeds the local participants or the non-sport related tourists.

The strategy asset seeking is primarily driven by gaining and integrating international knowledge mainly from benchmark events.

For our main research question of “how the motives for internationalization can be identified in the case of international running events in the Central-Eastern European region?” our results are in line with international findings that confirm market seeking motives to be dominant in the Central-Eastern European region. Furthermore, our results are compatible with the international tendency that strategic asset seeking motives are gaining strength in most of the markets. Interestingly, in case of the Hungarian case analysed, the market seeking motives are more pertinent as a short-term solution to quality issues in the service offering, i.e. attracting foreign runners is understood to be a more effective opportunity to raise the attendance of the event than developing the relatively small domestic target market. Meanwhile, strategic asset seeking behaviour is understood to be a more long-term consideration, as learning from international examples and refining the local services accordingly is less a solution for immediate issues but more an opportunity to gain a competitive edge for a longer horizon.

Our main findings are that market-seeking and strategic asset seeking aims can be identified in the case of CEE marathon organizers, but they have different motivations in short-term and long-term.

This was only our first step, this study should be seen as a starting point for further research. The limitation of our research is that it only involves two interviews and not covers all the markets of the CEE region. In the future, we wish to expand the number of interviews with the 8 organizers in Austria, Czech Republic and Poland. Try to expand international academic cooperation by involving more researchers from the region in the field of International Business or Leisure Sports. Willing to enlarge the sample with developing markets/events of Romania (Timisoara Marathon), Slovakia (Kosice Marathon) and Slovenia (Three Hearts Marathon). Finally expand the examined IB theoretical aspects including foreign entry modes, the importance of the nationality of the organizer and the strategy in internationalization.

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