

The Effect of UEFA Club Competitions on the Local Hospitality Performance

Stepan Chalupa¹, Martin Kocourek², Hana Bielikova³, Martin Petricek⁴

¹University College Prague, U Santosky 17, Prague, Czech Republic

²University of Hradec Kralove, Hradecka 1249/6, Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic

³Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Drazovska 4, Nitra, Slovakia

⁴Technical University of Liberec, Voronezská 13, Liberec, Czech Republic

Abstract – Sports events significantly affect the hosting destination and the interest in its visiting. Previous studies focused mainly on longitudinal events like the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups, where the single-day events were not investigated. The paper investigates how hosting UEFA competition finals affects the local hospitality industry's performance. The study adopted the benchmarking data from Smith Travel Research (STR) and evaluated the impact on the occupancy and prices of accommodation facilities. The results show a significant pricing effect for the day of the event and the day before the finals. There was increased demand when focusing on the occupancy rate, but not as significant as for the prices. No long-term effect on the hospitality industry was identified, and, in some cases, the negative effect might be perceived after the event's termination. To benefit from the event with significant interest from football fans, hoteliers should increase the sales rates, provide the guests with a broader range of services, and cooperate with the event organisers to increase the total performance.

Keywords – Revenue management, hotel performance, event management, sports events effect.

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Corresponding author: Stepan Chalupa,
University College Prague, U Santosky 17, Prague,
Czech Republic


Email: chalupa@ucp.cz

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1. Introduction

Sports events significantly affect the destination's image, perception, and interest in visiting the destination.

When focusing on the European Football competitions and the events connected to these competitions, the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) plays a significant role by creating and organising the international competitions of Champions League, Europa League and Conference League. The football clubs compete in their national leagues to access these international leagues to increase their revenue, get visibility, and increase the attractiveness of their games to their fans and other visitors.

When famous, the standalone stadium might be the destination of tourism, where the tourists are looking not only for the sports experience while spectating the matches but also for community-based experience [1].

A similar study was later conducted, and further investments were proposed due to the increasing popularity of the sports venues, where significant stress should be put on creating hospitable services and the complexity of the guest experience [2].

Standalone football matches and their organisation might also be used in business relationship creation and management. The study focusing on the highest Belgian League matches brought results showcasing the league's matches and their attendance with packages (including V.I.P. access and other services) as a practical result of business relations creation [3].

When focusing on the destination and competition dimensions of the sports (and mainly football) events, there might be a significant impact on destination marketing, where the accredited journalists who are reporting continuously about the event to home countries might help change the perceptions and stereotypes about the destination and increase in the interest in coming to the destination [4].

Several studies evaluated the long-term impact of the events on the destinations, where the UEFA EURO 2012 had mixed effects on the destination, where the questioning of the residents was conducted where both positives and negatives were identified. The positives outweighed the negatives [5]. Similar findings might be found in another studies [6], [7], [8], where the meta-review was created on the topic of the effect of sports events on the local economy. Most studies discuss the mixed impacts, both in the short and long term. In addition to previously mentioned studies, the prior planning and involvement of the touched stakeholders drive the event's success and mutual development of the destination and its image. These are later linked to positive short- and long-term effects on the locals, local economies, and their sustainability.

To highlight the importance of the international championships for the hosting cities or countries and simultaneously the spectators' strong interest in these events, the study commented on the organisation of the UEFA EURO 2020, which was highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though several restrictions were applied in terms of travelling and attending the events, the demand exceeded available capacities, and the event satisfied the needs of individual stakeholders [9].

More advanced findings connected with the residents' perception of the hosting and prosecution of the event were presented by another study, where the residents were questioned, and the mixed results were described. The significant differences in the statement's valuation were based on the personal attitude towards the COVID-19 restrictions [6]. These findings showcase significant interest in the common events and their possibility to boost local entrepreneurs' local economy and performance.

UEFA club competitions and international championships (UEFA EURO) are closely connected with the positive economic impact on the operations of the individual clubs involved in these competitions. The clubs must compete at the highest possible level and face attractive competitors from other European leagues [10], [11].

This study investigates the effect of hosting the finals of UEFA-created and managed competitions on the hospitality industry performance in the selected destinations. The Conference Leagues Final in 2023, Europa League Final in 2015 and Champions Leagues Finals in 2015 and 2022 were selected for the study purposes. The multiple selections of the Champions League Finals were created as the hospitality industry was still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022, and the reference to 2021 might be strongly biased by strongly growing tourism in the selected destination.

2. Literature Review

In this section, it is crucial to focus on the previously published studies in this field, where the impact on the hospitality industry is directly mentioned. Indirect impact on the hospitality industry was previously mentioned in the example of Southeastern Conference Football games [12]. The authors focused on the various data sources while considering several variables like hotel and market characteristics, previous hotel performance and the standalone impact of the football match and team involved. The most significant effect was identified in the expected quality of the match.

Another study was focused on the UEFA Euro 2004 hosted by Portugal. The time-framed sports mega event brought new visitors to the Algarve, where the hoteliers increased the selling rates significantly, decreasing stay demand. Overall evaluation showcases nearly nil effect on the hospitality market [13].

The previously mentioned study proposed implications for further research that should focus on the other dimensions of the Portuguese economy and evaluate the overall impact on the destination, Portugal. The evaluation was later conducted [14], where the event was compared to EXPO 98 and Porto 2001 events, which increased the overall image of the destinations. It is crucial to mention that the economic impact induced by the event was not measured. Similarly to this study, several other studies mention the impact of the UEFA Euros on the development of the destination and bringing more investment in the infrastructure, service and further development of the business in the destination [15], [16].

Another investigation on the UEFA Euro was linked to the tournament hosted by France in 2016 and later compared to FIFA World Cups in Russia and Qatar. The authors investigated the perception of these destinations through haphazard questioning of Swedish fans on online Facebook groups. The respondents supported the hypothesis that these mega-events improve the perception of the destination and make the destination more attractive. On the other hand, there were differences in the motivation to travel to individual destinations, as France was more acceptable and provided more attraction to football fans and the main motive was accompanied by sightseeing and experiencing the destination. The authors stated that it is crucial to push cooperation in the local economy to satisfy the needs of football fans and promote the sustainable development of the destination [17].

The lack of sustainability is causing significant abuse of the destination where long-term effects are strongly adverse, and the finance invested in the infrastructure has unrealistic returns on investment.

Previously mentioned tournaments might be apparent examples of sportswashing, where hosting the events softens negative emotions about the destinations [18].

Significantly higher coverage of the impact on the hospitality industry might be found for the FIFA World Cups. In 2014, the tournament was hosted by Brazil, and the research was based on the STR (Smith Travel Research – Currently CoStar Group) data about hotel performance in the cities hosting the group and elimination matches. Growing room rates mostly drove the overall impact in the hosting cities, but the impact of occupation varied between the destinations. The findings also prove short-term abuse of the destination, which might have positive impacts in the long term by significantly draining the interest in the destination without exciting football matches [19].

A similar effect was identified for several sports events in Finnish Lapland, where the impact on the hospitality industry was positive for the large-scale events (the effect of small-scale events was not proven) before and during the event, where the prices grew significantly. However, the occupancy remained at similar levels. After the events, the destinations faced decreased interest and demand for the proposed services, where the decline of 6 % was identified in the event stage [20]. Another aspect of the event's success and hosting destination is its allocation to shoulder periods on the market, which was proven by hosting the IIHF World Championship in Prague and Bratislava [21]. The authors identified a significant effect on the Bratislava hospitality market, where the performance of the hospitality industry was commonly low during the period when the championship was hosted. The market has never reached the same level of performance in recent days. It is crucial to mention that the effect was significant for the championship, where Prague faced improved performance only during the final stage.

FIFA World Cups drive significantly more fans to the hosting destination, leading to the opposite effects perceived during the Olympic Games [22]. The author's findings showcase exploitation of the destination during the event with no long-term effect and an insignificant effect on the revisit intentions and future development of tourism in the destination.

Previously mentioned studies focused mainly on the longitudinal events, where the interest of this research is in the significant one-day events (the final of the tournaments and championships). The previously mentioned study focusing on the IIHF World Championship hosted by Prague showcases the effect only during the final stage of the competition, where group stages brought no extra increase in hospitality performance [21].

The globally famous Super Bowl in the National Football League (N.F.L.) is driving the increase in the performance of the hotels in the hosting destination [23], where the other dimensions affect the hospitality industry's job creation [24] and volunteering [25].

Large-scale sports events drive higher interest levels into the hosting destination. In many cases, there was an identified pricing effect, where the hoteliers tended to increase the selling rates with minimal increase in the number of rooms sold. In most cases, the effect is only short-term; for most events, no long-term effect was identified. Previously mentioned studies focused mainly on football-oriented long-term events, where the group stages are played in several destinations, and the final part of the events is located at an exciting destination. The paper's primary focus is on the finals of selected UEFA-organised competitions.

3. Methodology

The study investigates the effect of hosting short-term sports events on the hospitality industry. To evaluate the performance of the hospitality market, the study adopted STR data shared via the STR Share Center. The studies previously adopted this approach, focusing on more extended events like the IIHF World Championships [21] or FIFA World Cup [19].

Basic KPIs are commonly used to evaluate the performance of the hospitality industry. Occupancy Rate, A.D.R. (Average Daily Rate) and synthetic indicator RevPAR (Revenue per Available Room.)

The occupancy rate might be calculated as

$$OCC = \frac{\text{Occupied Rooms}}{\text{Total Available Rooms}} \times 100.$$

It considers the number of occupied rooms without distinguishing the motive of use, room type, and overall number of rooms available for sale. In some cases, the market penetration index is used to compare the performance of a reference group of hotels.

The average daily rate might be calculated as

$$ADR = \frac{\text{Room Revenue}}{\text{Rooms Sold}}.$$

Room revenue is revenue generated by accommodation services (it is crucial to subtract additional services from selling rates like breakfast taxes) divided by the number of rooms sold. Similarly to the occupancy rate, the A.D.R. does not consider the different types of rooms and only provides the aggregated results for the whole accommodation facility.

The most complex indicator used within this study and previously mentioned research is revenue per available room (RevPAR), which is calculated as

$$RevPAR = \frac{ADR \times OCC}{Total\ Available\ Rooms}$$

The revenue generated from the accommodation services sales is divided by the number of available rooms (total rooms subtracted by the rooms out-of-order and services, the rooms that can not be sold at the monitored period).

After collecting the data from STR, these were compiled to showcase the performance during the event and the year before and after. To match the dates, the data were shifted to reflect the days in the week and the week of the year. This shift was used to reflect better the performance differences. The following section provides these results.

4. Results

This section of the paper is devoted to presenting the results—the effect of the final matches on the local hospitality industry performance is provided individually as standalone cases. In the first case, the final match of the UEFA Europa League 2015 was selected. Warsaw, Poland, hosted the finals on May 27, 2015. The final match was between Sevilla Fútbol Club S.A.D (Spain) and Futbolnyj klub Dnipro (Ukraine). The winner was Sevilla Fútbol Club S.A.D.

Figure 1 showcases the hospitality market's performance in selected years during the period of the finals match. The main events took place on Wednesdays, where the most significant difference in performance from previous and upcoming years might be identified. While the football teams attending the finals are not local, most of the fans are coming to the destination, where single-day trips are uncommon. That is why the hotelier also tends to increase the prices for the days before the event.

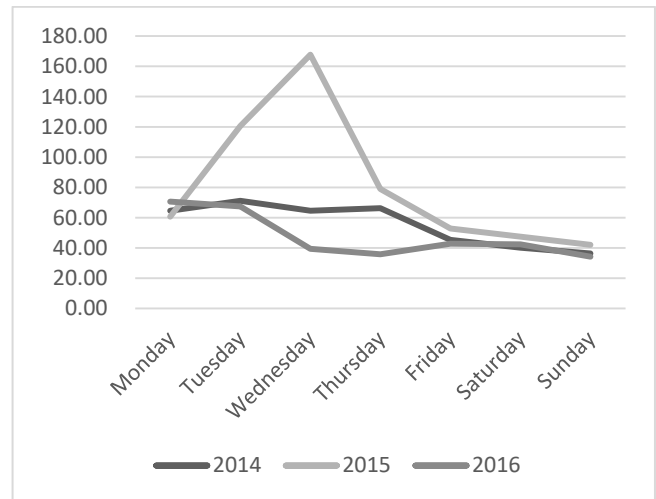


Figure 1. The effect on RevPAR – Europa League Finals 2015

To provide more detailed insights into the performance of the hospitality industry, the occupancy rate reached 97, 8 % (11, 8% increase to 2014) the day before the finals and 99, 1 % (18, 7% increase to 2014) during the finals. In 2016, there was a significant decrease in occupancy in these days. From the pricing point of view, the days before the final's prices grow by 51, 6 % and during the finals by 118, 9 %. Overall performance grew on average by 114, 6 %.

The second selected finals were the Champions League finals in 2015 hosted by Berlin on June 6 2015, between F.C. Barcelona and Juventus F.C. The winner was F.C. Barcelona. The finals took place on Saturday, where the occupancy rate for Friday grew by 3, 2 %. Interestingly, the occupancy rate decreased by 7, 3 % during the finals. As shown in Figure 2, the overall performance measured by RevPAR significantly increased.

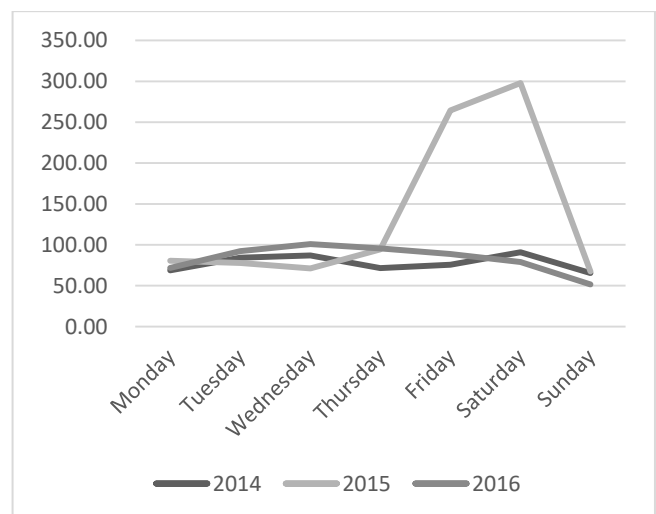


Figure 2. The effect on RevPAR – Champions League Finals 2015

As the occupancy rates were not significantly different, the opposite situation might be perceived with the prices, where an increase of 264,44 % was identified for the day before the finals and 297,79 % for the finals. The results are significantly higher than for the UEFA Europa League. However, an exciting situation might be identified for Sunday, where the prices were 40% higher than the previous year, but occupancy decreased by nearly 30 % with the final increase in RevPAR performance of 3 %, below the yearly average.

Paris hosted another final match of the Champions Leagues on May 28 2022, between Liverpool Football Club and Real Madrid Club de Fútbol. Figure 3 showcases the event's effect on the hospitality industry's performance. Compared to 2021 and 2023. To better understand the effect on the hospitality industry, it is crucial to mention the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and higher performance in 2023 (the overall performance of 2023 was better than that of 2022). This is directly visible for Monday-Wednesday and Sunday.

Contrary to the previously mentioned finals, it might be identified that the performance grows from Thursday, which is connected to higher interest in the destination, where the fans used the Champions League Finals as a primary motive for visiting Paris but also enjoyed other attractivities. Similarly to previous cases, the performance growth was mainly caused by the price increase (201,4 % on average to 2021 and identified decrease for 2023 of 18,1 %). From 2022 to 2023, the occupancy decreased by only 5,9 %.

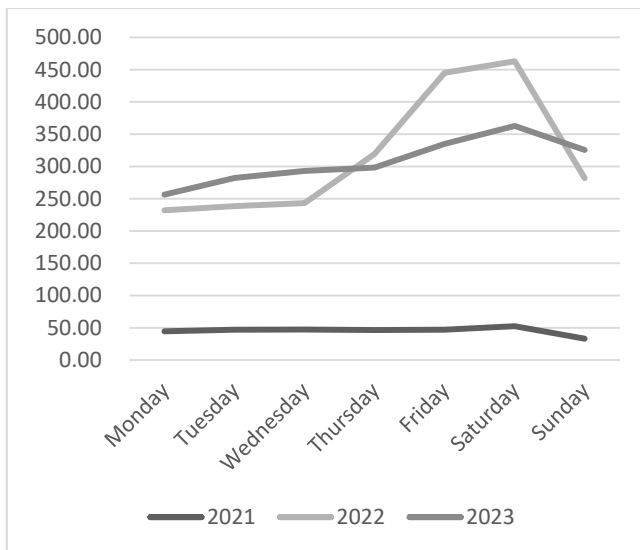


Figure 3. The effect on RevPAR – Champions League final 2022

Lastly, the study focuses on the finals of the most recent competition, the Europa Conference League, which Prague hosted on June 7 2023—the match between West Ham United Football Club and A.C.F. Fiorentina. Figure 4 showcases the different performance of the hospitality market in 2022 and 2023, for which more recent data is unavailable. Similarly to the previous case, the market was still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is visible in the year-to-year comparison of 2022 to 2023. In selected dates, the significantly higher performance was identified mainly for the event date and again dragged by the A.D.R.

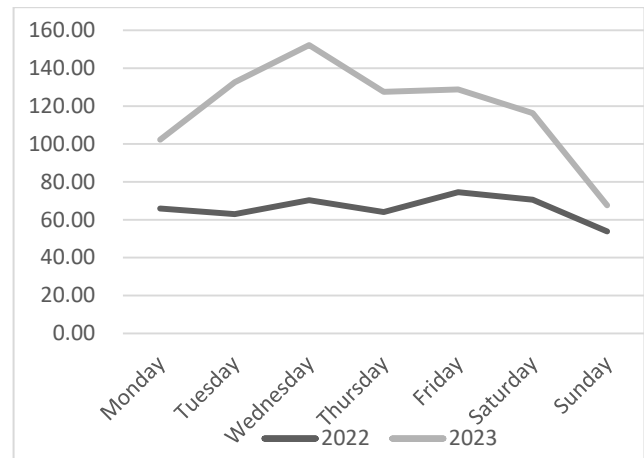


Figure 4. The effect on RevPAR – Europa Conference League Finals 2023

Previously mentioned results showcase significant pricing effects of the UEFA competition's final matches. When focusing on the occupancy increases, the more significant ones were identified for the finals during the week. For the weekend games, the increase in occupancy was minor, supported by a significantly higher price increase. In all cases, the events boosted the hospitality industry, but only in the case of Paris was the effect identified for events other than match and pre-match days.

5. Discussion

The study's results proved the impact of hosting the finals of international (European) club competitions on the local hospitality market performance. Similarly to previous studies, the occupancy impact was less significant than the pricing impact [13]. The level of development of the destination and current season on the market play significant roles where allocation of the events into shoulder periods might increase the significance of the effect on the hospitality industry. Contrary to that, the competitions are planned, and their finals are always held in the early summer seasons.

EUFA, as a main organiser, might cooperate with the selected destinations to promote football and its activity and help the destination attract investments and infrastructure development [15], [16].

Another aspect of the impact is in the competing clubs, where the more popular the opponents are, the higher the impact on the local hospitality market might be. [11]

Similarly to several studies [20], [21], [22], the effect of hosting the finals of the UEFA competitions was perceived mainly during the days before and during the event. Compared to performance in upcoming years, the hospitality market faced decline in interest and performance or was not significantly better than in the other periods of the year.

Even though studies mention the impact of the events on destination marketing, none of the previously mentioned studies provided reliable proof of such an effect. This study does not directly falsify these results and findings but fails to provide evidence for event-induced arrivals into the destination.

Several studies mentioned the negative effect on the destination's performance while the extremely high pricing changes are being identified [20]. Similarly to this insight, the Champions League finals hosted by Berlin showcased such an impact for Sunday, when occupancy significantly decreased after the event and overall performance increased by only 3 %, below the yearly growth rate.

On the other hand, when the exciting destination hosts the events, the fans prefer exploring the destination and spending a more extended time there [17]. The results proved this effect in the Paris finals of the Champions League.

Even though studies mentioned the positive effect of these events on infrastructure creation, there might also be a negative impact when the market is oversupplied, and luxury products are losing their importance for the market [26].

Lastly, the study focuses on the overall market conditions, where the significant effect of disparity might be perceived for independent, franchised, or chain-owned/managed accommodation facilities. From this point of view, independent hotels tend to be more flexible, but this flexibility is mainly derived from well-managed knowledge [27].

6. Conclusion

Previously mentioned results showcased the direct impact of the events on the hospitality industry's performance. This impact might only be perceived in the short term, and no long-term impact was recognised.

Data availability was the critical function when selecting the destination, and further research should evaluate the finals complexly while considering other matches.

While the results are significant, the study does not consider more factors that may cause the increases and decreases in the performance on the market. The results were created based on the previously published research.

The sports events bring interest in the destination, whereas the previous research primarily focused on the standard accommodation services. As AirBnB and other platforms are gaining momentum, the P2P accommodation providers are commonly omitted, which might lead to the overall market performance bias. For hotel owners and hospitality practitioners, the events are a great source of short-term increases in service demand and the driver of overall performance. To achieve the highest possible benefit from the event, hoteliers should cooperate with the organisers and other stakeholders. The fans will spend more time in the destination if an exciting product is not directly connected to a sports event.

They delivered reliable results that might be directly applicable to hotel operations and in further researching the impact of football on the hospitality industry.

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