

Major Sports Events Returning to Emerging Sports Tourism Nations: Willingness to Pay for the EuroBasket in Slovenia

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As Slovenia prepares to co-host the 2029 EuroBasket, or European Basketball Championship for men, this article examines the variables that influenced taxpayers' willingness to support public backing for a previous rendition of the tournament. The authors surveyed 374 Slovenian taxpayers when the country hosted the event in 2013, and determined that on average, they stated a willingness to pay (SWTP) of €18.7 per person. A Tobit model showed that belief in the societal impact of sports events and the nation-building potential of the tournament increased SWTP by €5.1. Wealthier respondents were less willing to contribute; to overcome this challenge, future promotional campaigns should target higher earners. Beyond money, respondents valued intangible benefits including national pride, international recognition, and skills gained in event organization and marketing. When Slovenia co-hosts the tournament again in 2029, the local organizing committee should spotlight both tangible and emotional benefits, amplify community narratives, and design curated promotional campaigns to secure the trust of a broad range of supporters and stakeholders.

Keywords: contingent valuation method, willingness to pay (WTP), European basketball championship, public goods, intangible effect, sport tourism, sport management



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Introduction

Researchers, tourism and hospitality professionals, policymakers, and other specialized publics and stakeholders disagree on whether investing public funds in the hosting of sporting events is wise. However, one thing is indisputable: these public subsidies do not go unnoticed (Maennig & Zimbalist, 2012). Mass media, scholars, and the general public are less attentive and opinionated when 'major' rather than 'mega' competitions such as world or continental championships are organized (Ličen et al., 2016). Yet, the sheer number of

major sporting events means they directly impact the lives of far more people than mega-events such as the Olympics or FIFA World Cups. The public subsidies customarily granted to such events render this impact both spiritual and material.

This paper analyses popular support for public funding of the European Basketball Championship for men, also known as EuroBasket, hosted by Slovenia in September 2013. Though still relatively small by international standards, the EuroBasket was, and remains to date, the largest non-recurring sports event

hosted by this country. Organizers thus lacked experience in staging competitions of such magnitude.

Also lacking experience in evaluating and supporting such events were the civil service, tourism and hospitality professionals, and the local population. Studies on contingent valuation and willingness to pay for sports events are concentrated in North America and Western Europe (Andreff, 2024; Bakhsh et al., 2022; Porter & Chin, 2012). Yet, as emerging sports tourism and sport management nations, Slovenia and other countries with similar geopolitical, athletic, economic, and societal characteristics will host events of similar size and scope in the future (Andreff, 2024). Thus, it is imperative to conduct an impartial assessment of the value such events create, especially as they receive public subsidies. To assess the value and desirability of the European Basketball Championship for men for the local population, the willingness to pay (WTP) of Slovenian taxpayers was measured using a contingent valuation method (CVM).

Despite the considerable time that has elapsed since the tournament, this analysis is timely as it was compiled only weeks after Slovenia was announced as a co-host of the 2029 edition of the same competition (To. G., 2025). Requests, or even expectations, of public subsidies for the tournament will inevitably arise soon, so knowing what level of support (if any) citizens found reasonable for the 2013 tournament can help inform the request – and influence the decision – for the second go. More broadly, Eastern and Southeastern Europe have become popular destinations for major sporting events, but there are still very few independent academic studies of their value and implications for residents. This study aspires to fill a scholarship void in a region where many nations are trying to affirm themselves as veritable sport tourism destinations. Finally, information on WTP and contingent valuation will provide valuable guidance to local communities aspiring or planning to invest in major sporting events to boost their local sports tourism products.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Sports generate both tangible and intangible benefits. The former refers to increased income due to

increased or generated consumption (e.g. by tourists attending an event), while the latter indicates the creation of public goods such as international prestige (Grix & Carmichael, 2012), local unity and civic pride – the ‘feel good effect’ (Maennig & Porsche, 2008). When hosting a major international event in a popular sport, public goods that are both non-excludable and non-rivalrous can include conversations about the event and a sense of pride deriving from perceived international visibility and recognition. However, these events contribute to national pride and identification only if they receive wide media coverage and include successful athletic performances, and even then, the boost in psychic income is largely limited to those who follow the competition with interest (Mutz & Gerke, 2024). Even unsuccessful bids for major sports events may leave positive intangible legacies, although these tend to be very limited (Tinaz & Ströbel, 2024).

Studies assessing tangible and intangible benefits are used for non-market purposes and are typically conducted before the event occurs. In contrast, market-based analyses (such as economic impact studies) only assess tangible benefits and are usually carried out after the event takes place. The former almost always estimate larger economic benefits than market-based studies later show (Solberg, 2017; Whitson & Horne, 2006). The most frequently used methods in non-market valuation studies are contingent valuation, hedonic pricing, and travel cost methods (Gergaud & Ginsburgh, 2013).

Contingent valuation is used to estimate the ‘non-use’ value of a good or service (or, in this case, an event) that is not subject to traditional market-based valuations (Arrow et al., 1993). A contingent valuation survey creates a hypothetical market by asking individuals how much they would be ‘willing to pay’ for the mere existence of the resource, allowing the assessment of a monetary value that is considered meaningful or reasonable.

Although this approach was originally developed for use in environmental economics, recent studies have used it in sport contexts. For example, studies conducted in North America have attempted to put a price tag on the benefits and costs associated with building or refurbishing venues to retain profession-

al teams or events. Taxpayers were usually supportive of public subsidies to sports teams and facilities to enhance the quality of life (Santo, 2007) and city reputation (Schwester, 2007). Stadium attendance (actual spectatorship) was the most consistent determinant of willingness to support public spending; however, the amount they were willing to pay very rarely met the amount of the actual (and necessary) subsidy. In Europe, teams receive public funding to avoid relegation or folding. Contingent valuations of professional soccer again highlighted the importance of attendance and consumption (use versus non-use) in approving of public spending to benefit professional teams (Castellanos Garcia et al., 2014; Wicker et al., 2016). A recent transnational study conducted in Europe and Asia assessed citizens' WTP for a sports fund designed to accomplish competitive success in the Olympic Games. Respondents in countries with a greater history of Olympic success were willing to pay more, indicating that the number of medals won was linked with more utility among individuals (Funahashi et al., 2020).

One-time events differ from professional and Olympic teams, despite both receiving public funding for their facilities and operations. Teams typically use only one home venue, which they use many times over multiple competitive seasons. Thus, teams can spread infrastructural costs over a long time, and attendance is known and relatively constant. Olympic teams often use existing facilities, and their expenses are mainly limited to staffing, materials, and travel. In contrast, events such as continental championships typically use multiple venues, but each hosts only very few games over a very short period. Permanent tenants must then be found after the event, which often proves to be difficult (Alm et al., 2016). Finally, ex-ante attendance estimates are complex, difficult to calculate (Solberg & Preuss, 2007), and often exaggerated (Porter & Fletcher, 2008). Emerging research in contingent valuation of sport events integrates event management with ecological accounting principles, to further facilitate consideration for the sustainability of sport event planning and execution (Rinker et al., 2025).

The economic impact of (mega) sports events on host communities can be either positive or negative:

Porter and Chin's (2012) comprehensive literature review examining events of various size staged over the preceding 15 years found 'no consistent positive impact from a sports event, often finding the event associated with a negative impact' (p. 248; see also Baade & Matheson, 2011). Elahi et al. (2021) detected similarly ambiguous outcomes in a more recent systematic review of studies on economic, as well as social, cultural, political, and environmental effects on local communities. Another comprehensive survey of the economic impact of professional sport teams, venues, and events in North America did not find tangible long-term economic effects on the host region regardless of estimation method, model specification or outcome variable, even when accounting for intangible benefits and residents' welfare (Bradbury et al., 2023). Any positive economic impacts are usually much more modest than those touted by sports promoters (e.g. Fourie & Santana-Gallego, 2011; Matheson, 2024; Zimbalist, 2015). This broad consensus among economists studying sport events has been challenged by some recent studies, but Feddersen and Maennig (2023) demonstrate that such work is often done by academic boosters who employ alternative data points or ranges and/or methods of analysis to demonstrate otherwise unlikely or dubious positive effects.

Duan et al. (2021) note that 'in sport and tourism literature, the impacts of sport events are often used interchangeably with event legacy' (p. 1746). They further note that residents compare the costs to the perceived social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits when developing an attitude towards the event. In their study of impact perception for a marathon race, Duan et al. (2021) found that perceived economic impact had no significant direct effect on event support; however, residents' overall quality of life played a mediating role in support and impact perception. Another literature review has also found no evidence that public funding of sport events substantially and sustainedly enhances the long-term subjective wellbeing of people living in host communities (Taks, 2023). When studying the social value of major sports events, scholars employ a multitude of definitions and methodologies yet seldom explain

their findings through strong theoretical frameworks (Bakhsh et al., 2023).

Some European scholars have used contingent valuation to assess public support for the hosting of mega-events such as the Olympic Games (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2008; Preuss et al., 2020; Walton et al., 2008; Wicker & Coates, 2018; Wicker et al., 2017) and the FIFA World Cup (Süssmuth et al., 2010; see also Matheson, 2024). However, studies of major events such as continental championships are much rarer. The two types of events differ in terms of periodicity, domesticity, generated economic activity, media appeal, and/or focus on spectators or competitors (Gratton et al., 2000). While mega events undoubtedly cost more, major events are much more frequent and thus impact many more local and national budgets. Local, regional, and/or national governments often justify these subsidies (to what are usually private enterprises) by claiming the events will generate two types of large positive externalities: a direct, tangible return on investment that benefits the public (e.g. urban development, increased tourism, job creation), and the provision of intangible public goods such as local unity, fan loyalty, and civic pride (Andranovich et al., 2001).

Ex-ante studies of contingent valuation of major sports events in Europe are relatively rare, and pertinent literature must be sought quite widely in academic journal archives. In 1996, spectators of a Davis Cup tennis match in France were asked to identify the maximum annual amount they would accept to pay to support organizing sporting events in the host city of Limousin. Women were willing to pay, on average, €10.6, while men were willing to pay significantly more, €14.7 (Barget & Gouguet, 2007). In 1997, the citizens of Trondheim in Norway stated they were willing to pay an average of NOK965¹ in earmarked taxes to host the World Skiing Championship (Andersson et al., 2004). Vekeman et al. (2015) tested various models and influencing factors of contingent valuation for the one-day cycling Tour of Flanders in 2009. Prompted by the question of what amount of additional annu-

al taxes they were willing to contribute to ensure the continued existence of the historic and culturally significant race, survey respondents expressed an average WTP of €10.3 and a median WTP of €4.2. Young women valued the event lower, while higher personal income and love for cycling (but not for other sports) clearly positively impacted valuation (Vekeman et al., 2015). Average WTP for the Grande Partenza (the first stage) of the cycling Giro d'Italia in the Gelderland region of the Netherlands among local adults was €3.58 before the event and €4.45 after the event; the share of respondents willing to pay anything at all rose from 29.7% ex ante to 39.3% ex post (De Boer et al., 2018). In another rare study of psychic income effects, both emotional reward and WTP for future international sports events remained higher even several years after Bergen hosted the World Road Cycling Championship in 2017, despite the financial failure of the original event (Solberg & Denstadli, 2025).

The only contingent valuation studies of sport events in Eastern Europe were conducted in Poland. There, Zawadski (2016) examined the intangible benefits and costs of the 2012 UEFA Euro. He asked adult participants in five major Polish cities to estimate the increased household property tax they would be willing to pay over five years to offset the costs associated with hosting the soccer tournament. The study reflected the complexity of hosting a major – perhaps even mega – sporting event in a country with a developing sport tourism and sport management industry, so no single average valuation was computed. Rather, the author determined that WTP increased among respondents with higher incomes, education, interest in football, and young or old age (but not the middle-aged) (Zawadski, 2016). The same author assessed WTP to host several non-mega events in a specific sports venue and determined that major events inspire significantly smaller amounts than the continental soccer championship. Still, WTP most obviously increases with personal income and interest in sport (Zawadski, 2020, 2022, 2024a). Zawadski also surmises that social benefits may become more apparent for smaller events because they may occur in the same city more than once (Zawadski, 2024a). We did not

1 Accounting for inflation, this sum would amount to NOK1898, or €159.9, in May 2025, per Inflation Calculator (<https://www.ssb.no/en/kalkulatorer/priskalkulator>).

find other more recent studies, or studies originating in Southeastern Europe.

Sport Event Management in Slovenia and Former Yugoslavia

Since 2000, countries that were formerly part of Yugoslavia have become increasingly frequent hosts of major sporting events. Slovenia hosted the European Men's Handball Championship in 2004 and the European Basketball Championship for Men in 2013. It co-hosted women's equivalents of both competitions in 2022 and 2023, respectively. It has also hosted World Championships in ski flying (2004, 2010, 2020), biathlon (2001, 2006, 2021), rowing (2011), and other sports, as well as recurring major events such as World Cup stops in Alpine skiing, ski jumping, cycling UCI ProSeries, tennis WTA Tour events, and more.

Croatia and Serbia have similarly lively sports events markets and often attract similar sports. These similarities are probably the result of a shared athletic history. Yugoslavia often hosted major and even mega sporting events such as the Winter Olympics in 1984, the UEFA Euro in 1976, the World Basketball Championship in 1970, and five continental basketball championships. However, the economic, social, and political situations of its successor nations differ considerably. This study presents the first comprehensive examination of willingness to pay for major sports events in a former Yugoslavian country attempting to establish a reputation as an emerging sport tourism and sport management (desti)nation (Slovenska turistična organizacija, n.d.).

The EuroBasket 2013

The men's European Basketball Championship 2013, or EuroBasket, was held between 4 and 22 September 2013 in four cities in Slovenia. The goals for the event were to generate a profit or at least avoid financial loss; facilitate a fresh start for Slovenian basketball; organize the best possible event; facilitate a medal/top placement for the Slovenian team; improve the superstructure and promote host cities; generate interest in basketball and sports; and generate interest in Slovenia as a sports and tourist destination (Eurobasket,

2013). These goals were used as the rationale to justify public subsidies provided to the event.

An early cost-benefit estimate prepared by the organizers anticipated a net effect of €39 million on the Slovenian economy; an amount based on what was described as a 'very conservative study' (Košarkarska zveza Slovenije, n.d., p. 2). The predicted effect included (non-specified) multiplier effects and an estimated €4 million 'not lost' because an estimated 3000–5000 Slovenian spectators would not travel abroad for the tournament (opportunity cost).

An ex-post cost-benefit analysis (CBA) commissioned by the organizers (Ivašković, 2014) determined that the event was well organized despite the then-persisting economic crisis. In the aftermath of the European debt crisis, Slovenia experienced a 24-month recession that spanned from 2011 until the end of 2013 (pm/kk, 2014). The project was conceived as a public-private partnership. The Slovenian central and local governments agreed to cover the organizing fee (initially set at €8.8 million and eventually reduced to €7.9 million; Ivašković, 2014, p. 38; Urad Vlade RS za komuniciranje, 2014, p. 17) and invest in the expansion and/or refurbishment of the five venues (Celje, Koper, Jesenice, and two in Ljubljana, the state capital) for a total investment of approximately €9.8 million (inclusive of €4.2 million funded by European Structural Funds) (Ivašković, 2014, pp. 37–38; Pavčnik, 2014). In turn, the limited liability company founded by the Basketball Federation of Slovenia (Košarkarska zveza Slovenije, hereinafter KZS) to organize the event assumed operational costs, which ultimately amounted to €13 million (Ivašković, 2014, pp. 10, 39–41). The treasury recovered an estimated €6.4 million in value added tax and income tax (p. 41).

The tournament reportedly attracted 31,480 international visitors who travelled to Slovenia specifically to attend the EuroBasket 2013 (KZS, 2013). A study assessing visitors' motivations to travel to one of the host cities determined that older, affluent males from non-neighbouring countries were more likely to visit the tourist destination (Lesjak & Podovšovnik Axelsson, 2015; Lesjak et al., 2017). Some residents of the same host city appreciated the positive cultural impacts derived from exposure and exchanges with

tourists, leading to a better understanding of visitors from foreign countries. The negative social impacts included traffic congestion and parking issues, while concern over crime and vandalism was low (Lesjak et al., 2014). Media exposure to the tournament also fed patriotic attitudes among Slovenian nationals (Ličen, 2017). A time series survey showed that Slovenian residents perceived the event as providing worldwide recognition of the nation, the promotion of an active lifestyle, and economic improvements. The perceived downturns included the high cost of tickets and a modest tourist appeal (Ličen & Cole, 2017).

Purpose of This Study

Despite the popularity of spectator sports, taxpayers' willingness to pay to host them varies considerably. For the EuroBasket 2013, the organizers prepared an ex-ante estimate of the benefits deriving from hosting the event. This study informed the government's decision to financially support the tournament and influenced the public's perception of its value. However, such top-down impact studies should be complemented by a bottom-up approach when studying the economics of sports events (Swart & Bob, 2012). Our study examines the bottom-up public support for the event and the factors that influenced WTP. Such studies are most often conducted in North America and Western Europe (Bakhsh et al., 2022; Porter & Chin, 2012) even though emerging economies are taking on ever more major and mega sports events (Andreff, 2024). Our findings will help fill this void and hopefully inspire scholars in other understudied countries with similar geopolitical, athletic, economic, and societal traits. We were guided by two main research questions:

- RQ1 *What monetary value were the surveyed taxpayers willing to pay to host the EuroBasket 2013?*
- RQ2 *Which factors determined their willingness to pay?*

Methods

The contingent valuation method is the most appropriate approach for assessing public support for public

funding of the EuroBasket because it directly measures residents' willingness to pay (WTP) for both tangible and intangible benefits associated with hosting the event. Unlike revealed preference methods such as hedonic pricing or travel cost, which are limited to market-based or use values (Funahashi et al., 2020), contingent valuation can capture non-market and non-use values such as happiness, national pride, and the prestige associated with hosting an event that are central to the justification of public spending on sporting events (Orlowski & Wicker, 2019).

The contingent valuation method's ability to elicit individual-level valuations through hypothetical scenarios allows for a comprehensive aggregation of public support, providing policymakers with a clear monetary estimate of the event's perceived social value (Orlowski & Wicker, 2019). This is particularly important for non-mega sporting events like the EuroBasket, where many benefits are intangible and not reflected in market transactions (Zawadzki, 2020, 2024a). Furthermore, contingent valuation has been successfully applied in similar contexts to estimate the value of elite sport success and the social impacts of both mega and non-mega sporting events, demonstrating its validity and policy relevance (Zawadzki, 2024b).

Alternative approaches such as the opportunity cost method can offer macro-level insights but struggle to capture the nuanced, individual-level preferences and the full spectrum of social benefits that the contingent valuation method provides. Hybrid approaches are emerging but are less established and often still rely on contingent valuation as a core component (e.g. Bakhsh et al., 2022).

Survey Design

The survey was part of a larger research endeavour and consisted of four sets of questions. The first set identified the respondents' attitudes to major sports events. The second set examined the respondents' knowledge of the EuroBasket 2013 and studied their perceptions of benefits and problems related to the event. The fourth set of questions included respondents' social, economic, and demographic characteristics.

The third section of the survey is central to this study and assessed participants' contingent valua-

tion. It started with a short description of the benefits expected from hosting the EuroBasket, including enhancing the global recognition and reputation of Slovenia as the host country, the promotion of the national brand (I Feel Slovenia), the opportunity for sports fans to watch the elite tournament live, the benefits for Slovenian businesses and service providers, and the tax revenues collected by the government.

The following paragraph explained that the tournament will be organized by EP 2013, a limited liability company owned by KZS. EP 2013 would cover the tournament's operational costs, while the national and local (municipal) governments in tournament host cities would cover the tournament application fee, bank guarantees, and operational and infrastructural costs associated with the four tournament venues. Survey participants were told that the national and local government funds allocated to the event could be used for other purposes, such as the funding of other sports events, sport clubs, youth or disability sport, recreation, or even other public goods such as education, pensions, social transfers, the environment, science, etc. Finally, participants were reminded that tax revenues are limited and can be spent in multiple ways, and the tournament would be held in a different country if Slovenia did not host it. We formulated the scenario to address budgetary limits, embedding effects, bias arising from the relation between the whole and its parts, bias arising from the symbolic value, and satisfaction arising from the 'warm-glow effect' (Nunes & Schokkaert, 2003).

After being introduced to this scenario, respondents were asked whether they approved of a one-time payment of €10 from their taxes towards the organizational costs of the 2013 European Basketball Championship for Men. The proposed sum is the median value of the amounts obtained in a pilot study and is close to the actual per-capita amount allocated by the government. The purpose of this question was twofold: first, to guide respondents who have no experience with the evaluation of non-market goods and might not be able to construct a reasonable value for such an unfamiliar good (i.e. provide a 'ballpark figure'). Second, the respondents could accept or reject this sum. If they rejected it, they were asked for the

reason they rejected it; their response to this follow-up question allowed us to identify protest responses. This question was followed by one asking the respondents to indicate the maximum amount of tax income they were willing to pay to subsidize the project. This question was used to determine stated willingness to pay (SWTP), which is the focus of this research.

An online survey was created and distributed through ika.si, a web-based survey research tool. A link to the survey was included in a dedicated news item published on MMC RTVSLO, the online service of the Slovenian public broadcaster. At the time of the survey, this web portal was the third most popular Slovenian website according to Alexa, a web traffic analysis company. The survey and news item attracted responses from taxpayers browsing through the public service website. Web browser cookies prevented individuals from completing multiple surveys. The survey was conducted one month before the start of the EuroBasket and was accessible between 1 and 9 August 2013.

Data Management and Regression Model

The initial sample included 710 observations. After excluding single missing values, outliers, and respondents who reported not earning an income (and were thus not taxpayers), we reduced the sample to 374 observations. Non-valid responses in contingent valuation surveys are common due to a combination of hypothetical bias (Hausman, 2012), protest behaviour (Jorgensen et al., 1999), non-response (Wang, 1997), ambivalence (Ready et al., 1995), and insensitivity to scope (Hausman, 2012). The final sample includes respondents over the age of 18 (the age of majority in Slovenia) who reported earning an income. In 2013, 74% of Slovenia's population reported using the Internet (Zdešar, 2013), so although the sample is not representative of the national population, its composition makes the results indicative of the broader popular sentiment. Survey participants were considerably more likely to be younger, male, and sports enthusiasts than the average population, with 46% of men and 42% of women belonging to the 28–37 age group, which represented the largest cohort in the sample. Such overrepresentation introduces po-

Table 1 Stratification and Sampling Weights

How often do you watch sports live or on tv? Strata (1–3)	Share within sample	Share of population*	Weights
1. Regularly	0.6203	0.09	0.000387081
2. Sometimes	0.3262	0.15	0.001153411
3. Never	0.0535	0.76	0.037897352

Note *Audience data from AGB Nielsen Media Research for RTV Slovenija, target audience 4+. Live and ‘fan zone’ audience was estimated as 10% of the television audience.

tential bias, as attitudes toward sports consumption may differ systematically from those of older or less sports-minded individuals. To mitigate this, we relied on stratification by reported viewing status (regular viewing, occasional viewing, and non-viewing),

which ensured that the weighted sample matched the population proportions across these key strata. Since the survey sample was large enough to conduct a contingent valuation survey, we followed Carson’s (2000) recommendation and weighted responses of primary

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables

Variable	Proportion	Linearized Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
Age				
18–27 years	0.18136	0.06312	0.05724	0.30548
28–37 years	0.41861	0.86473	0.24857	0.58864
38–47 years	0.19041	0.07056	0.05167	0.32915
48–57 years	0.16661	0.07449	0.02808	0.30514
58–67 years	0.04302	0.03840	−0.03249	0.11852
Completed education				
No formal education or elementary school	0.00242	0.00135	−0.00031	0.00499
High school	0.34522	0.08417	0.17971	0.51073
Two- or three-year university degree	0.17118	0.06311	0.04709	0.29527
Four- or five-year university degree	0.30336	0.08088	0.14431	0.46241
Master's, Doctoral degree	0.17790	0.07052	0.03924	0.31656
Net monthly nonzero income (class)				
Less than 500 EUR	0.09892	0.05293	−0.00516	0.20300
500–799 EUR	0.11412	0.05303	0.00985	0.21840
800–1,099 EUR	0.22590	0.07067	0.08693	0.36487
1,100–1,399 EUR	0.36090	0.08640	0.19100	0.53079
1,400–1,699 EUR	0.06963	0.05292	−0.00710	0.20103
1,700 – 1,999 EUR	0.01248	0.00314	0.00631	0.01866
More than 2,000 EUR	0.09071	0.05289	−0.01328	0.19471

NOTE $n = 374$, no. of strata = 3, no. of PSUs = 374

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Other Key Variables in the Model (n = 374, no. of strata = 3, no. of psus = 374)

	Proportion	Linearized Std. Err.	[95% Conf. Interval]	
SWTP	14.82126 (mean)	4.03815	6.88072	22.7618
National awareness*				
1	0.12709	0.06290	0.00340	0.25079
2	0.13565	0.06297	0.01184	0.25947
3	0.42865	0.08813	0.25536	0.60195
4	0.22302	0.06321	0.09872	0.34733
5	0.08557	0.03872	0.00944	0.16171
Opportunity to gain experience**				
0	0.76305	0.07637	0.61287	0.91323
1	0.23695	0.07637	0.08677	0.38713
Protest***				
0	0.68062	0.08413	0.51518	0.84605
1	0.31938	0.08413	0.15395	0.48482

Notes * National awareness in connection to willingness to pay as self-reported by expressing agreement with the assertion, 'Hosting these events enhances national awareness of the population', on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 = Not at all and 5 = Completely agree.

** Respondents' agreement with the assertion that one of the greatest advantages associated with hosting the event is the earning of experience in the organization and marketing of major sports events. 0 = disagree, 1 = agree.

*** Respondents' protest attitude as inferred from responses to the question why they were not willing to contribute the proposed EUR10 per taxpayer towards organizing the event. 0 = no protest or complaint, 1 = expressed complaint.

sampling unit (psu) variables with regard to the variable of frequency of attending live sport events or watching them on television to avoid sample bias (see Table 1). Sampling weights were calculated using ex-post information on EuroBasket 2013 live and TV audience. Individual weights were calculated to align the stratified survey sample with the known population distribution. For each viewing category, the weight was obtained as the ratio of the population share to the number of respondents in that category.

Table 2 presents summary statistics for the demographic variables, while Table 3 shows summary statistics for the key variables in the model.

Most participants reported being 28–37 years old (41.8%). In terms of education, most respondents (34.5%) had completed high (secondary) school. The most frequent non-zero net monthly income was between €1,100 and €1,399. Survey participants were thus slightly younger than the national average of 41 years, while reported earnings were close to the na-

tional average (the average net salary in August 2013 was €989.52; Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, 2014).³ As the respondent's income has a fairly strong positive correlation with their level of education (Baum et al., 2013), the latter variable was not included in the model.

Statistically significant factors influencing the respondents' stated willingness to pay included their perception of national awareness, their view of the event as an opportunity to acquire organizational and marketing experience, and a potential protest attitude towards public funding of the event (Table 3).

To incorporate sampling methodology in the analysis, we developed a regression model that accounts for the weighted structure of psus and sport strata. This method enables the calculation of robust standard errors in the regression model, which removes

² Average salaries have since grown and amounted to €1,577.42 in July 2025 (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.-b). We discuss some implications of such change for our study in the conclusion.

the bias introduced to the model through the heteroscedastic data (Regression Analysis of Household Expenditure and Income, 2009, p. 74).

As our purpose is to estimate the average stated willingness to pay, which is a continuous, directly observed variable, we employed a multivariate linear regression model. The values of the regression coefficients are assessed with the OLS method. Thus, we can also test whether our expectations, which are set based on economic theory, are true. Furthermore, we designed a Tobit model, also known as a censored regression model, to estimate relationships between variables, as WTP involves censoring from below (it cannot be negative). The model takes the following form:

$$S_{WTP} = X'\beta + e,$$

where S_{WTP} represents a vector of highest values of response variable, X' is a matrix of values of explanatory variables, β is a vector of regression coefficients, and e represents a vector of residuals.

The contingent valuation results proved reliable, as weighting corrected for sampling bias and both linear and Tobit models yielded consistent findings. Validity was ensured through careful scenario design, a pilot study to calibrate payment amounts, and the screening of protest responses to capture genuine willingness to pay (Carson, 2000).

Results

The marginal effect of each factor on $SWTP$ is presented in Table 4. The greatest explanatory power is reached when the national awareness variable (*nat_aw*) is included in the model. Individuals who value and attend sports events, particularly in connection with a stronger national awareness, were on average willing to pay €5.15 more towards hosting the EuroBasket 2013 than other respondents. Table 5 in the appendix reports the estimation results from both the OLS and Tobit models, providing a comparison of coefficients and significance levels across the two approaches. As shown in Table 5, both the OLS and Tobit models produce consistent results for the key explanatory variables, reinforcing the robustness of the findings.

The socio-economic variable measuring participants' net monthly income (variable *income_class*)

significantly impacted the respondents' willingness to pay. Every additional €300 of income reduced WTP by approximately €3.4 for an otherwise 'average' individual. This finding is a noteworthy contribution to an issue that has been yielding inconsistent conclusions.

Those who indicated that the project should not be financed with public sources but rather by someone else (a dummy variable *protest*) were, on average, willing to pay almost €25 less towards the project than other respondents. This is in line with economic theory: 'free riders' do not wish to pay for a good they may continue to access.

Individuals who saw the event more as 'a private initiative', i.e. those who saw the event as an opportunity for EP 2013 and KZS to gain organizational and marketing experience rather than prospective national benefits, stated lower willingness to pay (€11.5 less) than respondents who did not see the event in this light.

When these four explanatory variables are included in the model, the value of the constant is no longer statistically significantly different from 0 (see appendix). The value of the multiple regression coefficient of determination (R^2) and the value of the F -statistic are acceptable. Although the relatively small proportion of explained variance (31 percent) indicates that the regression model does not include all the variables that affect willingness to pay, it is undisputed that high income, 'protest financial attitude' and 'organizers gaining experience', without a change in all the other variables in the model, results in a lower willingness to pay. Lastly, the results demonstrate a direct and positive correlation between national awareness and willingness to pay.

The estimated value of willingness to pay at average values of explanatory variables was €18.69. Adjusted for inflation (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.-a), this would amount to €24.55 in August 2025. This average individual amount is used for aggregation purposes. The basis for aggregating WTP values is already defined with the selection of the form of payment for the accomplishment of the project. Since this was defined as a lump sum of paid tax, it covers all those liable to pay taxes, i.e. approximately 1.6 million Slovenian taxpayers (from a population of 2 million)

(Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.-c). The obtained value (approximately €30 million) provided a reasonably good reflection of the nation's perception of the use and non-use values of this major sports event and justifies the funds invested in the project by the national and local governments.

Discussion

The sum Slovenian respondents were willing to pay to host the 2013 EuroBasket was significantly lower (by as much as ten times) than SWTP in previous studies; however, the operating budgets of the 1997 World Skiing Championships, and especially the 2012 London Olympics and UEFA Euro, were significantly higher than the EuroBasket's (Andersson et al., 2004; Atkinson et al., 2008; Zawadski, 2016). Also, the GDP per capita of Slovenia in 2013 (€17,430) was significantly lower than that of Norway in 1997 (€40,039 in 2013 currency) or the United Kingdom's in 2012 (€32,598) – but was higher than Poland's in 2012 (€10,746).³ As the events and the circumstances surrounding them are not directly comparable, it is only fair to say that Slovenians, being poorer than Western Europeans, were willing to pay less for a smaller event.

Still, the article offers insight into the economic valuation of the EuroBasket 2013, arguably the largest sports event held in Slovenia until then – and perhaps since. Results show that SWTP was positively affected by national awareness, aligning with seminal (Maennig & Porsche, 2008) and more recent reviews of this relationship (Mutz & Gerke, 2024). In a departure

from previous studies (Mutz & Gerke, 2024), sport spectatorship could not be incorporated into the model to increase its explanatory ability. We speculate this influence was either absent – all nationally conscious people were willing to pay more, regardless of whether they also watched the event, perhaps to prove that Slovenia is able to take on such endeavours – or our survey sample was too homogeneous to establish this relationship. Sport participation could also not be integrated into the model as an explanatory variable. Variables lowering WTP included a protest financial attitude or tax aversion, and respondents' high income. While the former is expected, the latter is less common. Some studies have reported a decrease in WTP as income rises (Feehan, 2006; Schwester, 2007), but most found the opposite, ranging from analyses of WTP for the Olympic Games (Atkinson et al., 2008; Weimar & Rocha, 2017) to studies of sports events comparable to the EuroBasket in Poland (Zawadski, 2016, 2020, 2022, 2024). Slovenia and Poland both have progressive income taxation, but Poland's highest tax rate of 32% in the late 2010s (Ministerstwo Finansów, 2024), when the events studied by Zawadski studied were held, was lower than Slovenia's two highest income tax rates of 41% and 50% in 2013 (Pravilnik o določitvi olajšav in lestvice za odmero dohodnine za leto 2013, 2012). Perhaps Slovenia's higher earners felt they already pay enough (or too much) taxes and were unwilling to pay more. One final factor lowering WTP was the perception of the event as a private enterprise of the Basketball Federation of Slovenia

Table 4 Marginal Effects at Mean Value for Tobit Model

	Survey: Tobit regression		
	dy/dx	z	Sig.
income_class	-3.444556	-2.22	*
nat_aw	5.157737	2.27	*
Protest	-24.66587	-3.56	***
exp	-11.50254	-2.13	*

Note * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

3 GDP per capita as reported by the World Bank (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>). Inflation calculated using the United States Department of Labor Consumer Price Index calculator (<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpi/calc.pl>).

rather than a public good. Still, the analysis suggests that the event produced important public goods, most notably national awareness. The estimated willingness to pay when taking the average values of the explanatory variables is significant and fully justifies the funds invested by the state: taxpayers were theoretically willing to support even twice this amount. This investment of public funds was sound.

Countries in post-socialist and post-colonial contexts have joined in the efforts of established liberal capitalist systems to host sports events and invest in elite sport to promote tourism, attract media interest, enhance international prestige, and build internal coherence (Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Nauright, 2004). A previous study of the same EuroBasket showed that people who watched at least some of it live or in the media indeed expressed increased patriotic feelings despite the modest competitive outcome of the host nation (Ličen, 2017). Such enthusiasm might be a reason why nations in Eastern and Southeastern Europe more generally are increasingly eager to host or co-host continental championships and other major sporting competitions. Our study shows that taxpayers are willing to 'put their money where their mouths are'. Sport tourism and hospitality industry professionals should amplify their requests for public funding by arguing opportunities for both economic development and the strengthening of internal cohesion, national identification, and a 'feel good effect' for the local populations. To avoid the aversion of higher-income taxpayers experienced in 2013, the local organizing committee of the 2029 tournament should prepare a public relations campaign focused on persuading higher earners about both material and intangible benefits of hosting the tournament. This will be especially important since the tournament will only be held in the nation's capital and biggest city. The smaller cities that co-hosted the tournament in 2013 (Celje, Koper, and Jesenice) and their local tourist boards cannot expect to attract comparable masses of tourists and enjoy the associated benefits (Lesjak et al., 2017; Lesjak et al., 2014).

Our findings show that the relationship between income and WTP is context-dependent and varies across different events, settings, and economic and

cultural contexts. These findings help fill the void in studies of economic impact and contingent valuation originating outside of Western Europe and North America (Bakhsh et al., 2022; Porter & Chin, 2012). Hopefully, they inspire similar studies in other former socialist countries and emerging economies more generally as these nations take on the honour and burden of (co-)hosting ever more sporting events (Andreff, 2024). Further research should incorporate broader theoretical and methodological frameworks (Bakhsh et al., 2023), as well as consideration for local economic and cultural specificities. Our findings also suggest that hosting a major sports event in a country with limited financial and organizational capacities might attract public support if public subsidies are invested wisely. Most important from the perspective of this study are the public goods generated by the event. Despite, or perhaps because of, the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, which persisted in Slovenia through the end of 2013 (pm/kk, 2014), it seems the EuroBasket 2013 brought joy, emotional release, and relief – albeit temporary – to the local population (Lesjak et al., 2014; Ličen, 2017). Similar 'feel good' effects on the local population were recorded after Germany hosted the FIFA World Cup in 2006 (Maennig & Porsche, 2008). Then, Germany invested a reported €293.3 million (over several years) from its federal budget towards activities directly related to the event, such as venue renovation and accompanying activities (Die Bundesregierung, 2006, p. 19). This investment amounted to approximately €7 per income-tax-payer, which is less than the Slovenian government's contribution (€10/taxpayer) towards the EuroBasket 2013.⁴ Thus, per capita, direct public subsidy of the 2013 EuroBasket exceeded public subsidy of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. While the central and local governments funded the organizing fee for the 2013 EuroBasket (Urad Vlade Republike Slovenije za komuniciranje,

4 Figures include venue renovation. The figure for Slovenia, a net beneficiary of EU funding, includes money obtained through European Structural Funds (which could have been spent on other renovation projects). Neither figure includes major infrastructural investments: Germany reportedly spent a total of €3.7 billion in the years leading up to the event to upgrade the transportation network; this was 'not budgeted as World Cup expenditures, but benefited the 2006 World Cup' (Die Bundesregierung, 2006, p. 19).

2014), the German federal treasury did not contribute to bidding and organizational costs for the 2006 FIFA World Cup. This fundamental difference from the Slovenian bid (and perhaps all other bids to host major and mega events in new democracies in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe) likely pre-empted assertions of using public funds to finance a private and commercial endeavour. In our study, the perception of the 2013 EuroBasket as 'a private initiative' (perhaps further exacerbated by the delegation of the organization to a spin-off limited liability company owned by the national basketball federation) lowered WTP significantly. Sport tourism and event management professionals in the region should craft campaigns to demonstrate the public utility of such events ahead of a possible shift in public sentiment about such investments.

Limitations

Our approach has several limitations. Although we mitigated sample bias by weighting responses, the survey sample is not fully representative of the population as participants self-selected into the survey. These participants may be more engaged with sports than the general population, leading to the possibility of reporting higher valuations, which could lead to response bias in the study. The validity of contingent valuation survey responses may also be compromised, as non-valid responses are relatively common. This issue arises from several well-documented factors, including hypothetical bias, protest behaviour, non-response, ambivalence, and insensitivity to scope (Hausman, 2012; Jorgensen et al., 1999; Wang, 1997; Ready et al., 1995). While we mitigated these biases through response weighting, we acknowledge that residual biases may remain due to other unobserved differences between the survey participants and the national population. Some respondents may have behaved strategically as contingent valuation does not provide an adequate incentive to answer truthfully. People may over- or underestimate their actual WTP for the project, hoping to score the proverbial 'free lunch'. In this study, we reduced the possibility of a strategic bias by excluding people who declared no regular income, weighting answers to generate a

structure of respondents that reflects more accurately the population in terms of interest for sports, bringing attention to the split in financing between KZS and the state, and including questions aimed at revealing the actual choice of value (Garrod & Willis, 1999). Finally, we assumed that the CBA commissioned by the organizers was an accurate source of information.

Contextual constraints such as the timing of the survey, the national economic situation, and the use of an online survey platform may have influenced responses in ways that limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could mitigate these limitations by employing probability-based sampling techniques and triangulating stated preference data with revealed preference methods or complementary qualitative approaches.

Proposing an initial value of WTP was appropriate in this study because respondents had no experience with the evaluation of such a non-market good and might not have been able to construct a reasonable value for it (Santo, 2007). The value initially offered in this study was similar to the actual per-capita public expenditure for the hosting of the event.

Conclusion

This study examined popular support for the public subsidy of a major sports event returning to an emerging economy and sports tourism nation in Southeast Europe: namely, Slovenia was recently awarded the co-hosting of the 2029 EuroBasket (with Estonia, Greece, and Spain) after hosting the 2018 Futsal Euro, the 2020 Ski Flying World Championships, the 2021 Biathlon World Championships, and co-hosting the 2019 Men's EuroVolley, the 2022 Men's Volleyball World Championship, the 2022 European Women's Handball Championship, and the 2023 EuroBasket Women. Prominent French sports economist Wladimir Andreff (2024) recently documented how many emerging economies in different global regions are hosting ever more such events, so describing them as 'emerging' sports tourism nations may not be accurate for much longer. Meanwhile, the increasingly popular tournament co-hosting model has important implications for the hospitality industry, as it allows them to concentrate their promotional efforts on a

considerably smaller pool of target markets and potentially tailor their tourism products to best cater to specific visitors. This pertains to both national and local sports tourism and hospitality professionals. EuroBasket tournament co-hosts can nominate one national team (other than their own) to play in their country, thus influencing the potential for promotional synergies.

The €18.7 pro-capita subsidy that our survey participants were willing to allocate from taxes in 2013 is only a baseline rather than a guideline to assess a subsidy request ahead of the co-hosted 2029 tournament. Since 2013, the monthly average salary in Slovenia has increased by almost 60% to €1,577.42 (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.-b), while prices have increased (only) by 31.3% (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.-a). Economic indicators suggest that residents might be willing to approve a bigger subsidy this time: the average Slovenian is wealthier than in 2013. Yet, the intangible factors that propelled public backing then are less pronounced this time. The novelty of the event wore off: this will be a 'repeat' or 'return' rather than a first for the country. The 2029 tournament will be co-hosted by four countries rather than being an entirely homegrown enterprise, and Slovenia will not host any games in the more prestigious elimination stage. The media coverage, promotional potential, and impact of tourism will be correspondingly reduced. Within Slovenia, games will only be placed in the capital Ljubljana, thus reducing, if not eliminating, the tourist arrivals and other synergies that three peripheral cities experienced in 2013. Research on the 2013 tournament documented some positive effects on local tourism, but limited global media coverage. Ljubljana also has robust infrastructure in place, thus eliminating facility renovation as a budget request line. These circumstances suggest that the local organizing committee should develop a novel communication strategy to secure public support rather than relying on their past success.

Despite the substantial difference between 'major' and 'mega' events, the former can cost individual citizens just as much, or even more, than the latter. Scholars, decision-makers, and the public need to be aware of this, especially as the costs of hosting sport-

ing events have been rising exponentially (Matheson, 2024; Zimbalist, 2015) and shifting to emerging economies (Andreff, 2024). And yet, despite all their limitations, public subsidies for major sport events *can* meet popular support.

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Appendix*Table 5* Estimation Results for the Models of Stated Willingness to Pay (SWTP)

	Survey: Linear regression			Survey: Tobit regression		
	Coefficient	t	Sig.	Coefficient	t	Sig.
income_class	−3.81386	−1.99	**	−6.090558	−2.39	*
nat_aw	8.071305	2.78	***	9.119751	2.01	*
protest	−16.99122	−3.91	***	−43.61343	−3.17	**
exp	−15.54142	−2.39	**	−20.33843	−2.18	*
_cons	7.138238	0.97		7.409225	0.48	
No. of strata	3			No. of strata	3	
Number of obs.	374			Number of obs.	374	
Design df	371			Population size	.98846598	
F(4,368)	7.14			Design df	371	
Prob >F	0.0000			F(4,368)	3.41	
R-squared	0.3155			Prob >F	0.0093	
				Sigma	25.14981	4.73 ***
				Left-censored obs.	51	
				Uncensored obs.	323	
				Right-censored obs.	0	

Note * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$