



COMMENTARY BY ACHILLEAS TZIMAS AND CHRISTOS PETREAS

AN EVALUATION OF MASS MEDIA COVERAGE IN INTERNATIONAL ATHLETIC EVENTS AS SEEN THROUGH THE ORGANIZATION OF WINDSURFING CHAMPIONSHIPS IN IALISOS - RHODES UNTIL 2005

The recent hosting of the Olympic Games in Greece has raised the issue of the organization of athletic events and their effects on public services, promotion of the host country or area, the financial benefits, as well as the management of costly athletic complexes. Furthermore, the tourist industry in Greece, which is rapidly developing into the most important sector of the economy, can greatly benefit from such promotion.

The organization of athletic events and their relative repercussions are of particular interest. Regular athletic meetings of international championships and competitive sports have also come to the foreground (European athletic games, Euro- football etc). In light of the Olympic Games, Greece has been able to observe how the organization of an athletic event affects its host community, socially, economically and communicatively. Apart from the Olympic Games, the most popular events both in Greece and abroad, were those, which were held in extensive sports facilities, be they stadiums or special structures for games such as soccer.

The prime focus of major athletic events is not the sport in itself but the benefits gained by MM (mass media) coverage and the subsequent financial gains. In regular athletic events with regional or international range, broadcasting is paid for by MM organizations which is not often taken advantage of by the hosting area, and as such, no effective preparation for media coverage is undertaken and the repercussions of such coverage are often ignored.

However, we must bear in mind that there are athletic events, which have little to no requirements as far as permanent facilities are concerned and thus need no special expenditure or maintenance before or after the sporting event. Such sports can offer tremendous benefits on the same scale as the major athletic events, which have been held in Greece recently. Such examples are the Windsurfing Championships in Ialisos - Rhodes, which combine action with the sea.

The wind/kite surfing sport is unique in that it offers both participation and viewing by visiting tourists and local residents. As such we have not taken full advantage of the potential of tourist involvement or the organization of events, which, apart from attracting spectators, can offer tremendous economic gains. The sport of Wind/kite surfing has offered significant benefits to the island of Rhodes in recent years.



The major events, which have been held on Ialisos beach by the Rhodes Windsurfing, Kitesurfing & Sailing Academy (RWA-RKA) over the last decade, have created one of the best-organized spots for fanatics of the sport. Moreover, official findings have shown that the events have promoted the region due to MM coverage. The promotion of the championship events, which include some of the best windsurfers in the world, are also a chance for spectators to try the sport on one of the many surfing spots on the island. Ialisos is one of the best places on the island for Freestyle, Course and Slalom.

The wind in the area is stable creating side shore waves and the sea has wave patterns ranging from small cutting waves to very large waves. It has been noted that a large number of tourists visit Rhodes not only during athletic events but also at other periods, combining windsurfing and kitesurfing vacations. Data on wind/kite surfing as a sport, indicate that there are more than 15 million wind/kite surfers around the world.

The Formula Windsurfing events in 2002, 2004 and 2005, in Ialisos - Rhodes, apart from being a great success were also an important happening for the island. They produced worldwide media coverage in national and international press, establishing Rhodes and Windsurfing throughout the world. In view of the forthcoming Formula Windsurfing European Championship and other events in the next few years, we must stress that apart from great athletic events, they will be a great promotional opportunity for Greece as they will be the focal point of all interested parties, even more so than in previous events.

The experience gained from the events of the previous periods indicates that the repetition supports increasing attendance, media coverage and promotional benefits. The below tables present some data.

Table 1 – The events organized in Ialisos - Rhodes

No	YEAR	EVENT TITLE	AREA
1	1992	IFCA World Championship	International
2	1997	PWA World Cup	International
3	1998	Greek Funboard National Championship	National
4	1998	King of Rhodes Freestyle and Slalom event	Regional
5	1999	Greek Funboard National Championship	National
6	1999	King of Rhodes Freestyle and Slalom event	Regional
7	2002	Formula Windsurfing Grand Prix	International
8	2004	Formula Windsurfing Grand Prix	International
9	2005	Formula Windsurfing European Championship	International



The statistical table below, shows the increasing trends in practically all factors

Table 2 - Statistical information on events

Contents	Events								
	1992	1997	1998	1998	1999	1999	2002	2004	2005
Athletes competing	160	50	80	20	60	20	50	20	125
Support teams / attendants	600	200	300	100	250	100	200	150	>800
Duration in days*	14	10	10	7	10	7	14	14	>25 [†]
Spectators (est.)	> 1000	> 1000	600-800	> 200	500-600	> 200	> 1000	> 1000	> 3000
Duration of media coverage	The whole year	The whole year	2 months before & 4 months after	1 month before & 2 months after	2 months before & 4 months after	1 month before & 2 months after	The whole year	The whole year	24 months (6 months before & 18 months after)
Major sponsors - institutional	2	2	3	1	3	1	4	5	10
Major sponsors – commercial enterprises	1	4	3	1	4	2	0	4	5
Sponsors with products and services	4	8	9	4	10	6	10	12	9

* While the event typically lasts 5 days, athletes and their teams usually come earlier and stay after the event either to train or for a holiday.

[†] The length of the event period is due to the extended stay of many athletes and support teams staying on for further training, due to the quality wind conditions that can be found in lalisos



It is important to note the details of the mass media coverage, which show amazing interest in this sort of event:

Table 3 – Mass Media coverage by event

MME	1992	1997	1998	1998	1999	1999	2002	2004	2005
Local Press	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
National News press	15	12	10	6	8	6	20	20	25
National Sport press	10	6	4	-	5	-	10	10	10
International press	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	4	15
Local magazines	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
National magazines	6	8	10	4	10	4	10	8	10
International magazines	20	20	3	2	3	2	20	20	>20
Local Radio Stations	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
National Radio	4	6	10	2	10	2	Alpha Live +10	ERA Sport +10	ERA Sport +10
Local TV Stations	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
National TV Stations	ERT & Pool	ERT & Pool	ERT & Pool	ERT	ERT & Pool	ERT	Alpha & Pool	ERT & Pool	ERT & Pool
International TV Stations	PBA (100)	SSM/PWA (>150)	-	-	-	-	Tonix Pictures (>150)	DMI (>250)	Tonix Pictures (>450)
Internet/website	IFCA	RWA Cybex (>500)	RWA Cybex (>100)	RWA Cybex	RWA Cybex (>200)	RWA Cybex	RWA Cybex (>1000)	RWA Cybex (>1500)	RWA Cybex (>2000)
Organization	IFCA ISAF	PWA RWA	HYF RWA	RWA	HYF RWA	RWA	RWA ISAF IWA IFWC	RWA ISAF IWA IFWC	RWA ISAF IWA IFWC
Sponsors Web	2	2	4	2	4	2	14	21	24
E- newspapers	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	20	50



Conclusions can be derived, based on the above Tables, as well as from the evaluation of data collected from the (up to date) research (among athletes and spectators) in Ialiso – Rhodes. We can identify a number of factors as “good” for successful coverage of such athletic events by MM, indicatively:

- Previous advertising of event
- Good publishing material
- Branding of the event and the host area
- International events clearly have much larger ratings.
- The international aspect is more important than the number of athletes and attendants taking part.

The successful hosting of events up to now is evident by the potential scheduling of future Wind/kite surfing events from 2010 onwards:

2011: WORLD WIND/KITE SURFING FESTIVAL

2012: WORLD WIND/KITE SURFING FESTIVAL

A proposal is also pending to the Ministry of Tourism, for the organization of an **Aegean Odyssey** by windsurfing among the islands in the Aegean, in 2012, to be included in the course of the “**Olympic Flame**”, this being also a challenge for the best international athletes to participate in the event.

A proposal of the project “sportstourismgreece”[®] has been submitted to the Ministry of Tourism, including suggestions for an overall promotion strategy for athletic tourism. Also, a field research project on windsurfing and kitesurfing tourism is underway for the 2008 and 2009 period in a number of prime locations for the sports on Lefkada island (Complex of Ionian’s sea islands), Naxos island (Kiklades complex of islands) and Rhodes island (Dodecanese Complex of Islands) Southern Aegean region in Greece.

We have recommended that Rhodes become a point of attraction and training area for wind/kite surfing and sailing athletes in general. In support of the choice of Rhodes and Greece as a host for other athletic events we must consider the benefits gained in previous international Windsurfing Championships hosted by our country. These events were responsible for the strengthening and promotion of the international athletic spirit in our country, in an arena ‘the sea’, which is available free of charge. Most importantly, we do not need to **build colossal training facilities** to accommodate this athletic event. In our effort to promote new forms of quality tourism, wind/kite surfing, which is already established both athletically and as a tourist facility, is perhaps the only quick and inexpensive form of promotion for our islands and the Aegean in general.

Clearly it would be both prudent and useful to continue and expand the effort already started, for field research that would identify and analyze new forms of athletic tourism, which exhibit these advantages through MM coverage, with the benefits that this entails. As far as Rhodes is concerned, we have already scheduled research into successive future events.

The establishment of a series of continuing athletic events and their support in the future, will bring in huge benefits to Rhodes, the Aegean and Greece more generally. However, this can only be achieved through a combined and systematic effort by all involved.