

**GOLF AS A LINK BETWEEN TOURISM AND SPORTS. CASE
STUDY: THE UGOLINO GOLF CLUB – FLORENCE
(TUSCANY, ITALY)**

**GOLFUL - O LEGĂTURĂ ÎNTRE TURISM ȘI SPORT. STUDIU DE
CAZ: CLUBUL DE GOLF UGOLINO – FLORENȚA (REGIUNEA
TOSCANA, ITALIA)**

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Abstract: The main purpose of the study is to highlight the close ties between tourism and sports, as reflected in the case study chosen. The Ugolino Golf Club is visited by an average 10,000 foreign tourists a year; the features that make it stand out from other clubs are the high-difficulty courses and its proximity to the Renaissance city of Florence; numerous foreign tourists have listed the desire to visit Florence cultural monuments as a secondary reason. The club's unique features include it in the world's top 50. Since the time of its creation, 120 years ago, the Ugolino Club ensures a tourist stay that involves the harmonious blending of golf with relaxation and experience, offering tourists an opportunity to sample Tuscan cuisine and the famous Chianti wines. A form was used in analyzing the reasons expressed by tourists who come to golf on the club premises. The data obtained were processed using a factorial analysis, grouping the reasons according to the categories of main determining factors.

Keywords: golf, Ugolino, sports tourism, competition, relaxation, reason for tourism, factorial analysis

Cuvinte-cheie: golf, Ugolino, turism sportiv, competiție, relaxare, motivație turistică, analiză factorială

1. Introduction

Sports tourism is, on the one hand, an extension of sports activity perceived as a form of leisure during the holidays, and on the other hand as a necessity on the tourism market, which develops complementary products and services, by exploiting a series of "attractive" features of the land, offering a viable alternative to traditional holidays of "3 S: sun, sea and sand" and therefore ensuring permanent tourist inflows throughout the year (Ciampicacigli, R., Maresca, Simona, 2004, p. 1).

According to WTO specialists, sports tourism is not perceived as a section apart of the range of tourist services, but included in the category of reasons for

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tourism of the type “free time, relaxation, vacation” (Ciampicacigli, R., Maresca, Simona, 2004, p. 2).

Sports tourism is an original product, which involves integrating its own elements into leisure tourism activity. In the past few years, sporting events, especially those of international importance, have played an outstanding part for the tourism industry (organizing the Olympics requires the modernization and even expansion of the general infrastructure and services in the territory) and have become an important segment of the tourism market (they generate an intensive tourist traffic). Engaging in sports activities during a holiday has become a main reason for a significant number of tourists, due to the positive effects engaging in various sports has on health and relaxation.

The increase in free time periods is a factor shared by tourism and sports activities, and contributed to their development in time.

Engaging in sports goes back to ancient history; as early as that period, it marked the bond between sports activities and trips – in the sense of traveling – the sports Olympic Games organized in ancient Greece).

In the 19th century, the link between sports and tourism developed thanks to the positive perception of sports as a fundamental activity to engage in one's free time; it gained new values, from the simple physical exercise to a competition-based, ludic and health-restoring activity (Di Marco et.al, 2004).

Sports tourism is defined as “traveling in one's free time to engage in a sports activity, or to take part as a spectator to various sports events on a determined period (less than a year), outside one's area of residence” (Gibson, 1998, p. 156).

According to Ch. Pigeassou, sports tourism is the link between the tourist travel destination and the way one spends his/her vacation. Traveling, the tourist destination and the manner of spending one's holiday must serve the sporting experience: the tourist has to be an active participant or attend, as a spectator, cultural events related to sports activity (shows, conferences and congresses on sports issues).

2. The structure and place of sports tourism on the tourism market

Sports have become an important part of leisure tourist activity, which is reflected by the rise in numbers of tourists who choose an active holiday.

Specialized studies have drawn a classification of the forms of sports tourism, associating to them various reasons for tourism, whose analysis allowed identifying a typology of the sports tourist (Ciampicacigli & Maresca, 2004, p. 3-4).

Sports-tourism is used by those tourists who prefer to engage in a particular sports activity for at least half of the time spent on holiday; this means that the tourist accommodation facilities need to have the equipment necessary for engaging in sports activity, or that the facilities have to be located in a natural area that would allow engaging in various sports (winter sports in mountain regions, surfing on the seaside).

Sports tourism itself comes in three versions:

Leisure sports tourism involves engaging in a certain sport on an amateur scale, as well as taking part in small-scale sports competitions (local and/or national). It targets *active amateur* tourists (who regularly engage in amateur sports, and whose main purpose for traveling is participating in various contests and tournaments); *passive amateur* (spectators to a sports event).

Sports/business tourism is reserved to professional tourists, who are divided in two categories: *active professionals* (involved in high-performance sports, whose main goal for traveling is participating in various contests and tournaments); *passive professionals* (the participation of sports club leaders to sports-themed scientific events);

Event-based sports tourism involves attending local and international sports competitions as the main reason for traveling.

These distinct forms of sports tourism are differentiated by variations in the subjects involved, the destination chosen or the duration of the stay.

In addition to environmental tourism and park tourism, sports tourism makes up for around 4% of tourist traffic; in 2003 it registered a 0.77% rise in the number of tourists, from 8,428,000 tourists to 8,494,000; foreign-currency revenue in 2003 was estimated at around EUR 4 billion (*Rapporto sul turismo italiano*, Mercury, 2004, quoted by Ciampicacigli).

2.1. Sports tourism analyzed from the perspective of golf playing

Golf is a sport with intense activity in Europe (9.3 million players³); it is widely represented in Italy – it registered a 60% plus rise in the number of tourists with subscriptions to golf clubs, from 44,082 people in 1992 to 71,907 in 2003; a significant 83.4% rise was also registered in the case of certified golf clubs, from 169 to 310, during the same reference time period (*The Italian Golf Federation* quoted by Ciampicacigli, p. 5).

One can consider that golf incenses the development of sports tourism by raising the number of players; an increase in the number of occasional golf players could be noticed in the past few years. As far as the manner of generating profit is concerned, golf is one of those sports that involve high costs. The presence of a golf-playing tourist generates a seven-day stay for foreign tourists or a three-four-day stay for local tourists. The long duration of the stay is partly explained by the fact that golf tournaments last at least two days. This allows the golf player to have enough free time to visit the tourist destination's attractions. The expenses incurred by playing golf per tourist can amount to EUR 150 to EUR 180 and concern renting the grounds and/or sport equipment. On an average day with a significant tourist inflow to the Ugolino Golf Club, revenue can amount to EUR 2,000 to 2,500; in addition to golf-playing-related costs, there are also expenses related to accommodation, meals and visiting cultural landmarks, which leads to a rise of the total costs of the stay.

³ The International Golf Federation: the figure combines the number of golf-playing tourists in Continental Europe and Great Britain

In terms of psychology, golf allows for the tourist's satisfaction of the needs for hyper-excitation and feeling active, as the central figure of his own holiday, by experiencing his motor abilities. In numerous cases, when competing against other players, the desire to win is also a strong factor (Perussia 1984). Engaging in sports is the best way of combining dynamic exercise with moments of relaxation, due to the pleasant natural-landscape background of golf (Neulinger, 1981, Castelli, Guasco, 1984, Ingham, 1986, Perussia, 1989). In its turn, leisure psychology overlaps in certain respects with sports psychology, considering that the majority of leisure activities are sports activities (Horn, 1992, Russel, 1993, L. Cavaliere, 1994).

3. Presentation of the Ugolino Golf Club

The Ugolino Golf Club is located 6 km away from Florence, in the Grassano rural area, an administrative subdivision of Florence, in the Chianti hills, an area known for its extensive vineyards and famous wines. It is the oldest golf club in Italy; it was built in 1899 using the plans of British architects Blandford and Glannon. The club's 120th anniversary was celebrated in 2009, a very special event, also attended by local authorities' representatives (mayor of Florence, regional president of the Italian Golf Federation, the general headquarters of Tuscany region). During the ceremony, the club was awarded the Gold Medal for Sports Merits. The event also included the symbolic continuity of the club activity, with the oldest player relaying the flag with the sign of the club to the youngest club member, a six-year-old.

Ugolino is one of the foremost golf clubs of the world's top 50. It was included by Chris Santella in his book "50 golf clubs you must see before you die".



Fig. 1 Lodge used as a food-dispensing facility



Fig. 2 Beginners' golf course

Italian architect Gherardo Bosio created the plans for the buildings that make up the golf club: the reception, the swimming pool and the lodges hosting public food establishments. These are instances of architecture that combine functional and esthetic elements: the juice and coffee vending machines were integrated into the lodges, which are covered in vegetation so as to camouflage the modern look of

the devices, thus blending in with the landscape of the Chianti hills. The architecture of the buildings making up the club was also appreciated by the Florence Fine Arts Department.

The golf courses (18 in all – fig. 3) cover a surface of close to 40 hectares; the length of the courses feature extremely limited human intervention; by traveling across the golf tracks of varying difficulty one can discover the natural elements of the Tuscan hill landscape: pines, olive trees, vantage points of outstanding beauty.

The majority of the golf courses are sinuous because they closely follow the landscape of the Chianti hills (figure 4a&b). This is reflected in the ruggedness of the land, quite high in certain areas. The plain golf courses are very few, and regularly furbished for beginner golf players. This element grants a particularity to the golf grounds, which involves crossing a challenging course even for experienced golf players.

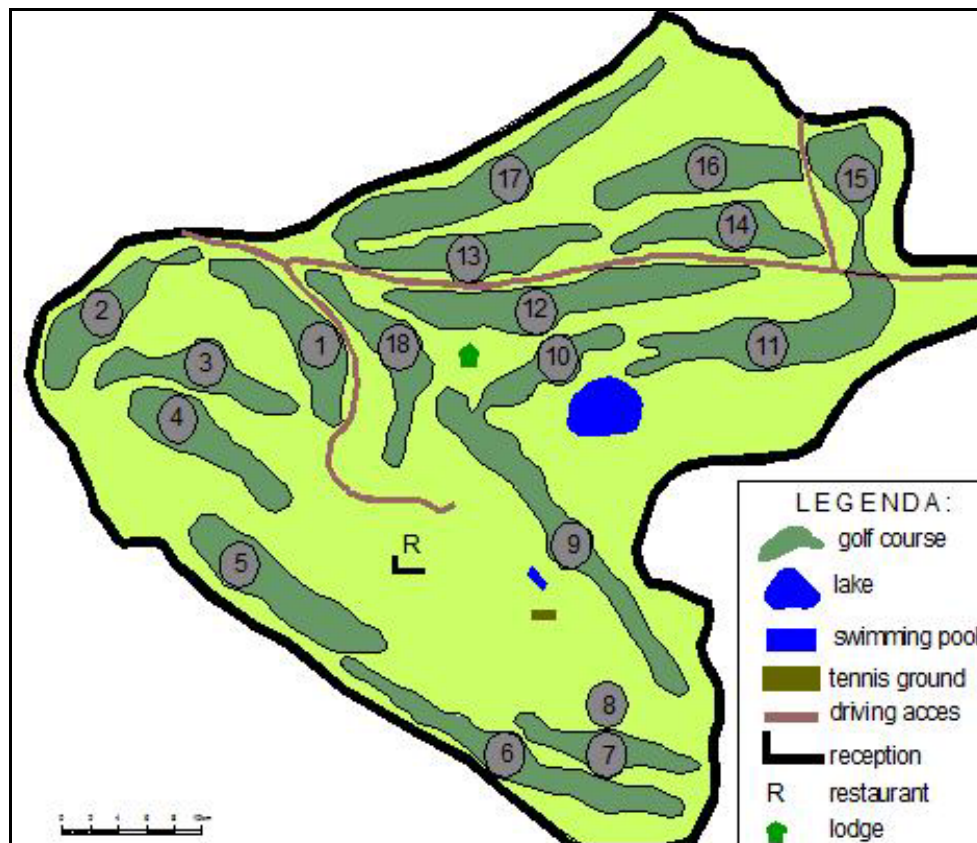


Fig. 3 Map of the Ugolino Golf Club, Florence

Some of the golf courses also have nighttime lighting, to ensure that golf can be played late into the evening.

The climate of the Chianti hill region is mild even in the cool seasons of the year, which thus creates the premises for golf-playing throughout the year (an average 300 days a year), excepting rainy days; the club is closed one day a week in winter.

An artificial lake was also created in order to secure the needed amount of water (the ground has to be slightly moist to ensure the best of conditions for golf-playing). The need for creating the artificial lake was due to the excessively hot climate in summer and the dry climate in autumn.

The club offers its customers multiple leisure opportunities: it is equipped with an outdoor swimming pool and two tennis grounds; on the first floor of the reception building there is a restaurant dispensing Tuscan cuisine foods and Chianti wine; on the second floor, there are two billiard rooms.



Fig. 4 a&b High-difficulty golf courses

The club organizes various golf tournaments attended by numerous tourists; prizes are given, offered by sponsors, usually major banking and automotive companies (Siddu, F., 1999).

Sponsorship is an event-focused communication technique that allows associating a brand or organization with an event of interest to a certain public. This technique is also used in other fields (culture, education), but its biggest media coverage is found in sports (Oprişan Virginia, Pop, N., 2007).

3.1. Analysis of tourist inflow

The Ugolino Golf Club is known worldwide, which is proved by the presence of an important number of foreign tourists (10,000 per year), from a very varied range of countries. This is due on the one hand to the quality of the golf grounds, and on the other hand to the promotion of services offered by the club by means of European tour operators or during International Tourism Fairs. The majority of foreign tourists come from Western Europe (Holland: 2,982, France: 532, England: 341) and Northern Europe (Sweden: 455, Denmark: 396) (Fig. 5).

Among Europeans with large financial means, German tourists make up for a significant part (the second-biggest group of tourists who visit the club: 1964 people). Other Central-European countries with significant tourist participation are Switzerland (623) and Austria (642). As compared to 2007 when international tourist traffic was dominated by German tourists, in 2008 the ratio of Dutch tourists has risen (15% of all foreign tourists). Statistic data for the former half of 2009 indicate a significant rise in numbers of German tourists, as well as a high ratio of Dutch, Scandinavian, Czech and Slovak tourists.

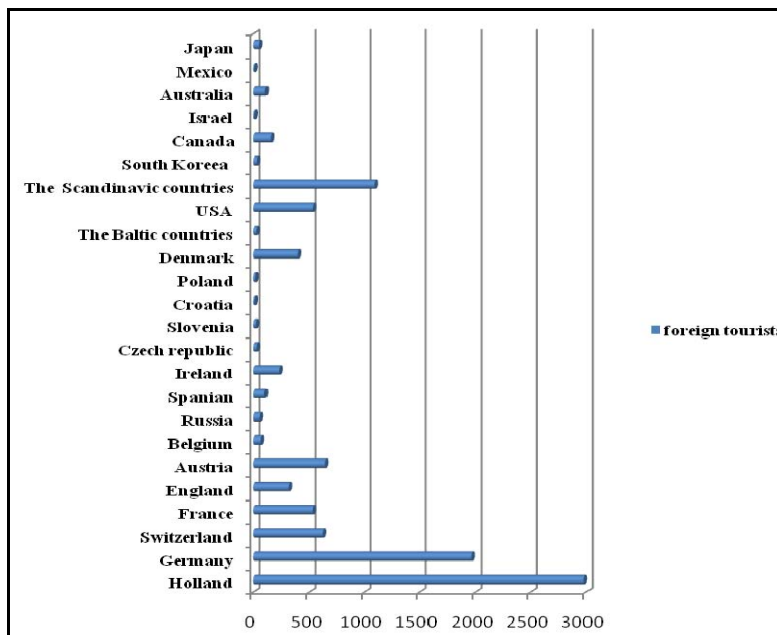


Fig. 5 The evolution of foreign tourists (2008)

Source: the Ugolino Golf Club

Although the ratio of Europeans is overwhelming (96% of the total number of foreign tourists – fig. 6), given the proximity of the Italian peninsula, a significant inflow of tourists originates in North America, with the US contributing the majority (543 tourists), followed by Australia (104) and Asia (96, with the majority consisting in Japanese and Korean tourists, with 52 and 33 people, respectively). The number of American tourists has dropped significantly from 2007 levels, when they used to make one of the biggest groups of tourists. The economic crisis' occurring much earlier in America than on the European continent was reflected in the sizeable drop of the ratio of American customers, which remained low in the former half of 2009 as well.

As far as the origin of local tourists is concerned, their majority (80%) comes from the same region the golf club is located in, Tuscany (Fig. 7). The North region is the second-biggest area of origin for tourists; its significant 15% ratio of the total number of tourists as compared to a mere 5% coming from the Central and South

regions is explained by economical factors: it is Italy's most developed region, and high-income tourists are more willing to travel. In the North region, the number of golf clubs is very high, as well (in the Milan province, any tourist resort offers the opportunity of using the services of a golf club as an alternative option of spending free time (Castelli, & Guasco, 1984, p. 124), which explains the fact that tourists from that region are frequent golf players and mention as their main reason the curiosity of discovering new clubs, thus overcoming the monotony of using the golf club in their locality of origin.

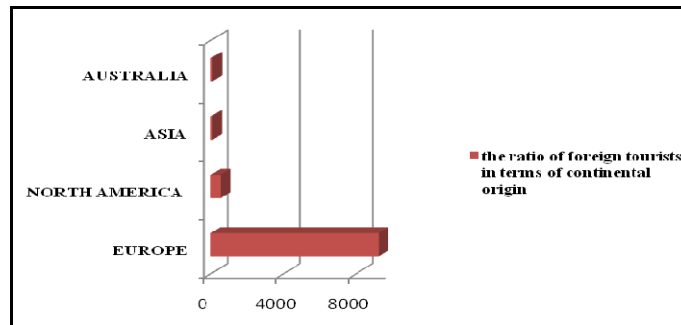


Fig. 6 The ratio of foreign tourists in terms of continental origin (2008)
Source: the Ugolino Golf Club

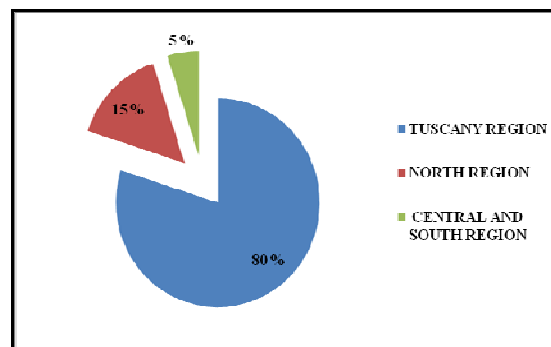


Fig. 7 The ratio of local tourists in terms of provenience (2008)
Source: the Ugolino Golf Club

3.2. Interpreting the forms

Forms were distributed to the tourists who visited the Ugolino Golf Club, during October-November 2008. The questions comprising the form were meant to identify the sociological and psycho-motor typical features of the golf player, and they were used to draw a profile of the golf-playing tourist. In addition, the main reasons resulting from the choice of engaging in golf as a free-time activity during one's stay, were also identified. Closed questions were phrased, and the 204 people interviewed were asked to indicate to what degree they agree with the statements in

the form; they were presented with 4 options to express their assent: “not at all”, “a little”, “quite” and “fully”.

When assessing the answers, the *Leisure Satisfaction* scale was used, taken over from specialized studies in the field (Ragheb and Beard, 1980); it was used to group the reasons listed by students depending on the main factors they generate.

A first observation is that most tourists who visit the Ugolino club are men, with women making up for an average 18%.

The average age of tourists is 38-40, but there are also younger and elderly tourists as well (people who have retired prefer to spend their free time playing golf).

Matched against the tourists' age, they were asked *what age did you start playing golf at?* The average age of starting to play gold was 32-33 years in the case of adults and the elderly. A noticeable trend is younger tourists starting to play golf at earlier ages (25-27 years). The high ratio of youth who engage in golf, although it is an expensive sport, is explained by the fact that significant discounts are offered to people who become club members.

In terms of their marital status, a significant number of the tourists interviewed (64%) are married. The importance of highlighting this aspect lies in the fact that there are tourists who choose to play golf alongside one other family member (20%) as a new means of establishing family bonds.

In terms of their profession and training levels, most golf players hold management positions or are involved in entrepreneurial activities (68%). 17% of the tourists interviewed are employed, and 15% are retired.

As far as game frequency is concerned, the times of predilection are days off (weekends and holidays) especially for local tourists. There are also Italian tourists who attend the golf club and engage in golf twice or three times a day on week days (20% of the total number of local tourists). Foreign tourists are a steady presence both on week days and weekends.

The majority of tourists have taken lessons to train for golf-playing.

Among the main reasons listed by the tourists who visit the Ugolino Golf Club, the most important is the pleasure to engage in golf; the second one is the desire to attend competitions. Most of those interviewed (95%) have attended a golf contest at least once. Some tourists expressed their passion for golf by the desire to test new golf grounds or play golf on high-difficulty courses (a high average ratio: 75% of the total number of tourists). In addition to the desire to play golf, most foreign tourists have also mentioned the (secondary) reason of wanting to get acquainted with the culture of the country they visit. This is explained by Florence's cultural landmarks, most of them Renaissance assets; in terms of culture and tourism, Florence is considered a city of the arts.

The most part of the respondents (45%) mentioned that playing golf is associated with the need for beauty, consisting in the opportunity of spending their free time by playing golf in pleasant premises, in green spaces, getting in touch with nature, or the drive towards relaxation. According to some respondents (30%), by playing golf they are able to forget about stress and everyday problems, which is a good means of escaping the daily material and social environment.

Other reasons listed by tourists (20%) are preserving a good state of health or developing one's own motor abilities.

3.3. Factorial analysis of the reasons supplied by tourists

Factorial analysis was used (more exactly, *principal component analysis*) in order to determine the factors that can explain the variation in the reasons for tourism, grouping them into categories and establishing correlations between them. The analysis used the *Leisure Satisfaction* scale (Ragheb and Beard, 1980).

Four main factors were identified, which were then used to group reasons for tourism: self control, escaping the environment, keeping fit and relaxation.

The self control factor was associated with the reasons tourists listed suggesting the idea of security resulting from playing golf. The information supplied by the tourists indicated that golf enhances their personalities, offers them security, offers them the opportunity of getting to know themselves better. By playing golf, they can get to know the others' personalities, they can try new experiences, enhance their awareness of things, use several of their abilities and add to their personalities.

The second factor was considered *escaping the material and social environment*, due to the reasons expressed by respondents under various forms which hint at this factor. Tourism becomes a means to depart the everyday environment, especially as far as tourists living in crowded and polluted urban areas are concerned. A golf course offers pleasant and quiet premises, where tourists can rejoice by spending their free time in the midst of nature, while also engaging in their favorite sports. Therefore, respondents consider that golf allows jaunts to interesting and pleasant premises outdoors.

Physical condition/keeping fit is the third factor identified using the reasons listed by tourists, expressed in the form of golf-playing as ensuring a steady peak physical condition. Frequently playing golf ensures steady muscle tone by means of constant physical activity for the 4 to 5 hours it takes during a golf match to travel the length of the course, which can be up to 3,000 sqm wide. By playing golf, tourists said, they use much of their physical capability, they preserve their muscle tone and spirits high, recover their strength, lead a healthy lifestyle; golf enhances their physical and mental state of well-being, and by playing golf they can assess their physical abilities.

The relaxation factor was identified using the variables that indicate that by playing golf tourists can get away from their problems: golf helps tourists eliminate stress and relax.

Interpreting the factor score indicates the fact that their values are roughly similar, but the highest score (3.14) was registered by second factor (escape), followed by the relaxation factor with a very close value (2.93). The data obtained indicate that the majority of tourists who indicated as reasons for tourism relaxation or escaping the regular living environment are adult people, who usually have management positions and feel a more acute need to relax in the midst of nature, that is on the pleasant premises offered by the golf course.

Table 1

Items	Item values			
	Self control	Escape	Keeping fit	Relaxation
Mean item average	2.48	3.14	2.79	2.93
Inter-item correlation	0.37	0.27	0.38	0.72
Spearman derivation	0.77	0.79	0.66	0.84

The average values of the other factors (2.79 for the physical condition factor and 2.48 for the self control factor) are high, and their frequent mentioning by tourists explains the “curative” qualities golf can have, and even its role in preserving a high physical and mental condition. The reasons that were linked to these factors were mainly expressed by the elderly people, who by playing golf preserve their state of health within normal parameters. The score of the self control factor also encompassed the options of adult tourists, who consider that engaging in golf offers them security.

Conclusions

Sports tourism involves subordinating the trip to a sports activity, with the holiday spot chosen to be the premises for practicing the favorite sport. One can say sports have become universal feature of leisure activities.

Sports activity originates in a manifestation nature, which conveys strong images which earn tourist inflows and important revenue for the host countries. The close ties established between tourism and sports activity is reflected by the combination of exercise with the drive for relaxation and experience/information.

Golf is a sports activity widely practiced worldwide, with a rise in tourist demand, and therefore an important sector of the tourist market. The development of golf tourism is due to the rise in the number of people who play it, and also favored by the opportunity of all-year sports, unlike other sports which are influenced by seasonality.

Using data accumulated during the survey, a general trend of golf tourist typology can be extrapolated. This type of sports starts to gradually develop in all rough age groups; in terms of professions, a rise in the number of medium-income people can be observed, which is incensed by the drop in the costs of golf by affiliation to a golf club and the low costs in getting trained to play golf.

Factorial analysis was used to identify the shared features of a set of respondents' statements on the manner sports activity influences their lifestyles. Analyzing the data obtained from the form involved the use of a large number of variables (reasons for tourism), and correlations were then established among them, function of four factors (self control, escaping the environment, relaxation and keeping fit).

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