Many times in orienteering it has been questioned how to make our sport more popular, more attractive for possible spectators and, mainly, how to explain its nature to people from outside our sport so that they could follow it fully understanding what’s going on. A possible solution to all these questions and disputes may be the Orient-Show concept (or Mini-Orienteering if you like) developed by the Russian Maxim Ryabkin. The concept is based on short courses of up to 500m in length which are run on maps at 1:500 scale or even larger. The whole idea is that the courses are run on such small areas that spectators, as well as speakers, can follow the action all the time, from start to finish, watching the runners making mistakes, breaking away from one another, etc.

Due to its nature, Orient-Show is probably the only form of orienteering which can bring our sport to big stadiums or arenas. As it will be shown later in the article, it is no problem to make such an orienteering course using artificial objects, in an environment up to now, atypical for our sport.

But let’s stop theorizing now. All is explained in detail below in an article by the author of the concept himself, Maxim Ryabkin.

The way to a spectator
Looking at the stages of orienteering development we can see that the sport constantly tries to open itself to spectators. Most of change-processes going on in our sport are connected to the searching of new forms of so called ‘spectator friendliness’. New forms of organising orienteering competitions are nothing other than attempts to create a form of orienteering which would be interesting for spectators and suitable for TV production.

The IOF determined the following ways of orienteering development:
- To organise attractive and interesting competitions of high quality for competitors, organisers, media, spectators, sponsors and other partners.
- To make orienteering competitions attractive for TV.

The organisers adapted competitions according to these demands. Competitions began to be organised in a new and more modern style:
- Sportsmen start and finish from within the arenas.
- Big screens show what’s going on in the forest.
- GPS technologies are involved.
- The amount and quality of information about orienteering in media increases.

How did the popularity of orienteering change?
I think orienteering is still not widespread enough around the world. It is thought that the problem is that our sport is not picturesque enough, does not have enough informational support and is not suitable for TV broadcasting. During the last 10 years, orienteering has changed a lot from the point of organisation. It has become better. However, not so much has changed when we look at popularity and recognition of our sport. Maybe there is a different problem? For example, orienteering is not understandable for ordinary spectators and this is the reason why it is not interesting for TV and sponsors.

Let’s look at the most popular sports. In what ways are they different from orienteering? The biggest differences are, that in other popular sports, spectators can follow the competition from a comfortable place, the rules are clear and do not demand additional efforts, but, above all, they can follow the action all the way from start to finish, from the beginning to the end.

Let’s take athletics. Sportsmen compete in small area all the time. Everything can be seen and the winner is the one who finishes first or jumps highest or furthest. Or there is a goal in which teams try to put the ball into. And so on… Everything is easy and clear.

But how can orienteering entertain a person who has, perhaps, just heard of our sport once in his or her life? The sportsmen run somewhere out in a forest, look for something there and finish dirty and tired. Almost all orienteering competitions are going this way. Looking at orienteering from the point of view of a non-orienteering spectator, I can only say that such a sport would not interest me and provide me with something worthy of watching.

So I think that the main problem of orienteering is THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORIENTEERING PROCESS BY THE NON-
The world leaders’ opinion about Orient-Show

“Mini-orienteering is interesting and funny! And to win it is only possible when you concentrate to the max, because everything happens so fast.”

Eduard Khrennikov, four times World Ski-O Champion and World Cup Winner.

“It is not ordinary. But the most important thing is that this kind of orienteering is interesting and understandable, even for spectators completely unaware of what orienteering is.”

Valentin Novikov, two times European Champion and silver medallist from the WOC 2004.

“I suppose mini-orienteering is something which can help our sport to become more interesting and understandable for spectators from outside of our sport.”

Tatyana Ryabkina (Perelyaeva), four times Junior World Champion and silver medallist from the EOC 2004 and WOC 2004.

Main characteristics of Orient-Show

- **Competition area:**
  - Competition is organised on a limited area of 100x50 metres size or even smaller.
  - There are up to 100 controls placed in the competition area.
  - Sportsmen can see the competition area with controls in it before the start.

- **Course and maps:**
  - The map scale is 1:500 or larger.
  - Lengths of courses are from 100 to 500 metres.
  - Winning time between 40 and 180 seconds.
  - Sportsmen start together on the same course.
  - There are no codes or control descriptions.

- **Forms of organisation:**
  - Foot-O.
  - Ski-O.

- **Spectators:**
  - Spectators follow the whole process of orienteering from start to finish.
  - Spectators can watch the event looking at their own map with the course marked on it.
  - The event is accompanied by music and live-commentary from a speaker commenting on the way the race develops while seeing what’s actually going on out on the course.

- **Advantages of Orient-Show**
  - Transparency of orienteering process.
  - Within just 2-3 minutes, an exciting, unpredictable and understandable plot of a face-to-face competition develops. It is an excellent demonstration of the potential and richness of orienteering.
  - Concept easy to understand even to groups of the population unaware of orienteering before.
  - The event can be held absolutely anywhere: in the countryside, in urban areas, football stadiums or inside halls.
  - An opportunity to hold interesting competitions for absolute newcomers as well as for elite sportsmen.
  - Ideal conditions for sponsors, photographers and TV-reporters.

ORIENTEERING PUBLIC. Only when we are able to divide orienteering into easy components and can show these to the spectators, only then our sport may become popular.

How can we achieve this?

It is necessary to show the process of orienteering instead of just showing the spectators how sportsmen start, punch at controls and finish.

At present, all kinds of orienteering events do not allow spectators to watch the process of orienteering, the nature of our sport. Instead, we offer the spectators pictures of sportsmen punching at controls, their running times and places in the result list. Sometimes we also show the trajectories of their routes.

How can we easily show orienteering and make it accessible to potential spectators and sponsors?

Let us divide orienteering in to 3 components: sportsmen/women, their aims (controls), movement (process of searching the controls). Only when spectators can watch the three components at the same time, in integration - to see actually how sportsmen move to controls - orienteering becomes understandable and distinguishable for spectators as a special kind of sport.

This means that to explain what orienteering is about and to increase the interest in the sport, it is necessary to SHOW THE PROCESS OF ORIENTEERING FROM START TO FINISH. And, as in many other sports, to make the competition even more thrilling, we can let the sportsmen start at the same time. Only then will we offer the spectators a real tough fight amongst sportsmen and women, who, using their orienteering skills, make for thrilling action, the results of which are obvious right after the runners finish. Action which will involve physical and psychological abilities, the maximum concentration possible, action which can be followed all the time by spectators, who properly understand what’s going on. Maybe then, orienteering as a sport will have a chance to become an interesting sport, even for the non-orienteering public...

How can we show orienteering from start to finish?

Even with the help of modern technologies such as GPS, minicameras and others, we cannot resolve the problem mentioned above. No matter what the technology, spectators cannot see the way the competition develops, nor the emotions of the runners, their technical skills and the way they orienteer – these remain hidden. But in the Orient-Show concept, nothing is hidden.

How can we show orienteering as entertaining sport?

I think there is one way to show orienteering in all its beauty and that is to create a new kind of orienteering format – ‘100-metre orienteering’ or ‘Mini-orienteering’. I can understand if it sounds unusual or strange to you, but remember, that often such things are just a matter of what we are used to out of a habit.

Mini-orienteering events have the following characteristics:
- Spectators watch the process of dwelling between sportsmen from start to finish.
- The competition is dynamic on the whole course.
- Sportsmen make decisions in difficult psychological situation – all happens in a short time. The mass-start format adds even more to the pressure.
- The race is finished in a short time.
All of the things mentioned above make it a great show. I believe, that such a form of orienteering competition may attract supporters and TV.

Most of the orienteers now probably think: “It is impossible. There is no orienteering over a 100-metre course.”

But believe me, it is possible to make an interesting and tough orienteering race even over such a short distance. In Russia, this project has been developed for 3 years now under the name of Orient-Show. We have gathered a relatively large amount of experience in organising such competitions.

What is Orient-Show?
‘Orient-Show’ or ‘Mini-Orienteering’ is a kind of orienteering with course-lengths between 100 to 500 metres, on maps of 1:500 scale. Dozens of controls are placed in the competition area and competitors do not have codes for their controls so they have to find the right ones purely by reading the map. Sportsmen start together on the same course and they are constantly in the spectators’ sight. The competition is accompanied by music and lively comments from the speaker.

With what can Mini-Orienteering contribute to orienteering?
- It is a possible way to present orienteering as a spectacular sport for mass media and exposing orienteering to new groups of population.
- Spectators can see and follow actions of professional orienteers under competitive conditions in real time, all the way from start to finish.
- It could bring new participants and new members into the International Orienteering Federation
- A chance for everyone to get involved. Everyone can find controls in the competition area without any special technical and physical abilities. Taking part in the show can make spectating even more interesting. Orienteering may become a really open and available sport.
- New competition conditions.
- Competition area for Mini-Orienteering can be made:
  - On natural landscapes
  - On a landscape built from artificial objects.
- Mini-Orienteering terrain can be man-made. With help from professional designers in creating 3-dimentional artificial elements for the competition area, light and musical accompaniment can connect our sport with art, which can give one more dimension to our sport.
- Unique advertising technologies. Mini-Orienteering opens possibilities for new advertising technologies. For the first time it is possible to keep spectators’ attentions focused on advertisement all the time, as they become an integrated part of the environment – e.g. as navigational features. It is possible to build the sport area from advertisement sponsor objects which create a network of passages. Advertisement objects can be billboards, 3-dimentional models of advertised products or even the products themselves.
- Good conditions for the studying of orienteering.
- Mini-orienteering can be used as a test of sportsmen’s technical and psychological skills, as well as an effective tool for teaching orienteering in a quick and simple way.
- A new kind of competition for disabled sportsmen. If the competition is organised with a separate start and finish, it will allow the disabled sportspeople to feel the heat of the moment in orienteering with the adrenalin rising in their bodies, while they rally in search of the controls. It makes the event much more exciting for sportsmen as with this concept they are not just restricted to solving orienteering puzzles.

As can be seen from the examples above, this kind of orienteering gives our sport unique opportunities of development all around the world. It can increase the prestige of our sport and spread it among the population in the whole world. I don’t say mini-orienteering should replace the traditional forms, but it can add something extra and new our sport is apparently searching for.