

RUNNING AND SERIOUS LEISURE PERSPECTIVE

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Saša Pišot

University of Primorska, Science and Research Centre

Abstract

Running as a mean and a path to physical fitness, health and wellbeing became a world revolution and popular “brand” of a healthy lifestyle. Running a marathon or a half marathon in Slovenia also became one of the fastest growing sport activities reflected in mass sport participation at recreational running competitions or events. This phenomenon needs a different perspective in researching who the runners are and what are their relations to their leisure time? This was also the aim of this research - to analyse who run a marathon and a half-marathon in Slovenia and how running affect to runner’s leisure time. From the point of Stebbins’s (2007) Serious Leisure Perspective – the theoretic framework we have analysed runners as amateurs and hobbyists in the sample of 260 runners of the 1st Istrian marathon 2014. According to results, we can conclude that running as “serious leisure” activity for runners is highly substantial and fulfilling. Running as a “career” in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience could be found in runner’s answers of their time practicing running. We notice a fair level of knowledge of sport nutrition and their willingness to spend more than 600 euros per year for sport equipment, fees and other. Since the obtained results were quite interesting, more characteristics of running as serious leisure will be studied within the scope of the next Istrian marathon in 2015.

Key words: *running habits, serious leisure perspective, male and female runners profile*

Introduction

Running as a mean and a path to physical fitness, health and wellbeing became a world revolution and popular “brand” of a healthy lifestyle. Slovenia also faces the running fever as the rest of Europe where 50 million people are estimated to run on a regular basis (Scheerder & Breedveld, 2015). According to the research (Pori et al., 2010) approx. 30,000 adults in Slovenia run regularly, which represents 2% of the adult Slovenian population. There is no doubt that running has become one of today’s most popular activities. Running a marathon or a half marathon has in Slovenia also become a very popular mass sport type of participation at recreational running competitions or events. The flow of the running subculture still rises and that phenomenon needs a different perspective in researching who the runners are and what are their relations to their leisure time. The increase in running activity can mostly be attributed to running events and commercial initiatives via social media and sport industry. In the last decade, we have evidenced the rise from 41 running sport events in 2004 to over 100 events in 2013 (Olympic Committee, 2013). Those issues were our main focus in this paper; to analyse the characteristics of runners and their relation to leisure time on the sample of runners of a new sport event on the Slovenian coast – the Istrian marathon.

From the point of Stebbins’s (2006) Serious Leisure Perspective – the theoretic framework that synthesises three main forms of leisure: serious leisure, casual leisure and project-based leisure, we have analysed runners on 42 km and 21 km distance as amateurs who run at the 1st Istrian marathon.

Leisure is defined (Stebbins, 2006) as unforced activity engaged in during free time, which people want to do and, in either a satisfying or a fulfilling way (or both) and use their abilities and resources to succeed at this. Meanwhile “free time“ is time away from unpleasant obligation. Pleasant obligation being treated here as essentially leisure; since “leisure man” in fact feels no significant coercion to enact the activity in question. Free choice is intentionally omitted from this definition, because choice generally is never completely free, but rather limited with all sorts of conditions.

In the Serious Leisure Perspective Stebbins (2006) also defines the “core activity perspective” where “core activity” is a distinctive set of interrelated actions of steps that must be followed to achieve an outcome or product attractive to the participant. According to the Stebbins’ framework the core activity of

running could be participation at a running sport event (running on time to certain distance). Also in running, the participant takes several interrelated steps to successfully run (or for example in other core activity ski downhill, rescue someone). Although core activity motivates people to participate in a larger leisure activity; the intensity, meaning and the context of appeal of this core vary across the three forms. For instance, in serious leisure, participants gain a sense of deep fulfilment from the core activity, whereas this is impossible in casual leisure. From that point serious leisure time could be called “committed leisure” as Tomlinson (1993) suggested, but although commitment is an important attitude in serious leisure, it is too narrow to serve as a descriptor of entire serious leisure perspective.

Serious Leisure Perspective (Stebbins, 2006) offers a classification and explanation of all leisure activities and experiences, as these two are framed in the social psychological, social, cultural and historical context in which each activity and accompanying experience take place.

From the point of subject who participated in serious leisure or its core activity we considered the runners as amateurs. The marginal view to leisure is evident for amateurs. They do not participate in popular leisure, so their form of leisure is closer to being work than any other. They are serious about their leisure and its core activity (running), sometimes they are preoccupied with sport activity what could reflect in fatigue and injuries. These are the reasons that are not rarely to be misunderstood by those of their associates, but they are still within the ambit of respectable society (Stebbins, 1979).

As we described, the aim of this paper is to analyse the profile of participants of 1st Istrian marathon from the point of Serious Leisure Perspective where main focus was on their amateurism, their core activity engagement (running) and its effect on their leisure time management (intensity, meaning and the context of appeal).

Methods

For the purpose of collecting the main characteristic of runners participating in the 1st Istrian marathon, an online quantitative survey questionnaire “A profile of 1st Istrian marathon runner“ was sent to all registered participants by e-mail. The research was conducted from 21st of January till 30th of April 2014 and consisted of 53 questions about socio-demographics characteristics, motive and running related habits and sport injuries at the end. The sample of participants consisted of those who fully completed the online questionnaire with expected response rate (16.5%), 337 participants, (176 males (52.2%) and 161 females (47.8%). We divided participants into three different groups according to the distance they intended to run: a full marathon (42.195 km); a half-marathon (21.097 km) and recreational run (8.5 km) and additionally also by gender. The further analyses of data focused on the runners’ running pursuit in the frame of the Serious Leisure Perspective, consisted of marathon runners on 42 km (14 females in average 41.4 years old, and 60 males in average 42 years old) and half marathon runners on 21 km (85 females in average 41 years old, and 101 males, in average 41.4 years old). Variables which define serious leisure; the *substantiality* as systematic physical preparation for running event, *fulfilling* of running from the point of runners motives of running; running as a *career* in expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge and experience were examined through several questions. The substantiality was examined by data of systematic physical preparation, planned running activities during the week and their time dedicated to training. The fulfilment of running was analysed by Motivations of Marathoners Scales (56 examples) of Masters, Ogles in Jolton (1993). Amateur running as a career was examined by analysing the running history and experiences in sport event participation and by their knowledge about sport diet and consumption habits dedicated to sport participation.

Results

Serious leisure perspective obtained analysed data of how structured, organised and planned is serious leisure and its core activity – running. Results showed that running as “serious leisure” or “core activity” is highly substantial. More than 90% runners systematically prepared themselves for the competition with planned amount of sufficient running kilometres. Marathon runners in majority ran from 30 to 50 km/week and one third of them even more than 50 km, while female marathon runners run slightly less. Half marathon runners (not related to gender) are divided mostly in two equal groups; those who run from 21 to 30 km per week and those who run 30 to 50 km per week and are apparently more enthusiastic. Running as a self-fulfilling activity) showed that “to compete with myself”; “to improve health and physical fitness” and “to diminish stress” were the most common answers to the question with regard to the motivation for running. We can find the gender differences which are related also to running distance, where female

marathon runners reported “to diminish stress” as the main motive for running, while male marathon runners value that motive the lowest among all three stated motives.

Running as a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience could be found in runners’ answers of their time practicing running (between 60–80% of them ran from 5 years to 10 years and more, most of them ran in average 3 times during the week and often at weekends. Female marathon runners have the most short running career (4–5 years), meanwhile 60% of male marathon runners run from 5 to more than 10 years. That also reflects the experience in participating at sport events, where almost one quarter of male marathon runners participated more than 10 times in the marathon run, while none of our female marathon runners participated more than 5 times. With regard to practicing sport nutrition, we found that the 50% of male marathon runners and 28% female marathon runners, 37% male and female half marathon runners have had a more healthy diet since they started running. A lower percentage, just one third of the runners reported about “the chasing the golden hour after run” and proper timing of meals. We found also a lower share (less than 1/10) of runners who consume sport supplements (energy bars, minerals, etc.). An important factor of relevance of running as career was reflected also in the runners’ willingness to spend more than 600 euros per year for sport equipment, fees and other .

Discussion

Results confirm the existence Serious Leisure Perspective characteristics in the group of amateur runners. Running and sport events (marathon) participation as a core activity is represented as a very *substantial* (systematically planned core activity for competition in sport event) and *fulfilling*, because for the majority of respondents the motive for running is the competition with themselves, the improvement of health and physical fitness and consequently to diminish stress. Running as a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience was found in the proportion of runners’ time devoted to running (5–10 years or longer running career, precise weekly and weekends running schedule, etc.), most runners have adopted and expand the knowledge on their nutrition habits to sport activity. Their consumption habits as spending and willingness to spend and to participate at mass sport events were more evident than with recreational runners, which reflected the importance of their running activity as a serious leisure perspective. This could imply that serious leisure of amateurs is the time when the core activity (running) is carefully structured, organised, allows self-fulfilment and enables the opportunity to upgrade own special skills, knowledge, personal wellbeing and the positive self-identity and social identity (social respect).

Conclusion

Running a marathon and a half marathon in the presented case could be defined as running as a career. The runners devoted to running activity much of their leisure time, for more than 5 years of engagement, with planned running schedule. Although their position based on the amateur level, most runners have adopted and expanded the knowledge on nutrition habits to sport activity and exercise. They are also willing to spend and to participate at mass sport events more often than other recreational runners. The interesting results that we have obtained at the same time open additional questions in the research of the Serious Leisure Perspective, so more characteristics of amateur runners as the rising sport subculture will be studied within the scope of the next, the 2nd Istrian marathon in 2015.

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