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DIFFERENCES IN TRAVEL BEHAVIORS OF SMALL AND LARGE CYCLING EVENTS PARTICIPANTS

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Abstract: Tourism has been and will continue to be one of the biggest and most profitable industries in the world. Sport is obviously a very important aspect of society in many different ways: culturally, economically and socially. Like in the past, local authorities continue to regard all sporting events as a way of promoting and positioning their destination. Participation in sport events relates to tourism because it also involves travelling to host destinations. Therefore, the aim of our study is to compare participation in small and large sport-for-all events in relation to tourism in Slovenia. We analysed the factors determining differences in the travel behaviours of sport event participants and certain aspects of participation (travel behaviour, frequency of sport event participation, reasons for participation) at the largest cycling event in Slovenia (the Franja cycling marathon) and two smaller cycling events (the “Three hearts Radenci” recreational cycling marathon and the “Around the region of Prlekija” recreational cycling marathon). The study analysed the active participants of different cycling sport events. The sample of respondents consisted of 382 participants. We found that over the third of the participants take on the role of a sport tourist in their travels. They are also very sport-active in their leisure time. The majority of them are engaged in sport activities more than three times a week. The results indicate differences in travel behaviour and sport-active lifestyles among the participants of different types of small and larger sport events.

Key words: recreational cycling events, sport tourism, travel behaviour

Introduction

A number of theories aim to explain the growing popularity of cycling (Bull, 2006; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008). Mass participation in sport events is nowadays an indicator of this popularity, but it does not explain it. It is well known that for a long time sport events not only provide spectators with pleasure as they attend events. More and more sport events like running or cycling marathons allow people to also take part in these events. This happens in the form of various mass running, cycling or triathlon sport events which have been increasingly popular since the 1980s (Hanold, 2008, Fister & Fister, 2011). Interest in such sport events is high and still rising. Across European countries, sport participation, especially the ‘mass sport events boom’, is a topic of particular interest. Moreover, attention to sport trends has been growing in recent years. Previous years have shown us that interest in sport participation is on the rise. In Slovenia it has been recognised that never before have so many people been participating in sport. The fact is that attitudes to recreational sport have changed radically (Doupona Topič, 2010).

Illustrative of this is the fact that tens of thousands of participants are engaged in the biggest marathons around the world (Shipway & Jones, 2008). Participation in mass

events is popular and trendy all over the Europe. It is crucial for participants that there is a crowd of like-minded people, making participation at sport events like a kind of social event and representing the reason and motivation to be active in their leisure time (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). Sport events have become more than a passive or active way of spending one's leisure time. Besides the already known motives of relaxation and social interaction, they also invigorate feelings of ability, capacity, happiness, freedom and authenticity. These are what people strive for most in their leisure time (Rauter, Doupona Topič, & Vehmas, 2011). This is also one of the main reasons for participating at such sport events. The increasing number of participants and popularity of these sport events also promotes tourism because sport events clearly attract many sport tourists (Chalip & Costa, 2005). That also explains why the most popular of such events are not only sport-related events but also pose challenges for tourism. For example, participation in marathon events relates to tourism because it mainly involves a lot of runners who travel to the locations of those events. The rising number of participants and popularity of these sport events is also exploited by the tourism industry because sport events clearly attract many large numbers of tourists (Chalip & Costa, 2005). For example, the Berlin Marathon attracts over 40,000 runners from more than 100 countries

and consequently provides a large number of overnight stays. We should also take into account the attractive photos and snapshots of the most popular host destinations which are published in different media and function as excellent promotion for the destination.

The popularity of sport events can be regarded as a tourist attraction. Popular and well-known tourist destinations exploit the potential of sport events for the development of local tourism. From this point of view, sport events might play an essential role by promoting the destination and may become increasingly important for the economy – they can even impact on the development of a city, region or even country. This depends on the size and dimension of the particular sport event (Yusof et al., 2009).

Most research studies have focused on the economic effects of sport tourism relative to sport events, with little coverage of the participants themselves, although some of them along with the fact that sport events hold tourism development potential have led to researchers turning their attention to the participants of these events. In this study we address the issue of how we might classify and understand different types of tourists. Gibson and Pennington-Gray (2005) suggest to role theory from sociology and its subsequent use in tourism studies. Gibson and Yiannakis developing a typology (Tourist Role Preference Scale – TRPS) that included only tourist roles, those that are leisure roles rather than including general travel roles (Weed, 2009). Tourist roles in TRPS are operationalized as statements that identify the primary behaviors associated with a particular tourist role. They found that individuals appear to choose roles with similar characteristics such as novelty, risk, and spontaneity, and that it is usually possible to identify dominant role characterizing a particular vacation. This can also be applied to sport tourism. Some authors (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Hallman & Breuer, 2010) mentioned that those people who travelled to the events and take part in the sport events have, according to the classification of Gibson (1998), all the characteristics of active sport tourists. Gibson developed a profile of the typical active sport tourist which distinguish sport tourist from other types of tourists are that they are more likely to be male affluent and college educated. It seems that we should add active sport tourists who travel for the purpose of participating in a sport event to a new category of active sport event tourists. Kaplanidou (2006) defined “active sport event tourists” as people who travelled with the purpose of actively participating in sport events.

The research focuses on differences among participants of large and small events as well as the potential of these sport-for-all events for tourism. The main goal of our research is to identify the travel behaviour of cyclists taking part in large or small sport-for-all events.

Methods

We analysed the factors determining differences in the travel behaviours of sport event participants and some aspects of sport participation in their leisure time. The sample of subjects

consisted of 382 participants (cyclists) in three recreational cycling events in Slovenia: the largest cycling event in Slovenia (the Franja cycling marathon) and two smaller cycling events (the “Three hearts Radenci” recreational cycling marathon and the “Around the region of Prlekija” recreational cycling marathon). The study was conducted in July and August 2011 and based on a specially designed and adapted questionnaire by Rauter and Doupona Topič (2011). Adaptations were made according to the Tourist Role Preference Scale (Yiannakis & Gibson, 1992). The questionnaire consists of 30 items, which were answered using a five-level scale (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.848). Moreover, the questionnaire also verified the subjects’ stratification characteristics (gender, age, education, income, marital status, number of children), their frequency of engaging in sport activities in their leisure time and of attending mass sport events as well as their related habits. With the help of the organiser of all three events a link to the online survey was sent via e-mail to all participants registered for all three cycling events (3500 registered participants of the Franja cycling marathon; 850 participants of the “Three hearts Radenci” recreational cycling marathon and 720 participants of the “Around the region of Prlekija” recreational cycling marathon). The data so acquired were first analysed using descriptive statistics methods. The connections between individual categories of tourist roles and other variables were verified through a correlation. The statistical significance of the differences was established using an analysis of the variance and the chi-square test.

Results and discussion

The study’s population was active cyclists who actively take part in sport events. The descriptive statistical analysis of their socio-demographic factors shows that most participants were middle-aged men, well-educated and mostly married. Seventy-eight percent of these were men and 22% were women. We did not find a statistically important difference between the male and female participants at the smaller or larger cycling events ($p=0.398$). The participants’ average age in the present study is 38.76 ± 13.74 years. This reflects the actual age structure of active participants in different mass sport events and coincides with previous studies. The results of earlier research (Bull, 2006; Getz & McConnell, 2011; Hallman & Breuer, 2010) show that the most common sport event participants are middle-aged people whose priorities are comfort and quality.

The participants’ social profile is also an interesting piece of background information. It hence follows that people in a higher social class in our research more frequently participate in various sport events. The results also show that the participants’ monthly income is much higher than the average monthly income of citizens in Slovenia. Several previous studies (Lee & Bhargava, 2004; Mansfield, 2007) confirm that education and the related feeling of belongingness to specific social groups are extremely important factors for including individuals in different sport activities. Education level often

correlates with income level. Kaplanidou (2006) concluded that the participants of several mass sport events belong to a social class with a higher income. Getz and McConell (2011) bring together the higher level of participants with their age structure and also with the financial aspects of participation in such events.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the cycling event participants

	Large cycling event ¹	Smaller cycling events ²	Sig.
Gender			
Male	78.9%	77.2%	$\chi^2=0.146$ $p=0.398$
Female	21.1%	22.8%	
Age	38.47±15.91	39.07±11.08	F=1.82 $p=0.67$
Education			
Primary school	0%	0.1%	$\chi^2=11.28$ $p=0.049^*$
Vocational school	4.1%	3.7%	
Secondary school	30.6%	42.6%	
College education	10.9%	13.3%	
University education	45.6%	34%	
Master's or doctorate	8.8%	5.3%	
Income			
Don't want to answer	15%	0%	$\chi^2=53.18$ $p=0.000^*$
No income	5.2%	4.8%	
< 800€	15.6%	23.2%	
801–1400€	34.7%	50%	
<1401€	29.6%	7.5%	

Legend: 1. participants of the largest cycling event in Slovenia (Franja cycling marathon), 2. participants of two smaller cycling events ("Three hearts Radenci" recreational cycling marathon and "Around the region of Prlekija" recreational cycling marathon); Sig.- statistical significance ($p<0.05^*$)

The entry fees and sometimes also the cost of travelling to the events are very high. A lot of studies (Cunningham, 2005; Daniels, 2007; Lee & Bhargava, 2004; West, 2009) connected the level of education with a higher standard of living. People with a higher education have better paid jobs and consecutively receive higher incomes. The results of our study showed there are statistical differences among the participants of larger and smaller cycling events in both the level of their education and their monthly income (Table 1). Results showed that almost a third (29,6%) of participants of large cycling event have monthly income higher than 1400€ in comparison with the participants of small cycling events (7,5%). One reason should be the level of entry fees which for the smaller events amount to around EUR 15 and for the larger event around EUR 35. The other reason for the differences is the destination (region) of the sport events. The smaller events take place in rural areas nearby two small towns. The larger event was organised in Ljubljana, which is the capital of Slovenia and also the most economically powerful part of the country.

Some previous studies (Kei, 2004; Mansfield, 2007; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004) found that marital status affected the participants' lifestyle, especially their leisure time, which involved an engagement in sport activities. They found that single people devote more time to leisure activities. It does not matter whether this means engaging in sport activities, hanging out with friends or attending a cultural or sport event. The results of our study do not allow us to completely confirm the abovementioned results of the previous studies. Among the participants at all three events, 18,9% of them were single and 45,2% were married. We identified statistically significant differences between the participants of the larger and smaller cycling events depending on how many children they have (Table 1).

Marital status is not such an important factor for participation in mass sport events. Family status is more strongly associated with the reasons for participating in the mass sport events. Single people are looking for friendships and communication, while runners with a family and children are particularly looking for special additional side programs dedicated to their children (Best, 2010).

Table 2. Reason for participating in the cycling events

Participation on the sport events is for me:	Large cycling event ¹	smaller cycling events ²	Sig.
Escape from everyday life activities	2.75±1.48	3.13±1.38	F=6.51; $p=0.011^*$
Acquiring new friends	2.80±1.14	3.41±1.13	F=27.15; $p=0.000^*$
Spending time with my family	2.17±1.68	3.13±1.28	F=57.26; $p=0.000^*$
Helps me to refresh my mind and body	4.34±0.93	4.46±0.81	F=1.83; $p=0.176$
Allows me to seek new and different experiences	4.04±1.03	3.91±1.09	F=0.89; $p=0.345$
Enhances my status with my peers	1.99±1.06	2.16±1.22	F=1.93; $p=0.166$
Is a special kind of activity in my life	3.84±1.31	3.80±1.21	F=0.12; $p=0.731$
Helps me achieve my dreams and fantasies	3.90±1.18	3.70±1.12	F=3.02; $p=0.083$

Legend: 1. participants of the largest cycling event in Slovenia (Franja cycling marathon), 2. participants of two smaller cycling events ("Three hearts Radenci" recreational cycling marathon and "Around the region of Prlekija" recreational cycling marathon); Sig.- statistical significance ($p<0.05^*$).

Shipway and Jones (2008) found that people attend sport events because they take a rest and refresh their mind from everyday life and obligations. Table 2 shows the importance of several reasons for participating in the cycling events. Refreshing the mind and body was the most popular reason for the participation among the cycling event participants. We also found statistically significant differences between the participants of the large or small cycling events in some reasons that belong more to the social aspects of participation. Participants in the small cycling events evaluated the importance of "spending time with family" and "acquiring new friends" higher than the participants in the larger cycling

event. The main reason for this might be that the participants in the smaller events represent a group of people who are more familiar with each other and more of them come from a rural environment.

Table 3. Frequency of event participation and of sport activity

	Large cycling event ¹	Smaller cycling events ²	Sig.
FREQUENCY OF SPORT PARTICIPATION (%)			
Never take part in physical activity	0	0.5	$\chi^2=25.301$ $p=0.000^*$
1–3 times a month	2.6	3.3	
Once a week	4.6	15.9	
2–3 times a week	32.5	42.3	
More than 3 times a week	60.3	37.9	
FREQUENCY OF EVENT PARTICIPATION			
Number of events per year	7.91±8.76	7.81±7.68	F=1.03 $p=0.902$
TAKE PART IN MASS SPORT EVENTS IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY (%)			
Never	48.5	57.2	$\chi^2=7.13$ $p=0.068$
Rarely (less than 2 times a year)	39.2	36.9	
Often	12.4	5.9	
Rarely	34	29	
Sometimes	14.4	17.2	
Often	5.2	2.7	
Always	1	0	

Legend: participants of the largest cycling event in Slovenia (Franja cycling marathon), 2. participants of two smaller cycling events (“Three hearts Radenci” recreational cycling marathon and “Around the region of Prlekija” recreational cycling marathon); Sig.- statistical significance ($p<0.05^*$).

We realised that for the cycling event participants sport activities are clearly an important factor of their leisure time. The research results reveal that the participants very often spend their leisure time by engaging in sport activities, just like when traveling where most of them take on the role of a sport tourist. The results show that the participants who took part in the larger cycling event are more often sport-active and also attend more sport events per year (Table 3). In addition, they participated more often in different sport events abroad in foreign countries. Based on these results, we can make a connection with the fact that among the participants of the larger cycling event there are also more of them who assume the role of sport tourists.

Based on the theoretical framework of Gibson and Yiannakis (2002) it is possible to identify the dominant tourist role, which was checked with the standardised questionnaire “Tourist Role Preference Scale”. The results show that our participants assume different tourist roles on their travels (Table 4).

It is therefore not surprising that these people largely take on the role of sport tourists on their travels. In earlier studies, mass sport event participants were automatically categorised as sport tourists (Deery et al., 2004; Hallman et al., 2010;

Table 4. The roles assumed by people while travelling or on holidays

Tourist role	All	Large cycling event ¹	Smaller cycling events ²	Sig.
»SPORT TOURIST«	39	41.8	36.2	$\chi^2=1.343$; $p=0.146$
»ANTHROPOLOGIST«	6.5	7.2	5.9	$\chi^2=0.306$; $p=0.365$
»SUN LOVER«	5.5	3.6	7.4	$\chi^2=2.666$; $p=0.079$
»ARCHAEOLOGIST«	5.5	4.1	6.9	$\chi^2=1.402$; $p=0.169$
»EXPLORER«	4.5	4.1	4.8	$\chi^2=0.092$; $p=0.478$
»THRILL-SEEKER«	7.1	5.7	8.5	$\chi^2=1.142$; $p=0.192$
»SEEKER«	2.9	2.6	3.2	$\chi^2=0.122$; $p=0.482$
»ACTION-SEEKER«	1	1	1.1	$\chi^2=0.001$; $p=0.675$
»ORGANISED MASS TOURIST«	2.6	2.1	3.2	$\chi^2=0.466$; $p=0.359$
»DRIFTER«	1.6	0	3.2	$\chi^2=6.257$; $p=0.14$
»EDUCATIONAL TOURIST«	1.3	0.5	2.1	$\chi^2=1.902$; $p=0.178$
»HIGH-CLASS TOURIST«	1.3	0	2.7	$\chi^2=5.200$; $p=0.028^*$
»JETSETTER«	1.6	0	3.2	$\chi^2=6.257$; $p=0.014^*$

Legend: % of those who defined themselves as one of the tourist types; participants of the largest cycling event in Slovenia (Franja cycling marathon), 2. participants of two smaller cycling events (“Three hearts Radenci” recreational cycling marathon and “Around the region of Prlekija” recreational cycling marathon); Sig.- statistical significance ($p<0.05^*$).

Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007). We found that the share of those who take on the role of a sport tourist was 39%. Such a finding raises the question of how to classify more than half (61%) of our study subjects since all of them were active participants in the cycling events and did not assume a sport tourist role. The results show that, among the participants in the larger cycling event, there were bigger shares of those who take on the role of a sport tourist (41.8%) compared to the participants in the two smaller events (36.2%). Large cycling event »the marathon Franja« is organised in the capital of Slovenia and is definitely more attractive for tourist in comparison to the two small events in rural area. We have already indicated, that participation in mass sport events often be linked to the sport tourism. A lot of people travel to participate at attractive sport events, like a large very known cycling marathons. This might be the reason, that a share of sport tourist among the participants of large cycling events is bigger.

The results reveal that our cycling event participants assume different tourist roles on their travels which are not necessarily associated with sport related reasons (Table 3). Namely, 6.5% of the participants in our study enjoy learning about different cultures (“anthropologists”) on their travels. Some of them take on the role of a tourist “sun lover” (5.5%)

who enjoy relaxing in warm places with lots of sun. The results indicate statistically significant differences between the participants of the smaller cycling events that cover the tourist role named “sun lover” (3.6%) compared to the larger cycling event (7.4%). The results also show that among the cycling marathon participants there were practically no “high-class tourists” who enjoy luxurious trips or those who prefer organised and guided tours.

Conclusion

Previous research about sport event tourism has shown the potential of sport-for-all events for developing tourism. Some research found that especially small sport events allow the possibility to develop unknown tourist destinations (Yusof et al., 2009). Earlier research into mass sport events does not discuss and define the participants of mass sport events separately. By separately discussing a participant in their role of a sport tourist from that of a participant who did not assume this role, we were able to better explain the characteristics of the sport event participants. To clarify this main goal of our research we relied on the theoretical background of role theory.

Using role theory and its application to tourism we can identify people with different motives and needs, different tourist roles. It was found that nearly 40% of the cyclists engage in sport activities during their travels and assume the role of a sport tourist. Among the participants in the large and small cycling events we were unable to find differences in the share of participants taking on the role of a sport tourist. In terms of developing sport tourism we cannot indicate whether small or large sport events are preferable. However, we are not in a position where we can carry out a lot of especially economic studies to identify the potential of sport event tourism and its impact on host tourist destinations. The results show that the typical cycling event participant was middle-aged, highly educated and had a higher income. A comparison pointed to the differences in the share of highly educated people among the small and large cycling event participants. People who attended the larger cycling event had a higher education level and a higher income. Like the share of participants with a higher education level among those taking part in the larger cycling event, they were also more involved in sport participation during their leisure time.

When conducting further research on sport event tourism it would make sense to employ more qualitative research methodology where the research would focus on questions such as: “Why and how do sport activities or active participation in sport events influence people’s lives?”

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