

Samo Rauter**MASS SPORTS EVENTS AS A WAY OF LIFE
(DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE
PARTICIPANTS IN A CYCLING AND
A RUNNING EVENT)****MNOŽIČNE ŠPORTNE PRIREDITVE
KOT NAČIN ŽIVLJENJA (RAZLIKE MED
UDELEŽENCI KOLESARSKE IN TEKAŠKE
PRIREDITVE)****ABSTRACT:**

The study aimed to establish the differences between cyclists and runners in terms of the frequency of them actively spending their leisure time and the frequency of them participating in various mass sports events. At the same time, we analysed the habits and experience of participants in such events and explained the correlation between their participation in mass sports events and their lifestyle. The study sample was made up of recreational cyclists (194) and runners (664). It included participants in two of the largest mass sports events in Slovenia, namely the Ljubljana Marathon and the Franja (Cycling) Marathon. The study was underpinned by quantitative and qualitative research. We established that the cyclists are more frequently active and attend more events than the runners. Moreover, the share of those classified as 'serious' participants is larger among the cyclists. We established that a person's active lifestyle is influenced by their participation in past events and experience gained. Many of them see their participation as a way of asserting themselves, a social event and a reason for physical activity. For the 'serious' participants, who still account for the smallest share of individuals attending the events, participation in a multitude of events represents a special lifestyle with sport occupying the central place of their leisure time.

Key words: mass sports events, cyclists, runners, leisure time

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IZVLEČEK:

Namen raziskave je bil ugotoviti razlike med kolesarji in tekači v pogostosti aktivnega preživljanja prostega časa in pogostosti udeležbe na različnih množičnih športnih prireditvah. Hkrati smo analizirali navade in doživetja udeležencev na prireditvah ter pojasnili povezavo med udeležbo ljudi na množičnih športnih prireditvah z njihovim načinom življenja. V vzorec raziskave smo vključili rekreativne kolesarje (194) in tekače (664). Obravnavali smo udeležence dveh največjih oziroma najbolj množičnih športnih prireditev v Sloveniji in sicer udeležence Ljubljanskega tekaškega maratona ter udeležence Kolesarskega maratona Franja. V raziskavi smo uporabili tako kvantitativno kot kvalitativno raziskovanje. Ugotovili smo, da so kolesarji pogostejše športnoaktivni in se udeležujejo večjega števila prireditev. Med njimi je tudi večji delež takih, ki jih lahko uvrščamo v skupino »zagnanih« udeležencev. Ugotovili smo, da udeležba in doživetja iz preteklih prireditev vplivajo na aktivni življenjski slog posameznikov. Mnogim pomeni udeležba obliko samopotrjevanja, družabni dogodek in motiv za gibanje. Pri bolj »zagnanih« udeležencih, ki sicer predstavljajo najmanjši delež posameznikov na prireditvah, sodelovanje na številnih prireditvah pomeni svojevrsten način življenja, kjer šport predstavlja osrednjo vrednoto njihovega prostega časa.

Glavne besede: množične športne prireditve, kolesarji, tekači, prosti čas

INTRODUCTION

The number of sports events dedicated to the public at large is growing every day (Hallman & Breuer, 2010). In Slovenia alone, there are plenty of running and cycling events for all those eager to engage in a physical activity and socialise. In recent times, sport and physical activity in one's leisure time have become a synonym for a healthy and quality life, whereas participation in sports events is for many people also a way of socialising. Previous studies indicated that the motivation to take part in sports events stems from previous engagement in sport activities, the desire to participate in an organised event, socialising during the event as a way of social interaction and, not least, the popularity of a particular event. Consequently, for most people a sport event is more than just the passive or active spending of leisure time (Green & Jones, 2005).

This is also one reason for the rising number of events, along with their higher quality, diversity and attractiveness. The above are reflected in bigger numbers of people engaging in a variety of sports in their leisure time, as well as in the changing mindset of people. Only a decade ago, people who practised sport were regarded as 'weird' and often also as idlers. Nowadays, this perception has changed considerably and is losing ground. It is more the opposite, people are becoming ever more aware of the positive aspects of an active lifestyle and have started to benefit from it. Many people also regard the practising of a sport as a good way to spend one's leisure time. For the most ardent enthusiasts, sport has become their way of life.

The social environment is an intertwinement of social, cultural, political and economic circumstances. Circles of friends, relatives and acquaintances as well as school, societies, clubs and different organisations shape one's views on sport activity. Personality traits largely define one's attitude to practising sport (Yair, 1990). Stamm and Lamprecht (2011) establish that health-associated goals are among the most common reasons for engaging in different sports, especially among adults. The desire to maintain and improve one's health is thus one of the key reasons to take up sports. However, these goals are not sufficient to motivate someone to practise sport over a longer period of time. After a certain period of engaging in a sport, the health-related reasons often become less important and are replaced by the taking up of challenges and enjoying sport. A sporty lifestyle is most easily explained by the motives of satisfaction and enjoyment, developing abilities, establishing friendships and overcoming the challenges inherent to a sport activity. The interweaving of all of these factors results in feelings of enjoyment that drive people to invest a lot of energy in sport, which is why it can also become a way of life.

Social interaction also plays an important role in sport activity. Namely, people are attracted by group activities largely because of the collective identification, the feeling of belonging, the strengthening of social connections and possibilities for group motivation (Green & Jones, 2005). This is one of the main reasons for mass participation in events associated with sport activities.

Fox (1982) defined "recreational" sport as *insignificant*, *casual* or even *fraudulent* compared to *serious* professional sport. A question arises of why many people consider practising sport to be a very serious activity, equal to their job or profession (Stebbins, 2007). Many people regard leisure activities like engaging in sports as very important. In a specific group of people this is clearly manifested in their excessive engagement in sport given that many 'amateur' athletes train and live by the principles of professional athletes. They practically subordinate their life solely to advancement in the sport they engage in during their leisure time. Such people often raise their

engagement in sport to a level equal to their work obligations or, even more, sport becomes the most important activity in their life (Stebbins, 2001).

Bryan (2000) explains that many people who engage in sport activities in their leisure time or practise a specific sport very 'seriously' soon become completely focused on their most popular sport. Even engaging in other sports that are quite similar to their preferred one is seen by them as an obstacle. The more 'seriously' they engage in their chosen sport, the less frequently they participate in competitions and events not explicitly associated with their preferred sport. A question emerges about whether this can also apply to running or cycling enthusiasts.

Green and Jones (2005) assert that sport devotees consider as very important those characteristics which dictate their lifestyle or show their different attitude to the mainstream culture. In any case, they put the selected sport activity at the forefront of their life. They often experience a feeling of belonging, while also joining an environment and choosing a company where everything revolves around their preferred sport. Shipway and Jones (2007) report that such sport enthusiasts also engage in a specific type of consumption. They share a similar style of dressing and usually only wear those brands that are renowned and popular in a specific sport. A special place is occupied by memorabilia t-shirts from past competitions which are particularly popular. Enthusiastic runners, cyclists or triathlon athletes often consider such sport equipment a status symbol. Top sport equipment is not only part of the 'image' but also helps boost the athletes' self-confidence and feeling of competence while engaging in a selected sport. From this point of view, having the most up-to-date and trendy sports equipment is very important for them (Bridel, 2010).

All of the above creates a connectedness and fuels the feeling of belonging to a particular circle of like-minded and physically active people. Willig (2008) explains two factors that distinguish 'athletes' from 'non-athletes'. It is the desire to become familiar with everything that concerns a selected sport and the immense popularity of strenuous endeavours. The fact that an endeavour is strenuous enough creates some sort of challenge for them. Many participants in various events are thus enthralled by the high level of difficulty of the trials. This is reflected in how they honour the suffering in sport, which is particularly interesting (Bridel, 2010). Namely, the more strenuous and difficult the activity, the stronger the athletes' pride and satisfaction with themselves. These people clearly appreciate another set of values, such as perseverance, determination and relentlessness, which also mean a different lifestyle tailored to the sport activities. An example is a group of runners whose conversations often only revolve around the level of difficulty of individual running events. They use special vocabulary or jargon to describe the efforts that only they are able to understand. The runners believe that 'others' (non-athletes) will never understand the point of enjoying strenuous endeavours. It is characteristic of the group of 'ardent' or 'serious athletes' that they demand from themselves an unbending readiness to exceed their own boundaries and abilities. The central role in their way of thinking and behaving is played by the ability to endure the pain caused by the effort as well as gaining experience and knowledge associated with the sport activity (Bridel, 2010).

The above demonstrates that their values are unique and that they differ from those of less physically active people. In sport, sports events or sport tourism, these individuals strive to find happiness, satisfaction, their own self, their personality and self-assurance that are many times subdued by the working day routine (Rauter & Doupona Topič, 2011).

METHODS

The study sample consisted of recreational cyclists and runners who actively participated in a mass sports event. The sample included participants in the two largest mass sports events in Slovenia, namely runners of the Ljubljana Marathon and cyclists of the Franja Marathon. In the initial phase, the quantitative part of the research was performed using the online survey method, whereby all registered participants of both events mentioned above were invited to take part in the survey. All of them were sent e-mails by the organisers of the events, with a link to our online survey. The online survey questionnaire was completed by 858 participants of one of the two mass sports events. The distribution of the sample between the two mass sports events was as follows: 664 subjects were participants in the Ljubljana Marathon and will hereinafter be referred to as the 'runners', while 194 subjects were participants in the Franja Marathon, to be referred to as the 'cyclists'. Data were processed with the IBM SPSS Statistics software package, ver. 20. The data were first analysed using descriptive statistics methods showing frequency distributions and the correlation between socio-demographic activities and engagement in sport. The classification and merging of participants with similar characteristics in terms of their frequency of engaging in sport were performed using the cluster analysis method. Ward's clustering method was applied. The criteria for group classification included: (1) frequency of engaging in sport; (2) quantity of engaging in sport (number of hours per week); (3) frequency of participation in mass sports events (number of events per year); and (4) participation in mass sports events abroad. Three groups of participants who attended either of the mass sports events were thus formed, sharing the most similar characteristics. They were named, based on the frequency of their participation in events and their characteristics, as follows: (1) *incidental participant*; (2) *enthusiastic participant*; and (3) *serious participant*.

In the second, qualitative part of the study, a discussion was carried out by a focus group of participants. The main purpose of the focus group research was to gain an insight into the views, feelings, experience and reactions of the participants (recreational runners and cyclists) which could not be obtained by other data collection methods (Gibbs, 1997). The participants in the focus group discussion included individuals with experience in different running or cycling events in Slovenia and abroad. The snowball approach was applied, namely invitations to participate in the focus group were sent to the representatives of recreational sport societies, asking them to forward the invitation to their active members who attend mass sports events. The focus group discussion was attended by nine mass event participants. Of these, four defined themselves as cyclists. The remaining five preferred running and attended running events, so they defined themselves as runners. The data obtained as a result of organising the focus group were transcribed and processed with the NVivo9 (QSR International) software package for qualitative research. Like with the interviews, the hierarchical analysis method was applied. Participation in the survey was voluntary. All personal data concerning the subjects were anonymised and only used for the research purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The online questionnaire was used to establish the social profile of those participating in either of the two most popular cycling and running events in Slovenia. Moreover, the frequency of

engaging in a chosen sport was also verified. Male participants in the sports events still dominate, which is particularly evident in the cycling event (Table 1).

Table 1: Structure of study subjects by gender

	CYCLISTS ¹	RUNNERS ²	TOTAL
Men	153	335	488
%	78.9%	50.5%	56.9%
Women	41	329	370
%	21.1%	49.5%	43.1%
n	194	664	858

Legend:¹participants of the Franja Marathon – cyclists, ²participants of the Ljubljana Marathon – runners

Other studies (Getz & McConnell, 2011; Martos & Salguero, 2009; Nogawa et al. , 1996; Stamm & Lamprecht, 2011) dealing with engagement in sport or socio-demographic characteristics of sport or sport-recreational event participants establish that the share of men who are physically active or actively participate in various sports events is higher than of women. Martos and Salguero (2009) report that the 2008 New York City Marathon hosted nearly 39,000 runners from 106 countries, ranking it among the so-called ‘big five’ running events. The share of men in this event was 66%. Something similar was established by Bull (2006) who formed a study sample of regular participants in cycling events in Scotland. Male participants were predominant (91%) in these events. It should be noted that the gender differences in the share of participants are larger in the case of cycling events compared to running events. A comparison with our sample shows similar trends as seen in other studies by different authors (Bull, 2006; Filo et al. , 2008), namely the female participants in the cycling marathon were in a minority (21. 1%). The reason for the lower participation of women in cycling events perhaps relates to the fact that most cycling marathons are attended by a large group of people and the cycling takes place in a dense group. Albert (1999) summarises the habits of cyclists and defines cycling in a dense group as a challenge that has to be overcome. He also mentions some traits of cyclists such as fearlessness, which is particularly true of participants in cycling competitions and events. This is the main reason for the smaller share of female cyclists, as only those women who are accustomed to and capable of cycling in a dense group participate. In many earlier studies, authors established that women dislike activities where they must cope with fear and be attentive all the time (Donnelly, 2006; Gilchrist, 2007; Laurendeau & Sharara, 2008). That is also the experience of Zarja (36 years, cyclist) who participated in our study:

I have experience cycling at the Franja Marathon and it was, how should I put it, adrenaline-packed. Mostly because of the crowd during the first kilometres and those who want to win before the first slope. Right behind me, perhaps only three metres away, a massive fall occurred. Oh, how it rattled. Tyres, wheels, everything was cracking. Gosh, you don't get to see this every day. I didn't fall but it was a negative experience I won't forget.

The age structure shows that most of the runners and cyclists are 30 to 40 years old. In our study, the cyclists (37. 54±10. 21 years) were slightly older than the runners (36. 21±9. 89 years) on average. Pate and O'Neill (2007) reported similar figures, namely, that mass sports events

are most often attended by men aged between 30 and 50, whereas women are slightly younger (25–45 years).

In the survey, the runners and cyclists were asked about the frequency of participating in various mass events throughout the year. The study subjects participated in 5.01 ± 5.86 events a year on average, which is completely comparable to previous studies where the participants in various events attended about five events a year on average (Bull, 2006; Getz & McConnell, 2011; McGehee et al., 2003; Nogawa et al., 1996). It was established for the cyclists that they participate in mass sports events more frequently (7.91 ± 8.76). The participants in running events attend fewer events (4.16 ± 4.36). A comparison of the frequency and weekly volume of engaging in different sports reveals some differences between the samples of runners and cyclists. The share of those engaging in sports at least three times a week is higher among the cyclists (60.3%). The subjects of our study engaged in sports 6.45 ± 3.92 hours a week.

A comparison of the frequency and weekly volume of engaging in a selected sport shows some differences between the cyclists and runners. The share of those who engage in sports at least three times a week is greater among the cyclists (60.3%). A comparison between the cyclists and the runners in terms of their weekly volume of engaging in sports reveals some statistically significant differences ($F=128.4$; $p=0.000$). The results of our study are comparable to the study by McGehee et al. (2003) which investigated recreational runners regularly attending running events. On average, they were physically active 4.5 days a week and their weekly volume of running was 20 miles (32 km) which, at a moderate pace (5 min/km), corresponds to six hours of running per week. In another study, Bull (2006) found for a group of recreational cyclists they were physically active 11.4 hours a week on average. Based on the abovementioned different studies, we may conclude that cyclists and runners perform a similar number of training units but the activity in a training unit of cyclists lasts longer. The reason primarily lies in the physiology and biomechanics of the sport. Although the quantity of time and effort is the same during cycling and running, it is during running that the strain and mechanical pressures on the body result in greater fatigue (Millet, Vleck, and Bentley, 2009). The socialising aspect of cycling must also be considered. Authors who delved into the habits of cyclists established that predominant among cyclists are not those who perform the training session alone but those who prefer cycling in pairs or large groups (Bull, 2006; DuRoy, 2000; Rauter & Doupona Topič, 2007). Ogles and Masters (2003) established the opposite, namely that three-quarters of participants in running marathons prefer to run alone. Jeffery (2010) mentioned that in the recent period, mostly because of the influence of the media and the intensive promotion of running, more people than ever before are joining special running groups. Nevertheless, the dominant share of runners is made up of those who run autonomously and do not depend on others.

The above findings of the study show that runners and especially cyclists very frequently engage in their preferred sport in their leisure time. Nevertheless, we found some differences between them and also in their reasons for engaging in sport and participating in different events. Consequently, we classified and merged participants with similar characteristics using the hierarchical cluster analysis method. Three groups were formed of the cycling and running event participants, according to the similarity of their characteristics. Depending on the frequency of participating in the events and the participants' characteristics, these groups were named as follows: (1) *incidental participant*; (2) *enthusiastic participant*; and (3) *serious participant*. We established that the cyclists are more physically active than the runners and participate in mass sports events more frequently. This also account for the bigger share of 'serious participants'

(16. 6%) among the cyclists than among the runners (3. 6%). Conversely, we established that the runners engage in sport less frequently. Due to the above, a larger share of runners is classified as ‘incidental participants’ (56. 2%).

Table 2: Characteristics of engaging in sport and participating in sports events by groups of participants in either mass event

	INCIDENTAL PARTICIPANTS	ENTHUSIASTIC PARTICIPANTS	SERIOUS PARTICIPANTS
	N=407	N=377	N=55
	48.5%	44.9%	6.6%
No. of hours of sport activity per week:	4.34±1.69	8.13±4.18	10.71±4.92
Frequency of engaging in sport			
I do not engage at all	0.2%	0%	0%
One to three times a month	3.2%	0%	0%
Once a month	6.6%	1.1%	0%
Two to three times a week	52.7%	29.7%	12.7%
More than three times a week	37.3%	69.2%	87.3%
Participation in mass sports events			
Number of events per year	1.92±1.02	5.82±2.68	22.62±9.52
Participation in events abroad			
Never	88.5%	47.2%	5.5%
Rarely (up to twice a year)	10.8%	46.9%	47.2%
Frequently	0.7%	5.9%	47.3%

Legend: The values of the frequency distribution are shown in %. The number of hours of engagement in sport and the number of participations in events per year are shown as the average value ± SD. The hierarchical cluster analysis included 97.8% of the total sample.

Table 2 shows that the group ‘serious participants’, in which the cyclists prevail, stands out the most. It is also the smallest group in terms of participant numbers. Members of this group differ from the other two particularly in the fact that they dedicate considerably more time to practising their preferred sport. This is also why the typical representative of this group was named ‘serious participant’. The share of study subjects in this is just 6. 6%. It is typical that their behaviour and conduct are quite similar to those of top-level athletes. The only difference is that they are not paid for their sports activity and do not depend on top results at competitions (Stebbins, 1992). They are physically active for more than 10 hours a week on average (10. 71±4. 92). They are even more distinguished by the fact that they attend mass sports events very frequently, i. e. 22. 62±9. 52 per year on average. Of these, 47. 3% attend mass sports events abroad more frequently, as described by a regular event participant:

I am an amateur cyclist. I hold a licence but I am not in a professional club. I attend about 25 events a year. These are short, not longer than an hour, but this year some were also one-week long, in France and Italy. (Zoran, 25 years, cyclist)

The discussion revealed the strong level of competitiveness felt by the ardent participants. For this reason, the participants take their leisure activities too seriously and want to resemble profes-

sional athletes in lifestyle. This means they subordinate their life to the sole goal of progress. Zoran clearly belongs to this group because he cannot imagine participating in an event without feeling at least a certain level of competitiveness. He has subordinated his lifestyle to practising sport (cycling) to the extent that he no longer perceives cycling as a leisure activity but as a commitment.

I would like to mention something about leisure time. For me, cycling or the sporting part of life is no longer my leisure. In fact, you have a programme and you have to carry it out. It becomes a commitment and you start to use your leisure time differently. You either rest or do some other things. This means that if you have a race on Sunday, you don't do anything on Saturday. You drink a lot, you don't expose yourself to the sun, you don't swim or spend your time at the seaside. Things like that. Everything revolves around this and once you start craving for top results or you force yourself to achieve them, you run out of free time. It's not leisure time anymore, so to speak. You ride your bicycle six times a week. How can you enjoy it? Well, you can enjoy it once a week. But you don't enjoy the remaining three or four times, or you relish just the first hour, not the next three or four hours. It's no longer a pleasure, it's more of an obligation. This is my view of recreation as a whole or sports or, eventually, also a mass event I take part in. It's more of an obligation. You just have to be there, and that's it. (Zoran, 25 years, cyclist)

The second group included 'enthusiastic participants' in either event covered by the study who were less frequently physically active than the group of 'ardent participants'. For them, engaging in sports represents the bulk of their leisure time. Up to 69.2% of them are physically active more than three times a week. They on average dedicate 8.13 ± 4.18 hours a week to practising sport. Nevertheless 'enthusiastic participants' frequently practise sport in their leisure time. Compared to the 'serious participants', they do not attend mass sports events that often (5.82 ± 2.68). It can be concluded that these individuals are simply enthusiastic about their sporty lifestyle, which is also apparent from the following statement:

I find great pleasure in spending my leisure time practising sports. Although I am 44 years old now, I think I am still making progress. To me, running means a way of training and a process of advancement. Sometimes, when I am not keen on training, I roll a film in my head and see how satisfied I'll be again when I am at the finish. That's why I run. When I ran a half-marathon for the first time I was enraptured by the fact that I could do it after so many years. I decided at that very moment that I would start running seriously. So I can't talk about any suffering at all because for me it's quite simple, I enjoy doing it. (Nuša, 44 years, runner)

Members of the group of 'incidental participants' are, compared to the other two groups, the least physically active and attend mass sports events rarely (48.5%). They take part in less than two mass sports events a year on average (1.92 ± 1.02). They on average dedicate 4.34 ± 1.69 hours a week to practising sport. Nevertheless, 'incidental participants' in either event are still considerably more physically active than the general population in Slovenia. A comparison with the *Sport-recreational activity of Slovenians* study reveals that Slovenians engage in sports less frequently, with those who are physically active more than three times a week accounting for 16.4% (Sila, 2010).

The atmosphere at the events is a special experience for many people. During the focus group discussion, many participants in the events explained that the fact they were part of a mass of people was already a special experience for them. With all the crowds accompanying the athletes, the mass event many times becomes a special experience.

I like it very much when the crowds cheer for their athletes so eagerly. I find this so fantastic and now I also cheer when I see people competing. I join the cheering, I'm in it with all my heart. I am completely absorbed. (Nace, 42 years, runner)

For these people, proving themselves and competing with people like them add to the motivation to actively spend leisure time which they would be unable to create by themselves. All of these expectations and experience often constitute a motive for a person to attend the event again.

Even if you just decide to get to the end. When the mass starts moving, the atmosphere carries you along. It has never happened to me that I was not satisfied with being faster than someone who was ten years younger than me. The reason I go is mainly because I can hardly wait for the Sunday to come, with that special atmosphere ... (Zdravko, 50 years, cyclist)

CONCLUSION

The study discussed participants of cycling and running mass sport events. The main subject of the study was to establish not only who participates but mainly why people participate in mass sports events and what are the differences between cyclists and runners. We also established that people participate in cycling or running mass events for a variety of reasons and may have completely different goals motivating them to attend an event. Therefore, at least three different types of participants can be distinguished. We named them incidental, enthusiastic and serious participants. We established that the cyclists are physically active and participate in mass sports events more frequently than the runners. Among them, the share of 'serious' participants is greater. We explained that for the 'ardent participants, who account for the smallest share of participants in the events, participation in many events represents a special lifestyle. Most of them engage in sports in a planned and organised manner and prepare themselves for individual events so as to achieve high results. Moreover, we established that 'enthusiastic' and 'incidental' participants engage in sport less frequently but still regularly, although their reasons to participate in various mass sports events differ from those of the 'serious' participants. The former engage in sport as amateurs and in an unorganised manner. For them, participating is not competing but spending one's leisure time sociably. In the future, it would be reasonable to focus greater attention on high quality research of different groups of people who engage in sport more 'seriously' during their leisure time. The meaning and inclusion of serious engagement in sport in a person's lifestyle also warrant more research attention.

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