

The Incentives and the Degree of Satisfaction of the Spectators of the Athens Classic Marathon 2015 and 2016

ARISTIDIS PAPAGRIGORIOU

Piraeus University of Applied Sciences, Department of Business Management

POLYXENI MOIRA

Piraeus University of Applied Sciences, Department of Business Management

VASILIKI KARAGIANNI

Piraeus University of Applied Sciences, Department of Business Management

DIMITRIOS MYLONOPOULOS

Piraeus University of Applied Sciences, Department of Business Management

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, tourism and sport are often characterized as “industries” due to the large number of people interested in them, as well as the increased revenues of the visitors’ host countries. The last few years, the increased touristic flow is accompanied by an increased interest in sport as a tourism product. The so-called “sport tourism” is currently being studied by the sport and the tourism industry, as well as the scientific community.

The Authentic Athens Marathon is one of the many sport events organized in the Greek capital. The game is accompanied by shorter races, the 5km and the 10km races, which attract both the athletes’ and the amateur athletes’ interest. From the perspective of the state and the Athens’ bodies, the organization’s purpose is to establish the Authentic Marathon as a world sport event, with the participation of runners and visitors from all over the world. Furthermore, through this organization,

efforts are also being made in order to promote Athens and Greece and to present them as international sport destinations.

The present quantitative study was conducted in order to investigate the incentives and the degree of satisfaction of the spectators of the Athens Marathon. For the needs of the study structured questionnaires of 17 closed ended questions were distributed during the 2015 and 2016 games.

The spectators stated that they attended the games because some of their friends or relatives participated in them, while a number of them stated that they attended the games due to their love and interest in sport. The spectators answered that they were very satisfied by the organization, the information given and the events that took place during the games. However, the findings suggest that, despite the competent bodies' efforts, Greece and Athens have not managed to be established in the consciousness of the public as sport destinations and that the Marathon does not attract a large number of foreign visitors.

Further research is needed in order to investigate both the extent to which the visitors are informed through the media and the incentives and the requests of the races' spectators and, mainly, of the foreign visitors.

Key Words: Sport, Tourism, Athens Authentic Marathon.

1. TOURISM AND SPORT

Tourism is a multi-dimensional social-economic phenomenon which, from antiquity to the present day, has always been and still is related to the leisure time. Tourists spend their leisure time traveling away from their place of residence and work, so that they will be able to experience the change. The reasons why a person decides to travel vary, according to the incentives and the purpose, for example, cultural understanding, education, recreation, sport, etc.

According to Edwards (1973), the concept of "sport" has its roots in "disport", which means to distract or to divert and refers to the overriding importance of sport as an activity that distracts the individuals' attention from the everyday austerity and its pressures.

Of course, this concept has nowadays changed. Sport can be considered from many different points of view and perspectives. So, sport is viewed as a game (Hart and Birell, 1981) or a diversion from the daily routine, as leisure or recreation, as a pleasant way to spend time in open areas, for example, hunting, fishing, skiing or hiking (Zeigler, 1984).

Nowadays, sport, just like tourism, is supposed to be one of the most large-scale social phenomena. At the same time, both activities are considered important "industries", since they both attract large groups of people at a constantly high pace. Lately, the interest of the sport and the tourism industry, as well as that of the scientific community in sport as a tourism product has substantially increased. As a matter of fact, the scientific community has recognized the latter as an area of special academic interest (Standeven & De Knop, 1999). Thus, the so-called "sport tourism" emerges as a tourism activity.

2. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

Olivova (1984) considers that the points that these two activities share in common are increasing rapidly. As a matter of fact, the term “sport tourism” has been invented in order to easily understand the use of sport as a tourism phenomenon.

Pigeassou (2004:287) mentions that the so-called “sport tourism” is a social and economic activity located between sport and tourism.

A large number of philosophical, entrepreneurial, communication, as well as social developments have contributed to the engagement between sport and tourism. These developments are focused on the following:

- a) “Sport tourism” presents increased popularity, since it has been based on, promoted through and is well-documented by big sport events of global dimension (Blatiz, 1991, In Kurtzman, 2001:104), like the Olympic Games, the World Championships, the Marathons and other, similar events.
- b) “Sport tourism” is a mass event, supported by the promotion through the media of the worship of the “athletes-heroes” and their “stalwartness” (Kurtzman et al., 1993).
- c) In the western societies, health promotion through physical activity for people of all ages has renewed the interest in the participation in a large variety of sport events (Bhatiz, 1991; Pigeassou, 1997:26) and, subsequently, an important increase in the organized offer of sport events is being observed at global level.
- d) Gradually, the importance of both sport and tourism in the promotion of the local, national and international friendship, as well as of the understanding among individuals, groups and communities, is being understood (Kurtzman et al. 1993).

Technological developments contribute to the development of sport tourism (Gammon & Robinson, 1997), while the same applies to the development of the means of transport, since they allow the athletes’ and spectators’ transport.

Sport tourism could be classified into two large categories based on the presence or the absence of active participation in the sport activities. Specifically, there is a distinction between the sport events’ spectators and the active participants in a sport organization. These distinctions have occasionally been subjected to intensive academic dialogue (Hall, 1992; Green, Chalip and Verden, 1998; Gibson, 1998; De Knop, 1990; Nogawa, Yamguchi & Hagi, 1996).

Another distinction could be made based on whether the participant is a sport professional or not. In this case, a big issue rises about whether a sport professional may be considered a tourist, since the transport lacks basic tourism elements, like the incentive, which is the recreation, the free choice and free time (Μυλωνόπουλος, 2016:27).

Gibson (1998) made an attempt to categorize sport tourism based on the activities carried out during these types of tourists’ vacations. Specifically, she suggests the following sport tourism categories: a) Sport and exercise tourism, which refers to tourists who want to combine exercise with sport during their vacations. Such examples are the tourists who visit destinations that allow them to combine their vacations with sport activities, like swimming, sailing, climbing, etc. As a matter of fact, it should be stressed that, for many tourists of this category, the participation in a sport event might be of greater importance in comparison to the destination that hosts the event. b) Sport events

tourism, when the tourists choose destinations that also provide sport services. In this case, the sport events (like the Olympic Games, the Football World Cup, the Marathons, etc.) are the basic incentive regarding the growth of tourist flows to certain destinations. c) Cultural sport tourism. This is a type of activity expressed through the visitors' interest to be in sport places of great historic importance and cultural interest, in places that host popular sports, in well-known emporia selling sports equipment or in meeting famous sports personalities (Γκικόσογ et al., 2000:83). The archaeological site of Ancient Olympia, large stadiums having hosted the Olympic Games, various football fields, etc. are all integrated into this category.

Kurtzman and Zauhar (1997) have made an attempt to solve the sport tourism definition problems through five basic products, namely the sport tourism attractions, the sport tourism cruises, the sport tourism resorts, the sport tourism tours and the sport tourism events.

Gibson (1998) divides sport tourism into the following three large categories: the attendance of a sport event, the visit to a sport location and the active participation in a sport event.

Gammon & Robinson (1997) mention two distinctions, "sport tourism" and "tourism athletics". At the same time, they describe a "narrower" and a "broader" definition for each concept. As long as it concerns "sport tourism", the transport's main incentive is the sport activity, while the tourism element just reinforces the total experience. The individuals participate in sport activities at random or on an incidental basis during their vacations. On the contrary, "tourism athletics" refers to individuals who either attend or participate in a competitive sport event. In this case, the travel is the transport's main incentive, while sport functions as the transport's secondary incentive.

According to Γκικόσογ et al. (2000:82) these tourists are divided into two subcategories, the one of the spectators and the other of the participants (athletes, organizers, etc.). The two subcategories' individuals substantially differ in their consumer characteristics and the length of stay at their destination.

According to the travel classification adopted by the World Tourism Organization and the United Nations, the sport activities categories include winter sports, watersports, recreational diving, major sport events (like, for example, the Olympic Games and the World Cup), hunting, fishing (as a recreational activity), safari and golf.

3. ANCIENT GREECE AND SPORT

Greece has been the cradle of civilization and sport. Gardiner (1930:1) supports the thesis that "the history of the athletics in the ancient world is the history of the athletics in ancient Greece, due to the fact that the Greek nation was the only athletic nation in the ancient world". Since antiquity, various games had been organized in Greece, in order to honor the gods, like, for example, the Panathenaic games, which were organized every four years in order to honor goddess Athena, the Isthmian games, which were organized in order to honor god Poseidon, the Pythian games, which were organized in order to honor god Apollo, the Heraia festival, which was organized in order to honor goddess Hera, the Asclepieia festival, which was organized in order to honor Asclepius and the Nemean games, which were organized in order to honor god Zeus. The games and festivals included athletic, as well as poetry, music, drama and other contests.

However, the oldest and most important of all the games were the Olympic Games, which were held every four years at Olympia in honor of Zeus, the father of all gods. Pausanias mentions that "... Hercules..., matched his brothers in a running race and crowned the winner with a branch of wild olive. Thus, on this occasion, Hercules has the reputation of being the first to have held the games and to have called them Olympic" (Παυσανίας, V, 7.7-9).

The games were held at the Stadium and the Hippodrome, in front of thousands of spectators from all over the known ancient Greek world. The winners' award was a branch of wild olive, called laurel, while the winners were honored by their home countries. Finally, during the games, ceasefire was taking effect.

4. THE ATHENS AUTHENTIC MARATHON

The Marathon route (42,195m) is one of the most important races in the modern Olympic Games. It was integrated into the Olympic program in 1896, after Michel Breal, a Sorbonne professor and friend of the French baron Pierre de Coubertin, had suggested it. Pierre de Coubertin was the founder of the International Olympic Committee and is regarded as the modern Olympic Games' reviver and father. The race was established in memory of the heroic accomplishment of the hemerodromos-herald⁶ who had brought the Athenians the news regarding their victory against the Persians (490 B.C.).

The participation in the Marathon is, probably, the most important challenge that runners face. As a matter of fact, Marathon attracts the most participants from all over the world. For a large number of people, the participation in a Marathon is a life goal, even if it is going to happen once and regardless of the time needed to complete the course. In fact, 95% of the participants need more than two hours in order to complete the 42,195m course. Marathon, apart from being a major sport event, is also an important social event for the host city/country, since thousands of people; both athletes and spectators visit the area in order to watch the competition. The benefits of the major sport event's organization for the host country include the attraction of high income tourists and the creation of a permanent tourism clientele. At the same time, high revenues from the transportation, the accommodation, the nutrition, the athletes' workout, the buys, the museum visits, etc. are being recorded.

Marathons are being organized all over the world. The biggest are those of New York (in 2016 51.264 persons passed the finish line), Chicago, Paris, London and Berlin (HPRC, 2016). For example, it should be mentioned that 712 Marathons were organized in the USA and 59 in Canada during 2016 (Marathon Statistics, 2016).

Of course, the top Marathon is the "classic" authentic Marathon, which is being held every November in Athens. The athletes follow the authentic route, which starts from the area of Marathon and ends at the Kallimarmaro Stadium of Athens. The whole distance is 42.195km. Since 1972 the Athens classic Marathon is being held under the auspices of the Greek National Tourism Organization and the Hellenic Athletics Federation. It took its current form in 1983 and its numbering began then.

⁶ In ancient Greece, the messages related to the war were undertaken by the hemerodromes or heralds, who were very quickly covering long distances using arduous roads, armed and fully equipped (Γιαννάκης, 2016).

It is included in the Gold Marathons of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF⁷).

At the same time, apart from the Marathon, 5km and 10km races, children's races, dynamic gait and a 1,200m race within the framework of the Special Olympics are also being organized.

The number of the athletes who participate in the races that accompany the Athens Classic (later Authentic) Marathon is constantly increasing. According to the available statistical data, 16,000 athletes were enrolled in the 33rd Athens Marathon in 2015, while 18,000 athletes were enrolled in the 34th Athens Marathon in 2016. In general, in the 2016 races, there were 50,000 registration forms regarding all the sports.

According to the studies held by the Marketing Agency of the Hellenic Association of Amateur Athletes, the contenders are accompanied by a mean of 1.50 persons. The athletes and their attendants stay in Greece for a mean of 5 days (mainly in Athens) and they spend on accommodation, nutrition, buys, museum visits, etc. a mean of €1,500 (the sum refers to 2.50 persons). According to the calculations made, the revenues for Athens amount to €11 million (Παπαποστόλου, 2015).

The Marathon becomes popular through the operation of websites, by its promotion through the social networks, television and radio, as well as with the use of posters and leaflets⁸.

5. THE RESEARCH

The present study was held in order to identify the spectators' incentives regarding the Athens Marathon attendance. Another objective was the investigation of the spectators' degree of satisfaction regarding the races' organization. Within this study, a structured questionnaire of 17 questions was distributed, during the 2015 (the 8th of November) and the 2016 (the 13th of November) races' days.

A total of 188 questionnaires were completed by the races' spectators. The questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of people willing to spend the time needed to complete them, during the races' days, from 08.00 to 20.00. The questionnaires were written both in Greek and in English.

Of the 188 spectators who had agreed to complete the questionnaires, 109 (57.90% of the respondents) were women and 79 (42.10%) were men. Furthermore, 16 (8.50%) of the people asked were aged between 12 and 18 years old, 60 (31.90%) were aged between 19 and 30 years old, 39 (20.80%) were aged between 31 and 40 years old, 36 (19.10%) were aged between 41 and 50 years old, 24 (12.80%) were aged between 51 and 60 years old, 7 (3.70%) were aged between 61 and 70 years old, while 6 persons (3.20%) were older than 70 years old.

As long as it concerns the spectators' occupation, the results are the following. Thirty-two of them (17.00%) were civil servants, 44 (23.40%) were employed in the private sector, 15 (8.00%) were self-employed, 15 (12.80%) were unemployed, 18 (9.60%) were pensioners, 18 (9.60%) were

⁷ Κλασικός Μαραθώνιος Αθηνών: Ο δρόμος της δόξας! [The Athens Classic Marathon: The road of glory!] In <http://www.visitmarathon.gr/index.php/el/marathon-race/klasikos-marathonios-athinon>

⁸ Μαραθώνιος Αθήνας [The Athens Marathon] (2016). In <http://www.athensauthenticmarathon.gr/site/index.php/el/news-gr/media-archives-gr>

housewives, 42 (22.30%) were pupils/students and, finally, 10 of them (5.30%) mentioned that they were occupied in something else, without being more specific.

Regarding the spectators' level of education, the findings are the following. Of the 188 spectators who had agreed to complete the questionnaires, 20 (10.60%) had completed compulsory education, 51 (27.20%) were secondary education graduates, 91 (48.40%) were tertiary education graduates, while 26 (13.80%) held a Master Degree or a PhD.

Regarding the spectators' origin, 166 (88.30%) of them had Greek nationality, 5 (2.70%) had come from Italy, while 17 (9.00%) indicated various places as country of origin, like the Netherlands, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Poland, etc. These findings clearly indicate that, despite the efforts made, the Athens Marathon does not attract foreign spectators, the way that other Marathons being held abroad do.

The largest proportion of the spectators who stated that they were not Athens citizens, namely 49.30% of them (34 persons) mentioned that they had visited Athens in order to attend the races, 13.00% of them (9 persons) had visited Athens on business, 31.90% of them (22 persons) had visited Athens for leisure purposes and 2.90% of them (2 persons) answered that they were found in Athens for other reasons. Of the 188 spectators who had agreed to complete the questionnaire, 31.90% (44 persons) answered that they would stay in Athens just to watch the races, while 18.10% (25 persons) answered that they would stay in Athens for 2 to 3 days. This finding fails to agree with the data given by the Hellenic Association of Amateur Athletes, that mention that the athletes and their attendants stay in Greece for a mean of 5 days.

Of the 188 spectators who had agreed to answer the questionnaire, 31.90% (60 persons) mentioned that they watched the races with friends, 21.30% (40 persons) with their spouse/partner, 14.40% (27 persons) with other members of their family, 13.80% (26 persons) alone and 13.80% (26 persons) with their spouse/partner and their children.

Regarding the way that the spectators were informed about the races, 41.50% (78 persons) mentioned that they were informed through the internet, 33.50% (63 persons) were informed by relatives and friends and 13.80% (26 persons) were informed through television. Finally, only a few persons mentioned that they were informed through the print and other media.

As long as it concerns the running routes, 135 persons (69.70%) answered that they watched the Marathon, 50 persons (26.60%) watched the 10Km race, 45 persons (23.90%) watched the morning 5Km race, 29 persons (15.50%) watched the children's races, 19 persons (10.00%) watched the evening 5Km race, 15 persons (7.90%) watched the Special Olympics races, while 12 persons (6.40%) watched the dynamic gait.

Of great importance is the finding that of the 188 spectators asked, 37.30% (70 persons) mentioned that they watched the races due to the fact that a friend or a relative was participating in them, 23.90% (38 persons) mentioned that they watched the races because they love sports and they are interested in them, while only 6.40% (12 persons) watched the races in order to satisfy their curiosity. The rest of the spectators asked mentioned that they watched the games for other reasons, like, for example, because they were just "passing through".

Of the 188 spectators who answered the questionnaire, 46,8% (88 persons) mentioned that they had watched similar races in the past, while 93.6% (176 persons) stated that they would like

similar races to be organized more often. As a matter of fact, 63.80% (120 persons) mentioned that they would gladly participate in similar organizations as volunteers.

The answers given by the spectators to the questions regarding the degree of satisfaction obtained from the organization and the other events were as follows:

Table 1. Degree of satisfaction obtained from the Athens Marathon

	Very satisfied		Satisfied		Neither satisfied		Dissatisfied		Very dissatisfied		Prefer not		M/V	
	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%
Organization	93	49.70	59	31.40	17	9.00	10	5.20	8	4.20	1	0.50	0	
Accessibility	72	38.30	48	26.00	34	18.10	23	12.20	9	4.90	1	0.50	11	00.50
Information about the races	76	40.40	52	27.70	35	18.60	9	4.80	11	5.80	5	2.70	11	00.50
Events	58	30.90	56	29.80	35	18.60	22	11.70	6	3.20	11	5.80	0	
Information about Athens	55	29.20	54	28.70	43	23.00	15	8.00	9	4.80	11	5.80	0	
Cultural attractions	68	36.30	49	26.10	28	15.00	13	7.00	17	9.00	12	6.50	11	00.50

It should be noted that the respondents appeared very satisfied by the organization (49.70%), the accessibility of the races' area (38.30%), the way they were informed about the races (40.40%), the events that took place in order to accompany the races (30.90% of the respondents were very satisfied and 29.80% of them were satisfied), the information provided about Athens (29.20% of the respondents were very satisfied and 28.70% of them were satisfied) and the cultural attractions (36.30%).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the present study indicate that, despite the competent bodies' efforts, Athens, even though it is the Marathon's city of origin, has not been established in the tourists' consciousness and does not attract a large number of foreign visitors to watch the races. As a matter of fact, the majority of the spectators (41.50%) were informed about the event through the internet, while 33.50%

of them were informed by relatives and friends. Finally, the contribution of television and other forms of promotion was only small.

The study has also shown that 37.30% of the spectators watched the races due to the fact that a friend or a member of their family participated in them, while 47.80% of the respondents watched the races because they love sports and they are interested in them. This percentage, combined with the spectators' percentage who stated that they had visited Athens in order to watch the races, allows the assumption that it refers to sport tourists, namely persons who travel in order to watch sport events combined with recreation.

Further research is needed in order to investigate the extent to which the visitors are informed through the media. Additionally, further research is needed so that the incentives of the races' spectators, mainly of the foreign visitors, will be identified, in order to be able to approach these groups of people and to design appropriate tourist packages for the successful promotion of athletic events in the future.

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