

Exploring Motivational Characteristics of Recreational Road Cyclists Competing in Multiday Tourism Events

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Introduction

The relationship between recreational cycling and tourism is attracting scholarly attention as cycling experiences resurgence as a recreational, leisure and sporting activity (Lamont, 2009). Sport tourism and recreational events, such as cycling; contribute significantly to the US economy. While it is widely accepted that sporting events are catalysts for economic growth and development both nationally and internationally, there are also many other social benefits (Wilson, 2006). Recreational and sporting events provide benefits such as increased community visibility and enhanced community image (Lee, 2001). Tourism also impacts a wide range of business sectors and augments employment and payroll income (Bonn & Harrington, 2008). According to Kuhback and Herauf (2005), in 2003, tourism-related direct and indirect employment was 5.4 million and 2.5 million, respectively. The tourism industry's value grew 4.5% to \$285 billion, which represented 2.6% of the GDP for the period 2001–2003 (Kuhback and Herauf, 2005). The desire to visit another community is primarily stimulated by attractions (Compton, 2010). In many communities, primary attractions are sporting events and tournaments, festivals, parks, and major recreation facilities operated by park and recreation departments. Bicycle tourism has been defined as trips away from an individual's home region, where active or passive participation in cycling are consider the main purpose of the trip (Lamont, 2009). Multiday cycling and touring events are now offered in many areas across the United States. While cycling had been a popular sport in other areas of the world, such as Australia and Europe, recreational and competing cycling is growing in the United States. The purpose of this study was the examination of the motivational characteristics of recreational cyclists as related to travel, sport tourism and interest in other recreational and sport activities. Sport and tourism managers can benefit from understanding the characteristics of cyclists, particularly the reasons they choose to combine sport with travel activities.

Methodology

A qualitative case study design was utilized for this study. The characteristics of qualitative research include eliciting understanding and meaning, the researcher as the primary instrument, the use of fieldwork, an inductive orientation to analysis and richly descriptive findings. Case study research does not provide a cause and effect relationship; the focus is toward personal interpretation and holistic treatment of the phenomena (Stake, 1995). The collection of data in qualitative research must involve multiple sources (Yin, 2003). Sources for this study included interviews, observation and participant observation. The researchers interviewed cyclists as they competed in a week-long event across the state of North Carolina. The researcher used semi-structured and open-ended questions for interviews with other cyclists. Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind an experience while pursuing in-depth information around the topic (McNamara, 1999). The aim is for the interviewer to put the person at ease. Conducting a good interview is like participating in a good conversation by listening intently and asking questions that focus on examples and feelings (Eisner, 1998).

Results

The presentation will present a demographic summary of the participants and an in-depth narrative explanation of emergent themes regarding the motivation of the cyclists. The demographics of the participants showed an average age of 51 with an average income of \$100,000. The income data and amount of money spent during the ride show a potential economic impact of cycling in the various small towns during the multiday event. Several consistent themes emerged regarding the motivation of the cyclists. The predominant themes were, to experience an adventurous challenge, to see the state of North Carolina from a different perspective (the back roads rather than the interstate or other busy attractions) and to experience the social aspect of a multiday cycling event. The data showed a physical,

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social and tourism aspect regarding the motivation of the cyclists. The results provide valuable information for sport managers and tourism directors interested in cycling events. An understanding of motivation characteristics of the cyclists can aid organizers and managers in the design, marketing and ultimate success and future direction of such events.