Motivations to Participate in Mid-Scale Running Event: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective.

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Gibson (2004) suggests we, as sport tourism scholars, need to “embark on work that is both theoretically grounded in longitudinal, or is based on work that already exists so that we can get some progression in the knowledge base” (p. 248). She goes on to state that we need to use theories from parent disciplines of sociology or social psychology to further develop our own understanding of sport tourism. One area that has centered on creating definitions, typologies, and descriptive information is individuals’ motivation to participate in sport tourism and events (Weed, 2009).

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory investigation is three-fold. First, we sought to determine if self-determination theory (SDT) may provide a theoretical foundation for understanding individuals’ motivations to participate in sport tourism events. Secondly, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) suggested further testing and validation of their scale to measure meanings people attach to sport events was warranted, and the current investigation provides such validation. Lastly, we compared sport tourists with local participants to determine if motivations to participate in a mid-scale marathon event varied based on the two types of participants.

SDT provides a unique framework for developing a stronger understanding of the numerous motives individuals possess when deciding to participate in physical activities (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; García-Mas et al., 2010). Ryan and Deci (2000) further subdivide motivation into three basic forms: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. First, amotivation is considered the complete lack of motivation to complete a task, or a lack of energy or desire to act (Ryan, Lynch, Vansteenkiste, & Deci, 2011). Extrinsic motivation is considered controlled motivation, or motivation based on rewards or punishments outside of the individual’s control (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and is subdivided into external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (Lox, Martin-Ginnis, & Petruzzello, 2006). Intrinsic motivation is consistent with autonomous motivation in which individuals integrate the activity into their own self-identity, and subdivided into motivation to know, to accomplish, and to experience stimulation (Vallerand, Blais, Briere, and Pelletier; 1989).

Within the sport tourism and event participation literature, six motivational themes have emerged: Organizational, Destination/Environment, Social/Group, Competition, Emotional and Learning. The organizational motivators differentiate one event from another (e.g., well-organized, price, reputation, image), and are important components of individuals’ selection criteria (Getz & McConnell, 2011; Hallmann, Kaplanidou, & Breur, 2010; Ryan & Lockyer, 2002). Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) defined destination/environment motivations as scenery, new places, experiencing new culture, the best location in the area, and other factors directly related with the host destination, including entertainment, which may drive a participant’s selection (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Urry, 2002; Walker, Hinch, & Higham, 2010). Individuals’ desire to create a sense of belongingness or membership to a wider social group defines their social/group motivation (Green & Jones, 2005). Several authors have established the importance of creating socialization opportunities for participants (to Bouchet, Lebrun, & Avvengere, 2004; Cassidy & Pegg, 2008; Ko, Park & Claussen, 2008), as well as the importance of participation on individuals’ identity (Shipway & Jones, 2007; Snelgrove & Wood, 2010). The competition motive can be described as the desire to enter into a rivalry in order to determine ones’ ability in relation to another (McDonald, Milne, & Hong, 2002). Research has found that the opportunity to “challenge myself” (Getz & McConnell, 2011), or the “sporting challenge” (Gillett & Kelly, 2006) are important components of individuals’ motivation to participate in events. Emotional motivations may develop from the nostalgia of participating in an event with a rich history (Fairly, 2003) and fulfill individuals’ desire to escape from their daily routine (Yfantidou, Costa, & Michalopoulos, 2008) with the enjoyment provided by the event experience (Petrick, 2002). Finally, learning about a new place and culture (Snelgrove, Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2008) or a cause associated with the event (Filo, Funk, & O’Brien, 2008) is another potential source of motivation.

Through a partnership with a mid-scale marathon in the Southwest United States, we e-mailed event participants a link to an online questionnaire. A total of 311 participants responded to the questionnaire, and 201 provided
completed questionnaires yielding a 64% response rate. The survey questionnaire was composed of three sections: motivation to participate, event meaning, and demographic items. Specifically, the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS; Pelletier et al., 1995) was administered to all participants to measure motivation. The SMS asked participants to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with 28 different reasons for which they were participating in a mid-scale marathon event. The evaluative meaning of the sport event experience was measured using a uni-dimensional scale consisting of 11 semantic differential items developed by Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010).

One sample t-tests showed that for both the residents and sport tourists all motivational factors were significantly higher (p<.05) than the neutral point with the exception of Introjection for residents. Also, amotivation was ranked lowest and was found to be significantly below the neutral point for both resident and sport tourist participants of the marathon. For both the residents and sport tourists, Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation was ranked highest amongst the motivation to participate in the marathon. A confirmatory factor analysis was undertaken, indicating the 11 scale items met or exceeded the recommended thresholds ($\chi^2 = 131.60, p<.001; \chi^2 = 131.60/df = 2.99, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04$). Both resident and sport tourist participants evaluated unhealthy/healthy to be the highest experience of the marathon. Finally, results from an independent sample t-test indicated no significant differences between the residents and sport tourists.

The results therefore establish SDT as a viable framework to understand individuals’ motivation to participate in marathon races. Further investigation of the antecedents is warranted as the analysis indicated a possible relationship between individuals’ motivation to participate in the marathon and the meaning they attached to it. The results also indicated that practitioners may benefit from utilizing a marketing campaign that focuses on the enjoyment, aesthetic qualities and excitement the event provides, as well as the health benefits individuals may attain from participation as these were the largest motivating factors for participants. Further discussion of the results, limitations, and future research will be presented.