

## PROFILES, SPORT HABITS AND TOURISM MOTIVES OF FITNESS CENTERS' VISITORS

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### Abstract

Sport in the modern time is not only an important content of our daily lives but it is also important content of stay in a tourist destination. Tourists seek a wide range of experiences and wish to feel enriched by engaging in new and specific sports activities. Therefore, the types of sports and sports services directly affect the tourists when choosing a destination they will visit and sport is frequently the main motive for travelling to a certain tourist destination. The aim of this paper is to analyze the profiles, tourism motives and sport habits of fitness centers' visitors during the holidays. The research was conducted through a questionnaire with specific target groups of sports participant in two fitness centers in Rijeka. Results were analysed during June 2010 and could be of great importance to both managers in tourism and sport.

**Key words:** *sports participants, sports activities, holidays*

### Introduction

Tourism and sport are two cognate and closely interrelated social phenomena. The interrelationship between tourism and sport was analysed by many authors (Hunziker & Krapf, 1942; Anthony, 1966; Glyptis, 1982; Standeven & De Knop, 1999; De Knop & Van Hoecke, 2003; Bartoluci, 2003), and as well as the similarity of their functions, it originates from the fact that the bearers of these two occurrences are as a rule the same subjects, i.e. tourists. Tourism, as an experience-oriented activity, and sport, as a performance-oriented activity, are very much like Siamese twins (Keller, 2002). Connection between travel motivators and sports participation is not new too. Motives for participating in sports involve the individual characteristics – interests, needs, goals and personality (Weinberg & Gould, 2008) and are also linked to similar work on the social-psychology of leisure (Mannel & Kleiber, 1997). There are clearly motives which are more specifically identified with sport (rather than tourism) such as competitiveness, a desire to win, the testing of one's abilities and the development of skills and competencies but many other motives might also be claimed by tourism. Complemented McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) classification system of the various travel motivators include physical (refreshment of body and mind and "recharging batteries" (Cohen 1988), health purposes – fitness and general wellbeing (Astrand, 1978; Long, 1990), weight control, physical appearance (Reeves, 2000)), interpersonal (sense of affiliation, visit friends and relatives – emotional warmth (Elias & Dunning, 1986), to expect unexpected, need to escape from routine experiences – "quest for excitement" (Elias & Dunning, 1986), and "ritual inversion" (Graburn, 1983) and status and prestige motivators (personal development, goal achievement, ego enhancement) that have relevance to sport. In each of these areas it is clear that the motives of the sports participants and the tourists can be remarkably similar. Considering sport as motivation for travelling, sport in the modern tourism has not only a perceptual role, but becomes ever more important contents of stay, with tourists who become active participants in various sports activities (Bartoluci, 2003). Furthermore, not only sport does become one of the contents of stay, but it is frequently the main motive for travelling to a certain tourist destination what makes a good foundation for development of selective form of tourism – *sports tourism*. It was back in 1997 that it was first suggested that sports tourism could be better categorised by a consumer motivation approach (Gammon & Robinson 1997). They make a distinction in two forms of sport-tourism using the term *sport tourism* if sport is the primary reason to travel and *tourism sport* if participation is seen as a secondary activity. Regarding sports tourists in general, Reeves (2000) identified six different visitor types, which are divided into: incidental, sporadic, occasional, regular, dedicated and driven. Weed and Bull (2004) structured the profiles of a variety of sports tourists under the three headings – primary sports tourists, associated sports tourists and tourists interested in sport, modified the supply side of the market for sports tourism from Glyptis's work (1982) and updated sports tourism types as tourism with sports content, sports participation tourism, sports training, sports events, and luxury sports tourism. As far as Croatia is concerned, the survey "Attitudes and Expenditures of Tourists in Croatia TOMAS" have been conducted by the Institute for Tourism since 1987 with the goal to obtain a profile on the attitudes and behaviour of tourists in Croatia. Although with the share of 10% in 2007, *sport and recreation* was only the seventh-ranking motive for visiting Croatia, that motive demonstrated a decline in importance and in 2010 had a share of only 8% among all motives (Institut za turizam, 2010). Researches that focus on specific profiles and motives of fitness centers' visitors usually do not analyse their tourism motives and it is still quite unexplored field of research. Although it is difficult task, defining a profile and motives for travelling of fitness centers'

visitors can ease the examination of the nature and extent of sports tourism provision and can assist in examining the range of strategies used by sports tourism managers and providers.

## Methods

Author tried, based on long term experience working with top and amateur athletes as well as numerous interviews with the concerned, to analyze the profiles, sport habits and motives of fitness centers' visitors when tourism is concerned, more precisely during their holidays. The empirical research was conducted by questionnaire distributed within specific target groups of sports participant in two fitness centers in Rijeka. There were 100 questionnaires in total, 50 in each fitness center. Data were collected during one week period in May 2010. The targeted groups were individuals in the gym, and participants in group trainings, both males and females. The questionnaire was prepared in Croatian language only and it is divided in two parts. First, the general demographic profiles of the respondents were examined. The second part (14 questions in total) examined the respondents' habits and motives when tourism and participation in sports activities during holidays are concerned. The response rate was very good and data analysis is based on 96 valid questionnaires. Data were analysed in June 2010 using simple descriptive statistical analysis.

## Results

Descriptive statistical analysis was run on respondents' demographic variables. The results are shown in Table 1. The sample contained more females (55.2 per cent) than males (44.8 per cent). The average age of the respondents was 29 years of age and more than 53 per cent of them were between 25 and 35 years old. Among 96 respondents, 9 of them (9.4 per cent) were professional and 87 (90.6 per cent) were amateur athletes. The average frequency of sports participation is 3.5 times per a week and 49 per cent have 2 or 3 trainings per a week and 32.3 per cent have 4 to 6 trainings per a week. Moreover, more than 81 per cent have between 2 and 6 trainings per a week, and 16.6 per cent train once or more per a day.

Table 1. Profile of survey respondents

Items	Percentage	Items	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Sports participation</i>	
Male	44.8	Professional	9.4
Female	55.2	Amateur	90.6
		<i>Frequency of sports participation</i>	
<i>Age</i>		Several time per a day	6.2
Under 18	0.0	Daily – once a day	10.4
18-25	27.1	4-6 time per a week	32.3
25-35	53.1	2-3 times per a week	49.0
35 and above	19.8	1 time per a week	2.1
		Do not participate in sports activities	0.0

Regarding the respondents' habits and motives when tourism and participation in sports activities during holidays are concerned, the most interesting results are shown in Table 2. The majority of the respondents (63.1 per cent) go more often on summer holidays than winter (only 7.4 per cent) while 29.5 per cent go on both summer and winter holidays. Also, the majority (84.4 per cent) travel on holidays outside their place of residence. For more than 60 per cent the length of staying abroad is between one and two weeks. The main motive for travel is *entertainment* (72.6 per cent), the second is visiting *family, relatives and friends* (21.1 per cent) and on the third place is *sport and recreation as competitor and/or observer* (20.0 per cent). Sport is the main and the most important motive for only 15.8 per cent, while for 33.7 per cent of respondents sport is not the motive for travelling at all. On average, one-quarter (25.3 per cent) of respondents mentioned some other motives for travel such as "rest", "relaxation" etc. While on holidays, all the respondents participate in some type of sport activities. Altogether 47 respondents (49.5 per cent) are mostly active on holidays, 29 respondents (30.5 per cent) are dominantly active and 3 respondents (3.3 per cent) are extremely active on holidays. Only 16 respondents (16.8 per cent) are mostly passive and there is no completely passive persons while on holidays. Moreover, 34 respondents (35.8 per cent) are engaged in sports activities on regular basis – once a day, followed by the respondents that are engaged in sports activities one to three times during their holidays (22.1 per cent), respondents that are engaged in sports activities more than once per a day (20.0 per cent), and the respondents that are engaged in sports activities four to six times during their holidays (17.9 per cent).

Table 2. Habits and motives of survey respondents (selection from questionnaire)

Items/question	Answers	Percentage
Do you travel on holidays (outside of your residence)?	a) Yes	84.4%
	b) No	15.6%
Do you travel to the summer and/or winter holidays? (1 answer)	a) Summer only	28.4%
	b) More often summer	34.7%
	c) Summer and winter	29.5%
	d) More often winter	5.3%
	e) Winter only	2.1%
What are your main motives for going on holidays? (max 2 answers)	a) Entertainment/fun	72.6%
	b) Health	10.5%
	c) Sport&Recreation (as competitor and/or observer)	20.0%
	d) Cultural events	7.4%
	e) Visit to family, relatives and friends	21.1%
	f) Shopping	2.1%
	g) Other (please add)	25.3%
During holidays, you are (1 answer):	a) Completely passive	0.0%
	b) Mostly passive	16.8%
	c) Mostly active	49.5%
	d) Dominantly active	30.5%
	e) Extremely active	3.2%
What are your main motives for participating in sport activities while on holidays? (max 3 answers)	a) Medical reasons (doctor recommendation)	23.2%
	b) Aesthetic and health reasons (wellbeing, physical appearance)	55.8%
	c) Quest for excitement	18.9%
	d) Socializing with people	58.9%
	e) Status and prestige	2.1%
	f) Other (please add)	12.6%
	g) I do not participate in sports activities	1.1%

By far the most popular sport/activity on summer holidays is *swimming* (83.2 per cent), followed by running (22.1 per cent), bicycling (21.1 per cent), beach volley (20.0 per cent), diving (16.8 per cent) and fitness/gym (15.8 per cent). On the other hand, when winter holidays are concerned, the most popular sport/activity is *skiing* (40.0 per cent), followed by fitness/gym (26.3 per cent), running (17.9 per cent), various types of aerobics (15.8 per cent) and mountaineering (12.2 per cent). It is interesting to notice that the main motives for participating in sports activities during holidays are *socializing with people* (58.9 per cent) and *aesthetic and health reasons meaning wellbeing and physical appearance* (55.8 per cent). Doctor's recommendation is the main motive for 23.2 per cent, quest for excitement for 18.9 per cent, while status and prestige is the main motive for only 2.1 per cent of respondents. Altogether 12.6 per cent of respondents mentioned some other motive for participating in sports activities during holidays as "enjoying in the nature", "fun/entertainment", "to be fit" or "just habit". On the question whether they visit sports events (games) during the holidays, the majority of respondents (66.7 per cent) answered they do not visit or very rarely visit sports events and only 33.3 per cent visit sports events on regular basis. The most popular sports events, both at home and during holidays, are football matches (45.8 per cent), sailing regatta (29.2 per cent), handball matches (28.1 per cent), tennis match (22.9 per cent) and basketball matches (19.8 per cent). Also, football matches are the most popular among men (60.5 per cent visited football match) but also among women (33.9 per cent). As far as mega events are concerned, 18.8 per cent of respondents have visited World Cup in football, 9.4 per cent visited World Handball Championship (also hosted by Croatia in 2009), 7.3 per cent visited Mediterranean Games, 7.3 per cent visited Winter Olympics and 6.2 per cent visited Summer Olympics. If having an opportunity, significant share of respondents would like to visit the world championships in team sports – football, handball, basketball (43.8 per cent) and Summer Olympics (40.6 per cent). It is interesting to notice that although only two women have visited Formula 1 Grand Prix event, eleven of them (20.7 per cent) would like to visit it in the future.

## Discussion and conclusions

Contemporary tourist destinations offer to its visitors the opportunity to develop their personal potential through active involvement in various sports and sports events. In such a way, destinations create set of experiences in sport which tourist can “take home” and share with the friends and families. In order to develop an adequate system of experiences destination and sports managers need to know and understand the motives and profile of participants in sports tourism. The research has shown the typical profile of sport participant in fitness centers – she or he is 29 years old amateur and trains three times per a week. When it comes to tourism, she/he goes more often on summer rather than winter holidays, between a week and two of stay, and usually outside her/his place of residence. The main motive for her/his travel is entertainment while sport and recreation as competitor and/or observer is on the third place and the most important motive for only 15.8 per cent of them. While on holidays, she/he is mostly active enjoying regularly in single-sport activities, before all swimming in summer and skiing in winter. The main motives for her/his participation in sports activities during holidays are socializing with people and aesthetic and medical reasons meaning wellbeing and physical appearance. She/he is not so interested in visiting other sports events during the holidays, but the most popular sports events are football matches, both for men and women. When she/he would have an opportunity, she/he would like to spend their holidays visiting one of the world championships in team sports (football, handball, basketball) and Summer Olympics. It could be concluded that sport habits of typical fitness centers’ visitors to some extent affect their travel and tourism motives. Typical fitness center’ visitor is occasional sports tourist (tourist interested in sport) for whom sport is not the primary trip purpose but is enjoying regularly in sport activities during holidays. Understanding, implementing and managing the profile of sports participants and their habits, motives and attitudes not only to sports but also to tourism and holidays may be crucial task for both destination and sports managers in attracting sports tourists and convincing them to stay in the destination.

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