Motivation for Students to Participate in Non-Traditional Outdoor Activities

Kristīne Karašniece 1 Mg.paed.; Agita Ābele 2 Dr.Paed, Mg.Psych., Mg.SpSc.
Latvian Academy of Sport Education, Latvia1,2
k.karasniece@gmail.com1; agita.abele@lspa.lv2

Abstract. In recent times sedentary work and sedentary lifestyle have become some of the most topical issues and discussion subjects. The problems caused by sedentary lifestyle are faced not only by adults, but by young people too. While addressing surrounding students we have concluded that students do not always necessarily want to take part in classic sports events, as it can be hard to find the motivation, or factors that would motivate them to prepare and take part in such competitions. Students find less traditional sports events in rural environments more binding and motivating, where participants need to prepare and promote the interest in sports through cooperation and a daring in a non-standard environment. These activities are directed towards creating a sense of community, enhancing inner motivation and encouraging character development by motivating the participants to overcome their self-perceived boundaries and not to give up. A variety of outdoor recreational and adventure activities that provide new challenges and unprecedented experiences is held. Examples of sports events in Latvia include „The Strong race“, „X-race“, „Dublis“ and different kinds of orienteering competitions the implementation of which requires a rural environment with its natural and artificial obstacles. During the study different students’ opinions about the motivating factors for participation in such events will be assessed along with students' opportunities and willingness to engage in physical activities while faced with the challenges of a rural environment. Purpose of the study: To assess students' main motivating factors when participating in physical outdoor activities and competitions. Subject of the study: Participants and organizers of the outdoor activity „The Strong Race“. Methods of research: theoretical, empirical and statistical. Most important conclusion is that in the classic race the motivation of winning something is no longer sufficient enough to draw a wide range of young people towards movement activities. Most of the young participants do not deny that to be good at movement activities requires a daily workout, however, during the race they want to enjoy themselves alongside their peers and friends. These are the nowadays key points how to get young people involve in sport activities.

Keywords: physical activities, motivation, outdoor activities and competitions, the rural environment.

Introduction

Some recent technological developments indirectly promote and develop a sedentary and unhealthy lifestyle. As a consequence ways of tackling sedentariness are increasingly being discussed, and the need to change our attitudes towards sports and different kinds of sports activities is gaining relevance. Startling facts were evaluated in the Latvian citizens' health influencing habit study in 2010. It points out that Latvian citizens (aged 15-64) are not taking sufficient care of their health:

- different types of objective and subjective health issues are characteristic to many of the respondents, especially for females;
- only 39.9% of the respondents do physical exercise at least 30 minutes a day, 2 to 3 times a week;
- only slightly more than half the respondents have a normal body mass. A large body weight and overweight is seen among a high proportion of the population – 45.1% respondents (Pudele, Villeruša, 2010).

This is the background of the problem and these numbers are evidence to the necessity to use as many motivating factors as possible to attract people to sports activities. Some of the currently most popular outside recreational activities for young people are unconventional outdoor activities and mass events, where participants must overcome obstacles in unusual circumstances thus affirming their capacity limits. One of such events in Latvia is "The Strong race", which attracts a large number of young participants. "The Strong race" is the first and only one extreme endurance mass race in the Baltic countries, which includes jogging, elements of classic cross-country and different skill and force discipline elements. It is a sporty challenge to everyone as the race takes place in unusual environments.
The aim of the article: To assess students' main motivating factors when participating in physical outdoor activities and competitions.

Activities that aim is to promote a healthy and active lifestyle have become increasingly popular among the Latvian youth. "The Strong race" is one of the events in Latvia which takes place in the outdoor environment and brings a lot of young people together in one place. This race was chosen for the object of our study as it enabled us to reach a large target audience of people in the 18 to 25 years old age group. The subjects of the study are the participants and organizers of the leisure activities event "The Strong race".

In the first part of the research a participant database was built and analyzed. The runners were grouped by age in order to compare changes in participant demographics in "The Strong race" from one year to the next between 2010 and 2014. In the second part of the research we carried out an online survey. The aim of this survey was to assess the views of young people on their motivating factors for participating in physical activities competitions. When analysing responses, we noted that this outdoor activity event can be viewed as more than just a race by the young participants.

Methodology

Methods of research: Theoretical (analysis of literary sources, research of regulatory acts, analysis of documented material), empirical (online survey – 478 respondents aged between 18 and 25 took part, responses were given in accordance to the Likert scale; direct interviews) and statistical processing of the results with SPSS17.

Results and discussion

Recreational researchers in their publications have written that people nowadays move away from nature, moving away from themselves. In doing this one degrades himself in the era of work and technology, forgetting about pleasure, leisure and relaxing activities. Increasingly, it is concluded that stress, depression and burnout syndrome are the major human internal environment-damaging and destructive factors. American researcher R. Louv writes about the lack of human interaction with nature-induced disturbance. He assumed that many people today experience a lack of natural factors in their life, therefore conducting activities such as hiking, boating, climbing mountains, Sunrise-watching has become a therapy that restores operational capability, and improves physical and mental condition (Louv, 2005). Nature provides us with resource rich environments for various kinds of leisure activities - fields, forests, rivers, beaches, Sun, wind, etc. One could argue that to organize movement activities in the open air does not require costly funding. At the same time, it creates a challenge, which is an essential factor to motivate activities for people at a young age, providing satisfaction for achieving goals, overcoming barriers and improving their abilities. Also regarding the services, programs, and management implementations, from to the survey responses of young people we can safely conclude that the natural environment and its resources provide this positive motivation for action without a large investment.

The question arises, why are today's studies of outdoor activities only about young people, and not for the society in general? Physical activities were once tied into everyday routine and were perceived as matter-of-course, but technological advances have reduced the common movement activity. This of course affects how we feel - individual rest and recovery has historically never been a big problem, but nowadays it sometimes even requires intervention of the government to develop special programmes for the promotion of human well-being and for drawing the public’s attention to it (Henderson, 2006).

In his research Latvian scientist J. Trusins concluded that for every person the everyday work process changes the capacity and the functional state of the human body. To maintain optimum capacity levels, we need to ensure rational work and rest periods. This means that the periods when we work are interspersed with periods of rest. This conclusion was reached through consistent results of physiological assessments (Trušiņš, 1996). Energy resources are being used during the work of different parts of our physiological systems especially during the work of nerve and muscle cells. Cells can only use a certain amount of energy resources, which I. Pavlov called the work barrier. Violation of this barrier results in the beginning of incapability, causing progressive fatigue. Fatigue dictates the quality
and quantity of work. Human fatigue is a comprehensive process that organic essence has a protective reaction against, but its physiological mechanism is brain cortical centre lockdown. To restore the forces that are consumed by work, humans need a physical activity break, which restores the human energy resources and creates an outdoor activity phenomenon. A recent psychological investigation aimed to show how these activities and nature itself benefit the recreational process after a period of everyday stress at home despite physical exhaustion during the activities in nature. Outdoor activities are a good way to get rid of distress and to leave the troubles of the workplace behind, especially for people living in urban areas and doing intellectual work on a daily basis (Gerlach, Schmitz, 2006). But how does one motivate people to do more physical activities?

Motivation is not unambiguous and for the most part is viewed as a poly-modal body, which initiates a person’s activity, which stimulates and fortifies a person’s actions, attitudes, necessities and interests. Three motivational groups are important in action – physiological, psychological and socio-motive (Reiss, 2002). These different motives mutually affect one another creating a person’s behavioural habits, which with time change into personality traits. Multiple researches have emphasized that motivating environmental influences are very important, especially in youth, because it is connected with the young person’s individual openness, discovery and the necessity for self-assertion (Ryan, Deci, 2000). Personality motivation process in sports and movement activity domain is explicitly complicated. It is connected with every person’s values, will, goal awareness, and performance capabilities, and this is affected cumulatively not only by individual factors, but also by the social and environment factors (Hagger, Chatzisarantis…, 2002).

Today's social and environmental factors are important motivational and incentivising factors for taking part in sports and active leisure activities. Similar research was conducted in the United States in 2013. This statistical research shows the participants’ leading motivational factors for doing outdoor activities. During the survey, 53% of the respondents involved in outdoor activities said that they did it to keep physically fit. 54% of the respondents considered outdoor activities an opportunity to spend more time with family and friends. But, most importantly, 72% of the respondents said they do it just to spend more time outdoors (What motivates you…, 2013). Like all outdoor activity participants, youth and young adult participants are also motivated to recreate outdoors by being with loved ones and getting exercise. In a similar research in the United States in 2014 it was shown that 75 % of young people in the 18-24 year old age group saw the factor of „getting exercise” as a top motivating factor and 60 % saw the factor of „keeping physically fit” as important. At the same time 51 % indicated the factor of spending more time „being with family and friends” as motivating to do outdoor activities. (Outdoor Participation…, 2014).

To assess the views of young people on their possible motivating factors to participate in physical activity competitions, a survey was carried out. Before the survey was carried out the participant database was analyzed, and the runners were grouped by age in order to allow us to make a comparative analysis and to assess directly the youth age group in next survey. Women's and men's starts were analysed separately, Figure 1 shows the male participant distribution by age in the years 2010 to 2014 (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. The numbers of male participants by age group between 2010 and 2014.](image)

It can be seen that the 18-25 year old and 26-35 year old groups dominated the competitions every year. Among female "Strong race” participants 18-25 year olds were the most active age group was (Figure 2).
A large increase of participants in all age groups was noticed in 2014. The 20-25 year olds were the largest age group by number of participants. This group was the most active in all five 'Strong race' events.

Figure 2. The numbers of female participants by age group between 2010 and 2014.

Data shows that the most active participants in this race are young people, which is also the target of our study. Motivational factors for young people to participate in such activities were examined in the next poll. Most active participants who participated in the survey were the young people – 18-25 year old students – 243 men and 235 women interviewees – 478 respondents altogether. With the help of the survey various motivational factors of individual significance to participate in non-traditional outdoor environmental events were evaluated. The following options were proposed in the questionnaire as the most important motivational factors, based on the theoretical information analysis and a summary of the discussion:

- to win the race and get an award,
- to overcome all obstacles,
- to finish,
- to experience shared activities,
- to receive a good service in the event,
- to gain self-assurance – "overcome myself - to prove to myself that I can",
- to assess myself in comparison with others – "show others that I can",
- to get involved in activities with friends and acquaintances,
- to feel dominance over others during competition.

When analyzing responses, it should be emphasized that this outdoor activity event is more than just a race for the young people. Among the largest portion of participants motivating factors for these activities were not associated just with victory or winning an award, in fact quite the opposite. Responses show that winning the race was not a popular motivator with the average rating for this factor of only 2.08, and 412 of 478 respondents or 86.2% rating the factor with 3 points or less on the importance scale (the most common rating was a 1) (Figure 3). Feeling dominance over others during competition emerged as the factor of second lowest importance. Only 19.5% of respondents considered this factor very important (5 out of 5), while the most common rating was a 3, given by 31.8% of the respondents (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Motivating factors: To win the race and get an award, to feel dominance over others during competition (rating on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not important, and 5 is very important).
The four factors with average ratings ranging from 3.0 to 4.5 shown in table 1 were seen by respondents to be more important than winning the race and feeling dominance over others. 293 people rated experiencing shared activities as very important – students want to feel different adventures and unusual situations. Along interesting activities during the competition, part of the students also want to enjoy a pleasurable service during the event (food, drinks, changing facilities, car parking, event information, relaxation tents) and 162 respondents rated this factor with 5 points. "To receive a good service in the event" received an average rating of 3.75. "To assess myself in comparison with others – "show others that I can", was noted as important by 49.4% of the respondents, while 28.2% respondents saw it unimportant. The average rating for this factor was 3.39 (Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivating factors</th>
<th>Rating on a scale of 1 to 5 (rating on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not important, and 5 is very important)</th>
<th>Statistical Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To experience shared activities</td>
<td>5: 293, 4: 53, 3: 13, 2: 5</td>
<td>The average: 4.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard error: 0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mode: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation: 0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To receive a good service in the event</td>
<td>5: 162, 4: 44, 3: 22</td>
<td>The average: 3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard error: 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mode: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation: 1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To assess myself in comparison with others – &quot;show others that I can&quot;</td>
<td>5: 149, 4: 87, 3: 73, 2: 62</td>
<td>The average: 3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard error: 0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mode: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation: 1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get involved in activities with friends and acquaintances</td>
<td>5: 214, 4: 154, 3: 68, 2: 27, 1: 15</td>
<td>The average: 4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard error: 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mode: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standard deviation: 1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For young people one of the most important motivating factors in this group is to get involved in activities with friends and acquaintances; 32.2% of respondents indicated this as important (4 out of 5) and 44.8% of respondents as very important (5 out of 5) (Table 1). It is great to see that the opportunity
to work with their peers and feel a sense of belonging in the movement activities event is an important factor of the young people’s assessments. Overcoming difficult obstacles together and providing a helping hand to each other is a very potent team building exercise. During the discussion a lot of young people said that they cooperate with people they know on a daily basis, but these events provided them with the opportunity to help and be helped by many participants whom they had never met. Experiencing shared activities was seen as an important or very important factor by 85.2% of the respondents, it was given an average rating of 4.42 (Table 1).

A group consisting of the three most important motivating factors for students is depicted in Figure 4, all three received an average rating of above 4.5. The most important motivating factor for young people by average rating, however, is gain to self-assurance – "overcome myself - to prove to myself that I can", that it is possible to overcome all the obstacles, and complete the distance to the end regardless of the place - just finish! 93.1% of the respondents noted this as important to them and 89.5% of the respondents considered being able to finish as the key goal. The average rating for this factor was 4.83 and the most common response a 5 (Figure 4). Participants appreciate the opportunity that the race provides – the ability to prove that it is possible to overcome difficult obstacles, one’s fears and weaknesses, as well as to push their abilities. Responses indicated that young people increasingly value fulfilling internal goals that they have set themselves, rather than goals set to them by the format of the race. To gain self-assurance – "overcome myself - to prove to myself that I can" was seen as important or very important by 93.3% of respondents (average rating was 4.68 and the most commonly given rating was a 5).

Conclusions

We can conclude from the views expressed by young people on the race and discussions about the future perspective of this kind of events in Latvia that:

- In the classic race the motivation of winning something is no longer sufficient enough to draw a wide range of young people towards movement activities. Most of the young participants do not deny that to be good at movement activities requires a daily workout, however, during the race they want to enjoy themselves alongside their peers and friends. Winning the race is seen as a secondary objective. Of the 478 participants 412 or 86.2% rated the factor of winning the race with only 1 or 2 points – meaning they viewed it as insignificant or unimportant.

- The youth at their core want to challenge their own limits, so for the majority feeling dominance over others is not high on the motivating factor list. Only 19.5% of the respondents rated it as very important, while 31.8% of the respondents rated it as average.

- Enduring the competition all the way to the end was one of the two most popular motivating factors – "to finish" received an average rating of 4.83. In these active events taking place in a nature environment the young participants see proving their determination as the ultimate benchmark for success.
The other most highly rated motivating factor, closely related to finishing the race, is to gain self-assurance – "overcome myself - to prove to myself that I can", it was rated as important or very important by 93.3% of the respondents (average rating of 4.68 and the most commonly given rating was a 5). Adding weight to the idea that students predominantly found motivation in proving their determination was the highly rated motivational factor of completing all the obstacles, which received an average rating of 4.62.

The social environment during a competition is important for young people. The socializing aspect of sports is accomplished really well by working and overcoming difficulties together, and a diverse set of naturally formed and artificially constructed obstacles offers the perfect environment for doing that. At the same time being in the nature serves a recreational function, reducing dominant influences of the daily stress (such as effects of being constantly exposed to social media). When asked after competitions of this sorts, participants tended to describe themselves as feeling emotionally fulfilled, physically tired, but also satisfied by their progress and personal achievements.

Bibliography