

(SP) TRENDS AND RETENTION TECHNIQUES IN MUNICIPAL RECREATION PROGRAMS IN GREECE

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Introduction

Up to today the main effort of the Department of State of Health and Social Policy and the Municipal Authorities to provide to citizens of Greece opportunities for increasing their level of physical activity -sports-recreation-health- included the funding and administration of supervised fitness programs (Afthinos, 1998). The municipal authorities of each city have the responsibility to provide sufficient occasions of indoor and outdoor recreation. A separate administration entity (Municipal Organization for Exercise and Youth -M.O.E.Y.) has been formed in every city for this purpose (<http://www.sportsnet.gr>, 2006). Generally, it appears reasonable to managers that run these entities to ask for quality of services despite of the satisfaction with the experience of service (Lentell, 2000). The aim of the present research was to find the trends and retention techniques of citizens at the municipal athletic programs. It is very important for MOEY to be able to achieve high levels of enrolment and retain within its activities the majority of its customers. Unfortunately, Papadimitriou (2000), reports that the general culture of state and the system that is followed, includes the bureaucracy to a large extent, thing that renders government organizations slow. Also, Rousseti et al. (2005), reports that the correspondence in the municipal athletic organisms is not satisfactory and this contributes to become cumbersome at the direct resolution of problems because complex bureaucratic structures of operation and impede the communication with exercising citizens.

Methods

Sample: The sample of this study consisted of 303 citizens of the City of Komotini which is located at the prefecture of Rodopi at Eastern Greece. 135 men and 153 women, (missing values - 15 questionnaires), of all ages, members or not of MOEY. *Questionnaire:* The questionnaire used in this study included 29 multiple-choice or closed questions that recorded: a. demographical and personal data, b. information related to benefits of programs participation, c. reasons of participation and d. information related to content of programs. The construction of this questionnaire was based on the questionnaire of Michalopoulos M., Argyropoulos E. & Costa G. (1998).

Process of Measurement: The questionnaires were distributed to the members of the MOEY right after the completion of their exercise. Citizens that were not enrolled at the MOEY's programs were recruited at the prefecture of Rodopi on a walk-in basis. In cases of older adults with impaired vision, questions were orally presented to them. The variables that were searched were the total reason of participation and total participating factors

Results

Data processing included factor analysis in order to test the structural validity of the questionnaires. Factor analysis included principal components analysis and (varimax) rotation of axes. The five factors revealed through the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Results from the factor analysis of the questionnaire of services, which contained the five factors.

QUESTIONS	FACTORS				
The municipal organization fulfills what it promises.	.68				
The personnel responses at the complaints of the customers.	.77				
The personnel is interested about the progress of the members.	.81				
Facility attraction and operation.		.61			
Cleanliness of facilities and locker rooms.		.71			
Courteous personnel.		.79			
Professional knowledge of the personnel.		.68			
Emergency procedures that are provided.		.54			
Consistent in maintaining participants' records.			.48		
The offered programs are renewed regularly.			.58		
Quality of the equipment.			.83		
Quality of the organization.			.77		
The activities begin and finish on time.			.52		
Variety of programs and equipment.				.59	
Convenient time schedule.				.74	
Lack of rush at the equipment/programs.				.77	
Briefing by the personnel for problems/changes.				.60	
Location of sport center.					.42
Social opportunity and acquaintances.					.77

The results confirmed also the structural validity of questionnaire of Michalopoulos M. et al. (1998). The reliability of questionnaires was checked calculating "Cronbach's alpha" for all the questions. The "total alpha" of the scale was .86. The mean scores of the statements included in questions 19 and 20 were also estimated. The content of the 19th question about the reason of participation corresponds to six statements and the question about health was the most popular 65,3% and the content of the 20th question corresponds to nineteen statements which were between six and seven of the 7-scale and concerned the participating factors such as questions about the duration, frequency, time zones, promotion, charge of services, facilities and program's planning.

Discussion

- *Duration - Frequency- Time zones of programs*: In order for MOEY to continue succeeding in its role – to promote a physically active and health enhancing lifestyle and provide the opportunities to all citizens, it should first have as a priority to maintain

within its activities all the presently enrolled members and then to expand the programs so that they cover the needs and interests of future members. MOEY members tend to participate in the fitness programs for seven months within the period of one year showing consistent physical activity behaviour. The preferred time zones, days and frequencies of participation in fitness programs and skill learning were afternoon hours, 3 times per week on Monday/ Wednesday/ Friday. By increasing the number of activities offered during the above time zones MOEY will be able to gather more citizens and additionally flexible hours and dates of program participation (monthly passes to all programs) will further increase program enrolment.

- *Promotion*: Most of the MOEY members exercise alone although they report that they would prefer to exercise with a friend or relative, situation which may be proven positive since word of mouth promotion is one of the best ways to promote these activities (Bone, 1995). An ideal situation or a goal for the MOEY would be to include in its yearly planning events such as “bring a friend” for the first day of each month, where enrolled members will bring along a non member which constituted 45,5% of the subjects in this study.

- *Charge of Services*: Moreover, participants declared willingness to have citizens of other municipalities participating in MOEY programs if the same fee charges were applied. Subjects in this study were also willing to pay up to 15 Euro monthly fees. This amount would go along the resolution of the main problem that MOEY is facing which is financing the programs. The organization could charge selectively programs that have higher costs of operation, or included de-marketing techniques by leaving free of charge the non popular time zones and charging for participation at the most popular ones.

- *Facilities*: Most participants were reluctant in travelling a distance more than one kilometre to get to the gym and they wanted to be able to take a short walk or drive there. MOEY could construct or lease gyms or use school gyms in various regions of city and in the highly populated villages, in order to satisfy all citizens with their "neighbourhood" gym.

- *Planning of Programs*: Moreover, the most popular program and activities are fitness programs for women, exercise for people with heart disease and swimming programs, in addition to programs that include the use of free weights, fitness instruments as treadmills, bicycles and steppers. This result can help the designers of programs to create programs according to the will of citizens.

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