

Runners: types, identity and club affiliation

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Background

Recreational running is the biggest physical activity in Denmark among adults (16+) and has witnessed a boom since the 1990s, as has also been seen in other European countries (van Bottenburg, 2006). In 1993 nine percent of Danes ran regularly, and by 2007 this had increased to one out of four Danes (Pilgaard, 2009).

Despite many people running regularly, only a limited number of runners do so in organized clubs. 85 percent of Danish runners run self-organized and only seven percent are member of an athletic club.

Objectives

With this background a study was conducted on behalf of the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF) and the Danish Athletic Federation (DAF) to help determine how DIF and DAF can raise club participation among runners. With this intention the study contributes important knowledge about runners in Denmark. It does so by giving answers to questions that address what peoples' motives are for running, what their ambitions are regarding running, how they organize running, what they wish to gain from a club membership and what their running habits are.

Methods

The study is based on a survey with 4,052 runners and is supported by interviews and focus group interviews with runners. The survey was conducted as an internet questionnaire comprising 59 questions. About half of the respondents were club members, and the ability to compare members with non-members was important in processing the results.

Results/conclusion

With inspiration from Vos, Scheerder, Boen & Feys (2008), the study's findings divide runners in to five different types:

the traditional runner, the social runner, the challenge-seeking runner, the self-organized runner and the health runner. The types differ in their motives for running, organization of running and running habits.

One of the main findings in the study is that runners alternate between different ways of organizing running. 76 percent of the runners in the survey run alone, together with peers or colleagues and/or in a club. Only 14 percent only run alone.

Interestingly the study also finds that runners vary according to the emphasis they put on running as part of their identity and hereby adds important knowledge by identifying factors that influence runners in their choice to become club members. The role identity plays for the different types of runners is closely linked to their motives and running habits, and the study shows that identity seems to be a paramount factor in the runner's decision to become a club member or not. Clubs are mainly for the most dedicated runners for whom running is a big part of their identity.

Even though half the non-members have considered club membership only few runners do join a club. According to the findings in this study this might be to do with the fact that athletic clubs primarily cater for the most dedicated runners which makes new beginners and less dedicated runners feel that the clubs are not for them. Therefore the study concludes that it is only by working with the different types of runners and putting forward tailor-made offers accordingly that clubs can increase memberships among runners.

With this conclusion DIF and DAF have decided on a project with the aim of getting 10.000 new runners as members of athletic clubs by the end of 2013 (an increase in DAF members of 25 percent).

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