

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED LEISURE CONSTRAINTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECREATIONAL SPORT INVOLVEMENT

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Aim and Research Questions

The present study aimed to: a) test the factorial validity of the Leisure Constraints (Alexandris et al., 2002) and Leisure Involvement (Kyle & Chick, 2002) scales b) segment participants according to their involvement levels c) test differences in the perception of constraints among groups with different involvement levels.

Theoretical Background

According to the hierarchical model of leisure constraints, as proposed by Jackson et al. (1993), constraints can influence not only an individual's decision to participate or not in a particular leisure activity, but also subsequent aspects of participation, such as the experience from participation and the involvement with the activity. The empirical evidence on the influence of constraints on subsequent aspects of sport participation has been weak so far (Balaska et al., 2012). We selected involvement as the dependent variable, because it has been shown (Alexandris, 2012; Kyle et al., 2004) to be a key variable in leisure and sport behavior, since it is associated with positive behavioral outcomes, such as loyalty with sport programs, attachment with sports or a specific sport activity and increased retention rates (Alexandris, 2012).

Methodology, Research Design and Data Analysis: The data were collected by means of five street surveys, which were conducted in five local authorities of the prefecture of Central Macedonia, Greece. Adult individuals were approached by a team of three researchers, who asked them to fill the questionnaires in kiosks that have been set for this purpose. These streets were the main shopping downtown streets in each of the five prefectures. It should, however, be recognized that this is a non-probability, convenient sampling method; the sample drawn cannot be considered as representative of the study population, subsequently, the results cannot be generalized with confidence. Five hundred and eighty one (N=581) individuals participated in the research (63% were women and 37% were men, 52% were single and 48% were married individuals). Recreational sports were defined as sport activities, in which individuals take place during their leisure time. The participants filled the eight-dimensional Leisure Constraints Questionnaire (Time, Individual/Psychological, Limited Interest, Not-Enjoyable Past Experiences, Lack of Partners, Facilities / Services, and Cost, Alexandris et al., 2002), and the four-dimensional leisure involvement questionnaire (Centrality, Attraction, Self-Expression, Social, Kyle & Chick, 2002). Annual sport participation rates were also measured with the survey, which are not presented in this study. The measurement models were tested with confirmatory factor analyses; categorization of participants into involvement levels was made with a cluster analysis; finally, differences in the perception of constraints among individuals in different involvement levels were tested with an Analysis of Variance.

Results, Discussion, and Implications:

The results indicated that the factorial validity of both leisure and involvement models was supported with the use of a confirmatory factor analysis ($\chi^2=620.7$, $df=322$, $p<.001$, $NFI=0.90$, $NNFI=0.94$, $CFI=0.95$, $IFI=0.95$, $SRMR=0.05$, $RMSEA=0.05$ for leisure constraints and $\chi^2=124.7$, $df=48$, $p<.001$, $NFI=0.96$, $NNFI=0.96$, $CFI=0.97$, $IFI=0.97$, $SRMR=0.03$, $RMSEA=0.06$ for sport involvement). Three groups were revealed after the cluster analysis (high, medium and low involved), which had statistically significant differences in all the four involvement dimensions. The results of the ANOVA's revealed statistical significant differences in the lack of interest ($F=13.7$, $p<.001$), not enjoyable past experience ($F=3.42$, $p<.05$), individual / psychological ($F=6.92$, $p<.001$) and cost ($F=3.59$, $p<.05$) dimensions. In all these dimensions scores were lower in the high involved individuals in comparison with other two groups. These results further advance our understanding of the hierarchical model of leisure constraints (Crawford et al., 1991; Jackson et al., 1993), as they indicate that intrapersonal constraints (individual / psychological, not-enjoyable past experience and limited interest) and cost related constraints influence subsequent aspects of recreational sport participation (involvement). The involvement construct was shown to be a useful segmentation variable in this study, since participants were categorized in three groups (high, medium and low). Special reference should be made to the medium and low involved individuals, who should be targeted by practitioners and policy makers in order to help them advance the level of involvement and avoid their drop out of sport participation. The study showed that developing strategies for targeting the intrapersonal constraints can be a key issue towards this direction. Although the removal of these constraints is not easy, there have been some discussions in previous papers (Alexandris et al., 2011) on how these types of constraints can be addressed. The results further indicated that the current economic crisis has started to influence participation in some sports, which are perceived as expensive, especially among the less involved individuals.

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