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# EXAMINING RECREATIONAL SPORT PARTICIPATION BEHAVIOR IN A PERIOD OF ECONOMIC CRISIS: THE CASE OF GREECE

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## Abstract

Greece has been in the middle of a severe economic crisis during the last four years. 2013 was the sixth year in succession that Greece has been in recession. Private sector demand has collapsed; there have been deep falls in consumer spending on goods and services and even great reductions in real private sector capital spending. Consumer spending reduced more than 22% from 2010. Unemployment has reached historic highs; more than 25% of the working population is out of work and youth unemployment is close to 60%. It has to be noted that the government financial support for sport federations and local authorities has also been reduced. The 2014 figures show that sport federations will have cuts on the budget, which in some cases they exceeds the 50% (Alexandris & Balaska, 2014, in press). It would be expected that the demand for recreational sport services would also be affected by this economic crisis. The present study aims to present data about recreational sport participation (sport participation rates, activities and sport services used), collected during the period of economic crisis, and comment on the changes in recreational behavior, as a result of the financial problems. A survey of the general population of an urban place in Greece was used, using the methodology that has been applied in similar surveys (Alexandris & Stodolska, 2004). Five hundred and eighteen (N=518) individuals participated in the study. The results showed that 45% of adult individuals are those that participate in some type of recreational sport during their leisure time. In terms of frequency of sport participation, 5.6% stated that they participate almost every day, 14.6% stated that they participated 3-5 times per week, 15.2% stated that they participate 1-2 times per week, and 9.6% stated that they participate less than once a week. About the Place of Sport Participation, the majority of sport participants (65.9%) reported that they participate in free / unorganized sport activities. Furthermore, 24.5% reported that they

were members of private health clubs, while 9.7% reported that they were members of local authority sport programs (“sport for all” programs). About Sport Activities Participation Rates, the majority of participants (43.8%) reported “walking for exercise purposes” as the most popular activity. “Outdoor Running” was the second most popular activity (29.3%), followed by “strength and conditioning (24.3%), Biking (17.1%), Aerobics (15.1%), Swimming (12.3%) and Football (12.3%). When these results are compared with previous studies in Greece, they show that despite the economic crisis and the reductions in consumer spending, sport participation patterns have not been negatively influenced (Alexandris et al., 2012; Balaska et al., 2013). They can also mean that sports are a mean to overcome everyday problems and influence positively the quality of life in difficult economic conditions. However, it has to be noted that in a European level the sport participation rates in Greece are still low (Special Eurobarometer 412, 2014). Subsequently, sport service providers, such as local authorities’ and recreational sport clubs should changing, modernize their organizational structure and culture with the aim to promote sports within society more effectively, and become as much as possible financially independent (Alexandris & Balaska, 2014, in press).

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