

# (SP) SPECTATORS AND PARTICIPANTS IN SPORTS. WHAT ARE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS?

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## **Introduction**

In the field of public sport policies, it is widely accepted the relationship between promotion of sports attendance and sports participation. In fact, a significant percentage of funds in sport are spent in new sport facilities to support professional sports and to sponsorship sport events (Garcia, Puig & Lagardera, 2005). Moreover, in a context of stagnation or decrease in sports participation in Europe, sports federations, professional, college and amateur clubs and teams claim for additional public economic support to spread fans attendance, and as a consequence increase sports participation.

The empirical literature has analyzed the relationship between sports participation and spectatorship (e.g.: Burnett, Menon & Smart, 1993; Shamir & Ruskin, 1984). Nevertheless, there is a lack of studies focusing exclusively in the relationship between sports attendance and sports participation (Thrane, 2001; White & Wilson, 1999).

This paper tries to overcome this gap considering the relationship between both leisure activities and introducing a new methodological approach with ordered probit models.

## **Methods**

The overwhelming majority of studies focuses its attention on a specific competitive sport, such as baseball, soccer, basketball, rugby. In this research, however, we have considered forty different sports and recreational activities following the Council of Europe's definition (Council of Europe, 1992).

Selection of the independent variables was based on the indication of previous research findings in the literature reviewed. Income levels and occupation and professional status are drawn from economic theories; while individual and social characteristics—gender, age, educational levels, type of household, or degree of urbanization – are taken from sociological theories and sports motivation from psychological theories.

We decided to base our study on a questionnaire survey combining information about sports participation and sports attendance, using a stratified random sample of the population in Navarre (Spain). Then, from a total population of 365,000 aged between 16 and 65 years, a sample size was set of 700 subjects, stratified by gender, age and size of population. The confidence level was 95.5% with a sampling error of +/- 3.8%. The survey was conducted in the second semester of 2004 by the network telephone interviewing system (CATI).

The choice of method to test the relationships formulated depends on the type of dependent variable analyzed. The dependent variables frequency of sports participation and frequency of sports attendance are categorical and hierarchical. This invalidates the use not only of ordinary least square regressions, but also of multinomial probit or logit estimates, due to the fact that they do not take into account the additional information contained in the order of the dependent variable. The alternative, therefore, is to use a

number of ordered probit or logit models, both of which yield very similar results. We have selected the ordered probit model. The ordered probit models have been estimated in other papers to analyze the demand for sports attendance (Forrest & Simmons, 2002) or sports participation (Lera & Rapún, 2005). The parameters are estimated by maximum likelihood techniques, using the routines included to this effect in the Limdep 8.0 program (Greene, 2002).

## **Results**

One of the main findings is that there is no relationship between the frequency of sports participation and sports attendance. Also, we can appreciate in the models the different roles played by the independent variables in terms of attendance and participation in sports.

Frequency of sports participation is positively determined mainly by age, number of sporting activities and some of the motivating factors; and negatively by some occupations and professional status categories. Also, women participate in sport more frequently than men. The main positive determinants of frequency of sports attendance are size of household, consumption of sports practice and competition motivation, while it is negatively determined by age, degree of urbanization and recreational motivation. Also, men attend sporting events more often than women. The role played by occupation and professional status is practically irrelevant. Then, if this variable is a proxy variable to consider time availability, it could be asserted that time availability is more relevant to explain frequency of sports participation than sports attendance.

## **Discussion**

These results have significant implications for sports policies. In the first place, the results make a clear distinction between the sports participation decision and the sports attendance decision. This distinction may be of significant use to sports managers, sporting organizations and government when selecting the most efficient strategies to increase numbers of sports participants or sport spectators.

In the field of public sport policy, the financial support to professional sport clubs and the public sponsorship to sporting events could be not useful to increase frequency of sports participation. It does not mean that sporting events or professional clubs should not receive financial support, but this support cannot be justified as a way to increase sports participation.

The strategies in order to increase sports participation should clearly be very different from the strategies focusing on sports attendance.

On the one hand, if the final purpose is to increase sport participation, the marketing communication strategies to attract more people should focus on the positive benefit of sports in terms of good appearance and entertainment, specially to women and the elderly, who are most affected by knowledge constraints (Alexandris & Carrol, 1999).

On the other hand, specific actions and efforts should be made to attract the different segments with less frequency in sporting events. Also, so as to attract more people to sporting events communication strategies should be focused on competitive and fans motivations. Finally, it should be interesting to promote sports attendance through sponsoring community activities, such as school activities and club activities.

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