Examining the rationale behind participation in running related travel

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1. Introduction and Aims

The running phenomenon has grown substantially over the last two decades and urban areas are entertaining running events with increasing frequency, employing them as generators of sport related tourism, however whilst some events are oversubscribed annually others receive fewer entrants. This study has examined the fragmentation in the running phenomenon, linking running subculture involvement to the rationale to travel. The objective was to examine the interrelationship of motivational and constraint factors leading to an individual's participation in running related tourism whilst highlighting the heterogeneity evident in the subculture.

2. Literature Review

Temple (1981) conducted one of the former studies into running and subscribed three types of runner; joggers, club runners and top-class internationals. Yair (1992) depicted "professional, semi-professional or amateur level" (258) runners, whilst Smith (1998) distinguished between athletes, runners, and joggers. However, although evidently literature has focused contextually on running links with sports tourism have been limited.

On the other hand "there have been a number of attempts at developing a typology of sports tourists" (Weed and Bull 2004 pg 74), including Hall (1992), Standeven and De Knop (1999), Reese (2000), Weed and Bull (2004); however few focus on the niche market of running.

"Work on travel motivation has differentiated push factors from pull factors" (Kim and Chalip 2003 pg 695) largely because they are thought to combine and coordinate to determine travel intentions and influence destination choice. A set of pull and push motives were extracted from reviewed literature. Given that constraints, such as time or monetary variables, can effectively prevent travel motives from materialising into explicit behaviour these were also incorporated.
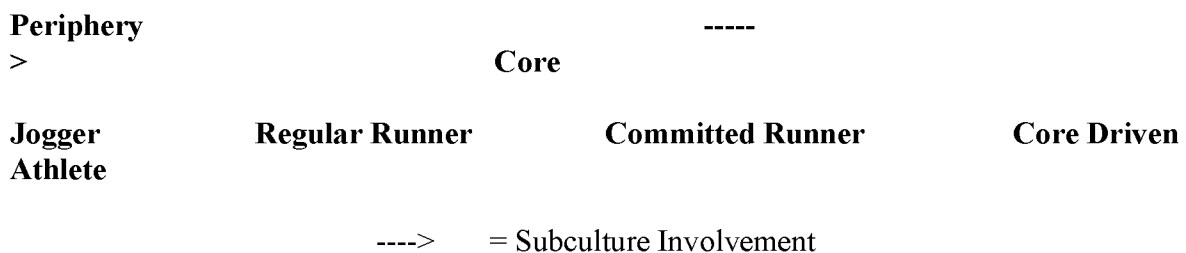
3. Method

Analogies were extracted from literature contextualised surrounding the running subculture, and also from sports tourism literature to build a hypothetical typology. A conceptual framework was extracted from motivational literature to facilitate the examination of a number of push and pull motives, constraints, and travel behaviour variables attached to each group in the typology.

A questionnaire was completed by 500 long distance runners (150 completed at the London Marathon, 350 using an online survey). The three sections of the questionnaire reflected the variables in the conceptual framework. The first aimed to identify running related behaviour, the second examined common motives and constraints, and the third section focused on the explicit travel behaviours exhibited. The basis of each question was drawn from the literature.

Cluster analysis was used to extract the cluster types and verify the hypothetical typology. Hierarchical classification method was utilised as a preliminary measure to establish how many cluster number solutions were indeed feasible. K-means cluster analysis then verified the correct structure. Secondly, using descriptive statistics a thorough investigation prevailed to assess the importance of key motives and constraints exhibited by each cluster.

4. Results

A four type classification was verified (Figure 1.0).

Periphery   -----
>   **Core**

Jogger   **Regular Runner**   **Committed Runner**   **Core Driven**
Athlete

                 ---->   = Subculture Involvement

Motives varied depending upon subculture involvement; those more involved at the "core" of the subculture more likely to travel for sports motives, such as PB potential, with tourism induced motives, such as relaxation, more significant to those less involved (Joggers). Constraints however emerged from the findings as preventing travel across the subculture homogeneously and the overriding trend was to travel to races spending less than one night at the location. Recommendations were made to providers in the industry on the basis on exploiting the motives attached to each cluster and tackling the constraints to increase existing travel behaviour.

5. Conclusion

Further work is needed by suppliers to minimise travel constraints in order to capitalise on the running involvement that emerged in this study. Further academic work is needed to uncover as to whether this is feasible. Considering the addictive nature of running, and the substantial allocation of resources portrayed in the sample this subculture has lucrative possibilities for sports tourism practitioners.