

DIFFERENCES IN CHARACTERISTICS OF CYCLING EVENT PARTICIPANTS IN SLOVENIA IN YEARS 2005 AND 2006

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Submitted in April, 2009

The main aim of this study is to find out some characteristics of randomly selected cycling event participants in the years 2005 and 2006. A two day recreation and active lifestyle promoting event provided a cycling offer that corresponded to both sexes and people of different ages and psychophysical abilities. Randomly selected recreational cyclists (261) were asked to complete the anonymous questionnaire. The results show a small but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.268$, $p < 0.01$) between the frequency of participation in physical/sport activities and age. Close to 50% of participants in 2005 were active 4–6 times per week and in the next year 39% of the contestants were as active. There is also a statistically significant positive relationship between frequency of participation in physical/sport activities and self assessment of health status in 2005 ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.01$) and 2006 ($r = 0.311$, $p < 0.01$). Participants assessed their health as being good or very good in 83% (in 2005) and in 77% (in 2006). The coefficient indicates also a small but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.219$, $p < 0.01$) between the importance of physical/sport activities and age.

The knowledge of some characteristics of recreational cyclists could contribute to the improvement of mass cycling (and other) events and, at the same time, also to the development of cycling tourism in Slovenia which has excellent natural features for this type of activity.

Keywords: Cycling, physical/sport activity, promotion of health, festival of cycling.

INTRODUCTION

Slovenians first acquainted themselves with cycling as early as 1869 when the first bicycle “appeared” in Slovenia. The first race, however, took place two decades later. The bicycle (etymology: Latin “bis” – “twice” and Greek “kylos” – “wheel”) was rather impractical as it was driven directly by the pedals placed on the enlarged high front wheel (oversized penny-farthing wheel), while the back wheel served to maintain balance (Milošević, 1999). Slovenia was introduced to the bicycle almost simultaneously with the rest of Europe. As a bourgeois fashion vagary, the bicycle initially stood for prestige; later on it became a practical and light means of transport. The first Slovenian cycling club, the so called “Der Laidacher Byciklisticher Club” (Ljubljana Cycling Club), was established in 1885 by the pro German Ljubljana bourgeoisie. Two years later, however, the Slovenians established the Slovenian Cyclists Club of Ljubljana (Vehar, 1996).

Everyday cycling is an effective form of aerobic exercise, as it is well known that regular physical/sport activity (this term refers to any movement of the body that results in energy expenditure and has the aim of maintaining or improving physical fitness or health)

has a beneficial effect on the human organism, inhibits the development of a series of health disorders and diseases, and contributes to the strengthening of mental health (Cavill, Kahlmeier, & Racioppi, 2006; Dixon, Mauzey, & Hall, 2003) and improvement of the individual’s physical self concept and self appreciation (Fox, 1999). Everyday cycling also reduces the risk of serious conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and the most common form of diabetes (Carnall, 2000). At low speed, cycling, this “group sport of individuals”, triggers accelerated activity of the lungs and the cardiovascular system and is most beneficial to leg muscles as well as arms when ascending, while the joints do not suffer. Activities of this kind result in great energy consumption and may help cope with stress and psychological exhaustion (Ropret & Tomc, 1989).

A sedentary lifestyle, a reflection of our contemporary lifestyle, is fast becoming one of the most pressing social concerns as it triggers numerous, to the human body adverse effects. A passive lifestyle gives rise to diverse health problems (Blair et al., 1989; Kyle, Morabia, Schutz, & Pitchard, 2004; Leon & Connett, 1991; Rodriguez et al., 1994) and, (in)directly, also to social (Tarlov, 1996) and economic problems (Ruhm, 2000).

The level of participation in physical/sport activities in Slovenia is low, but the share of organized recreational activities increases on a yearly basis – in 2007 there were 45 organized recreational activities planned to take place from March to October (as much as two a day at different locations).

As people all around the world are more and more aware of the negative effects of our contemporary (sedentary) lifestyle (Jeffery, 2001; Rzewnicki, 2003), organized physical/sport activities have been well attended for several years now. The “Lake Taupo Cycle Challenge” event was launched in 1977 and today it is one of the biggest recreational sporting events in New Zealand – in 2006, 12.000 recreational cyclists pushed the pedals at the 160 kilometre long one day event. In Australia, there is the “Festival of Cycling” – active families challenge people’s day at Albert Park. The aim of the festival, which takes place in April, is to promote an annual day of healthy participation for all families. Closer to Slovenia is the Dutch “Fietsvierdaagse” which consists of four days of recreational cycling and offers daily tours of 30 to 100 kilometres which are attended in mass numbers, by families and pensioners, in particular.

In 2005, a cycling event was launched in Slovenia which represented a link between competitive and recreational sport, namely the “Festival of Cycling,” which took place conjointly with the “Franja Barcasse Marathon”, the latter being accompanied also by shorter races (family and mountain bike race). As the event was also attended by some foreign participants, it could be ranked side by side with some other big sporting events taking place in Slovenia and Europe. A two day recreation and active lifestyle promoting programme provided a cycling offer that corresponded to both sexes and people of different ages and psychophysical abilities. With a view to popularizing cycling and triggering mass participation, the central motive of the event was to attract people to take part in it and give full vent to their abilities and potential, achieve goals, test themselves and socialize. In light of such a diverse attending population, we wanted to establish some characteristics of the people who participate in organized cycling events.

The main aim of this study is to find out age, gender and educational level differences in randomly selected cycling event participants in 2005 and 2006 and compare it with the thesis that the most frequent participants in physical/sport activities are middle aged people with college or higher education, who are active 2–3 times a week and assess their health status as being very good.

METHODS

Participants

Altogether 261 randomly selected participants (including 201 males) were included in the study, which was conducted on two occasions. The measurements were performed in two years (2005 and 2006). TABLE 1 shows the distribution of participants regarding their age group and the year of the test. The participants were grouped into six age groups for every decade of age.

Data collection

Using an anonymous questionnaire as a data collection instrument, we have collected data for: basic socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, level of education), sport activities (self perceived significance, frequency of participation, forms and modes of physical/sport activities, participation in individual sports, organization of physical/sport activity, participation in sporting events), and assessment of health and amount of income spent on recreation (appendix).

Data processing

All basic data manipulations were performed using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Office 2003, Microsoft Co., USA) and statistically analysed with the SPSS 12.0 (SPSS Inc., USA). Different variables (the significance of physical/sport activity, frequency of participation in physical/sport activity and self assessment of health status) were used and correlations between them calculated. We used Spearman’s rank coefficient (between participation in physical/sport activities and age, be-

TABLE 1
Classification of respondents according to age groups

		Age group												Total	
		20 years and below		21–30 years		31–40 years		41–50 years		51–60 years		61 years and above			
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006		
Male	f	20	12	40	22	18	38	9	25	2	9	1	5	90	111
	F %	22.2	10.8	44.4	19.8	20.0	34.2	10.0	22.5	2.2	8.1	1.1	4.5	100.0	100.0
Female	f	2	2	8	9	12	10	6	6	0	2	2	1	30	30
	F %	6.7	6.7	26.7	30.0	40.0	33.3	20.0	20.0	0	6.7	6.7	3.3	100.0	100.0

tween physical/sport activities and age and between participation in physical/sport activities and self-assessment of health status) and Pearson's chi-square for testing our thesis. We tried to extract sufficient information from the data to confirm our thesis and we expressed appropriate conclusions in terms as described below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the pioneer year of the "Festival of Cycling", 40% of participants were aged between 21 and 30 and a quarter of the participants were aged between 31 and 40 (TABLE 1). Among participants in the following year, 34% were between 31 and 40, 22% aged from 21 to 30 and 22% aged from 41 to 50. The participants aged over 61 represented the lowest share (3.4%). Our data correspond to the data of cycling participation provided by the Australian Sports Commission (2005) which show that cycling is most popular with those in the 35–44 year age group and least popular with those 65 years and over.

As ageing results not only in failing physical and mental strength, but also in greater life experience, sports programmes should be designed in such a manner as to correspond to the needs and personal characteristics of individuals as well as their social and economic conditions.

The research carried out in 2002 on physical/sport activity in the second half of the life of the Swiss population included over 9000 inhabitants aged over 50. More than one third of the population failed to engage in physical/sport activity on a sufficient basis (Meyer, Rezny, & Stuck, 2005). The connection with our research therefore exists, since the negative trend in the lack of physical/sport activity exists. As it seems older contestants were less active than younger ones – there is a small but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.268$, $p < 0.01$) between frequency of participation in physical/sport activities and age.

It is well known that moderate forms of exercise significantly contribute to both improvement of health and longevity, if pursued over a longer period of time. It has been proven that regular physical/sport activity

preserves the health of people of all ages. As sport for the third life period still lacks attention, professional guidance and perfected programmes should aim at improving this area, as well.

The coefficient indicates a small but statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.219$, $p < 0.01$) between the significance of physical/sport activities and age – the higher the age of contestants was, the smaller was the significance of physical/sport activities. Therefore society does not consider sport to be a value in and of itself, since sport activity most frequently serves as a means of achieving general and particular social goals. Participation in sport is motivated by social and personal factors. The underlying social value of sport is in that it can, as a special social activity, contribute significantly to the balance between social and individual needs and goals (Tušak & Bednarik, 2002).

Physical/sport activity was of high significance to 57% of the respondents interviewed in 2006 and to 46% of the respondents interviewed the previous year (TABLE 4). They were mostly with secondary education (57% in 2005 and 49% in 2006), followed by the respondents with higher education (18% in 2005 and 15% in 2006) (TABLE 2).

More than half of the female respondents interviewed in 2005 and 60% in 2006 participated in physical/sport activities 2–3 times a week. Almost 60% of the male respondents interviewed in 2005 were active 4–6 times a week, while one year later 44% male respondents were as active (TABLE 3).

We find these data satisfactory, considering that half and slightly less than 40% of the respondents interviewed in 2006 devoted to physical/sport activities 120 days and approximately 240 days a year, respectively. These data are most likely the result of a varied sports offer, further, of a lifestyle that incorporates physical activity into everyday life, and of a great awareness of the significance of exercise.

In 2004, the 15th study was carried out within the framework of the target research programme "Competitiveness of Slovenia 2001–2006" under the title "Physical/sport activity for health" and under the auspices of the Science and Research Centre of Koper, University of Primorska.

TABLE 2

Classification of respondents according to education level

		Educational level												Total	
		Primary		Vocational		Secondary		College		Higher		Other			
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006		
Male	f	11	12	7	16	54	53	5	13	12	14	1	3	90	111
	F %	12.2	10.8	7.8	14.4	60.0	47.7	5.6	11.7	13.3	12.6	1.1	2.7	100.0	100.0
Female	f	0	0	1	1	14	16	4	6	10	7	1	0	30	30
	F %	0	0	3.3	3.3	46.7	53.3	13.3	20.0	33.3	23.3	3.3	0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 3

Classification of respondents according to frequency of participation in physical/sport activity

		Frequency of participation in physical/sport activity							
		Up to once a week		2-3 times a week		4-6 times a week		Total	
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Male	f	8	13	29	49	53	49	90	111
	F %	8.9	11.7	32.2	44.1	58.9	44.1	100.0	100.0
Female	f	8	6	16	18	6	6	30	30
	F %	26.7	20.0	53.3	60.0	20.0	20.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 4

Classification of respondents according to significance of physical/sport activity

		Significance of participation in physical/sport activity									
		Poor		Medium		High		Great		Total	
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Male	f	1	3	26	31	44	63	19	14	90	111
	F %	1.1	2.7	28.9	27.9	48.9	56.8	21.1	12.6	100.0	100.0
Female	f	0	0	9	10	11	17	10	3	30	30
	F %	0	0	30.3	33.3	36.7	56.7	33.3	10.0	100.0	100.0

The interviews were conducted by the public opinion and mass communication research centre within the framework of the Research Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences (2004/2), and within the framework of the wider European social sciences research. 1442 individuals were interviewed, namely, 46% male and 54% female respondents aged between 15 and 95. As regards the question of frequency of participation in physical/sport activities and share of physically active individuals, the majority of respondents, who came from very diverse socio-demographic environments, participated in physical/sport activities on a more frequent and regular basis. Inactive, occasionally active and regularly active respondents were at an approximate ratio of 4:3:3 (Sila, 2005).

Within the framework of the project "Physical/sport activity for health" (Završnik et al., 2004), which was carried out in 2003 and 2004, 34% of male and as much as 43.5% of female respondents (out of a total of 749 respondents) declared that they did not participate in sport activities in their leisure time whereas 21% of male and 17% of female respondents declared they were physically active once a week, which results are similar to the results of our research, which found that 13.5% were active up to once a week in 2005 and 2006, respectively (TABLE 3). One quarter of male and one quarter of female respondents participated in physical/sport activity several times a week, according to the findings of the project "Physical/sport activity for health"; our research, however, obtained much better results (as already mentioned here above).

The following are the results obtained by three French preventive medicine centres which, for research purposes, have asked 3019 healthy adults (aged above 18) from diverse socio-demographic environments to complete a questionnaire relating to leisure time activities, reasons for (non)participation in physical/sport activities, frequency of participation in physical/sport activities, the relationship between physical/sport activity and health, and level of stress: 44% of respondents participated in physical/sport activities on a regular basis; almost 90% of them equated the said activities with the sense of being healthy; following exercise, 33% felt their energy level was greater and 25% felt they were more relaxed (Perrin et al., 2002).

Recreational cyclists included in our research were also asked to assess their health status (their own opinion) (TABLE 5). Participants assessed their health as good or very good in 83% (2005) and in 77% (2006), while only 3% (2005) and 4% the following year claimed that their health status is very poor or poor. There is also a statistically significant positive relationship between frequency of participation in physical/sport activities and self assessment of health status in 2005 ($r = 0.319$, $p < 0.01$) and 2006 ($r = 0.311$, $p < 0.01$). That confirms the fact that contestants who engage more in physical/sport activities assess their health status higher. This result relates to the above fact of frequent participation in physical/sport activity, considering that it contributes enormously to one's well being. General health self assessment provided by the cyclists who participated in the above mentioned event is therefore rather positive

TABLE 5

Classification of respondents according to self-assessment of health status

		Self assessment of health status							
		Very poor or poor		Satisfactory		Good or very good		Total	
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Male	f	3	6	7	18	79	87	89	111
	F %	3.4	5.4	7.9	16.2	88.8	78.4	100.0	100.0
Female	f	1	0	9	8	20	22	30	30
	F %	3.3	0	30.0	26.7	66.7	73.3	100.0	100.0

TABLE 6

Classification of respondents according to frequency of participation in mass sporting events

		Frequency of participation in mass sporting events									
		Very rarely		Rarely		Often		Very often		Total	
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Male	f	2	19	28	48	43	38	15	6	88	111
	F %	2.3	17.1	31.8	43.2	48.9	34.2	17.0	5.4	100.0	100.0
Female	f	0	4	5	19	19	6	6	1	30	30
	F %	0	13.3	16.7	63.3	63.3	20.0	20.0	3.3	100.0	100.0

as it testifies that they are well aware and conscious of the fact that participation in physical/sport activities constitutes a key element of quality lifestyle.

The most frequently listed among the physical/sport activities in which the interviewed recreational cyclists participate are two seasonal sports, namely cycling and alpine skiing, which are followed by running and mountaineering.

The respondents most frequently participated in cycling (113 answers), alpine skiing (47 answers), outdoor running (43 answers) and mountain climbing or mountaineering (39 answers).

The following physical/sport activities comparable with our results were presented within the framework of the public opinion survey: Slovenians most frequently exercise by walking (59%), swimming (29%), cycling (26%), skiing (16%) and running (12%) (Sila, 2005).

Outdoor activities are evidently predominant owing to the fact that daily we spend too much time in enclosed spaces, for which reason we want to spend as much of our "leisure time" as possible outdoors. Many people instinctively associate physical/sport activity with the outdoors, which throughout the year offers various forms of recreation in which more and more people tend to participate despite the indoor trend. According to Cankar (2003), human corporality constitutes a fundamental starting point of one's connection with nature. The feelings of connectedness are equally accentuated in contact with nature. Family and other social milieus, which increasingly fail to exercise their

functions, assume an especially important function in our relationship with nature.

The research data attesting to increased participation in organized activities are positive.

In 2005, 52% of the festival participants often attended mass sporting events (TABLE 6). Almost half of the respondents interviewed the following year attended similar events rarely. 18% of the respondents interviewed in 2005 and only 5% of the respondents interviewed in 2006 declared that they attended mass sporting events very often.

We can conclude on the basis of the data given in TABLE 6 that there exists a visible trend in increased participation in mass sporting events. Greater participation could possibly be triggered by greater media support (previous announcements, preparations for certain physical/sport activities, introduction of new equipment, and similar). Our research aims at encouraging the organizers of future physical/sporting events to devote even greater attention to the preparatory organization of events, adapt programmes to all age groups, and may be adapt to and cooperate with other similar events in terms of contents (e.g. in the context of seasons).

Road cyclists dominated both years: 38% the first year and almost 60% the following year. In 2005, 34% of respondents opted for mountain biking and as little as 10% in 2006. Further, 26% of the festival participants opted for a combination of mountain biking and road cycling in 2005 and 31% in 2006, while 56% of all respondents are members of sport clubs.

TABLE 7

Classification of respondents according to the proportion of income given for recreation

		Income given for recreation							
		Very small or small		Medium		High or very		Total	
		2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Male	f	33	24	37	52	17	35	87	111
	F %	37.9	21.6	42.5	46.8	19.5	31.5	100.0	100.0
Female	f	7	8	15	20	8	2	30	30
	F %	23.3	26.7	50.0	66.7	26.7	6.7	100.0	100.0

We were also interested in the proportion of their income that the participants in the said event devote to physical/sport activities. The results have shown that 44% (2005) and 51% (2006) of respondents spend a medium proportion of their income on recreation (TABLE 7). In realistic terms, this is the most favourable of answers, considering that the price of equipment is relatively high and that, in addition to the payment of requisites, participation in certain sports also requires payment of membership fees, use of recreation grounds, and the like.

Of the respondents, 21% (2005) and 26% (2006) declared that they spend a very high or high proportion of their income for physical/sport activities and 34% (2005) and 23% (2006) of respondents declared that they spend a very small or small proportion of their income for recreation. The latter most likely participate in seasonal physical/sport activities which do not require additional expenditures (hiking, running, walking, swimming, etc.); however, they nevertheless attend organized events such as the "Festival of cycling". We have found that the Slovenian model of sport financing corresponds to the European model. The data clearly show that the majority of income is spent on membership fees and sport courses. According to the revenues of sport associations, football (16%), as a sport discipline, is undoubtedly the most popular and is followed by skiing and basketball (9%) and handball and mountaineering (Meyer et al., 2005) which, however, are lagging far behind. We have established that, in general, the total sport expenditure amounts to 2.33% of Slovenian GDP, a share that is greater than that of the majority of the EU Member States (Retar, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Knowing the differences in characteristics of sport event participants could help us to identify additional factors that could encourage and motivate further participation in sporting events or would attract newcomers.

As we found out, the most frequent participants in physical/sport activities are middle aged people - the questioned population aged over 51 attended events

(4%) and aged under 21 years (14%). For improving this fact, routes and time limits should be adapted in such a manner to suit respective age groups.

We find encouraging that the results attest to the significance of physical/sport activity - more than half of the respondents consider physical/sport activity to be very important. Also encouraging is the data which shows that 44% of the participants engage in physical/sport activities 4-6 times a week.

There exists a link between sporting participation and quality of life (or well being) which in recent years started to constitute one of the principal values of society. Although development (or "progress") brought sedentariness to society, physical/sport activity has become extremely popular and important for the life of individuals and, consequently, society as a whole. Participation in physical/sport activities has a positive impact on aspects of quality of life as it relates to social inclusion, which brings well being, expressed as satisfaction with life as a whole, and social well being, too.

That is why it would be reasonable to base sporting events on the motivation, in particular, of the population aged over 50 and, as we have found that the share of female cyclists is lower than the share of those attending similar events abroad, it would be reasonable if the media focused more strongly on them in terms of recreational cycling.

The most crucial is the awareness of the fact that all forms of exercise contribute significantly to both the improvement and preservation of health and longevity if pursued over a longer period of time. The types of exercise that people find most attractive, that they can most easily include in their everyday life and that correspond to their physical abilities, age and health status should constitute the contents of such physical/sport activity as would ensure an adequate, healthy and active lifestyle.

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Appendix

Questionnaire - festival of cycling

Sex: M F

Age ____

Educational level:

Primary education

Vocational education

Secondary education

College

Higher education, College

Other

Significance of physical/sport activities in life:

Zero

Poor

Medium

High

Great

How often do you participate in physical/sport activities?

few times a year

1-3 times per month

once per week

2-3 times per week

4-6 times per week

How would you assess your health?

Very poor

Poor

Satisfactory

Good

Very good

Name the sports you engage in most frequently _____

How many days you approximately engage in it? _____

Do you do it organised or not? _____

Do you do them alone, with friends, with your family or with the club? _____

How often do you participate in mass sporting events?

Very rarely

Rarely

Often

Very often

Do you prefer road cycling or mountain biking? _____

What is the proportion of income given for physical/sport activities?

Very small

Small

Medium

High

Very high

**ROZDÍLY V CHARAKTERISTICE ÚČASTNÍKŮ
CYKLISTICKÝCH AKCÍ VE SLOVINSKU
V LETECH 2005 A 2006
(Souhrn anglického textu)**

Hlavním cílem této studie je nalézt určité charakteristiky náhodně vybraných účastníků cyklistických akcí v letech 2005 a 2006. Dvoudenní rekreační akce na podporu aktivního životního stylu poskytovala možnost cyklistického vyžití pro osoby obou pohlaví, různého věku a různých psychických a fyzických schopností. Náhodně vybraní rekreační cyklisté (261) byli požádáni, aby vyplnili anonymní dotazník. Výsledky ukazují malou, avšak statisticky významnou negativní korelaci ($r = -0,268$, $p < 0,01$) mezi frekvencí zapojení do pohybových/sportovních aktivit a věkem. Téměř 50 % účastníků v roce 2005 bylo aktivních 4–6 × týdně a v následujícím roce to bylo 39 % soutěžících. Je zde také statisticky významný pozitivní vztah mezi frekvencí zapojení do pohybových/sportovních aktivit a subjektivním hodnocením zdravotního stavu v roce 2005 ($r = 0,319$, $p < 0,01$) a 2006 ($r = 0,311$, $p < 0,01$). Účastníci hodnotili svůj zdravotní stav jako dobrý či velmi dobrý v 83 % (v roce 2005) a v 77 % (v roce 2006). Koeficient také vyjadřuje malou, avšak statisticky významnou negativní korelaci ($r = -0,219$, $p < 0,01$) mezi důležitostí pohybových/sportovních aktivit a věkem.

Znalost některých charakteristik rekreačních cyklistů může přispět ke zlepšení masových cyklistických (i jiných) akcí a zároveň také k vývoji cykloturistiky ve Slovinsku, které má pro tyto aktivity skvělé přírodní podmínky.

Klíčová slova: cyklistika, pohybová/sportovní aktivita, podpora zdraví, festival cyklistiky.

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