

WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN A NON-COMPETITIVE GYMNASTICS FESTIVAL? – A CASE STUDY OF WORLD GYMNAESTRADA

Bortoleto Marco¹, Thomas Heinen², Sun Jun³, Eliana Toledo⁴, Laurita Schiavon¹, Livia Pasqua¹, Mauricio Oliveira⁵, Fernanda Menegaldo^{5,1}

¹University of Campinas, Physical Education Faculty, Campinas, Brazil

²Leipzig University, Faculty of Sport Science, Leipzig, Germany

³Chung-Ang University, Physical Education Seoul, Seoul, Republic of Korea

⁴University of Campinas, Applied Science Faculty, Limeira, Brazil

⁵University of Espirito Santo, Department of Sports, Vitoria, Brazil

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Abstract

Sport participation might have very different goals, especially for non-competitive events. This study analyses the motivation of participants to join in the XV World Gymnaestrada in Helsinki in 2015, which is considered one of the largest international non-competitive gymnastics festival worldwide. Methods: The Goal Content for Exercise Questionnaire (GCEQ) was applied to 86 adults (56 female/ 30 male) and analyzed statistically. In addition, 24 short interviews were conducted and the data were analyzed by a Content Analysis. Results: “Social Affiliation” and “Skill Development” seem to be the principal motivations. Both are more important for women than for men. “Social Recognition” was also of particular relevance for the participants. Finally, the number of WG participations shows the same tendency in motivation for beginners and very experienced participants.

Keywords: *gymnastics for all, gymnastics festivals, motivation, non-competitive sports, sport participation.*

INTRODUCTION

Massive non-competitive gymnastics events have been an integral part of the gymnastics community since the last two decades of the XIX century (Wichmann, 2014). The participation of thousands of people in this kind of gymnastics festivals still represents a contemporary phenomenon, developing and propagating a particular interest in some international sports organizations (Merkel, 2013).

According to that, the World Gymnaestrada (WG) is organized every four years since 1953 by the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) in partnership with National Gymnastics Federations. It can be considered as one of the main international gymnastics festivals (Wichmann, 2015a, 2015b; Patricio, Bortoleto & Carbinatto, 2016), bringing a huge number of participants together,

performing in gymnastics and sharing experiences during this one-week event. The last Gymnaestrada was hosted in Helsinki (Finland) in 2015 and attracted more than 20,000 participants from 50 different nations (Paoliello et al., 2016; FIG, 2017), thereby renovating the “spirit” of the non-competitive and group gymnastics.

Contemporary demands such as health maintenance, social development and educational values have helped to make sport participation a relevant subject for researchers in the field (Lauren, Stewart & Christopher, 2017) and discussion on the agenda of many organizations (e.g., UNESCO), especially those interested in sport, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005). Thus, the reasons for participating in recreational sports and, even more so, in high-performance sports, have constituted an important subject to the academic research (Tsai et al., 2015). Nevertheless, when we compared to high-performance sports, we do not observe the same attention regarding non-competitive sports (Ojja & Telama, 1991; Thomson, 2000), as is the case of Gymnastics for All (GfA).

However, understanding the motivation that leads to the participation at the mentioned sport event can be an important prerequisite to support the development of organizational strategies, and to optimize the organization committee work for future festivals. This information can also help to understand the role non-competitive events play in terms of sports participation (DaCosta & Miragaya, 2002).

In this sense, the main goal of this study was to identify what motivates people to participate in the 2015 edition of the World Gymnaestrada, thereby examining some intrinsic and extrinsic motivational aspects (Sebire, Standage & Vansteenkiste, 2009).

METHODS

The methodological approach comprised two steps. First, data were collected by using the Goal Content for

Exercise Questionnaire (GCEQ) (Sebire, Standage & Vansteenkiste, 2008). The English version of this questionnaire was applied personally to 86 adult participants (56 females and 30 males, with age ranging from 17 to 69 years with an average value of 37.2 years). Second, and complementary, we developed a short interview with 24 participants (20 females and 4 males - age range: 18-60 years, average age: 29 years), comprising one single question: “What motivates you to take part in the World Gymnaestrada?” The data were registered using a Digital Recorder in MP3 format and then transcribed as a text afterwards. This second procedure had the purpose of validating the overall pattern of results obtained with the application of the GCEQ questionnaire.

Considering the information provided in the WG official registration system (Gymnaplana) used by the Local Organizing Committee (LOC), the total number of participants were exactly 20.473 of which 15.330 (73%) were over the age of 17, the age group that characterized the study sample.

Considering the total number of participants, females represented 83% with 17.430 (12.724 adults) and males represented 17% with 3.570 (2.606 adults), numbers that show that the sample of this study (69.1% for females and 30.9% for males – considering the questionnaires and interviews) can be considered as adequate.

The cultural and geographic diversity was taken into account to the data collection, thus having participants from 35 (70%) of 50 National Federations involved at WG.

In relation to the diversity of experience in WG’s participation the sample include people from 1 to 9 participations, with an average of 2.36.

Each of the 20 items of the GCEQ questionnaire could be evaluated on a 7-point scale (Likert-type): 1-2 not at all important; 3-5 moderately important; 6-7 extremely important (Sebire et al., 2008). Data were analyzed statistically using SPSS software. In particular, we calculated a

multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with gender (female vs. male) as group factor, and Social Affiliation, Image, Health Management, Social Recognition, and Skill Development as dependent variables.

Furthermore, interview data were analyzed by Content Analysis procedure (Krippendorff, 1980). According to Dart (2012, p.650), the thematic “coding scheme was based on a system of categories and sub-categories” upon the GCEQ principal factors (social affiliation; image; health management; social recognition; skill development) when the first, third and fifth factor are intrinsic factors, and the second and fourth factor represent extrinsic exercise goal content (Sebire et al., 2009).

RESULTS

First, and considering participants estimated importance in the factors of the GCEQ, a MANOVA revealed the following result: There was a tendency for an overall significant effect of gender on the dependent variables (Wilks lambda = 0.876, $F(5, 80) = 2.261$, $p = .056$). When inspecting the univariate ANOVAs, however, there was a significant effect of gender on Social Affiliation, $F(1, 84) = 4.706$, $p = .032$. The effect of gender on Skill Development showed a tendency towards statistical significance, $F(1, 84) = 3.296$, $p = .073$. Social Affiliation was more important for females than for males (mean \pm SE; females: 5.79 ± 0.12 ; males: 5.35 ± 0.16), and skill development was also more important for females than for males (females: 5.02 ± 0.19 ; males: 4.47 ± 0.25). The effects of gender on image, health management, and social recognition were not statistically significant (all $p > .20$),

indicating that image, health management, and social recognition were in average equally important for both, females and males (see Table 1 for an overview).

Table 1
Means and standard errors of the GCEQ subscales for females and males.

GCEQ subscale	Gender		sig.
	Females	Males	
Social Affiliation	5.79 ± 0.12	5.35 ± 0.16	$p=.032$
Image	3.18 ± 0.21	3.34 ± 0.28	n.s.
Health Management	4.55 ± 0.19	4.35 ± 0.26	n.s.
Social Recognition	3.85 ± 0.18	4.22 ± 0.24	n.s.
Skill Development	5.02 ± 0.19	4.47 ± 0.25	$p=.073$

Additionally, as can be seen from Table 1, participants evaluate Social Affiliation in average as most important, followed by Skill Development, and Health Management. Social Recognition and Image are evaluated with smaller scores. Thus, highlighting the importance of Social Affiliation as the most important goal content for both, females and males, when participating at the World Gymnaestrada, showing coherence for a non-competitive sport.

Furthermore, concerning the interviews, *Social Affiliation* and *Social Recognition* were the most outstanding categories in the speeches, with 17 nominations (71%) and 18 for the second (75%), respectively. *Health* was highlighted only by one interviewee. However, it's important to highlight the only two categories that were chosen by men rather than by women: *Image* and *Social Recognition*.

Regarding the number of participation in WG we found:

Table 2
World Gimnaestrada participation

WG Participations	GCEQ	Interview	Sample	%
1	38	13	51	46
2	20	6	26	24
3	7	2	9	8
4	9	1	10	9
5	2	0	2	2
6	7	1	8	7
7	2	0	2	2
8	0	0	0	0
9	1	1	2	2
TOTAL	86	24	Average 2,36	100

Statistically the number of WG participations does not play a role in participant's reactions. According to that, people are rather "stable" in their motives and motivations and taking part in more and more WG's may not influence this.

DISCUSSION

As is widely debated, age and gender are factors that modulate sports participation (Koivula, 1999; Molanorouzi, Khoo & Morris, 2015). Still, gender remains a central issue in sports participation (United Nations, 2005) and recent studies still point out to an imbalance situation with greater male participation in sport (Van Heerden, 2014; Eime et al., 2016). However, the higher female participation in non-competitive sports has already been reported as superior with secondary students (Recours, Souville & Griffet, 2005) as well in adult's recreational sports programs (Tsai et al, 2015). The permanence of women in sports in adulthood is also greater, as other studies show (Pacheco et al, 2014). In the case of World Gymnaestrada the participation is mostly female (83%). Previous studies reinforce our findings, reporting a greater participation of women in GfA in Portugal (Silva et al., 2016), Finland (Dufur, 2006), Japan (Soares et al., 2015), as well as in several Latin American countries (Paoliello et al., 2016) participants

of WG.

Although *Skill Development* is per se not a priority feature for GfA events, it was indicated as an important motivation for participation in WG. Considering that participation in WG does not foresee many training sessions or educational activities (workshops e.g.), perhaps the possibility of display and to watch other groups performances are responsible for this type of opinion. In fact, statistically women have given more attention than men to that motivation, and a similar tendency was reported by Sirard, Pfeiffer & Pate (2006) with "middle school students".

The "sense of belonging", understood from the concept of *Social Recognition* deeply discussed by Axel Honneth (1995), seems to represent a nuclear aspect to practice the GfA and, consequently, can be observed as an important element in the WG participants' discourse (Wichmann & Jarvis, 2015). In this sense, participation at WG represents a group and national representation. Many of the respondents say they feel they belong to the "family" of gymnastics. The WG seems to produce a "collective sense" in the participants, producing a positive experience that engaging people to take part in the event following edition.

That's really great to be at the WG because it's a the most perfect place for young people and old people to be

together and to practice our favorite sports, watch the others, to be together the hole day. Young, old and people from different nations together is amazing. It's a perfect place to watch all the others and I will participate forever. (Coach; women; Austria; 52 years old; 4 WG participations)

According to that, the *Social Recognition* seems to be related to the nature of WG, an event where participants are performers and also spectators (Wichmann & Jarvis, 2015). To display the group choreographies and to see what the other participants are doing emerge as a characteristic of the event building a fundamental motivation. In fact, the pleasure to show and to possibility to watch the other groups performances were emphasized by many of the interviewees. In their own words:

We are motivate to bring our team the nationally disabilities display team to World Gymnaestrada to display watch people with a learning disabilities or intellectual disabilities can achieve and with lots of time and patient. The team have been participating in the World Gymnaestrada since 1987. The majority have all the team have Down's syndrome. The ages range from 12 to 47 and they all love to show what they can do. (Coach; women; UK; 60 years old; 6 WG participations)

For me, is very interesting to come here and see gymnastics from all the world and also meet people from everywhere and just enjoy a good community and atmosphere. (Gymnast; women; Denmark; 19 years old; first WG participation)

Related to that, the *Social Affiliation* was statistically more important for women than for men. In recreational sport, that include GfA, as showed by Tsai et al (2015), report that "make friends" is more associated with adults female participation in sports.

It's an international event that includes so many nations. We have so much fun and contact with different cultures. We can see such different gymnastics forms, all together and we love this. It's a fun week, sleeping in schools, being together. People training for months before the WG, and when it is getting closer we fell very nervous. Definitely, it's very cool. (Gymnast; women; Germany; 27 years old; 2 WG participations)

Although the practice of physical activity and sport is increasingly associated with health maintenance (Hardman, 2001), curiously in our case WG participants did not highlight *Health* as a motivation. In the same sense, *Image* and *Fitness* was not indicated as a significant reason. Similar studies in younger populations have already revealed positive trends for this variable (Pacheco et al., 2012). In any case, Health is still a motivation present in the discourse of the participants, as we see in the words of this interviewee:

It's lovely to come here because my team includes mothers, kids, and hole family together. We do for health, happiness, and specially to meet people from different countries. (Coach; women; Mongolia; 52 years old; 3 WG participations)

CONCLUSIONS

The literature about women sport participation shows greater appreciation for motivations such as Fitness, Health and Appearance (Image). However, most of these studies were performed on participation in competitive sports and about the practice of physical activity and fitness centers. We did not find any study that discusses specific participation in non-competitive sports.

We observed that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivating the participation in WG. In this sense, Social Affiliation and Skill Development (intrinsic) and Social Recognition (extrinsic) were the principal

motivation reported.

From the methodological point of view the GCEQ fit well to analyze the participant motivation of a non-competitive gymnastics festival without any change/modification. However, complementary methods, including qualitative approaches, can give greater reliability to the study. For further studies we suggest the use of other GCEQ languages versions in order to enlarge the sample and access more non-English speakers.

The predominance of female participants seems to be related to the most prominent motivations reported. On the other hand, it shows that it is necessary to give more attention and try to attract more men to GfA practice and to the WG.

Finally, we agree that the “increasing participation in sport is an objective for both government and sporting organizations” (Eime et al., 2016, p.1) and need to “emphasizing that the concept of sport for all to promote cultural development, relates to policies which seek to extend the benefits of sport to as many people as possible” (Council of Europe, 1975). According to that reason non-competitive sports as GfA should have more attention from the authorities and the academic community, reinforcing the United Nations (2008) recommendations.

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Corresponding author:

Marco A.C. Bortoleto
701 Érico Veríssimo
Campinas
São Paulo
Brazil
E-mail: bortoleto@fef.unicamp.br