

# **Serving The Healthy? The Effect Of Running Event Participation On Sport Participation And Healthy Lifestyle Adoption. A Dutch Case Study.**

Hover, P.<sup>1</sup>; Eldert, P. van<sup>1</sup>; Brito, M. de<sup>2</sup>; Middelkamp, E.<sup>2</sup>; Mitas, O.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Mulier Institute, Utrecht, The Netherlands; <sup>2</sup>Breda University of Applied Sciences, Breda, The Netherlands

p.hover@mulierinstituut.nl; p.vaneldert@mulierinstituut.nl; Brito.M@buas.nl; ellismiddelkamp@hotmail.com; ondrejmitas@gmail.com

## **Aim and Research Questions**

The popularity of the participation in running has increased spectacularly in The Netherlands during the past decades. One of the catalysts of this development on the supply side of the market is the improved professionalism, increased commercialisation and the increased diversity of mass participation running events. The interest in business runs, increased health awareness and the flexibility of running are developments on the demand side that drove up the demand for participation in running events.

Large running events lead to impacts, which differ per stakeholder. Stakeholders of running event organisers and their partners include participants, visitors, event volunteers and the local population. One of the desirable impacts of running events are a stimulating positive effect on the levels of sports participation and a healthier diet, both in the run up as well as after the event.

This study is focusses on the participants of two running events in The Netherlands. The research questions are: 1) What is the profile of the participants? 2) What are the motives for event participation? 3) What is the effect of event participation on sports participation and diet pre-event and post-event? Every question is answered for three groups of participants, that is 1) participants who ran 5 kilometres or less, 2) those who ran more than five kilometres but less than 10 and 3) participants who ran more than 10 kilometres.

## **Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

Mass participation in running events is seen as a strategy to promote sports participation (Alexandris et al., 2017; Hover & Hoeijmakers (2018) reported that 72 per cent of the adult participants in Dutch running events were stimulated to increase their level of sports participation and physical activity as a result of their event participation. Comparable evidence is also found abroad (Lane et al., 2008). Furthermore, proponents consider events as motivators for the adoption of a healthy diet (Murphy et al., 2015).

The impact of an event is what happens automatically as a result of the event, which is temporary by nature. Gratton & Preuss (2008) define legacy as the planned and unplanned, positive and negative, intangible and tangible structures created through a sport event that remain in place after the event. Legacies may change over time (Richards et al., 2013).

## **Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis**

A mixed methods research design was applied. Data were collected through an online questionnaire among a random sample of participants of the Marathon Amersfoort 2019 and the Brandloyalty Vestingloop 's-Hertogenbosch 2019. Data collection started the day after the event. Participants were invited to answer the questionnaire by means of a personal email of the event organiser. Data from 2,031 runners were collected (n=444 for 5 kilometres or less; n=814 for 6 up to and including 10 kilometres; n=773 for more than 10 kilometres). For both events semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the organiser and with the key commercial event sponsor. A representative of the Royal Dutch Athletics Federation was interviewed too.

## Results/Findings and Discussion

Preliminary analyses shows that as the event distance increases the proportion of participants who rate their own health increases too, as well as the proportion of men and older age groups. After the event participants rate their health as being much better than the average perceived health of adults in The Netherlands. Compared to the participants of the shorter distances, significantly less 10+ kilometres participants report the motive 'to improve my health'. The 10+ kilometres participants practised sports more frequently than the other participants in the period before the event. The extent to which the event stimulated to practise sports in the pre-event period does not show significant differences between the three groups. As to dietary changes in the run up to the event as a result of event participation differences between the three groups are smaller, with the proportion of healthy dietary changes slightly increasing with the increase of the event distance. There is room for improvement as regards strategic planning for the desired event legacies by the organiser and partners.

By the time of the conference more results will be presented, including results of the impact in the post-event period, results of multivariate analyses and results of the interviews, which will allow us to put forward recommendations.

## Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

Running event participation leads to substantial effects on sports participation and dietary adaptations, and that this varies per distance. Participants rate their health better after the event than the average adult person in The Netherlands. It is desired that a comprehensive understanding is gained of how the events can be used for realising the intended societal impacts, ideally leading to legacy plans with sound objectives, an evaluation programme and a legacy manager. Local athletics and running clubs and commercial event partners could play a key role in this.

## References

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