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Using heritage for long runs A discussion on the supply side of long run events staged on heritage trails

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the importance of heritage, and specifically on the trails that have a significant heritage connotation, and at the same time can serve as the setting of events that are addressed to amateur long run athletes. It explores the intrinsic relationship that connects the heritage trail with the running event, and the role of key stakeholders involved in the conceptualization and realization of such events. A gap in the literature was identified, in the way such events are recorded, processed and evaluated on such variables as impacts for the local community, burden on heritage, motivation on athletes etc. A platform for recording, processing and disseminating information is suggested to be created, so that it can act as a “book of knowledge” where best practices, lessons learned, identification of opportunities can be shared. The paper has particular value for Greece, as it is a country in which heritage trails are in abundance, while running events on heritage trails are organized, but there has been scant effort to track their influence on the amateur athletes.

Keywords: *Heritage, sport, tourism, experience, long run, Greece, impacts*

JEL Classification: L83; O14.

1. Introduction

Departure for the current paper has been a previous discussion on the experience of the amateur runners of long distance races, and the possible locus between sports heritage and cultural tourism, as these blend with the amateur runner athlete's experience (Gavrili & Vakalakis, 2015). In this discussion it became evident that the setting of the run, in this case the heritage trail, has the potential to influence the amateur runners, because of the connectedness, the memory, the identity (Coghlan & Filo, 2013) and the motivation it instills to them, when realizing the characteristics and history of the trail they run on (Gavrili & Vakalakis, 2015), as well as on the experience they have of the event (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013), as well as with the connection between sports and heritage that may be created (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005, 2015, Gibson, 1998, Gibson, Kaplanidou & Kang, 2012, Lamont, 2013). Even more, considerations for further research emerged in that paper, some of which are the following based on the observation that there is a rising trend to organize amateur running events in Greece, often accompanied with a need for setting the running trail in diverse settings: a) A research consideration on the impact that amateur running events set on the heritage trail; b) A research consideration on the impact of running events on the local destination.

2. Theoretical Review

Heritage tourism

Heritage tourism is an ever-developing theme in tourism research. Being a fairly new topic for discussion, it is often reviewed in line with cultural tourism (McKercher and du Cros, 2002; Timothy & Boyd, 2003; du Cros and McKercher, 2015). It is a multi-faced topic that touches both on demand and supply in tourism (Karagiannis & Tsoukatos, 2003; Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011). An effort has been made to connect heritage, culture and sports tourism, a topic that has been receiving growing attention (Green & Chalip, 1998; Ramshaw & Gammon, 2005 & 2015; Gibson, et al., 2012), as well as the impact of heritage and cultural tourism on the visitor (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Massara & Severino, 2013; du Cros & McKercher, 2015). In this paper heritage and cultural tourism will be viewed under the lights of the supply side, i.e. the destination and its stakeholders.

Staged authenticity

Authentication has been reviewed as an important element in sports tourism (Lamont, 2014). There has been extensive reference in the literature in relation to staged authenticity and the tourist (MacCannel, 1973; Wang, 1999; Chhabra et al., 2003; Yang & Wall, 2009; Lau, 2010; Kim et al., 2011; Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Lu et al., 2015), the tourist object (Hughes, 1995; Taylor, 2001) and the authenticity of the experience (Taylor, 2001; Lasten & Upchurch, 2012; Barnett & Deutsch, 2016). However, not so many articles have been devoted to the relationship between staged authenticity and the supply side, in other words on the destination, the local community and the heritage trail per se. There has been little reference in the literature on the connection between authenticity, built heritage and the tourism experience (Crang, 1996), authenticity, heritage and sports events (Chhabra et al., 2003; McCartney & Osti, 2007), or authenticity as experienced by the host (Zhu, 2012). An effort has been made to show the role of authenticity in connecting the supply and demand sides of cultural tourism (Apostolakis, 2003; Maoz, 2006).

Initially, the focus of this paper was to examine the extend of influence that Greek heritage trails may pose on the stakeholders involved in the conceptualization, planning and implementation of running events that are catering to amateur runner athletes, as well as the impact of these events on the heritage trails and the destination at large. The stakeholders explored are the micro-destination on which the heritage trail is located,

which, in itself comprises a collection of local stakeholders, the state authorities in the form of SEGAS¹, the athletic authority that approves centrally all athletic events, and in the form of KAS², the heritage authority that centrally controls the heritage trail, the athletic event organizers, and the amateur athletes.

Starting from the research consideration above, it is widely discussed in the literature that events act as a leverage of development in a destination (McKercher & Du Cross, 2002, Pike, 2008, Getz, 2009, Edgel & Swanson, 2013, Du Cross & McKercher, 2015). The type of such development impacts may vary, and highly depend on the event's conceptual and organizational characteristics (Bowdin et al, 2011). Furthermore, in researching for the motivational effect the running event may have on the amateur athletes, it became evident that the topic is still under research, but it seems that the trail on which the running event is set, i.e. the running trail, may play a special role in creating a sense of connectedness to the athletes (Coghlan & Filo, 2013), especially when this trail has some heritage significance for the runners, hence acting as a motivator for their decision to enlist in a run and to successfully complete it (Gavrili & Vakalakis, 2015).

Furthermore, it seems that in Greece there is a rising trend in attending running events (Petridis & Batrakoulis, 2013). The athletes' increasing participation may be a demand driver that has contributed to more running events being organized. In a separate discussion it might be interesting to explore the reasons that have led to this rising trend, especially when paired with the Greek economic crisis that seems to dissuade people from exercising through the use of expensive equipment, for the sake of more economical types of sports, simpler in tools and apparel. By the same token, given the economic crisis that has caused serious delays in constructing or maintaining stadiums and courts, it seems that running events may be facing an increased preference by the supply side, because of the fact that they do not require expensive infrastructure for their hosting and realization.

Throughout the research on the topic of running on heritage (Gavrili & Vakalakis, 2015), it has been impossible to locate an official trusted source that records, coordinates and measures the running events addressed to amateur athletes in Greece. Even the observation of the trend to organize runs in a variety of trails, often with a heritage significance to the runners, has been made on the basis of the authors' personal involvement as a result of their favorite pastime which is long running and participation in running events aimed at amateur athletes.

This observation gave food for thought for further considerations on the topic, some of which are discussed later in this paper.

Events' impacts and policy issues on the destination

The role of attractions in enticing tourists to travel has been one of the most prominent themes in tourism research (Leiper, 1990; Garrod & Fyall, 2000; McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Kusen, 2010; Romao et al., 2013; du Cros & McKercher, 2015). Equally, the impact of tourists on attractions has been widely discussed, along with the ever-important role of Cultural Heritage Managers in protecting the attractions in question (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Poria et al., 2003; Pacifico & Vogel, 2012; du Cros & McKercher, 2015). Attractions, an inclusive term to refer to trails, sites, buildings, remnants, etc. (Leiper, 1990) receive a lot of pressure when becoming the focus of the tourist's journey (Jovicic & Ivanovic, 2007); even more so, when the tourist engages in an activity that is performed on or very close to the attraction, impacting directly on the site's state and condition (Poria et al., 2003). Moreover, additional issues arise when attractions are used for activities, such as seasonality attributed to the nature of the activity (Higham & Hinch, 2002), often contributing to the destination's unpredictable future growth and development (Butler, 2009).

The topic of economic impacts on a destination has been thoroughly researched (Cooper et al., 1993; Smith, 2001; Hall, 2008; Nissan et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Edgell & Swanson, 2013). In fact, it has been one of the seminal topics in tourism. On the contrary, the focused discussion of economic impacts on cultural tourism destinations is still evolving (du Cros & McKercher, 2015).

¹ Hellenic Athletics Federation

² Central Archaeological Council and Council of Museums

Equally important is the provision of tourism policy that corresponds to the needs of the destination and protects its strengths, in this case its attractions (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Stevenson et al., 2008; Hall, 2008 & 2011; Edgell & Swanson, 2013; du Cros & McKercher, 2015). The stakeholders' relationship and involvement in cultural tourism development has been discussed, stressing the importance of this factor in the successful implementation of a tourism policy that embraces cultural tourism and does not restrain itself in the mass tourism development model (Chang et al., 1996; Nuryanti, 1996; McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Chiabai et al., 2013; du Cros & McKercher, 2015). A common theme in cultural tourism research in the attitude of the Heritage Management sector, which is often rigid and cumbersome, initially with the intention to protect the heritage, but eventually acting in antagonism with the objective of tourism managers to support the development of the community in which the heritage resides, through tourism revenue. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Heritage Management sector's protective effort is often rightful and justified, as it guards heritage from vandalism and mass-tourism over-usage that might discredit and degrade its intrinsic value (ICOMOS, 1994 in McKercher & du Cros, 2002; du Cros & McKercher, 2015).

The economic contribution of events on local communities has also been widely discussed in the literature as already explored previously in this article. It follows that a holistic tourism development, including the discourse between the local, often microscopic, communities that connect to the heritage site and the organizers of running events on heritage sites is of paramount importance.

3. Initial research objective of this paper

Taking up from previous research on the topic of organizing long run events on trails of historic and/or heritage significance addressed to amateur athletes (Gavrili & Vakalakis, 2015), the scope of this paper initially was to research the supply-side, and more specifically to identify the impacts of small to medium-range running events on the local community, even more so when these events make use of the heritage found in the vicinity in an effort to increase participation in the event. Furthermore, the paper initially aimed at investigating whether there is a difference in economic impact in the case of runs organized on original heritage trails versus runs on devised setting. For this reason, the relationship of staged authenticity with heritage in general, and sports heritage in particular, has been examined. The initial hypothesis was that long runs set on veritable heritage trails have a more significant economic impact to the local community, in contrast to long runs on devised settings.

In order to examine the hypothesis, the following methodology would be used:

a) A catalogue of long run events organized in Greece since 2010 would be devised, the source of which being the internet sites used by event organizers to publicize future events. A distinction between heritage and non-heritage settings would be drawn, the criterion being whether the title of the event would include clues that relate to the heritage setting.

b) The financial statements of the municipalities in which the long runs have been organized would be used as a tool to detect economic impacts of the long run events.

c) The organizers' site(s) would be used to draw information on participation numbers, fees, costs, etc. Any qualitative comments would be reviewed in order to draw conclusions accordingly.

The findings and the contribution of the article would be to establish a system that connects heritage long run events with economic impacts for the local community, hoping that a proliferation of information might emerge in relation to the effectiveness of long run events, which, in turn, could be useful to the local community, as well as to other stakeholders involved in the organization and the execution of the long run events.

Research obstacles

During the research phase, the following obstacles were encountered, that prove to be insurmountable.

a) Even though AIMS³ (2016) provides a definition for long runs that applies for professional athletes, there is no official definition for long run events addressed to amateur athletes, with the exception of the marathon run. The sites of AIMS and SEGAS were researched, without finding a successful, comprehensive definition or typology that encompasses all types of running addressed to amateur athletes. Due to the lack of standard definitions provided by the supervisory local and international authorities, the effort to create a catalogue by recording the types of runs advertised on the internet has proven fruitless. It was observed that organizers tend to create a variety of events loosely characterized as “run”, so that they can be easily marketed and may create a brand for the event, often connecting it to the place of the run, hence the heritage trail, and not with the type of the run.

Even more, no one source of information was identified that collects and publishes all scheduled events. The portals used to collect the information for this article were the “Running News”, the “Running Magazine”, and the e-version of the “Runner” magazine. These portals were chosen on the basis of personal observation as to the comprehensiveness and proliferation of information they contain, in comparison to other portals of similar aim. It was observed that information provision is fragmented, and neither widely nor readily available. The portals, being proprietary to running enterprises, cannot be held responsible for any changes in the schedule of running events, as their main role is to publicize events organized by third parties.

b) As already noted previously, the impact of events on the destination is undoubtable, despite the fact that the research on the impact of small and medium sized events on the micro-scale of the local community is not in abundance. The methodology of this paper suggested that the economic impacts of small to medium-sized long run events would be gauged from the financial statements of the municipalities, in the jurisdiction of which the run was organized. The idea was further encouraged because the runs are often organized under the auspice of the municipality, a characteristic that secures the smooth operation of the event in such crucial sectors as local traffic diversion, police, first aid and security involvement, etc.

However, great difficulty was encountered in trying to identify the economic impact of events on the municipalities’ financial statements. The municipalities follow the provision for disclosing financial statements as specified in the respective law, in which case they are not obliged to record their finances in such detail (Akalides & Moschopoulos, 2008; Loizidis & Patsouratis, 2008).

c) In an effort to collect the relevant information directly from the event organizers’ sites, it was found that there is no uniformity in the type or format of the information provided; at times it was observed that crucial information pertaining to the event prior to its actual holding was missing from the site. Even more, there was no information connecting the event with the local community after the event was over. The main piece of information was reporting the results of the run, without giving any information on the amount of spectators, runners’ local spending, and impact of the event organizers in the local community either in the form of revenue, donation, or even contribution to local taxes. Moreover, no mentioning was done on the environmental impacts that the local community had to undergo for the sake of the event, despite the logical, yet not stated conclusion, that the amount of runners, as deducted by the runners’ entry list, would create congestion in the area. It is sometimes ironic to think that the running event organizers and the running portals are celebrating the fact that the running movement has had a steady increase since 2010 (RunningNews, 17/8/2015; RunRepeat, 2015), but there is no effort to measure the results of this increase, neither on the positive side, as expressed in economic impacts, nor on the negative side, as expressed in environmental impacts to the local community which hosts and eventually facilitates the realization of the running event.

³ Association of International Marathons and Distance Races

It has become obvious that the exception to the above has been Athens Authentic Marathon which provides an abundance of data, both in terms of the demand (number of athletes, performance levels, records, etc.) and in terms of the supply in the sense of impacts of the event on the local community and to the tourism development of Greece at large (RunningNews, 2015).

4. Discussion

A variety of stakeholders are involved in the organization and execution of small and medium-size long run events, such as amateur runners, event organizers, destinations, and state authorities. Using as a starting point the economic impacts of the Authentic Marathon, as they have been recently presented (Tsiartas, 2015), it becomes evident through the literature that athletic events in which amateur athletes are invited to participate have a positive economic impact for the area of destination in which the events are held (Getz, 2009, Bowdin et al., 2011, Edgel & Swanson, 2013). Keeping record of such events and the positive and negative impact they may have on each stakeholder group may offer a valuable source of suggestions and recommendations for future events in Greece and / or in other countries with a similarly reach collection of heritage trails. However, to the extent that the author of the current paper could research it, there is no one mechanism that records, processes and evaluates the multiplicity of running events that are organized in Greece. Moreover, one important dimension that should be considered is the impact of such an event on the heritage trail per se, and how a potentially negative impacts could impair the heritage trail's significance. Examples of past similar events have shown that there are heritage trails that, despite their intrinsic merit and hence attractiveness to runners, cannot withstand the wear and tear that comes as a natural consequence of the running event (Timothy & Boyd, 2003, Du Cross and McKercher, 2015).

On the other hand, a commonly recurring problem that athletes face is the low standards of organization of running events, that becomes evident in various facets of such events, with varying degrees of importance and impact on the athletes themselves, the heritage trail, the destination stakeholders, the event organizers and the finally the state authorities. Problems as simple and often silly as petty thefts of runners' belongings, transportation of the runners to the site, especially when it is of significant heritage and vehicle access is restricted, pricing of the event to reflect the services offered to the athletes, runners' supplies that act as a form of economic leakage if they are not produced in the destination, management of waste that is incurred as a result of the run, are often dealt with partially or not at all. On a varying degree of importance, other problems may be associated with the natural wear and tear of the heritage trail, that is multiplied by the runners' pounding simultaneously, the environmental pollution brought by runners and possibly their spectators, accommodation issues that may arise as a result of lack of capacity in the area, over-commercialization of the event by sponsors in a way which may not be fitting to the heritage trail's intrinsic value, or, on the contrary, missed opportunities for increased revenue as a result of the event's merchandise. Last, but not at all least, a common problem in the Greek economy, tax evasion of the event organizers, local businesses, transportation organizations or any other stakeholder that may perceive of the event as an opportunity for fast, unrecorded profit. With the exception of the Authentic Marathon event organizer who is set up and follows international specifications for similar events, many running events in Greece are far from being organized taking into consideration all stakeholders involved.

A common problem faced in heritage that becomes accessible for visitors, in this case athletes, is the agreement over the authorities that will be responsible for the heritage venue. As it is now, there is a big gap between heritage managers and tourism managers, in this case event organizers. On the one hand, heritage managers are very, often too, protective of the heritage trail, for reasons that are widely understood, accepted, and often self-explanatory and have to do with the conservation, the study and the establishment of appropriate rules and etiquette while visiting the heritage trail (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; KAS, 2015). On the contrary, tourism managers and event organizers present an excellent opportunity for driving revenue to the, usually underfinanced, heritage site, heritage trail in this case, that the heritage managers could utilize wisely in financing further the study and conservation of the site/trail. The difficulty resides in the different

starting points of the two sides, in the diverse, often contradictory, objectives the two groups have for the site/heritage and the value they associate to it. An electronic platform that records data of running events may be a starting point for bridging the two groups, of which the contribution could be to keep a systematic record of heritage trail runs, to provide for a data-base where improvement of processes, best practices, positive and negative impacts could be shared on the basis of information that could be collected, processed and disseminated back to the stakeholders of the heritage trails. As mentioned above, this coordinating platform could involve a variety of stakeholders representing all sides, such as SEGAS, KAS, agencies representing heritage management and conservation, and of course the destinations on the territory of which the heritage trail is located and have the most benefit from the event and the most impact from the fact that, in terms of land use, the heritage trail cannot be used to anything else other than admiration by scientists, and – in the best of the cases – tourists.

In conclusion, to the author's knowledge and in reviewing the international academic data bases, there is no systematic recording of the running events that are organized on heritage trails in Greece, nor any subsequent study of the running events' impacts (positive and negative) on the heritage trail or on the local community. An initial attempt to tap on the subject has proven unsuccessful, because the information on the Greek amateur running movement is scant and scattered among different state authorities and running event organizers. Therefore, the original contribution of this paper is that it identified a gap in the relevant literature that might contribute in the systematization, identification of opportunities, lessons learned, best practices of running events that are organized in heritage trails and are addressed to the amateur athletes. A systematized recording and processing of running events organized on heritage trail could further reveal opportunities for growth for the local destinations in a direct fashion, and for the country as a whole in an indirect or even induced fashion, in the manner that economic impacts of events tourism tend to diffuse initially in the local society and are eventually induced in the state economy (Getz, 2009, Edgel & Swanson, 2013).

5. Limitations & Conclusions

The case of Greece as a setting for heritage trail long runs has been briefly examined. The main limitation of this research was the fragmentation of the topics when discussed in the literature. A theoretical review was conducted by using only international data bases. To the author's knowledge the topic of systematic recording and processing the running events that are organized on heritage trails in Greece has not been dealt with in an international level, in English-speaking academic databases. This sets a limitation in case such an endeavor has been discussed in the local literature in the Greek language that is not accessible to the international scholars.

In concluding, it seems that there may be area for Greece in exploiting such opportunities of events of this type, as it may be argued that, if there were such a systematic recording and processing of information aiming to create a "book of knowledge" of best practices, lessons learned, etc. it might contribute to the for the prompt identification of opportunities and for the optimization of impacts for Greece, which is a country in which heritage trails are found in abundance. Even more, the sharing of knowledge through a systematized effort could be of value to all stakeholders involved, be that the major ones, such as SEGAS and KAS, or smaller, more local ones, such as the destination's profit-oriented and non-for-profit organizations. Last, but not at all least, the amateur runners could be profited, by being offered the chance to participate in a well-organized running event, and at the same time to contribute to the destination's economic development, while they themselves become inspired by running on heritage (Gavrili & Vakalakis, 2015). Given the ever increasing popularity of long runs in places of significance, it would be interesting to further explore whether it is a specific type of heritage (ex. associated with a specific historical aspect) or a wider concept of heritage, such as a wine route, gastronomy fair, or a cultural or spiritual site that may equally motivate athletes (ibid).

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