

## EXPLORATION OF GENDER PATTERNS AND DIFFERENCES IN ENDURANCE SPORTS EVENT TOURISM

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**Abstract:** Event tourism represents one of the rapidly expanding segments within the realm of sports tourism globally. This research aims to investigate the emerging patterns in sports event participation and sports tourism among endurance athletes, with a specific emphasis on gender distinctions. Using a survey methodology, a dataset comprising 609 endurance athletes was analyzed to examine their sporting habits, behaviors, motivations, and attitudes. Special attention was given to preferences for sports events and tourism-related aspects. The findings indicate that female athletes tend to prioritise external motivational factors more than their male counterparts. In terms of sports event preferences, female respondents attributed significantly higher importance to factors such as race accessibility, affordability, and program offerings. Regarding travel behavior, female athletes exhibited greater inclinations towards traveling with family and supporters, as well as planning supplementary tourism activities around their race engagements. The study underscores the importance of recognizing gender-specific preferences and motivations in sports event participation and sports tourism among endurance athletes, highlighting the need for tailored strategies to enhance engagement and satisfaction among both male and female participants.

**Keywords:** sports event tourism, sports participation, endurance sports, gender, sports tourism

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, global changes and societal characteristics have significantly altered the domains of sports and tourism. Longer-term health provisions such as social distancing, increased leisure time, confinement, and the easing of travel restrictions have all contributed to a continual surge in the popularity of sports and tourism (COMCEC, 2022; UNWTO, 2022), concomitantly amplifying the prominence of sports tourism. It is crucial to highlight that "sports and tourism are among the most sought-after leisure experiences," significantly contributing to the promotion of economic growth (Getz – Page, 2016; Myburgh, 2017; Nyikana and Tichaawa, 2018; 2020). Sports tourism, emerging at the intersection of these fields, is a multi-billion dollar global industry and the fastest-growing segment within the global tourism and travel sector, realizing significant economic growth (Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Myburgh, 2017; McKay et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2024).

According to UNWTO (2024) statistical analyses, sports tourism is responsible for 10% of the expenditures realized and generated in the global tourism sector. Forecasts reflect the prominent role of sports tourism, with a projected growth rate of 17.5% between 2023 and 2030 (UNWTO, 2024). It is a fact that Covid reduced the desire and opportunity to travel in the field of sports tourism as well, and due to restrictions on participation in competitions (), similar to what research has confirmed for other tourism products (Kumar and Nafi, 2020, Korinth and Ranasinghe, 2020). However, athletes and active participants in sporting events generated increasing demand in the market again after the restrictions (Meditinos et al., 2021), which was confirmed by a Croatian study among runners (Hemmonsbey et al., 2021), as well as being proven for other tourism products (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021; Pahrudin et al., 2022, Cehan and Iațu, 2024).

The complexity of sports tourism is demonstrated by its multifaceted positive effects. These include instances where sports activities serve as either primary or secondary motivations during travel. Additionally, it encompasses tourism

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related to various sizes of sports events, attracting tourists as participants or spectators (UNWTO, 2024). Among these, sports events represent one of the most dynamically developing segments of sports tourism worldwide (Neirotti, 2003; Getz, 2008; Myburgh, 2017). This is partly due to sporting events' appeal to a wide range of audiences and their ability to expand tourism geographically and seasonally (Gibson et al., 2012).

Moving masses intra- and intercontinentally, sports tourism plays a key role in promoting economic, social, and environmental actions, accelerating development, and leaving a long-lasting positive legacy. However, to generate real revenues, these events must be both attractive and affordable for specific target markets (Myburgh, 2017). They must incorporate the sporting event in a manner that satisfies the needs of specific travelers while also integrating additional tourism sectors (Candrea and Ispas, 2010). This study aims to examine the patterns related to sports event tourism among endurance athletes, with particular attention to gender differences. Specifically, we seek to map and analyze the attitudes and preferences associated with the sports tourism behavior of endurance athletes, focusing on event characteristics, travel preferences, and spending patterns. By understanding these factors, we can provide valuable insights for event organizers, tourism-related businesses, and local governments to develop more effective strategies and services.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports tourism can be categorized based on the individual's role, distinguishing between active sports tourism, where individuals actively participate in sporting activities, and passive sports tourism, where individuals attend these events as spectators. Getz (2013) emphasizes that sports tourism encompasses sporting events involving both amateur and professional participants, as well as spectators. Thus, sporting events are spatial-temporal phenomena shaped by the unique interactions of location, people, and various systems, including design and programs (Getz, 2008). Understanding the motivation and behavior of sports tourists is crucial for destinations and tourism-related businesses to improve their services and develop effective marketing strategies (Gibson, 2005). Dixon et al. (2012) highlighted the necessity of examining the socio-demographic characteristics, travel habits, and the impacts of these factors on different groups of sports tourists. This approach enables the creation of profiles that assist event organizers in developing appropriate tourism products, services, and packages, ultimately leading to greater benefits for both the event and its surrounding environment.

Parra-Camacho et al. (2019) examined the sporting habits and motivational patterns of participants in urban running events. They identified five dimensions in the motives for participating in running competitions: physical-psychological, interest in running events, leisure time and social recognition-related, competition-challenge, and material motives related to prizes. Gender differences in sports participation have been widely studied. While various sports activities may be categorized as feminine, masculine, or neutral, sports in general are typically considered a masculine domain (Riemer and Viso, 2003). Numerous studies indicate that men exhibit higher levels of physical activity and participation in physical activities compared to women (Getz and McConnell, 2011; Stamm and Lamprecht, 2011). Additionally, men are not only more likely to engage in sports activities but also spend more on sports than women (Lamb et al., 1992).

This pattern is similarly observed in endurance sports. Scheer (2019) examined participation in ultra-endurance sports and found that, although there is a global increasing trend in participation among both men and women, men participate in such events at a significantly higher rate. Moreover, the gender gap in participation appears to be widening over the years. However, it's worth noting that this study may not account for regional variations in participation trends or explore the underlying reasons for this widening gap. In contrast, a Spanish study showed the dominance of female participants (Ramos-Ruiz et al., 2024). Regarding motivational factors, studies have consistently shown that males and females exhibit different motives for participation in physical activities (Morris et al., 1995; Egli et al., 2011; Chowdhury, 2012; Molanorouzi et al., 2015, Ramos-Ruiz et al. 2024). For instance, Egli et al. (2011) found that male college students are more motivated by internal factors such as challenges and competition, while females are more motivated by extrinsic factors like weight management and appearance.

However, these studies often focus on general physical activities and may not fully capture the nuances specific to endurance sports. There are studies that highlight the different motivations of female and male runners and running event participants, with results showing that women are more motivated by weight maintenance, self-esteem, and psychological coping motives (Malchrowicz-Moško and Poczta, 2019; Hanson et al., 2015). Ramos-Ruiz et al. (2024), examining the motivations of Cordoba half-marathon runners, not only pointed out the gender difference, confirming that out of 416 participants, female participants dominated, as they were more motivated than men to compete and surpass themselves. At the same time, this recent study identified two new motivational factors in addition to the previous ones: one is "inclusivity at various levels" and the other is "posting of images on social networks".

The importance of event characteristics such as accessibility, reputation, and organizational aspects has been highlighted in several studies. Alexandris et al. (2011) categorized participation constraints into two major groups, with accessibility playing a significant role among external factors. Miragaia and Martins (2015) emphasized the crucial roles of proximity, accessibility, and cost in the choice of winter sport destinations. While these studies provide valuable insights, they may not fully account for the unique aspects of endurance sports events.

Scheer's (2019) examination of ultra-endurance sports reveals a significant increase in participation over the last 25 years, particularly among women and older athletes. This trend reflects broader societal shifts towards health consciousness and the pursuit of extreme personal challenges. A Polish study confirms the importance of health-related motivation, which is particularly significant for runners and endurance athletes who have gone through Covid infection. The research demonstrated that for these individuals, health orientation, psychological coping, and self-esteem are the primary motivations (Rozmiarek et al., 2022). However, the article's focus on participation numbers lacks a deeper

exploration of the underlying factors driving these changes, such as cultural influences or the role of social media in popularizing these events. Additionally, while it highlights the growing participation of women, it doesn't sufficiently address the barriers they may still face or how these events are adapting to meet their needs. Ben Dori and Kemp (2020) further explore the rise of women in endurance sports, identifying increasing female participation as a significant trend. They provide a more nuanced analysis by considering factors like community support and changing perceptions of female athletes. Nevertheless, their study could benefit from a broader geographical scope, as the trends observed may differ significantly across different regions, influenced by varying cultural norms and economic conditions.

The UNWTO (2024) report on sports tourism highlights the sector's rapid growth and its substantial economic impact. This report underscores the role of sports events in boosting local economies and fostering international tourism. However, the report tends to focus on the economic benefits, somewhat overlooking the environmental and social implications of mass sports tourism, such as the strain on local resources and potential disruption to communities. Furthermore, while it mentions the economic gains, it does not sufficiently discuss how these benefits are distributed among different stakeholders, which is crucial for understanding the broader impact of sports tourism. Getz (2008) emphasize the increasing importance of studying gender differences in the context of organizing sports events, whether in terms of design, production, or management. The information obtained from such studies proves crucial in developing effective sports tourism services, sports events tailored to meet the needs of consumers, and marketing strategies designed for more efficient sales.

This study aims to address some of the gaps in the existing literature by providing a more thorough understanding of gender differences in endurance sports tourism. By focusing on motivations, preferences, and economic behaviors specifically related to endurance sports events, we hope to contribute valuable insights to the field of sports tourism research and practice. Our findings could help event organizers, tourism businesses, and policymakers develop more targeted and effective strategies to cater to the diverse needs of male and female endurance athletes, potentially leading to increased participation, satisfaction, and economic impact of endurance sports events.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

During the data collection process, purposive sampling was employed (Neuman, 2007), as the aim of the research was to examine the characteristics, habits, and attitudes of individuals engaged in specific endurance sports (Figure 1.). Participation in the study required individuals to be 18 years or older, actively involved in sports, and to have participated at least once in the past year in an endurance sports competition of their preference. Athletes were provided the opportunity to complete the questionnaire either in person at various domestically held endurance race venues or via email sent by race organizers, until the end of the 2022-2023 competitive season.

The questionnaire design aimed to gather comprehensive information regarding participants' demographic characteristics, socioeconomic backgrounds, sporting habits, and attitudes. This facilitated detailed examination of correlations between different factors and emerging patterns within the research. Accordingly, the questionnaire was structured into three main segments: basic personal information, habits related to sporting activities, and questions focusing on sporting attitudes. Following data cleansing, 609 valid responses were available for further analysis. Analyses predominantly revolved around descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequencies, etc.) to gain insight into participants' general characteristics and provide a foundation for subsequent investigations. Various correlation analyses, such as contingency table analyses and independent samples t-tests, were employed to explore gender differences.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to document information regarding participants' gender distribution, age group distribution, residency, and most frequently practiced endurance sports. Additionally, these data served a validating purpose, ensuring that adult participants engaged in endurance sports competitions were also examined.

In addition to descriptive statistics, correlation analyses were conducted to methodically uncover differences and similarities between data groups. The primary focus of the research was to examine gender differences evident in endurance sports. Therefore, the analysis extended to potential disparities in sporting habits, expenditure propensity, etc., between the two genders. Cross-tabulation analysis, including Pearson's chi-square test, was employed as part of structural examination and validation methods. Furthermore, independent samples t-tests were conducted for the two groups.

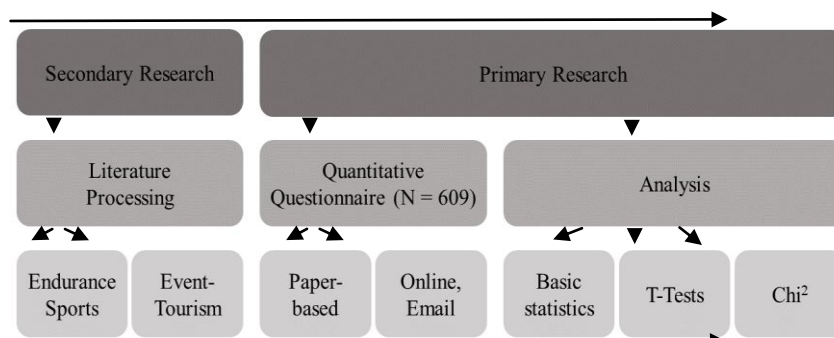


Figure 1. Research methodology

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The statistical data summarizing the most significant demographic characteristics of the sample (N=609) are presented in Table 1. In terms of the gender distribution of respondents, it can be stated that the sample exhibited an

optimal representation, as the database encloses data from 49.43% male and 50.57% female athletes. On the one hand, demonstrating such gender distribution is undoubtedly advantageous as it renders our sample population suitable for the study of gender patterns. On the other hand, given that the questionnaire was administered among endurance athletes (at race venues; distributed via email to registered competitors by organizers), this outcome corroborates recent developments in endurance sports, indicating an increasing interest among women in such disciplines (Joyner, 2017; Scheer, 2019; Ben Dori and Kemp, 2020). The age distribution within the age groups presented a more diversified picture. However, the results align with the trend observed in endurance competitions, indicating that athletes participating in such disciplines predominantly belong to the middle age group (Scheer, 2019). Based on the regional overview, it can be observed that athletes from all regions of Hungary were represented in the sample. The distribution pattern however indicates a predominance of individuals from northern regions among endurance athletes.

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the sample (N=609)  
\*Based on the exchange rates of the Hungarian National Bank on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Demographics	Category	Distribution
Gender	Male	49.43%
	Female	50.57%
Age	18-30 yrs	10.67%
	31-40 yrs	29.23%
	41-50 yrs	49.26%
	51 yrs or above	10.84%
Region	Northern Hungary	17.73%
	Northern Great Plain	12.48%
	Southern Great Plain	9.85%
	Central Hungary	33.99%
	Western Transdanubia	11.49%
	Central Transdanubia	7.06%
	Southern Transdanubia	7.39%
Place of Residence	Capital City	20.85%
	County Seat	27.59%
	Town	35.14%
	Village	16.42%
Highest level of Education	University	67.98%
	High School	10.84%
	Technical School	16.91%
	Vocational School	3.94%
	Primary School	0.33%
Labor market Status	Entrepreneur	14.78%
	Employed	76.68%
	Student	2.30%
	Job Seeker	2.46%
	Retired	1.81%
	On Parental Leave	1.97%
Per capita net income*	Below 250 Eur	2.46%
	251 – 350 Eur	11.99%
	351 – 450 Eur	15.27%
	451 – 550 Eur	17.73%
	551 – 650 Eur	15.76%
651 Eur or above	36.78%	

In the case of the highest level of education attained, more than half of the sample (67.98%) is considered highly educated with a university degree, while athletes with only primary school education represented a negligible percentage (0.33%). As of their labor market status, the vast majority of the sample are in an employed status (76.68%), with 14.78% being entrepreneurs. Additionally, there are negligible percentages of students (2.30%), job seekers (2.46%), retirees (1.81%), or athletes on parental leave (1.97%) pre-sent. This distribution was expected based on the age categories and the high physical demands of endurance sports. Based on the distribution of per capita net income, the majority of the sample (36.78%) were represented from the highest income category, while the least were represented at the bottom of the list from the lowest income category (2.46%).

Due to the pronounced specificity of the sport discipline, examining the attitudes and habits of endurance athletes necessitates mapping out the sports-specific profile. Based on the sporting categories, the basic population was divided into two major segments. One group consisted of competitors exclusively engaged in endurance running events (e.g. road, cross-country, trail, or ultramarathon running), while the other group encompassed multi-sport athletes who participate in multiple disciplines, including triathlon, cycling, or even obstacle course racing.

As depicted in Table 2, based on the distribution according to sporting categories, the sample consists of 57.64% athletes exclusively engaged in endurance running, while 42.36% are multisport athletes. Based on the competition

experiences, the following picture emerged regarding the competitors. On average, the sample started engaging in endurance sports activities 9.31 years ago (standard deviation: 5.99), with some competitors indicating their involvement in the sport as early as 20 years ago. Regarding competitive participation, the average duration of involvement in competitions is 7.76 years (standard deviation: 5.70). Concerning participation in endurance competitions per year (median: 5; mode: 5) (Table 3.), the highest percentage (40.23%) participates in such events 5-9 times annually, followed by those participating 5 times or fewer (33.00%), 10-14 times (18.56%), 20 times or more (5.75%), and 15-19 times (2.46%).

Table 2. The sporting characteristics of the sample (N=609)

Demographics	Category	Distribution
Sporting categories	Runners	57.64%
	Multisport athletes	42.36%
Participation in competitions per year	Less than 5	33.00%
	5 – 9	40.23%
	10 – 14	18.56%
	15 – 19	2.46%
	More than 20	5.75%
Competitive level	Beginner	7.26%
	Average	49.17%
	Advanced	26.97%
	High	7.88%
	Veteran	8.71%
Aim	Challenges	32.28%
	Fitness	60.63%
	Social	7.09%

The frequency of participation in competitions indicates that the sample consistently and purposefully attends these events (Cumm.: 67.00% participate in more than 5 races annually), making it a lifestyle choice that integrates into their leisure and consequently travel habits, generating a high number of yearly trips and thus a constant demand for endurance competitions. This ensures organizers a consumer base necessary for their operating.

Regarding the level of competition, based on their self-reporting, nearly half of the athletes consider themselves to be at an average level (49.17%), followed by 26.97% at an advanced level, with approximately equal proportions considering themselves to be beginners (7.26%), high-level competitors (7.88%), and veterans (8.71%). As for the primary motivation for participation, the sports and fitness value of the competitions was highlighted most prominently (60.63%), followed by the physical demands of the races and the challenges they present (32.28%), and the social aspect of sports events (7.09%).

After establishing the basic athlete profile, we further examined the attitudes of the population segmented by gender. As seen in Figure 2, gender patterns appear in all three questions. Regarding their sporting discipline, in exclusively running athletes females were more involved (53.8%), while in multisport athletes higher percentage of male athletes (53.9%) were found. It is interesting to note that in terms of competitive level, between Beginner and Advanced athletes, as the level increases, the higher percentage of male competitors are present, while on the top- (High), and Veteran level the split is equal. The result also indicates that efforts to eliminate gender inequality in endurance sports are becoming evident, as an increasing number of female athletes can be observed at entry levels (Joyner, 2017; Scheer, 2019; Ben Dori and Kemp, 2020). This trend is undoubtedly positive, not only for the sustainability of endurance sport event organizers but also for the enhancement of competition and performance regarding the sport.

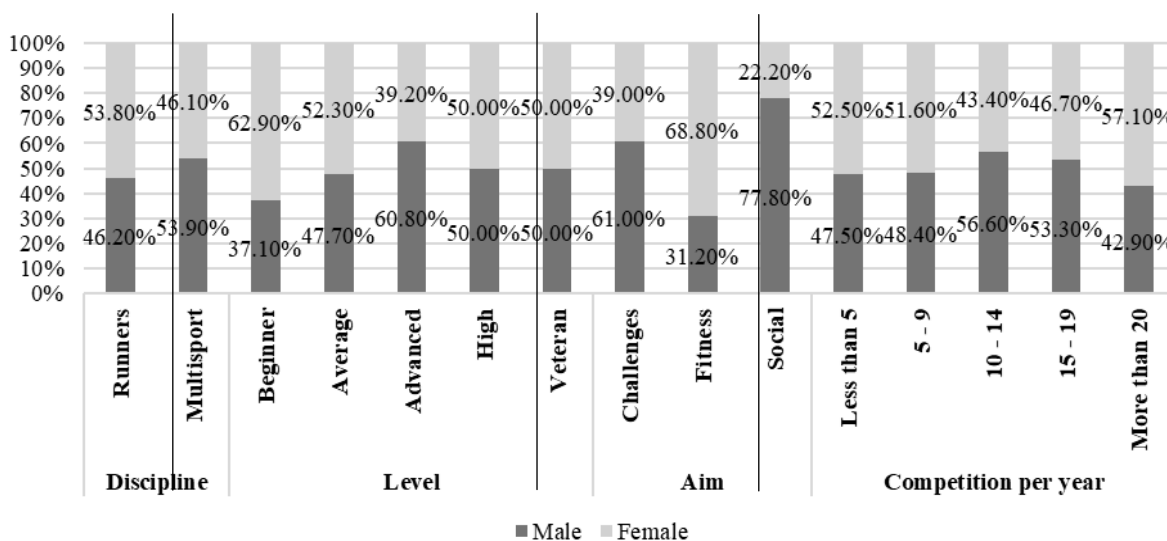


Figure 2. The sporting profiles based on gender (N=609)

Looking at the background motive or aim of the respondents, a noticeably higher per-centage of female respondents indicated that they compete with a focus on fitness (68.8%), whereas male respondents were more likely to identify with competing for challenge (61.0%) and social purposes (77.8%). The results are consistent with the main thesis of many sports and gender research findings, namely that males and females exhibit different motives for participation in physical activities. Furthermore, the results also align with the notion that certain motivational factors play a more significant role for each gender (Morris et al., 1995; Egli et al., 2011; Chowdhury, 2012; Molanorouzi et al., 2015). Egli et al., (2011) in their research state for example that male college students are more motivated by internal factors (challenges, strength, competition), while females are more motivated by extrinsic factors, such as weight management, appearance and fitness. Chowdhury (2012) presented similar findings, highlighting that male athletes reported higher motivation for challenge and affiliation, whereas female athletes reported higher motivation for appearance.

Morris et al. (1995) found that the strongest discriminating factors between the genders sporting motives were challenge, health and status. Further explaining that females rated health higher, while males regarded challenge and status more important. Regarding the frequency of competition, gender differences followed the pattern of competitive levels. Although there were no significant differences between the two genders, as with the competitive levels, men were represented at a higher percentage among advanced and high-level competitors. In contrast, the gender distribution among veterans was largely equal. Similarly, in terms of frequency, men were more likely to report competing 10–14 or 15–19 times per year. However, at the highest level, this difference was no longer evident.

To further analyze gender differences, beyond the athletic profile, we deemed it essential to examine preferences related to the endurance sports events. We analyzed these attitudes through five major dimensions, each represented by three statements. This allowed us to assess the importance of the accessibility, reputation, sports value, core- and supplementary programs, and organizational aspects surrounding these events (Table 3.). Respondents were asked to choose which factor is important to them regarding an event. Initially, we evaluated the results comprehensively across the entire sample, followed by a gender-specific analysis. Based on the responses from the entire population, the five most important criteria were the well-organized nature of the event (O1) (72.2%), easy accessibility (A2) (72.2%), affordability of the related costs (A1) (70.8%), the challenge presented (S1) (70.6%), and the proximity of the event (A3) (47.3%).

It is important to highlight that for the entire sample, all three statements within the accessibility dimension were among the most highly valued event characteristics. The importance of accessibility is reflected in numerous studies related to sports events and competitions. Alexandris et al. (2011) categorize participation constraints into two major groups, with accessibility playing a significant role among external factors (Hungenberg et al., 2013). In their examination of the relationship between leisure time involvement and psychological commitment, Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) also highlight the significance of accessibility as a personal moderator. Myburgh et al. (2018) emphasize Iwasaki and Havitz's thesis in their study on the commitment of endurance athletes, in which they state that the accessibility of a sports event plays a key role in participation. In their research focusing on the choice of winter sport destinations, Miragaia and Martins (2015) highlight the crucial roles of proximity, accessibility, and cost. The importance of affordability and the level of registration fees is also emphasized by Fotiadis et al. (2016) in their study on cycling competitions.

In terms of gender differences (Table 3.) across the five dimension two major differences were found. Females regarded significantly more important the affordability of the related costs of the events (eg. registration and travel expenses) (A1) (F: 76.6%, M: 64.8%) ( $p=0.001$ ), and the charitable purpose of the event (P3) (F: 42.9%; M: 28.5%) ( $p=0.000$ ). While below the significant threshold value, there are tendency like differences in other event characteristics preferences as well. Females rated more than 5 percent higher the importance of the event accessibility (A2), and the well-organized nature of the event (A3), but scored higher on the different available categories (O1) and the supplementary activities and attractions of the event (P2) as well. While males rated higher the importance of the challenge presented (S1) and the annuality of the events (O2). The former result corroborates to those presented earlier in Figure 2, in which men indicated "challenge" as a motivation for competitions at higher percentage than women (F: 31.0%; M: 69.0%).

Table 3. The importance of different event characteristics, based on gender (N=609)

Dimension		Statement	Male	Female	Sig.
Accessibility, affordability	A1	The registration for the event and the travel expenses are affordable.	64.80%	<b>76.60%</b>	<b>0.001</b>
	A2	The event is easily accessible.	69.40%	75.00%	0.147
	A3	The event is close to my hometown.	48.50%	46.10%	0.571
Reputation, attractiveness	R1	The event receives significant media coverage and publicity.	3.00%	2.60%	0.810
	R2	The event has a good reputation and international recognition.	32.20%	32.10%	1.000
	R3	The event attracts the world's top endurance athletes.	7.30%	6.20%	0.629
Sports value	S1	The event presents a challenge for me.	72.40%	68.80%	0.374
	S2	The event helps me qualify for other events.	13.60%	13.60%	1.000
	S3	The event offers cash prizes.	3.00%	2.90%	1.000
Programs	P1	The event includes 'pre-events' that cater to the entire family (e.g., fun runs, junior events).	8.60%	8.10%	0.884
	P2	The event venue offers numerous activities and attractions.	19.90%	23.10%	0.375
	P3	Participation in the event serves charitable purposes.	28.60%	<b>42.90%</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Event, organizing characteristics	O1	The event offers various categories including professional, amateur etc.	19.30%	24.70%	0.118
	O2	The event takes place annually.	24.90%	20.50%	0.208
	O3	The event is well-organized.	69.40%	75.00%	0.147

Following the examination of attitudes related to competitions, we also investigated travel behavior associated with events, analyzing both the entire sample and the data broken down by gender (Table 4). Seven items were formulated, which athletes rated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 5 meant "strongly agree."

Based on these ratings, the highest average score for the entire sample was for travel planning to accommodate competitions (T2) (Overall Mean = 3.29; Std. = 1.28), followed by traveling with family and friends (T7) (Overall Mean = 3.18; Std. = 1.25), and travel opportunities provided by the competitions (T1) (Overall Mean = 3.16; Std. = 1.26). Holiday planning around sporting events (T4) (Overall Mean = 2.88; Std. = 1.23) and visiting tourist attractions besides the competitions (T5) (Overall Mean = 2.82; Std. = 1.29) were in the middle of the list.

The lowest ratings were for visiting attractions and destinations (T6) (Overall Mean = 2.69; Std. = 1.36) and returning to the competition location for vacation purposes (T3) (Overall Mean = 2.60; Std. = 1.22).

Table 4. Event participation and the travel behaviour, based on gender (N=609)

	Statement	t - value	p - value	Mean	Male	Female
T1	Endurance sports competitions offer opportunities for extensive travel.	-1.601	0.110	3.16	3.08	3.24
T2	I plan my trips to accommodate my competitions.	-1.675	0.094	3.29	3.21	3.38
T3	I intend to return to the destination where I participated in the race for vacation purposes.	-1.678	0.092	2.60	2.51	2.68
T4	I plan holidays around sports activities.	-2.395	<b>0.017</b>	2.88	2.76	<b>3.00</b>
T5	I visit tourist attractions before, during, and/or after participating in endurance events.	-2.616	<b>0.009</b>	2.82	2.68	<b>2.95</b>
T6	I plan my sports participation to include visits to various attractions and destinations.	-2.884	<b>0.004</b>	2.69	2.53	<b>2.84</b>
T7	Family and friends can accompany me to endurance events.	-2.925	<b>0.004</b>	3.18	3.03	<b>3.32</b>

Gender differences were observed in four instances (Table 4). Female athletes rated travel with family and friends (T7) significantly higher. Additionally, they also rated tourism-related activities organized around the competition significantly higher (T4, T5, T6). These results underscore a nuanced aspect of female athletes' approach to event-tourism, revealing a multifaceted engagement beyond the confines of the sporting competition itself. The tendency of female athletes to integrate tourism-related activities into their competition travel planning, such as organizing holidays around competitions and visiting attractions before and after the event, suggests a broader perspective on their athletic pursuits. This behavior aligns with the broader concept of sport tourism, wherein individuals engage in travel activities for the purpose of participating in or observing sports events, but also seek to explore the cultural, recreational, and leisure opportunities available at the destination (Kruger and Saayman, 2013; 2015; Zarotis, 2019).

The inclination of female athletes towards such integrated travel experiences reflects their desire to maximize the benefits derived from participation in sports events beyond the competitive aspect. It underscores their recognition of competition travel as an opportunity for holistic personal enrichment, encompassing not only athletic performance but also cultural immersion, leisure, and social engagement (Getz and Andersson, 2010; Lamont and Kennelly, 2012).

Beyond travel behavior, we also examined the spending profiles of athletes (Table 5). For this purpose, we identified seven areas related to their sport, each rated on a Likert-scale from 1 to 5 to indicate the intensity of annual spending, where 1 represented the lowest and 5 the highest expenditure. Within these seven dimensions, we naturally included spending related to competition travel (C1) and registration fees (C2). Additionally, we identified areas related to preparation, maintenance, and improvement of sports performance (e.g., gym membership, trainer) (C3), sports equipment (whether clothing (C6) or gear (C5)), as well as contributions to the overall well-being of athletes (Dietary supplements (C4); Health services (C7)).

Table 5. Annual sports related spendings, based on gender (N=609)

	Statement	t - value	p - value	Mean	Male	Female
C1	Travel-related costs (travel expenses, accommodation)	1.548	0.122	4.45	4.61	4.30
C2	Registration fees (event and competition expenses).	2.267	<b>0.024</b>	2.50	<b>2.64</b>	2.36
C3	Gym membership, trainer (offline, online, personal)	-2.036	<b>0.042</b>	2.29	2.12	<b>2.46</b>
C4	Dietary supplements (vitamins, proteins, etc.)	-0.249	0.804	2.43	2.41	2.44
C5	Sports equipment, gears (bicycles-, weights, etc.)	4.757	<b>0.000</b>	2.27	<b>2.62</b>	1.93
C6	Sportswear (clothing, footwear, watches etc.)	1.328	0.185	2.99	3.08	2.90
C7	Healthcare services (massage, physio, orthopedics, etc.)	-1.584	0.114	1.74	1.64	1.84

For the entire sample, the highest expenditure was related to travel costs (C1) (Overall Mean = 4.45; Std. = 2.49). This is not surprising, as it emerged from the question regarding competition frequency that the sample is a highly involved one, with over half of them participating frequently yearly. The result suggests that athletes prioritize participation in competitions, recognizing the necessity of these expenditures to achieve competitive success and personal goals. The willingness to invest heavily in travel underscores a commitment to their sport and the value placed on the experiences and opportunities derived from competing at various locations.

The second highest spending is realized in the sportswear area (C6) (Overall Mean = 2.99; Std. = 1.64). The substantial expenditure on sportswear (shoes, clothes, wearables) as the second-highest category indicates the importance athletes place on having appropriate and high-quality gear. This investment is likely driven by the need for functional, performance-enhancing, and often sport-specific apparel that supports their training and competition



activities. The prioritization of sportswear spending also reflects broader trends in the sports industry where advanced materials and technologies are continually being developed to improve athletic performance and comfort.

In third place on the list are registration fees (C2) (Overall Mean = 2.50; Std. = 1.54). This can also be correlated with the high competition participation rate within the sample, although the relatively affordable registration fees domestically, lower the overall annual expenditures significantly. This expenditure represents the cost of access to structured competition, which is a critical component of an athlete's career and development. The financial commitment to registration fees indicates that athletes are dedicated to maintaining an active competitive schedule, which is vital for ranking, exposure, and career progression.

The relatively lower annual spending on dietary supplements (C4); gym membership and training (C3); sports equipment (C5); and healthcare services (C7) suggests that these areas, while still important, are less of a financial priority compared to the aforementioned categories. This can be due to the fact that on one hand athletes may perceive these areas as less immediately critical to their performance compared to travel, apparel, and competition participation. And on the other the varying costs and perceived value of these services and products might influence their spending patterns.

Spending patterns were further examined within the sample, segmented by gender, where three key differences were found (Table 5). According to self-reports, male athletes spend significantly more on registration fees (C2) (F: 2.36; M: 2.64) ( $p = 0.024$ ) and sports equipment (C5) (F: 1.93; M: 2.62) ( $p = 0.000$ ), while female athletes spend more on gym memberships and training (C3) (F: 2.46; M: 2.12) ( $p = 0.042$ ). Although no significant difference was found, there is a trend indicating that males also spend more on travel costs (C1) (F: 4.30; M: 4.61) ( $p = 0.122$ ). This result is in line with their higher spending on registration fees, both of which are critical component of event participation. It is also interesting to note, that in the question examining the importance of event-related characteristics (Table 3), female athletes rated the affordability of registration and travel costs significantly more important, so it is not surprising that males spend more on both of these.

The results present notable insights into the gender-specific spending patterns of athletes, revealing distinct financial priorities between male and female participants. Male athletes' significantly higher expenditure on registration fees (C2) and sports equipment (C5) suggests a greater investment in direct competition participation and the necessary gear for performance. The emphasis on sports equipment also underscores the importance placed on having the right tools and gear to optimize performance, which may reflect a prioritization of tangible assets that directly impact athletic outcomes. In contrast, female athletes' higher spending on gym memberships and training (C3) points to a different approach to athletic preparation and maintenance. This spending pattern indicates a significant investment in the foundational aspects of their training regimes, focusing on consistent physical conditioning and skill development. The emphasis on gym memberships and training can be interpreted as a commitment to long-term fitness (which was present in their motivation as well) and readiness, highlighting the importance of structured and guided physical preparation.

## CONCLUSION

Present study aimed to examine the sports event participations of endurance athletes with special focus on gender differences. Utilizing survey method, a dataset of 609 endurance athletes was analyzed regarding their motivations, event preferences, travel behaviors, and expenditure patterns as well.

The findings revealed distinct patterns across several dimensions. In terms of motivational factors, female athletes exhibited a stronger inclination towards external motivations compared to their male counterparts. This suggests that factors external to the sport itself play a crucial role in influencing female athletes' participation decisions. Regarding sports event characteristics, accessibility, affordability, and program offerings emerged as significantly more important to female athletes than to males. In contrast, male athletes placed higher value on the challenge presented by the race, reflecting potentially different psychological orientations towards competition.

In terms of travel behavior, females expressed a greater preference for organizing trips that include family and friends, indicating a broader social context in their sporting engagements. Furthermore, female athletes were more likely to plan supplementary tourist activities around their race schedules, suggesting a multifaceted approach to their participation in sports events. Concerning spending patterns, male athletes tended to allocate more of their budget towards registration fees, possibly indicating a greater emphasis on competitive participation costs.

In contrast, females allocated more resources towards gym memberships and sports equipment, underscoring a focus on preparation and training outside of organized events. Overall, these findings underscore the nuanced ways in which gender influences various aspects of sports event participation, from initial motivations to logistical planning and financial considerations. Recognizing these differences is essential for developing targeted strategies to enhance the engagement and satisfaction of both male and female athletes in sports tourism contexts.

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