

Mountaineering marathon on Fruška Gora – the promotion of active lifestyle

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Introduction

Fruška Gora is an isolated, narrow, island mountain in the Pannonia plain, in the north of Serbia. The main characteristic of this region is the existence of numerous protected, rare and endangered species. In addition, it is rich in cultural heritage, namely 17 orthodox monasteries famous for their specific architecture, treasures, libraries and frescoes and numerous archaeological sites from prehistoric and historic times. Fruška Gora is proclaimed a National Park in 1960 in order to provide its permanent protection and to improve its natural resources and beauty. The area of active protection is 25.525 ha. Due to its outstanding natural resources that bring its visitors closer to nature, Fruška Gora is an ideal place for rest and recreation (National Park Fruška Gora, 2014). Globally, most protected areas, and especially national parks are the focus of substantial, and in many cases, increasing recreational and tourism interest (Newsome, 2014). Fruška Gora has created conditions for a one-day stay in the woods, therefore, its intangible values, such as beautiful landscapes and opportunities to experience nature and recreate, are the most important motives for the visit. For the past 37 years, the mountaineering club “Železničar” has been organizing a two-day mountaineering marathon on Fruška Gora with the aim of promoting its cultural and natural beauties, improving healthy lifestyle and raising ecological awareness.

Mountaineering Marathon

”A special day I live for” (Female, 28, Hungary). This is how an international Marathon attendee described this manifestation held annually on Fruška Gora for the past 37 years, either at the end of April or at the beginning of May. It has both competitive and recreational character and gathers participants from different European countries. It has 17 trails in total out of which 97% run through the wilderness and only 3% run through the urban environment. The trails are projected so as to pass through the most idyllic parts of Fruška Gora and by several monasteries, frequently changing the elevation. The routes are customized for recreation and for athletes, with length ranging from 4,3 km (Trail of Joy) to 111 km (Ultra Marathon Plus).

Method

The aim of this study was to generate insight into the scale and extent of such organized event in one geographic area and determine the participants’ profiles and motives for taking part in the

Marathon, which by all means has the multiple positive impacts – ecological, health, social etc. In addition, the authors sought to get participants' assessments of different aspects of the event organization. As the main research techniques, the on-site survey and in-depth interview were conducted. The questionnaire was distributed among the Marathon participants in 2013, while the organizers were interviewed and their existing statistical database was analysed. Non-parametric statistical procedures, Chi-square test (χ^2 - test) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), were applied in order to obtain the results.

Results and discussion

According to the statistical data, in the recent years, the number of marathon participants has increased. In 1978 their number was 407 and over the years it has increased significantly, reaching 18.727 participants in 2013 (Table 1). The growing popularity of the event and the large group of people interested in visiting and recreating in natural areas constitutes a complex demographic of users and indicates the people's need to reconnect with nature. In this preliminary study, most of the respondents reported that they participate in the Marathon in order to have fun and socialize (45%) and spend time in the natural environment (30%). However, only 7% of them reported that they participate in the Marathon in order to compete, while 18% claimed that their main motive for participation is hiking. On the other hand, their assessment of specific organizational aspects of the manifestation was not very satisfying. This leaves space for the improvement of the transportation to/from Fruška Gora, and certain trail facilities; garbage bins and toilettes in particular.

	The First Marathon	The hardest Marathon	The Marathon with the least number of participants	The Marathon with the largest number of participants
Dates	27-28 th May 1978	24-25 th May 1980	8-9 th May 1999	27-28 th April 2013
Trail number and length	1 trail - 86 km	1 trail - 87 km	1 trail - 81,3 km	17 trails of different length
Number of participants at the start line	407	947	11	18.728
Number of participants at the finish line	306 (75,18 %)	409 (43,19 %)	11	16.835 (89,9 %)
Number of participants that gave up	101 (24,82 %)	538 (56,81 %)	0	1.892 (10,1 %)

Table 1 Fruška Gora Mountaineering Marathon overview

Concluding remarks

It is evident that the natural recreation has gained the increasing societal importance in the last decades. The growing number of participants in the Marathon, which is estimated to range from 14.000 to 20.000 in the recent years, accounts for the important fact to support this statement. The main idea of the Marathon is to promote healthy lifestyle and attract more visitors into the nature. Therefore, it is to be hoped that there will be an exponential growth in the number of natural recreationists the whole year round. The management of, and issues associated with, recreation and tourism in protected areas encompasses a diverse and complex array of actual and predicted impacts, planning frameworks and management strategies. The park managers and the Marathon organizers should take responsibility of educating participants and supervising the event, thus the ecological and recreation policy should be carried out.

References

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