

Breeding racing pigeons: The serious leisure perspective

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Introduction

Pigeon racing is based on the remarkable homing instinct of pigeons, which enables their return to their loft, usually many hundred miles away. It offers not only the thrills and excitement of racing, but also the more sedate and intellectual rewards of breeding and rearing the birds (Jones, 2015). The history of breeding and racing pigeon is somewhat ancient. Pigeon homing was immensely popular during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nowadays, pigeon breeding continues in many countries, especially through pigeon clubs or associations. These communities primarily aim to train and race homing pigeons. Apart from this, secondary objectives relevant to sustainability are also stated, including careful breeding, and taking measures to counter the poaching of birds (Baker, 2013).

In many ways, pigeon breeding is recreational, with its refreshing, amusing and pleasure effects. However pigeon breeding is also expensive, time consuming, require space and specialised knowledge (Jones, 2015). Pigeons are bred for many years in large cages. Breeders provide quality and healthy living conditions for the birds. This recreation requires considerable effort and time. However, breeders generally take pleasure in spending time with their pigeons, coaching and racing them. Pigeon racing usually covers hundreds of kilometres between and across international borders. Not only pigeons and their breeders, but also people interested in watching the race are moved across borders. Hence pigeon breeding includes racing as an important recreational activity. Moreover it can be considered as a serious leisure activity not casual.

Robert Stebbins defined serious leisure as “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting in nature for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills and knowledge” (Stebbins, 2007:5).

There is little research examining the serious leisure perspective in Turkey. In addition, no research has been found to survey breeding racing pigeons as a recreation in the country. Thus the aim of this study is to examine breeding racing pigeons with serious leisure approach in Turkey.

Method

A survey research method was applied for the purpose of the study. There are 16 active pigeon racing associations in Turkey. The research population consists of members of these associations. Akyıldız's (2013) Serious and Casual Leisure Measure Scale, developed in accordance with the Serious Leisure Perspective (Stebbins, 2007), was used in preparing the questionnaire. A total of 104 survey questionnaires were collected via internet survey. The data were interpreted by applying descriptive statistical analysis.

Results

Some basic demographic characteristics of the participants were obtained using survey. All participants are male, level of education is not high, and the mean age is about 35 years (Figure 1).

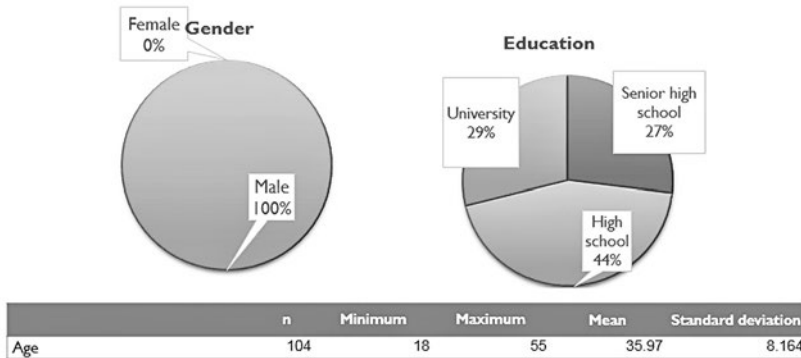


Figure 1. Demographic characteristics

Result analysis of Serious and Casual Leisure Measure Scale have been summarised in Table 2. The factors are respectively ranked as *competence, persevere, psychosocial benefits, therapeutic benefits, effort, career, identity, social world* and *dependence*. The Cronbach Alpha value, which shows the internal consistency of the scale, is 0.95, which is quite high. Correlation matrix is utilised to determine the structure validity of the scales. It was observed that there is a relationship between factors. The results of this analysis indicate that the participants agreed to all factors of the scale.

Table 1. Breeding racing characteristics

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Career	4.2724	.69521
Competence	4.5327	.65869
Psychosocial benefits	4.3750	.77437
Therapeutic benefits	4.4365	.79404
Social world	3.8894	1.11631
Dependence	3.7091	1.15178
Identity	4.0745	.92227
Persevere	4.4495	.71681
Effort	4.2452	.80199
n=104 Measured on a 5-point scale Measured on a 5 point scale where 1= Strongly disagree and 5=Strongly agree		

Conclusions

This study reflects that, breeding racing pigeons has all the characteristics of 'serious leisure'. The practice requires competence and perseverance. Pigeon breeding also requires significant personal effort. Additionally, participants reap psychosocial and therapeutic benefits. Their social world is deeply enriched, and their pursuit tend to identify themselves. Finally, participants sometimes depend on breeding pigeon for psychosocial reasons.

The current study was mainly conducted in descriptive terms. The study would be repeated with large sample size. Given that the recreational aspects of pigeon breeding has been somewhat ignored, despite its historical value, further research may thoroughly investigate the practice and its effects from the standpoint of sustainability.



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