

Recreational use in Natural Protected Areas: Adventure Races

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Adventure Races are an endurance multisport composed of several physical activities. Races may endure hours or days, featuring outdoor expeditions. Natural protected areas opened to the general public, such as National and State Parks, are common settings for Adventure Races (BARTOLETTI & MAGRO, 2015). Thus, the increasing flow of visitors (athletes and spectators) in natural protected areas and the pressures they may impose on ecosystems due to recreational activities raise concerns that despite the positive effects on local micro economy brought by recreational use in natural protected areas, such use might also bring negative effects (NEWSOME et al., 2011). Specifically in the case of Adventure Races the long extension in time and space of the events added to increasing popularity among participants and spectators demands evaluations regarding ecosystem impacts and management so that recreational use in this particular form might continue in a sustainable manner. This research aimed to analyse Adventure Races' rules as well as to interview races' organizers and athletes in search of trends in Adventure Races' organization in Brazil. It also sought whether or not, and to which extent these organizers and adventure sports' consumers took into consideration environmental issues and not only logistical and financial factors when choosing the location, date and rules for a race. Finally, national park managers were too questioned about their professional perceptions towards the positive and negative impacts that Adventure Races had or may have on their work areas. Based on the information gathered from these tree stakeholders the final goal was to aid the establishment of better management actions focused on developing Adventure Races so that they will better meet the demands in public use and the objectives of conservation in natural protected areas.

Methods

The data was obtained through the use of three structured questionnaires including yes-or-no questions, Likert scale and more open questions that allowed personalised answers. Questionnaires targeted Adventure Race's athletes and organisers in general (not linked to a specific event) and National Park managers. Data was collected during two months through a website designed specifically for this purpose. We were able to work with a sample set of 62 questionnaires representing 19 athletes, 8 races' organisers and 35 park managers.

Results

The results discussed within this study refer mainly to the perceptions that demonstrate whether or not the respondents believed that Adventure Races may cause environmental and social impacts.

Do you believe Adventure Races may cause positive and negative social and environmental impacts?

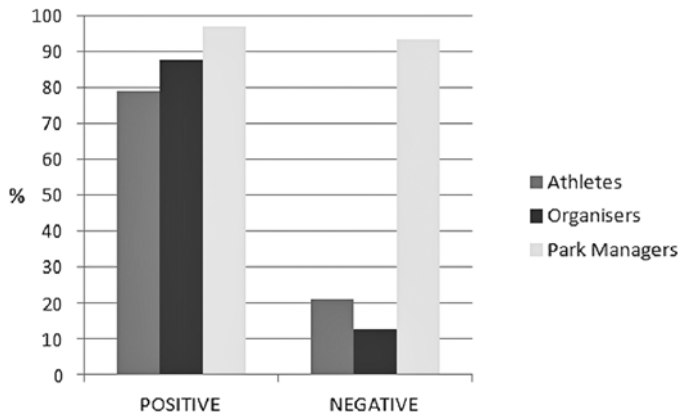


Figure 1. Most of the interviewees declared they believe Adventure Races cause positive impacts

When asked the question “Do you believe Adventure Races may cause positive and negative social and environmental impacts?” respondents from the three groups reported that (figure 1).

It was noticeable how athletes and races’organisers in the sample interviewed seemed to believe Adventure Races only cause positive impacts. A few explanations may arise for this finding. It is possible that these people believe that compared to other uses of land Adventure Races are mostly non harmful, it is possible they really have never been brought to think about negative impacts related to recreational use in natural areas, and also that they have been aware of these impacts but preferred not to admit so in a scientific questionnaire in order to promote a better image of their business, in the case of races’ organisers.

Regardless of the reasons this is indicative of the need for enhanced communication strategies to educate both races’ organisers and athletes about the possibility of negative impacts related to Adventure Races so that events may be planned accordingly to prevent and minimize them.

From simple solutions such as providing water in specific points through the race for athletes to fill their own bottles or hydration bags instead of providing plastic water bags to planning races so that they won’t happen in the same period as endangered species reproduction, or in the same period local communities use the land for cultural purposes, a lot can be done to enhance the quality and sustainability of adventure sports events as long as the people involved in this form of public use are aware that it might also bring negative impacts.

After all another interesting finding of this survey was that all athletes interviewed raced for leisure and the main reason to do so, even more important than the physical challenge, was happiness and pleasure followed by being in contact with nature.

And it takes being aware of one's potential to harm to care and prolong a happy relationship with nature.



BARTOLETTI, C.; MAGRO, T. C. Corridas de Aventura: contexto e implicações para áreas naturais protegidas. In: VIII Congresso Brasileiro de Unidades de Conservação, 2015, Curitiba. Anais do VIII CBUC. Curitiba: Fundação Grupo Boticário de Proteção à Natureza, 2015. p. 01-07.

NEWSOME, D; LACROIX, C. & PICKERING, C. (2011). Adventure Racing Events in Australia: context, assessment and implications for protected area management, *Australian Geographer*, 42:4, 403-418.