

Stakeholders' perceptions towards factors of influence on the choice of places for adventure races

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Adventure Races are part of an increasing trend of outdoor sports. They are multisport competitions varying in length and duration that take place in idyllic natural places. Thus there is potential for a range of environmental impacts as shown by previous research (KAY; LABERGE, 2002; NEWSOME et al., 2011). One of the particulars of Adventure Races is the navigation through maps and compasses that eventually, if not constantly, makes racers pass by primitive areas outside established formal trails. This causes vegetation trampling, weed and seed spread, and informal trail formation. On the other hand there are significant positive impacts derived from the opportunity of being in nature practicing sports, such as the development of an emotional bond with the space able to stimulate environmental conservation, health improvements among the participants and environmental education possibilities (FIGUEIREDO; SCHWARTZ, 2013). This study reports the results of online questionnaires directed to adventure racers and race organisers, as well as to national park managers. Whereas in previous works more attention was given to organisers' perceptions and attitudes, this focuses on racers (BARTOLETTI; MAGRO, 2016). A few questions intended to investigate what adventure racers and organisers perceived to be the most and least important factors when choosing a place to race or organise an event: environmental and sustainability related factors or factors related to logistics such as safety and proximity to hotels.

Methods

Regarding its nature this was an exploratory and descriptive socio-environmental research that aimed to scrutinize how Adventure Races have been organized in Brazil and how potential social and environmental impacts have been perceived and managed.

Regarding the means the research was a combination of literature review and online surveys. The literature review began with an online search by the key-words "Outdoor Recreation" and "Adventure Races". Documents referenced that bore relation to the research theme were investigated whether they were books, scientific articles, adventure races' rules or interviews.

The primary data collection through online surveys was conducted during a two month period based on three questionnaires, one for each stakeholder the research aimed to interview: adventure race organisers, racers and national park managers.

Although questionnaires were designed to be similar in order to assess suchlike themes and situations each had particular features and questions depending on the target group. A similar feature in both questionnaires, for racers and organisers, was the use of Likert Scale to evaluate factors that influenced their choices of venues where to participate in or organise an adventure race (LIKERT, 1932).

The following items are an example of the conceptual Likert Scale used:

1. Not important
2. Of little importance

3. Indifferent/Neutral
4. Important
5. Indispensable

Data was analysed with Friedman Test which is a nonparametric statistical method equivalent to ANOVA yet more suitable for qualitative information analysis (SEWARD; DOANE, 2014).

Results

The online surveys yielded 62 interviews - 19 racers, 8 race organisers and 35 national park managers. Despite planning efforts in order to publicize the research among athletes on a social media - as their personal contacts were unknown because property of adventure races' organisers which made it difficult to obtain - the 19 athletes who answered surely represented a much lower number of subjects than expected.

This small sample has been accredited to the fact that social medias are often not checked by subscribers frequently even though the invitation has been on for over a month. Also we believe many athletes might still perceive research of this nature in Brazil as a threat to their recreational activity.

When asked to evaluate with Likert Scale a range of factors that could influence their choice of a place to race, the amateur athletes interviewed ranked first – as the most important factor - *terrain and the challenge it imposes* and ranked last – as the least important - *soil and possibility of erosion*.

For this sample of athletes the challenges provided by the land and its different types of terrain was the most important factor when choosing the venue for an adventure race. However, factors related to security – *ease of rescue* and *risk potential* – also received many evaluations either as “important” or even “indispensable” factors.

Factors supposedly inherent to a natural environment such as *landscape beauty* and *wild and remote quality* featured among the five more important factors of influence to this sample of racers reinforcing how nature and its characteristics provide recreational ecosystem services of importance.

The fact that *soil and possibility of erosion* was evaluated as the least important factor of influence whereas *terrain and the challenge it imposes* was evaluated as the most important is an interesting data. It raises concern that for many athletes erosion is not perceived as an ecological problem rather than as *challenge* provided by a rough terrain for their adventure sport.

Interestingly the same answer was given by the sample of organisers. They too ranked *soil and possibility of erosion* last in their list of factors that influence the choice of a place to organise an adventure race.

So this poses an important question. How to better communicate with visitors who think this way? Who perceive erosion as challenge and not an ecological issue that needs to be addressed?

References

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