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Travelling to Compete: Antecedents of Individuals' Involvement in Small-scale Sports Events

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Abstract

This study is to develop a conceptual model linking motivation, involvement, and changes in travel style to the selection of destinations and choice of events among amateur participants involved in small-scale sports events. Partial least squares and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis were implemented to test this model, based on the responses collected during a local athletic event in Greece. A longitudinal study was conducted to better establish the effectiveness of the proposed model utilizing two data sets of the same 99 non-professional athletes, representing the vast majority of participants in the Sfindami small-scale running events held in 2014 and 2016, respectively. The results showed that the influences of destination and event choice factors on involvement were not significant while the effect from changes in travel style were significant for both 2014 and 2016 cases. Two of the four hypotheses were verified and useful managerial insights for small-scale event managers are suggested for supporting the viability of small-scale local sport events.

Keywords: amateur athletes, travel style, involvement, motivation, PLS, fs/QCA.

1. Introduction

Sport events participants' motivation and involvement is an on-going continuous debate for the academic community. As Mirehie and Gibson (2020) research indicates as people get more involved in sport activities over the long-term then patterns of participation occurs. Involvement and motives are important for destination marketing (Wen and Huang 2020). Research studies in the area of sport tourism-related events have tried to investigate various behavioral patterns such as: motivations for different kinds of events (mega, major, hallmark) on travel styles (Katsoni and Vrontou 2016, Brida, Disegna, and Osti 2013, Kaplanidou and Gibson 2012, Kim, Fredline, and Cuskelly 2018), spatial and temporal patterns of visual event-related opportunities offered to elite and amateur athletes (Del Percio et al. 2007, Byers, Hayday, and Pappous 2020, Goebert and Greenhalgh 2020), event and destination choices of sport and tourism events (Halpenny, Kulczycki, and Moghimehfar 2016, Hallmann and Breuer 2010, Perić, Vitezić, and Badurina 2019).

Although there are many studies that focus on participants' motivation and involvement of large events (e.g. Moital, Bain, and Thomas, 2019), there is still limited research on small scale events. Small scale events are starting to gain practitioners', academicians' and governments' attention (Fotiadis and Vassiliadis 2020) because these events have an important economic impact (Duglio and Beltramo 2017, Kwiatkowski 2017, Daniels, Norman, and Henry 2004). A key issue for small scale event-organizers is to gain access to information regarding potential participants' decision making processes (Fotiadis et al. 2016), because it is crucial in formulating the event product offering and determining the overall success of an event. Kelly and Fairley (2018) indicates strategies' effects may be different for different event sizes. The motivation to attend a sporting event is particularly important for destination marketing managers

and decision makers of festivals and special events as they could offer an enhanced experience which will meet participants expectations (Egresi and Kara 2014). In addition, they could promote their events to target groups of potential participants (Mohsin 2005, Funk and Bruun 2007). Furthermore, it has been found that different motives can affect the way athletes, the media, and potential audience members decide about the destination they plan to visit (Fotiadis et al. 2016, Halpenny, Kulczycki, and Moghimehfar 2016, Jurbala and Stevens 2020)

Until now, most of the small scale sport events research focuses on a single sporting event, while longitudinal studies are rather limited. Besides that, most of the studies related to sporting event motives are cross-sectional and usually their results cannot be generalized or further investigated. Instead, the current research seeks to reveal the factors that influence amateur athletes' participation and involvement in international small-scale sport events. In doing so, this research applies and extends a model of sport event participation based on the career trajectory model (Getz and Andersson 2010). The model was modified as it was applied to non-professional athletes who have chosen to compete in small-scale events, as the one held on an annual basis in Sfendami, Greece. In this model it is explored how changes in travel behavior is and selection of destination and events are affecting amateur athletes' involvement. More of that it is investigated if athletes motives mediates the relationship between changes in travel style and involvement.

This research uses a case study approach and draws data from the 2017 and 2018 Sfendami running events. Sfendami Mountain Festival is an international small-scale sporting event, which takes place in the mountainous Sfendami rural town in Greece (Sfendami, 2020). As many other events in rural areas, it is the highlight of the year for the small village. The main objective is to extend our knowledge with regards to the antecedents of participants' involvement in this particular type of events since, in general, very few studies have examined the behavioral

aspects of small-scale local sport tourist events. Then, as similar studies usually collect data at one specific point in time, the data collection approach of the current study makes it one of the few that examines this topic in two different time periods for a particular place and surveying the same participants. Additionally, the methodological approach followed is based on combining two different data analysis techniques in order to provide a set of complementary solutions which may further enhance the robustness of analysis; together with the longitudinal study approach, this approach enhances the generalizability of the outputs, which is always challenging on small-scale events.

Our findings may be valuable for academics as well as for tourism practitioners, as it proposes and tests a new model to determine individuals' involvement of non-professionals participating in small-scale sports events. Theoretically, this research contributes to unraveling the behavioral antecedents of motivation and involvement in this particular type of sports events. From a managerial viewpoint, it seeks to offer important insights for sport event organizers and managers to potentially improve the event attractiveness and viability in the long-term.

2. Literature review

2.1 Small-scale sports events

During the last few years small-scale sports events have grown significantly (Tzetzis, Alexandris, and Kapsampeli 2014). Small scale events are considered of great importance due to the high levels of social and economic impact on the local communities (Perić, Đurkin, and Wise 2016). According to (Kelly and Fairley 2018, p.342), “Small-scale events are often created by individuals who have an interest in a particular activity and use the event as a means to celebrate that particular activity or identity”. Also, Higham (1999) defined small-scale sports events as

“regular season sporting competitions (ice hockey, basketball, soccer, rugby leagues), international sporting fixtures, domestic competitions, masters or disabled sports, and the like” (Higham, 1999 p. 87). Gibson, Kaplanidou, and Kang (2012) provided a rather comprehensive definition by postulating that small-scale sports events are those with limited national impact where there may be more participants than spectators and, in spite annual reoccurrence, receive limited media attention.

In fact, various emerging destinations organize sports events that directly promote the use of local services, consumption of local products and utilization of local facilities (Fotiadis, Vassiliadis, and Yeh 2016) thus creating a positive destination image (Pereira et al. 2015), and an important overall economic benefit for the community at large (Duglio and Beltramo 2017). Small-scale sporting events usually use existing functional infrastructure, require very limited public funds, and generate a predictable flow of loyal visitors (Tzetzis, Alexandris, and Kapsampeli 2014, Low and Pyun 2016). Gibson et al. (2003) and Veltri, Miller, and Harris (2009) contend that small and medium sized communities are well suited to these events because the economic benefits are greater proportionately than when they occur in larger cities where the complexities of logistics and competition for facilities are likely to increase the costs to both organizers and participants.

2.2 Motivation

Motivational theories posit that motives can activate a person to take action (Hallmann, Shipway, and Harms 2012). Different types of needs and expectations can motivate someone on different levels (Georgiadis et al. 2006). As Peachey et al. (2014) postulate, there are four different types of motives that can attract a participant to a sports event. They can be motivated by cultural, social, skill development, and travel motives. Just as with general tourism motivations some researchers examining sport tourism specifically say that the motivational factors include the

opportunity to encounter different cultures, behaviors, attitudes, and values (Turco et al. 2003, Chen and Funk 2010). Consequently, many researchers view participation motivation as useful in the classification of sport tourism participants – because a sports-based visit must be planned and is the primary driver for the travel (Deery, Jago, and Fredline 2004). Others contend that the athletic experience and the type of event are the primary motivations rather than the travel experience or destination (Green and Chalip 1998), because sport tourism is a specialty travel activity with very specific travel and pleasure purposes (Getz and Andersson 2010). Motivation also seem to differ among amateur and professional participants (Buning and Gibson 2016). In a study about cyclists it was clear that the motive of competing was the least important to beginners and one of the most important for professional participants (Buning and Gibson 2016). Aicher, Karadakis, and Eddosary (2015) examined whether there are differences with regards to the motives of local and non-local participants and they found out that there are not any significant differences. Nevertheless, some differences were signified in the participants' perceptions of the event described in this particular case study.

2.3 Involvement

Involvement is crucial for understanding the decision making processes related to recreational activities and sport tourism events (Lee 2011, Getz and McConnell 2011). It depends on past experiences and the nature of events (Jin, Lee, and Lee 2013). Involvement is a motivational factor that can drive recreational priorities and may shape various corresponding consumer profiles in tourism (Filo et al. 2011). Participant behavior is affected by the individual's level of involvement in sports as destinations and events are often chosen on the basis of factors external to the specific sporting event (Funk and James 2002, Kruger 1995, Laverie and Arnett 2000), including promotional activities for specialized products and seminars

occurring in connection with the event. Higher involvement comes with greater experience and experienced athletes are more concerned about skills improvement (Robinson and Gammon 2004). Sport tourism behavior is connected with involvement and the desire to succeed in the form of overnight stays before and during the event, and other activities that can improve individual competitiveness (McGehee, Yoon, and Cardenas 2003), including money and time spent on well-being and personal interests (Ryan and Trauer 2005). Demographic attributes and individual attitudes (Ogles and Masters 2003, Funk and Bruun 2007, McGehee, Yoon, and Cardenas 2003, Lee and Um 1992, Litvin, Crotts, and Hefner 2004) are also important in the decisions of sports tourists; for example, Crompton (1979) states that demographics and attitudes are important factors after involvement and motivation that affect participation in a sporting event.

The role, prestige and competitive challenge of an event are also factors in some sport tourism decisions where it is seen as a step in sport career development. Getz (2008) proposed a modified model of “The Event-Tourist Career Trajectory” suggested first by Pearce and Lee (2005). The assumption is that some people create an event-specific career and development path in order to progress in their chosen sport to higher levels of achievement and performance (Getz and Andersson 2010).

Highly-involved athletes are willing to travel farther, using more time and types of transport than other participants. These athletes tend to participate in events that are held in foreign countries as well as travel within their home country. The willingness of highly-involved athletes to use air-travel extends the range and possibility of events available for participation. Consequently, it is anticipated that:

H1: Selection of destinations and events affects the level of involvement in sport events.

2.4 Travel Style

Highly involved athletes tend to be significantly motivated by higher-order self-actualized needs and not lower-level factors such as relaxation and socialization. Studies show that motivational factors are connected with values, attitudes, behavior and culture (Chen and Funk 2010, Turco et al. 2003). Highly involved athletes, however, have the type of event and the athletic experience as primary motivations rather than the travel experience (Green and Chalip 1998). Specifically, a personal competitive orientation among athletes enhances the significance of the main factors that influence event selection decisions, as it has been supported for various sport events including Olympic ones (Amorose and Horn 2000, Pensgaard, Roberts, and Ursin 1999, Go and Govers 1999).

According to Getz and Andersson (2010), the consideration of high travel frequency for events is related to the behavior of highly-involved athletes. Beaton et al. (2011), posit that higher involvement result in people who find an activity central to their lives personally demanding and a part of their self-identity. Athletes with high-involvement tend to take part in more sports events and trips that are competition-oriented, but may also be accompanied by family members and/or friends who modify their event and destination selections. These travel companions can have travel motivations and agendas that are different from the athlete (Getz and Andersson 2010). Combining the previous arguments, our expectation is that:

H2: Changes in travel style of amateur athletes affect the level of involvement in sport events.

Research in event management (Getz and Andersson, 2010; Ogles and Masters, 2003) shows that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can have an effect on travel style. Travellers to sport

events are motivated primarily by self-improvement objectives and personal goal achievement as “opposed to social and relaxation motivations” (Getz and Andersson, 2010, p.473). Athletes with high levels of involvement may travel far from home and participate in a large number of events as they are driven to challenge themselves, prove their ability to others, compete in a famous event, win prize money or simply improve their athletic ability through competition. However, tourism motivations can play a part in decision making when the distance travelled and the expense of the destination is considered (Nicolau and Más, 2006).

As Deery, Jago, and Fredline (2004) stated, participant motivation is interrelated with leisure involvement (Wiley, Shaw, and Havitz 2000) as it can effect decision making about a sporting event and continued participation. Rothschild (1984) also identified involvement as a key motivational factor in decision making. Therefore, as some athletes are more involved in an event we expect them to have levels of motivational attitudes that are different from those who are less involved. The improvement of skills, winning, attending competition-relevant seminars and product promotions will particularly motivate athletes with higher levels of motivation that may positively affect their involvement with sports (Funk and James 2002, Kruger 1995, Laverie and Arnett 2000, Robinson and Gammon 2004). Therefore, it is expected that:

H3: Motivation positively mediates the relationship between changes in travel style and involvement.

2.5 Destination and Events Choices

Highly-involved athletes tend to participate in many different types of events (small, medium, large scale) and select those events on the basis of challenge-level, novelty and prestige,

which are all higher-order selection criteria. Therefore, the location of an event can be less important than the characteristics of an event (Getz and Andersson, 2010, p.474). Shih (1986) confirmed that values, lifestyle, and other psychographic factors, are more relevant for understanding travel behaviors than demographics, while Scheiner and Holz-Rau (2007) found that socio-economic and demographic variables such as age, education level, income, sex, nationality or cohort have a greater influence on travel mode than lifestyle. Even so, lifestyle impacts attitudes about locations, decisions about those locations, and travel mode. Li and Cai (2011) found that for Chinese travelers personal values played the most important role in behavioral intentions. Also, Buning and Gibson (2016) found that travel behavior related to event characteristics transformed with career advancement.

H4: Selection of destinations and events positively mediate the relationship between changes in travel style and motivation.

Four hypotheses were developed and examined in relation to a small-scale sport tourism event as it appears in Figure 1. This conceptualization of the tourism decision-making process starts with the idea that participants who are more involved might have different attitudes and behaviors than those who are less involved in the sport (Figure 1).

[Figure 1 here].

3. Method

3.1 Research Context

The Sfendami Mountain Festival is a two-day event that occurs every year in mid-April. It is held in Sfendami, a mountainous small town that is situated in low hills at an altitude of 160 meters in the Greek prefecture of Pieria (see Appendix I). The festival was first time organized in

2007 with mountain bike races, and in the following year mountain running races were added. The particular sporting event meets all small-scale event characteristics as these have been specified by Gibson et al. (2012) and Higham (1999). The Festival celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2016, and is regarded as a local hallmark for the wider regional area.

3.2 Sampling

To test the hypotheses of the proposed model a self-administered on-site intercept survey was conducted (Malhotra, 2007) at Profitis Elias Hill during the Sfindami Mountain Festival in 2017 and in 2018. The organizing committee shared contact information of the participants from both 2014 and 2016 events, so authors would have access to the events registry and select the athletes that would participate in both events. A consent letter was signed by participants before they would fill out the questionnaire, thus agreeing to participate, and their rights to participate or withdraw at any time was explicitly communicated. The collected information was encrypted and coded to protect respondents' privacy and every piece of information was treated confidentially. Survey respondents were asked their opinions after completing their registration for the events. To facilitate Greek participants' responses, the questionnaire was translated and made available into Greek in addition to the English version. Moreover, to ensure the quality of translations involved, the measurement instrument was translated from English to Greek via the double-back translation procedure with the assistance of two qualified translators (Brislin, 1980).

There is no obvious coverage error since all respondents were sport-tourists participating in the running events. In order to run a longitudinal analysis for the 2014 and 2016 Sfindami events, 99 event participants were surveyed in both 2014 and 2016 events, respectively. Two datasets of the same 99 non-professional runners were extracted from the respective 2014 and 2016 runners' populations to capture participants' responses in the best possible way. This

approach would allow for useful comparisons on the factorial structural relationships of the proposed model. Demographics regarding survey participants' are provided in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

3.3 Measurement

The survey instrument included five parts, instructions on filling out the questionnaire, registration for the events, self-image, participation and self-motivation factors, and demographic questions. All attitudinal measurements were made on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1=totally disagree to 7=totally agree. Involvement, represented in the proposed model by latent variable *involvement*, was measured using a 15-item scale, drawn from the Consumer Involvement Profile (Laurent and Kapferer 1985) and adapted to sports events. The descriptions of all Involvement items are provided in Appendix II.

Motivation was measured with 18 statements, covering intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivators, which were adopted from previous research in the field of event management (Ogles and Masters 2003). These items are located in the motivation section in Appendix II and are used as indicators of the construct *motivation*. Since participation in events may partially affect travel behavior of participants, the construct *travel style* was introduced to represent the possible changes in the travel style of the sport-tourists; it was measured with a 10-item scale that had been previously used by Getz and Andersson (2010). The original 26-item scale describing destination and event choice factors (Getz and Andersson 2010) was modified to adapt to the running events of the Sfindami Mountain Festival. The inclusion of the construct *destinations & events choices*, may explain a possibly significant relationship with involvement, as well as with travel styles.

3.4 Analysis of the data

First, a structural equation modeling approach using Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique was employed in order to measure, estimate and confirm the latent constructs, as well as to test the significance of the paths between constructs. PLS technique does not strictly require a normal distribution of the data collected (Gefen and Straub, 2005) and at the same time it does have the ability to produce reliable results utilizing a relatively small sample sizes, thus making it particularly suitable for predictive purposes and theory building (Loureiro and González, 2008). PLS-SEM is very popular for two reasons: a) it allows for an exploratory approach to be taken when testing a number of research hypotheses, and b) it can work fine with even very small samples (whereas CB-SEM solutions would be underdefined) (Hair et al. 2014). Now, in this particular research we have small populations anyway, so there is no way to study small-scale events and ask 200-300 respondents. Since the solution is well-defined by the PLS software there is not a problem as three other studies with small sample indicate . There are at least three studies they are using small samples (Hernández-Perlines 2016, Leal-Rodríguez et al. 2014, Gelhard and von Delft 2016).

The application of the PLS algorithm refined the initial collection of 69 indicators to a final list of 27 items that our results show to be the most relevant to small-scale sport events. The main measures of central tendency and dispersion, and *t*-statistics of final indicators, as well as the composite reliabilities (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of the encompassing factors are provided on Table 2. Regarding-statistics, CR and AVE values, they all exceed the threshold values published in literature (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). Univariate normality has also been examined via skewness and kurtosis. Values for skewness and kurtosis are well below 1, thus supporting univariate normality for both the 2014 and 2016

datasets. Regarding statistics, CR and AVE values, they all exceed the relevant threshold values, namely 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Hair et al. 2010). Univariate normality has also been examined via skewness and kurtosis. Values for skewness and kurtosis are well below the corresponding conventional criterion of ± 1.96 for both statistics, showing that data do not deviate from normality (Thode 2002, Hair et al. 2010), thus supporting univariate normality for both the 2017 and 2018 datasets.

At second stage, this research also applies fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA 2.0), a tool that bridges quantitative and qualitative approaches (Ragin, 2009) based on correlational reasoning (Woodside 2014, 2013, Fotiadis, Yeh, and Huan 2016, Woodside, Hsu, and Marshall 2011, Prado and Woodside 2015). As a technique it allows the examination of configurations that contribute to the outcome of interest (Rauch, Dekker, and Woodside 2015) producing several recipes or scenarios that may lead to equivalent overall impact. Through fs/QCA, we attempt to find pathways that are sufficient for identifying different combinations of attributes, outcomes for selection of destinations and events, involvement, changes in travel styles, and motivation. We needed to calibrate these fuzzy sets in terms of membership before we could analyze the data. The rules we followed included: (1) consistency values should be higher than 0.75 (Fotiadis, Yeh, and Huan 2016), (2) raw coverage values should be between 0.40 and 0.65 (Ragin, 2008a; Woodside, 2013), and consistency scores should be higher than coverage scores (Ragin, 2000, 2008a, 2008b). The fs/QCA analysis can create three possible solutions (Calabuig Moreno et al. 2016): complex, parsimonious, and intermediate. The intermediate solution was chosen as the most suitable for this study because it can assure a balance among the other two solutions (Rauch, Dekker, and Woodside 2015). In essence, “Intermediate solutions use

counterfactuals to try to simplify the complex solution without making unjustified assumptions” (Elliott 2013, 6).

Overall, the data analysis procedure, based on these two techniques, secures a holistic approach. As it is important to investigate both symmetric and asymmetric approaches (Kaya et al. 2020), several research studies have used a mixed type of methodology/data analysis techniques that included both SEM and Fuzzy sets e.g. (Afonso et al. 2018, Mikalef and Pateli 2017, Yueh, Lu, and Lin 2016). Furthermore, there are published studies that used these techniques this way to investigate sport-related topics (Calabuig Moreno et al. 2016, Fotiadis et al. 2016, Alonso-Dos-Santos et al. 2018).

As Vizcaíno and Chousa (2016) posit, structural equation modeling techniques offer one solution that links the hypothesized variables by accounting for the total effects, while fs/QCA emphasizes on revealing alternatives. In this case, PLS uncovers the net effect of the antecedents on an outcome, whereas fs/QCA provides the various combinations of recipes associated to the outcome (Fang, Shao, and Wen 2016).

[Table 2 here]

The rationale of having the same respondents, in both years 2014 and 2016, is to build some good understanding of sport tourists’ choices and involvement in the particular event by building and reserving a certain profiler for this group of participants, thus limiting the parameters that would vary in our analyses.

After checking the study design and data assumptions, the statistical preparations included statistical comparisons of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test between the related two-year samples (ie 2014 & 2016) in order to verify the null hypothesis (Ho) of the zero mean differences between the two data sets. The statistical significance of the results was determined by choosing the cutoff

value at the level of $\alpha=0.05$ (5%). This means a 5% (or less) possibility to obtain a zero mean difference between the two data sets. With this test we identified whether the athletes' perceptions and attitude levels have been changed in the two-year period of our study.

Ultimately, we could not reject the H_0 because we have not encountered statistically significant differences at $\alpha=5\%$ (and less). Therefore, we support that the two groups of athletes behaved in a similar manner, therefore we can generalize the findings which arise from the techniques and datasets applied in the two different periods of studies.

4. Results

4.1 PLS results

The significance of the paths included in the structural model was tested using path coefficients and t -statistics to calculate the corresponding p -values for the sample data acquired in years 2014 and 2016, based on a bootstrapping technique provided by PLS-graph 3.0 (see Figures 2 and 3). As indicated by path loadings and the associated significance levels, the influence of destination choice and event choice on involvement ($\beta_{2014} = 0.051$, $\beta_{2016} = 0.113$) were not significant at the 0.05 level leading to the rejection of both associations (H_1). The direct, significant and positive effect of changes in travel style on involvement has been confirmed in both 2016 and 2018, thus supporting H_2 ($\beta_{2014} = 0.312$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta_{2016} = 0.359$, $p < 0.01$). The influences of changes in travel style on motivation ($\beta_{2014} = 0.440$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta_{2016} = 0.308$, $p < 0.01$) and that of motivation on involvement ($\beta_{2014} = 0.395$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta_{2016} = 0.327$, $p < 0.01$) have been found to be both positive and significant based on the path coefficients and associated levels of significance. Consequently, motivation partially mediates the relationship between changes in both travel style and involvement, thus supporting H_3 . Finally, the partial mediation of the relationship between changes in travel style and motivation by the destination

and event choice factors is supported for the amateur sport tourists participating in the Festival in 2016 ($\beta^{TRA-DEST}_{2016} = 0.326, p < 0.01$ and $\beta^{DEST-MOT}_{2016} = 0.403, p < 0.01$), but not for those in the 2014 event. Thus, H₄ is not ratified for both datasets and is an aspect of the model that is open to further investigation.

As Figure 3 shows, the proposed model has high predictive power, derived from our estimates on coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). Regarding R^2 , the model explains 19.3% and 33.8% of the variance in motivation for 2014 and 2016 respectively, indicating medium to large effects (Cohen, 1988). Furthermore, the model explained 36.2% and 41.5% of the variance in the involvement latent variable indicating large effects, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. The changes in R^2 value when exogenous variables are omitted from the model are provided by the f^2 effect size; as shown on Table 3 all effects exerted by all antecedents on *involvement* are of medium to large magnitude for both 2014 and 2016 values ($0.11 < f^2 < 9.04$, Cohen, 1988). Finally, by implementing the blindfolding procedure for the Stone-Geisser test with an omission distance $D = 6$, it is derived that the proposed model structure offers high predictive relevance for all endogenous constructs. Q^2 values were 0.559, 0.487 and 0.345 for the 2014 sample, and 0.510, 0.430 and 0.210 for the 2016 one, respectively. These values correspond to the destination & event choices, motivation and involvement latent variables, thus satisfying the criterion $Q^2 > 0$. Notwithstanding this, the explanatory power of *destinations & events choices* is low overall, while the amount of variance explained by both *motivation* and *involvement* is satisfactory.

[Figures 2 and 3 here]

[Table 3]

4.2 fs/QCA results

Three different models were developed for examining and analyzing whether the four hypotheses about sport tourists' decisions were supported or not. The first model used *destination & event choices* as the outcome variable and *motivation, travel style* and *involvement* as causal antecedents in an attempt to confirm H₁ & H₄. As shown in Table 4, the influences of destination and event choice factors on involvement were significant for year 2016, but not for 2014. Furthermore, the relationship between changes in travel style and participant motivation as mediated by the destination and event choice is supported for both datasets. The analysis shows that coverage for both datasets acquired in 2014 and 2016 is high, which is supported by high consistency scores. fs/QCA analysis also supports the PLS-Graph results, which indicated that the influences exerted from destination and event choice factors can be significant on travel style changes for both datasets. Moreover, these can be quite significant when a combination of positive motivation and high involvement for year 2014 is considered.

[Table 4 here]

Another model that was developed for *travel style* gave an interesting outcome that showed *motivation, involvement, and destination & event choices* were its causal antecedents. This model explains the propositions described in H₂ and that changes in travel style mediate the level of involvement that is confirmed in both 2014 and 2016 (see Table 5). However, since coverage scores for involvement and destination choice are higher than 0.65, then support for these have not been achieved. Another interesting result, which partly explains the previous ones, is that a combination of negative effects from the selection of destination and event along with the negative effect of motivation can bring about significant changes in travel style. The model

coverage and model consistency for both years are at the appropriate level for inclusion in these results.

[Table 5 here]

The third model was developed to explain H₃. In this situation, *motivation* was the outcome variable, and *involvement*, *travel style* and *destination & event choices* were the antecedents. As we can see on Table 6, motivation positively mediates the relationship between changes in travel style and involvement for both datasets and is the reason H₃ being supported. Again fs/QCA results are ratifying PLS-Graph results as the relationship between motivation's positive effects on changes in travel style and the negative effects on involvement for the sport tourists of the 2014 festival events are partially mediated.

As shown on Table 7, H₂ and H₃ are supported in both cases from PLS-Graph and fs/QCA while there are some differences in the other two hypotheses.

[Tables 6 and 7 here]

5. Conclusions

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study tested a model with two different tools (PLS and fs/QCA) to explore the relationships between changes in travel style, destination and event choice, participant motivation and involvement of non-professional athletes in sport events using a longitudinal study design with comparisons between two time points. The proposed model was empirically tested using survey data of the same 99 participants who attended the 2014 and 2016 Sfindami Mountain Festival running events, respectively. In both techniques implemented and the respective points

in time, the majority of the relationships hypothesized were found to be statistically significant. This is an outcome that leads to a number of interesting conclusions with respect to the factors that largely influence sport-tourists' involvement to small-scale athletic events. The study confirms the importance of including the *travel style* construct in the model. The significant and positive effects it exerts on the degree of development of *destinations and events choices* criteria and *involvement* are clearly supported by the results and confirm its importance in developing small-scale sports events. Except for the direct influence of *travel style* on *involvement*, a result similar to that was previously reported by Berne and García-Uceda (2008), a new and indirect relationship has been revealed with *motivation* acting as a mediator, thus increasing the explanatory value of the proposed model. The results show that *motivation* strongly affects *involvement* in small-scale community-based sports events, a relationship that demonstrates the key role of *involvement* as it reflects people's motivation to process information (Pham, 1992). In addition, the influence of *motivation* on *involvement* with small-scale sports events is supported by Goossens (2000) who postulated that affective involvement occurs when individuals identify a new stimulus, i.e. a new motive.

However, PLS analysis did not provide evidence of significant influences on motivation and involvement originating from the selection criteria used by sport-tourists. On the other hand, the triangular relationship formed by changes in *travel style*, *motivation* and *involvement* strongly predicts their behavior. Furthermore, the events' selection criteria appear to result from the changes made in *travel style*. This discrepancy is covered by implementing fs/QCA, emerging from the different models created and the number of alternative scenarios offered. Specifically, it has been indicated that a combination of motivation and high involvement can positively impact destination & event choices. On the other hand, a mixture of negative effects exerted from

motivations and the selection of destination and events induce noteworthy variations on travel style.

This research mainly contributes to examining non-professional athletes' behavior who travel to compete in small-scale sport events. Specifically, it has applied a comprehensive methodological approach which sought to investigate the antecedents of sport-tourists' participation and involvement to small-scale sports events. This has occurred based on a longitudinal study, which traced the changes in their involvement over time, and analyzing the data by employing the Partial Least Squares technique followed by a fuzzy set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis. In fact, as small-scale related case studies are usually based on small datasets, it is rather challenging to generalize findings due to the relatively small size of the populations. Consequently, the proposed approach may help with investigating individuals' behaviors related to participating in small-scale sports events.

5.2 Managerial implications

This study shows that marketing practice and strategy can be more successful if small-scale event organizers build a communication plan based on the motivation and involvement factors that are the most attractive to highly motivated amateur athletes. Sports events in rural societies like the one in this study are usually initiated by amateurs who want to actualize their vision for developing their community and local area. Unfortunately, this is driven by enthusiasm for the sport and those amateurs usually have limited knowledge about marketing and managerial issues. This makes it very difficult to create successful events even when the events are very significant for the local society. Academic research has been of little use to these entrepreneurs because it mainly focuses on large-scale event management and marketing and not on smaller

events spread around a country and impacting the lives of thousands of residents and other stakeholders both socially and economically.

Since every country and every locality has different characteristics and varying tourism needs, it is imperative that we see more research, which discusses the issue of sports events, such as the one discussed here. This study shows that marketing practice and strategy can be more successful if small-scale event organizers build a communication plan based on the motivation and involvement factors that are the most attractive to highly motivated amateur athletes. The following managerial planning suggestions are provided based on the study results (Table 8).

[Tables 8 here]

As it is visible on table 8 changes in travel style are affecting involvement and for that reason sport event managers should emphasize to highly motivated amateur athletes who need to be well informed about the event and the facilities and activities that support it. More of that policy makers and event organizers shouldn't only focus on the brand name of the event but with the destination brand name too as there are interrelated. They could promote interesting places with unusual parallel activities for the visitors like local cooking festivals etc.

5.3 Limitations and directions for future research

This study is not free of limitations; the main one being that it focuses on one specific rural area in one European country. Every rural area has different characteristics that relate to its historical, social, economic and demographic development. This means our results cannot be generalized to all the places that host small-scale sport tourism events either in Greece or other parts of the world. Currently, the Sfindami Mountain Festival has only attracted Greek non-professional athletes and it was not possible to examine the motivations and involvement of

foreign athletes as a separate segment. New studies should include more locations within urban Greece, involve participants from other countries and examine rural localities in Greece and overseas.

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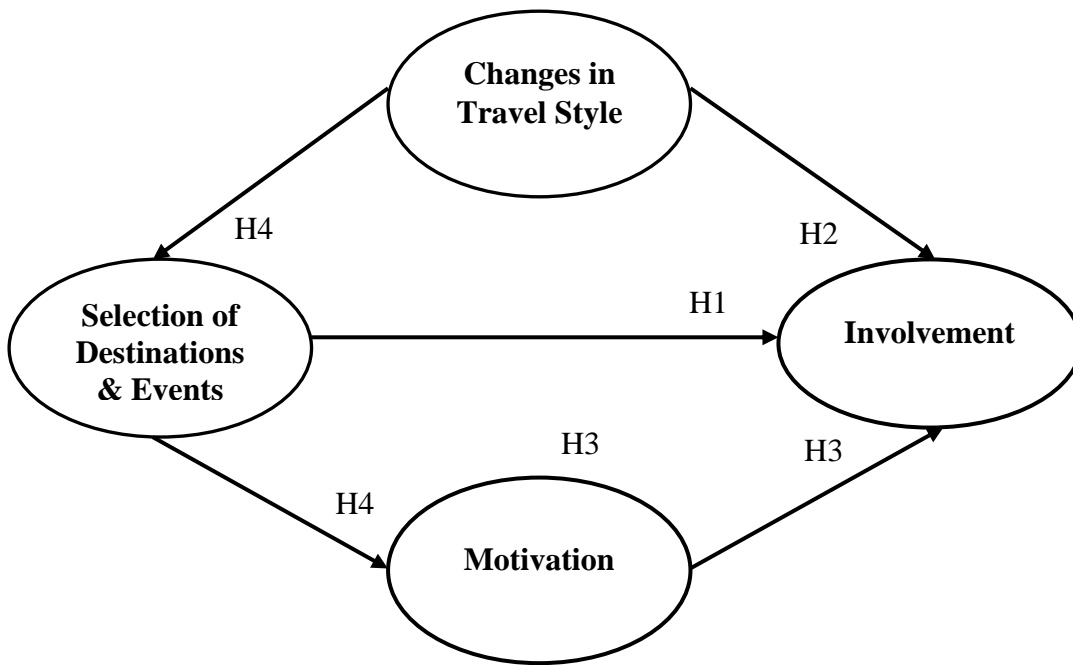


Figure 1: A conceptual model for amateur athletes' participation choices.

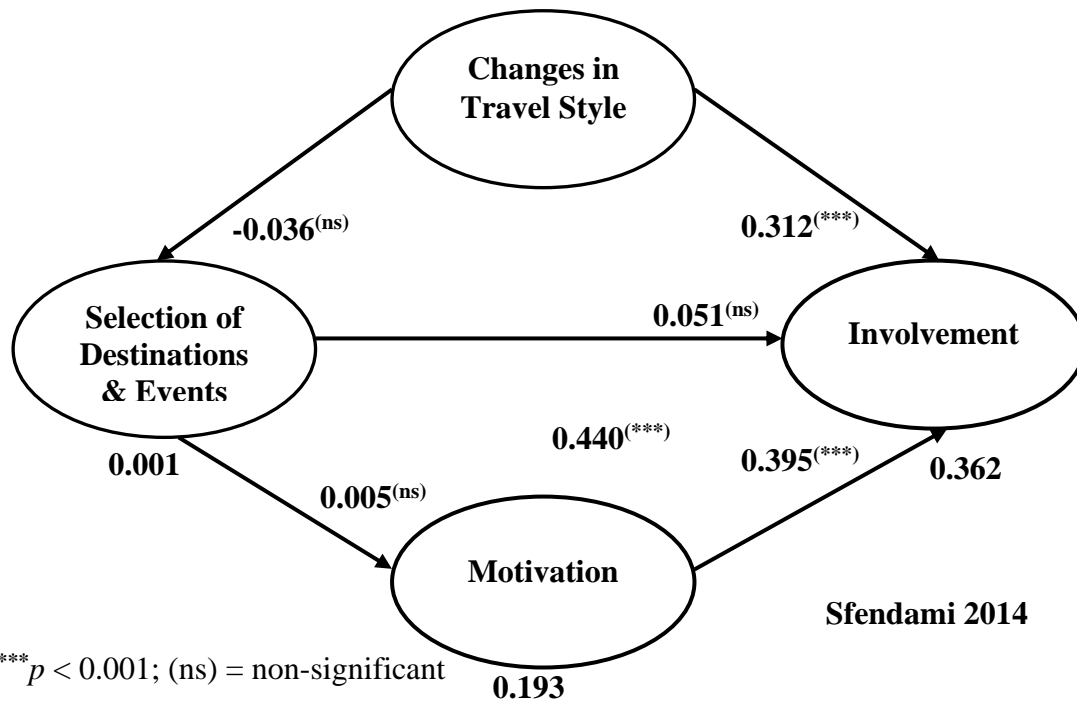


Figure 2: Structural model with path coefficients and R^2 coefficients for year 2014.

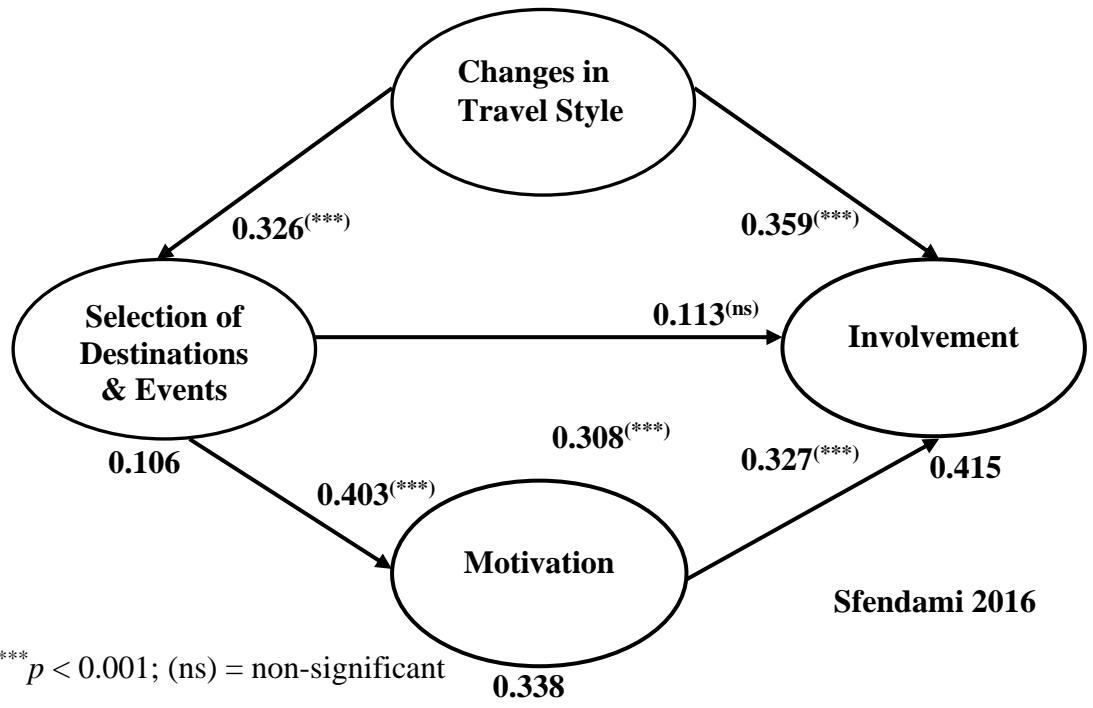


Figure 3: Structural model with path coefficients and R^2 coefficients for year 2016.

Table 1. Survey participant profile.

Survey Participant Profile	Percentage
Gender	%
Male	52.6
Female	47.4
Age group	
<18	12.5
18-29	29.5
30-39	29.7
40-49	20.5
50-59	5.2
> 60	2.6
Distance covered to reach Sfindami Festival	
< 10 km	18.4
11–50 km	25.9
> 50 km	55.7
Highest level of Education	
Primary	2.2
Intermediate	7.8
High School	19.9
Technical training	5.2
College	48.5
Masters	14.0
Ph.D.	2.4
Employment Status	
Full-time employee	50.2
Part-time employee	14.7
Free-lancer /	12.3
Businessperson	4.9
Household	14.1
Pupil / Student	2.3
Pensioner	1.3
Unemployed	0.2
Other	

Table 2. Assessment of the final measurement model.

Construct	Item	Year	Mean (SD)	Loading	Std. error	T-statistic	CR	AVE
1. Destinations & events choices		2014					0.814	0.621
		2016					0.798	0.596
	Special travel & accommodation packages are provided	2014	4.59 (1.48)	0.627	0.0511	12.270		
		2016	4.39 (1.56)	0.832	0.0623	13.354		
	Competitors receive great gift	2014	3.64 (1.51)	0.914	0.0488	18.729		
		2016	4.86 (1.48)	0.907	0.0501	18.104		
	Involvement of a major corporate sponsor	2014	3.68 (1.50)	0.896	0.0487	18.398		
		2016	3.94 (1.39)	0.971	0.0549	17.686		
	It's in a world class destination	2014	4.28 (1.25)	0.978	0.0474	20.632		
		2016	4.39 (1.26)	0.971	0.0492	19.736		
	Entertainment available in the area	2014	4.65 (1.44)	0.820	0.0551	14.882		
		2016	4.92 (1.40)	0.624	0.0464	13.448		
	The reputation & prestige of the event	2014	5.15 (1.33)	0.876	0.0502	17.450		
		2016	3.88 (1.36)	0.979	0.0537	18.230		
	A party is included in the fee	2014	4.72 (1.54)	0.952	0.0539	17.662		
		2016	5.10 (1.31)	0.804	0.0508	15.827		
	Timing every third minute & the result is sent as a text message	2014	3.89 (1.72)	0.787	0.0426	18.474		
		2016	4.24 (1.59)	0.726	0.0413	17.579		
	The running event is part of Greek circuit	2014	4.17 (1.21)	0.887	0.0495	17.919		
		2016	3.58 (1.27)	0.605	0.0433	13.972		
2. Travel styles		2014					0.822	0.703
		2016					0.814	0.695
	Travelling far to events?	2014	4.67 (1.48)	0.989	0.0405	24.664		
		2016	5.34 (1.61)	0.946	0.0435	21.747		
<i>Have you changed with regard to...</i>	Selecting events on the basis of destination attractiveness?	2014	4.67 (1.51)	0.936	0.0415	22.554		
		2016	4.47 (1.48)	0.946	0.0420	22.523		

Travelling to events by air?	2014	3.26 (1.39)	0.787	0.0412	19.101		
	2016	4.30 (1.37)	0.946	0.0555	17.045		
Travelling throughout the year?	2014	4.38 (1.59)	0.990	0.0356	27.808		
	2016	4.33 (1.56)	0.894	0.0417	21.438		
Going to international events?	2014	3.66 (1.76)	0.754	0.0345	21.855		
	2016	5.59 (1.26)	0.636	0.0376	16.914		
Combining events with holidays?	2014	4.58 (1.47)	0.931	0.0364	25.557		
	2016	5.44 (1.52)	0.948	0.0425	22.306		
Competing in prestigious events?	2014	4.73 (1.41)	0.991	0.0332	29.849		
	2016	4.82 (1.44)	0.966	0.0389	24.833		
Taking long trips?	2014	4.64 (1.51)	0.997	0.0347	28.732		
	2016	4.81 (1.52)	0.965	0.0455	21.209		
3. Motivation	2014					0.787	0.601
	2016					0.773	0.590
Travel to interesting places	2014	5.50 (1.21)	0.921	0.0471	19.554		
	2016	4.82 (1.47)	0.903	0.0455	19.846		
Do something unusual	2016	5.28 (1.20)	0.908	0.0596	15.235		
	2016	4.59 (1.18)	0.998	0.0611	16.339		
To improve my time	2014	5.33 (1.25)	0.943	0.0575	16.400		
	2016	4.85 (1.19)	0.994	0.0595	16.705		
Prepare for more important events	2014	4.90 (1.51)	0.827	0.0614	13.469		
	2016	4.78 (1.41)	0.989	0.0628	15.748		
Prove to myself that I can do it	2014	5.85 (1.22)	0.970	0.0562	17.260		
	2016	4.47 (1.25)	0.997	0.0579	17.219		
For health benefits; to get fit	2014	5.67 (1.25)	0.967	0.0582	16.615		
	2016	5.62 (1.34)	0.992	0.0569	17.434		
4. Involvement	2014					0.781	0.688
	2016					0.744	0.656
Others probably say I spend too much time training for events	2014	4.42 (1.59)	0.732	0.0609	12.019		
	2016	3.91 (1.56)	0.827	0.0649	12.742		
Each year I spend a lot of money on running equipment	2014	4.32 (1.61)	0.797	0.0552	14.438		
	2016	3.97 (1.53)	0.563	0.0507	11.104		
Each year I spend a lot of money traveling to running events	2014	4.10 (1.28)	0.956	0.0538	17.769		
	2016	3.63 (1.26)	0.935	0.0597	15.661		
I read a lot about running in specialized magazines and books	2014	5.27 (1.35)	0.898	0.0627	14.322		
	2016	4.57 (1.29)	0.846	0.0615	13.756		

Note: All t-statistics are significant at 0.01 level; CR: Composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted.

Table 3. Effect Size f^2 Values (years 2014 | 2016).

Factors	Destination & Event Choices	Involvement	Motivation	Travel changes
Destination & Event Choices		0.139 0.309	0.110 0.216	
Involvement				
Motivation		0.923 0.326		
Travel changes	4.946 9.040	0.118 0.341	0.780 0.875	

Table 4. Effects of motivation, travel style, and involvement on participant destination choice.

Model 1: Selection of Destinations & Events = F(Motivation, Changes in Travel Style, Involvement)				
	2014		2016	
	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency
Motivation	0.601	0.804	0.521	0.850
Changes in Travel Style	0.431	0.851	0.429	0.855
Involvement			0.611	0.833
Motivation * Involvement	0.617	0.800		
Model Coverage	0.805		0.949	
Model Consistency	0.804		0.769	

Table 5. Effects of motivations, involvement, and destination choice on participant travel style.

Model 2: Changes in Travel Style = F(Motivation, Involvement, Selection of Destinations & Events)				
	2014		2016	
	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency
Motivation	0.461	0.899	0.455	0.840
Involvement	0.690	0.880	0.816	0.826
Selection of Destinations & Events			0.734	0.832
Selection of Destinations & Events * Motivation	0.611	0.907		
Model Coverage	0.826		0.957	
Model Consistency	0.855		0.756	

Table 6. Effects of involvement, travel style and destination choice on participant motivation.

Model 3: Motivation = F(Involvement, Changes in Travel Style, Selection of Destinations & Events)				
	2014		2016	
	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency
Involvement	0.590	0.880	0.450	0.824
Changes in Travel Style	0.611	0.907	0.526	0.816
Selection of Destinations & Events			0.720	0.806
Involvement * Changes in Travel Style	0.582	0.816		
Model Coverage	0.898		0.928	
Model Consistency	0.757		0.741	

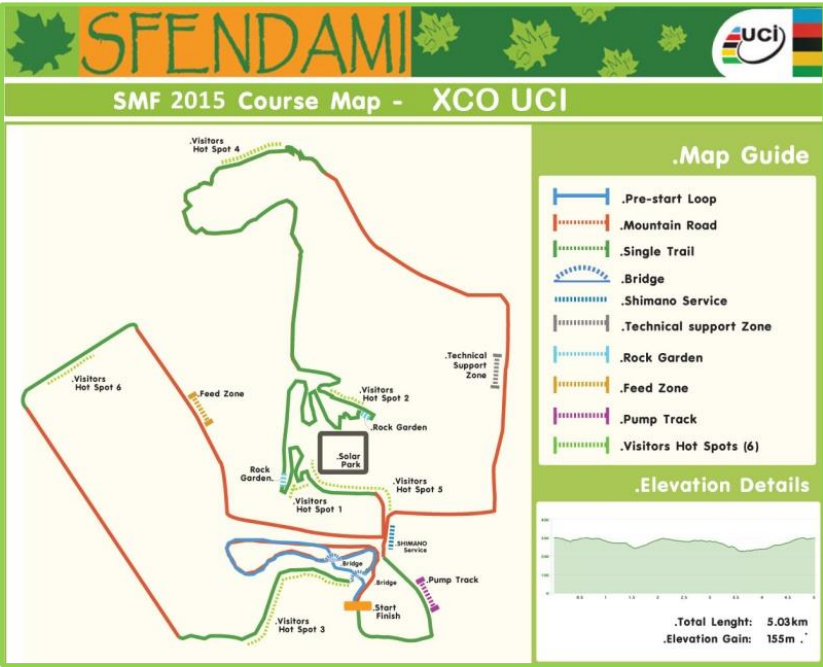
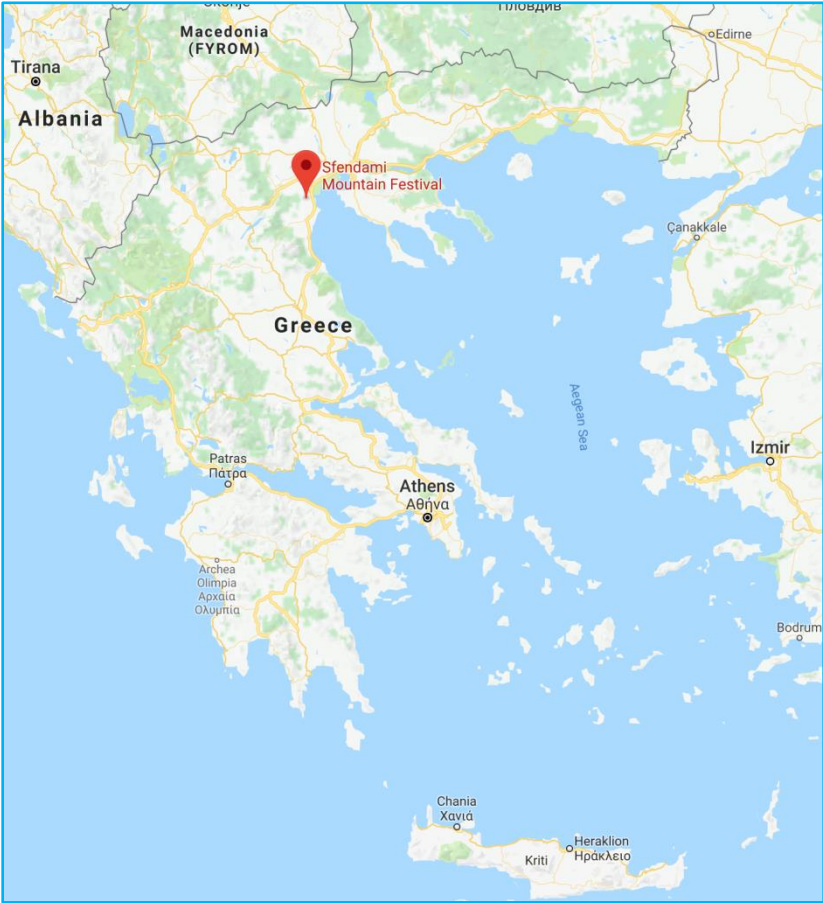
Table 7: Hypotheses Testing Results.

Hypothesis	Partial Least Squares Graph		Fuzzy-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis	
	2014	2016	2014	2016
H ₁ : Selection of destinations and events significantly and positively affects the level of involvement in sports events	Not Supported	Not Supported	Not Supported	Supported
H ₂ : Changes in travel style of sport-tourists significantly and positively affect the level of involvement in sports events	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported
H ₃ : Motivation positively mediates the relationship between changes in travel style and involvement	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported
H ₄ : Selection of destinations and events positively mediate the relationship between changes in travel style and motivation	Not Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported

Table 8. Managerial Implications, with corresponding communication plan, and action plan.

Supported research study result	Communication Plan	Action Plan
Changes in travel style of sport-tourists significantly and positively impact the level of involvement in sports events	Target-audience; give emphasis to highly motivated amateur athletes; be in contact via e-mail list with them	Important aspects; inform the audience, e.g, from or through the organizer website, and the sport related media how can they more easily take long trips for such prestigious international events like the Sfindami Mountain Festival and how it can be interesting to travel by plane to the destination, especially by combining events with holidays
Motivation positively mediates the relationship between changes in travel style and involvement	Motivational aspects may be strengthened via promotional tools and integrated communications used by the organizing event committee	Promote interesting places with unusual parallel activities for the visitors like local cooking festival for athletes, sport fashion competition and prize list, dance festival and pasta party etc.,- Promote activities that they can do for themselves, e.g, for their health status, to improve their running time and to be prepared for other events
Selection of destinations and events positively mediate the relationship between changes in travel style and motivation	Focus on the brand name of the destination. Focus on different aspects of the events.	Promote how the right decision about visiting a successful destination & event can be useful for the athletes. Destination and event characteristics like, alternative accommodations such as Airbnb, party and entertainment facilities, just in time information about their run based timing and their self-improvement, famous and interesting destinations to visit can be the basic theme of the promotion and advertising strategy for below and above the line media selection tools

Appendix I: Map of Sfendami Mountain Festival, Greece.



Appendix II: Measurement scales.

Involvement (Laurent and Kapferer 1985)	Destination & event choice (Andersson, Getz, and Mykletun 2014)	Motivation (Ogles and Masters 2003)
(C11) Without running I would be bored	(C41) A lot of prize money is awarded	(C21) To challenge myself
(C12) I really hate it when an event is poorly organized	(C42) A low entry fee	(C22) Improve my athletic ability
(C13) The events I compete in say a lot about the kind of person I am	(C43) Keeping my overall cost low	(C23) Win prize money
(C14) Others consult me about my expertise in running	(C44) The larger the better (many participants)	(C24) Be with my family or spouse
(C15) I might lose valued friends if I gave up running	(C45) My friends are also going	(C25) Be with my friends
(C16) Running takes up so much time it leaves little for other activities	(C46) My spouse or family wants to go there	(C26) Participate in a famous event
(C17) Others probably say I spend too much time training for events	(C47) The event is really well organized	(C27) Be in a famous city or area
(C18) Competing is a particularly pleasurable experience	(C48) Special travel and accommodation packages are provided	(C28) Travel to interesting places
(C19) I would rather be a competitive runner than do any other activity	(C49) Competitors receive great gifts	(C29) Do something unusual
(C110) It requires a lot of thought to select the best events to compete in	(C410) The course is fast	(C210) To improve my time
(C111) I attach great importance to my target times	(C411) It's exclusive (difficult to qualify for)	(C211) Prepare for more important events
(C112) Each year I spend a lot of money on running equipment	(C412) Involvement of a major corporate sponsor	(C212) Prove to others that I can do it
(C113) I belong to a running club or team	(C413) I want a new event experience every time	(C213) Prove to myself that I can do it
(C114) Each year I spend a lot of money traveling to running events	(C414) A recommendation to attend the event from someone I trust	(C214) Have fun!
(C115) I read a lot about running specialized magazines and books	(C415) The event gets a lot of media coverage	(C215) For the thrill of it!
Changes in travel style (Getz and Andersson, 2010)	(C416) It's a very scenic, interesting route	(C216) Raise money for charity
<i>Have you changed with regard to...</i>	(C417) The expected weather conditions are attractive	(C217) Meet new people
(C31) Travelling far to events?	(C418) Small and intimate (few competitors)	(C218) For health benefits; to get fit
(C32) Travelling to many events?	(C419) A party atmosphere surrounding the event	
(C33) Selecting events on the basis of destination attractiveness?	(C420) It's in a world-class city or destination	
(C34) Travelling to events by air?	(C421) Everything I need to know is on a user-friendly website	
(C35) Travelling throughout the year?		

(C36) Going to international events?	(C422) Entertainment available in the area
(C37) Combining events with holidays?	(C423) The reputation and prestige of the event
(C38) Competing in prestigious events?	(C424) A party is included in the fee
(C39) Taking family along to events?	(C425) Timing every third minute and the result is sent as a text message
(C310) Taking long trips?	(C426) The marathon is part of the Hellenic classic circuit
