

Comparative analysis of Olympic and Paralympic tourists

Alexandr Vetitnev ^{1*} and Nadezhda Bobina ²

¹ Sochi State University, 26a, Sovetskaya str., Sochi, 354000, Russia, Tel: +79882399453. E-mail: polina@sochi.com

² Sochi State University, 26a, Sovetskaya str., Sochi, 354000, Russia. E-mail: sochi.nadya@mail.ru

* Corresponding author

Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to identify the differences in behaviour and expenditures of the Olympic and Paralympic tourists during the XXII Olympic Winter Games. The analysis showed that these two tourists' flows differed in terms of the objectives of the trip, the reasons for travel, the level and structure of spending. Olympic visitors were classified as the primary sports tourist profile. Paralympic tourists explained their visit to the Games as a concomitant event and relate mainly to the profile, which was called by Weed (2008) "the tourists interested in sport". It was also found that tourists' daily spending during the Olympics was significantly higher than Paralympic visitors' expenditures and amounted approximately US\$ 259 vs. US\$ 191.

Keywords: Olympic tourists; Paralympic tourists; 2014 Sochi Olympic Games; tourists' expenditures

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Introduction

The Olympic Games are one of the most important global events that attract significant numbers of tourists (Hardie and Perry, 2013; Higham and Hinch, 2018, Uvinha *et al.*, 2018; Yetis & Kaygisiz, 2018). Weed (2008, p. 22) defined Olympic tourism as “tourist behaviour motivated or generated by Olympic-related activities”. Gibson (2013) believed that Olympic tourists are heterogeneous, and they can be grouped as participants (active sport tourists), spectators (event sport tourists) and persons who venerate attractions associated with physical activities (nostalgia tourists). Although both the Olympics and the Paralympics are carried out one after the other using a common sports infrastructure, there are no publications that have compared the visitors who came to these events. It is not clear whether they have the same purposes of the trip, the same factors that influenced the decision to attend the Games, and the same manner of spending money. The existing professional literature does not give answers to these questions. However, information about the behaviour of separate groups of tourists and their expenses is required to assess the impact of mega-events on the destination and can be useful for planning tourism at the host places (Melo & Sobry, 2017). Thus, the goal of this paper is to identify the differences in behaviour and expenditures of the Olympic and Paralympic tourists.

Numerous studies of tourists visiting the Olympic or Paralympic Games, contain mainly information about tourist's separate characteristics. Kurtzman and Zauhar (2005) presented a detailed overview about the sport tourism consumer motivation. They noted that participation in, or attendance a sporting competition by tourists, was engineered by such factors as advertising, social peer groups and opinions of friends and relatives. Reeves (2000) pointed out that there are some common traits in motivations of both sports participants and sport tourists. Agreeing with McIntosh and Goeldner (1986), Weed (2008) identified several categories of Olympic tourist motivators: physical, interpersonal, cultural and prestige.

Weed (2009), Weed and Bull (2009) proposed classification of sports tourist activities, includes three profiles: primary sports tourists, associated experience sports tourists, and tourists interested in sport. The first profile combines tourists for whom the primary reason for travel is sport tourism participation. Second one unites sports tourists for whom factors other than the sport are the reason for their event participation, although sport is one of the important reasons for the trip. Third profile contains tourists who are interested in sport but sport event is not the primary trip purpose. Weed (2008) gave examples of Olympic tourists that can be referred to the first profile: athletes; winter sports tourists; sport competition visitors and participants in mass sports events. The “associated experience” Olympic tourists (second profile) may include some ski tourists who are more interested in the post activity experience, or tourists receiving corporate hospitality at Olympics. Olympic tourists of the third profile view sports opportunities as one of the additional factors in choosing a holiday destination. Tourists of this type may not plan to visit sport events in advance and often decide on a trip spontaneously. This profile comprises of any number of different holiday types or types of tourists (Weed, 2008).

As for the Paralympic sports tourists, the main publications are devoted to the participants of the Games - athletes with a disability (Misiner *et al.*, 2013; Purdue and Howe, 2012, 2013; Braye, Dixon and Gibbons, 2015). In sporadic articles about the spectators of Paralympic competitions the problems of visiting the Paralympic Games, in terms of visitors with disabilities were also studied (Byon, Cottingham and Carroll, 2010). One of the few articles available about this topic was the work of Ekmekci *et al.* (2013), in which the characteristics of the visitors to the London 2012 Paralympic Games were given. These researchers studied consumer behaviours and identified socio-demographic and economic variables, which explained spectators' length of stay, expenditures, and attendance at the

Summer Paralympics. Unfortunately, we could not find the article about the spectators to Paralympic Winter Games, as well as about the comparative characteristics of the tourists who visited the Olympics and Paralympics. This information may be of interest to both the scholars and the regional administrators and sports managers.

Research Method

The 2014 Winter Olympic Games took place in Sochi, which is the famous Russian resort on the Black Sea Coast. This resort attracts more than 5 million tourists annually, until recently, mostly in summer. The target population for this study was tourists who arrived to Sochi during the Olympic and Paralympic Games in February-March of 2014. The survey was carried out by a group of trained undergraduate students during the tourists' journey by special trains of Olympic guests from rail stations to Olympic arenas and back. Interview method using a special questionnaire was conducted to collect data in two versions: Russian and English. Interviewers walked along the wagons and invited passengers to take part in the survey.

The questionnaire included several sections: issues about the aim of Olympic trip, questions about factors effecting on the decision to travel, socio-demographic and behavioural issues and questions on tourist expenditures. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample (20 sport tourists) during sport competitions before the Games and was adopted with minor revisions. The final sample for the analysis was 832 respondents in total and included 404 Olympic and 428 Paralympic tourists. The data was analysed using IBM SPSS, v.21. Chi-square and ANOVA test were used to identify differences in socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics of Olympic and Paralympic tourists. MANOVA-test was carried out to analyse tourists' total and daily expenditures.

Results

The socio-demographic status of respondents is given in the Table 1, but the comparison of socio-demographic characteristics of the Olympic and Paralympic tourists did not find statistically significant differences. A certain limitation of the result's interpretation is the lack of participation of the foreign tourists in this survey.

At the same time, the main purpose of the trip to Sochi was different between tourist groups (Table 2). Though main motive for both groups of tourists was the Games (77.1% and 65.1%), the Paralympic tourists pointed more often to recreation and business as one of the important purposes of the travel. This fact, probably, indicates that a significant part of the Paralympic Games visitors (more than third) require additional motives for the trip, while the Olympic Games are an outstanding event in itself, therefore Olympic tourists are less needed for additional incentives.

Higher demand for Olympics events is also indicated by the timing of the travel decisions. The Olympic tourists decided to visit the Games much earlier than Paralympic one (231 vs. 48 days before the Games beginning). This indicator was not affected by the place of tourist residence, since no statistical differences between the groups were found.

Significant differences between the tourist groups were also detected in some of the main factors that caused the tourist visit to Sochi (Table 3).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic and Behavioural Profile of Samples

Variables	Olympic tourists (%) n = 404	Paralympic tourists (%) n = 428
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	48.6	54.7
Male	51.4	45.3
<i>Age</i>		
16-19	11.0	10.0
20-29	28.9	33.6
30-39	28.4	26.2
40-49	16.6	15.4
50-59	11.8	8.2
60 and over	3.3	6.6
<i>Occupations</i>		
Student	10.2	12.0
Unskilled worker	12.9	10.3
Professional	19.4	27.3
Military	3.5	3.2
Government official	10.0	12.0
Retired	6.6	7.1
Unemployed	3.8	1.8
Housework	6.7	4.5
Business owner	12.40	11.3
Executive/manager	11.3	8.8
Others	3.2	1.7
<i>Educational level</i>		
High school or below	5.4	14.2
Some college or college graduate	41.1	44.6
College graduate or above	53.6	41.2
<i>Monthly income per person</i>		
Below 20,000 RUB	6.6	7.5
21,000 – 60,000 RUB	13.7	19.3
Above 60,000 RUB	32.7	32.5
<i>Region/country of residence</i>		
Moscow	13.7	12.9
Central European Region of Russia	4.5	5.5
North-West	6.3	6.2
Volga Region	7.2	11.8
South Region	47.5	49.5
North Caucasus	4.8	4.9
Ural	5.7	1.9
Siberia	3.9	5.5
Far East	1.8	0.5
Former Soviet Union Countries	3.3	1.4
Other Countries	1.5	0.8
<i>Holiday organization mode</i>		
Travel agency	8.3	6.9
Him (her) self	84.4	83.6
Other	7.3	9.5
<i>Source of payment for travel</i>		
Him (her) self	87.1	84.1
Employer	5.2	10.5
State programs	3.7	4.6
Others	3.9	0.7
<i>Decision concerning the timing of the trip</i>		
Days before arrivals	231.4	48.4

Table 2. *The main purpose of the trip to Sochi*

Purpose	Olympic tourists (n=404)	Paralympic tourists (n=428)	Total (n=832)
Visit the Olympics	77.1	65.1	71.0
Recreation	10.5	20.5	15.6
Treatment	2.5	1.9	2.2
Business	5.7	8.9	7.3
Other	4.2	3.6	3.9

Note: Chi-square = 20.394, df = 4, p < 0.000

Table 3. *The factors which effected on the decision to visit Sochi*

Factor	Olympic tourists, % (n=404)	Paralympic tourists, % (n=428)	χ^2	p-value
Desire to cheer	44.8	37.9	4.145	0.025
Visiting competitions	42.6	43.5	0.066	0.426
Not wanting to miss the chance to visit the home Games	39.6	47.9	5.805	0.010
Participant of the Games	4.2	3.3	0.509	0.289
Desire to support the athletes	26.7	32.7	3.549	0.035
New experience	7.9	6.5	0.590	0.263
Dip into the festival atmosphere	30.9	39.3	6.642	0.006
Spend time with friend	13.9	9.1	4.635	0.020
Non-Olympic factors	42.6	53.4	9.738	0.001

Note: choice of three answers was allowed

More Olympic tourists were motivated by a desire to cheer and travel in a company of friends. Paralympic tourists had a greater desire to support athletes, dip into the festival atmosphere and did not want to miss the chance to attend the Games. Non-Olympic factors for this group were more important.

For understanding the tourist expenditures pattern during the Games individual's total expenditure and the expenditure of 1 person per day, as well as separate areas of expenditure have been obtained (Table 4).

The results revealed that the average total personal expenditures by tourists at the Olympics was RUB 66,425 (\$1,911, if the official exchange rate USD/RUB of The Bank of Russia averaged 34.76 on February, 11th of 2014) and by tourists at the Paralympics was RUB 67,099 (\$1,930). Although the total expenditures of the Olympic and Paralympic visitors did not differ, the daily expenses during the Olympics were 35% higher and amounted to RUB 9,012 (\$259.26) vs. RUB 6,651 (US\$ 191.34). The absence of any differences in total expenditures was due to the shorter length of tourist stay at the Olympics compared with the Paralympic tourists (9.23 nights vs. 13.92 nights).

Table 4. *Olympic vs. Paralympic tourists' expenditures (per person, RUB)*

Tourist expenditure	Olympic tourists (n=256)			Paralympic tourists (n=305)			F
	Mean	Std. error	%	Mean	Std. error	%	
Total expenditure on the trip	66425	5419	-	67099	13205	-	0.002
Daily expenditure	9012	605	-	6651	911	-	4.329*
Disaggregated total expenditure on the trip:			100.0			100.0	
Accommodation	26227	10517	39.50	31778	9636	47.46	0.151
Transport to destination	11004	925	16.57	8172	848	12.28	5.094*
Shopping	1783	296	2.69	689	125	1.13	11.450*
Food and drink*	6517	610	9.81	10172	1255	15.26	5.917*
Cultural/sporting activities*	1335	197	2.01	1715	207	2.66	2.452
Local transport	542	86	0.82	621	89	0.94	0.298
Health	202	55	0.30	655	80	0.98	19.594*
Olympic souvenirs	3431	593	5.17	2945	270	4.59	0.468
Olympic tickets*	14337	1417	21.59	9485	940	14.24	7.345*
Other	1024	159	1.54	259	103	0.49	15.768*

Note: MANOVA, $F = 9.362$, $p < 0.05$; Wilk's $\Lambda = 0.855$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.145$

* the differences between tourist groups' expenditures were significant, $p < 0.05$

The multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare disaggregated expenditures between Olympic and Paralympic tourists. There were statistically significant differences in cost of transport, food and drink, tickets and medicine (see Table 3).

The Olympic tourist expenditures were higher for transport and tickets, while for Paralympic visitor expenditures were higher for food and medicine.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has shown that the Olympic tourists differed in some characteristics from those who have visited Sochi during the Paralympic Games. The Olympic visitors prepared for the trip in advance and visit to the Olympics was their main aim, where certain part of tourists surveyed during the Paralympics noted their visit to the Games needs some additional activities during their stay. Different factors influenced the arrival of tourists to Sochi: Olympic tourists were more like to cheer with friends at the competitions, while the Paralympic visitors were more interested in support of athletes in comparison with Olympic tourists. Another significant motive for the second group was the desire to get into the atmosphere of the Olympics. Considering these differences as typological criteria one may include Olympic tourists in the first Weeds' profile (primary sports tourists), while Paralympic tourists are mainly classified as the third profile (tourists interested in sport).

As to expenditures it could be assumed that the tourist spending at the Olympics was greater because of the higher price level. Indeed, the daily expenses of Olympic tourists were significantly higher than the Paralympic tourists, but the total expenditures were not substantially different due to a longer stay

of tourists during the Paralympics. This fact and the structure of spending indicate, once again, that the Paralympic tourists realized additional purposes for their visit to Sochi (recreation, business, entertainment, etc.).

This information may be useful to the authorities of the host destinations for the assessment of the economic impact of tourism and to be able to develop tailor made tourism products as pointed out by Lesjak, Axelsson and Mekinc (2017). The differences of visitors should induce International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the host committees to develop marketing strategies combining both the Olympic and Paralympic experience and considering both events as a whole. Event organizers should draw attention to those participants who already chose the Olympics and offer them tickets for the next event, perhaps as one “package”. Event marketers should seek to attract spectators to these events from the tourists who are already on holiday in the destination. In this case, event organizers should be more active in promoting interest of spectators in the event as a sporting competition, rather than participation out of a sense of compassion only.

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