

## La relación entre la experiencia de un evento deportivo y el bienestar psicológico: el caso de una “Maratón de Vela”

### The relationship between sport event experience and psychological well-being: the case of a “Sailing Marathon”

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**Resumen.** La naturaleza especial de los servicios deportivos recreativos orienta el interés investigativo contemporáneo hacia la naturaleza holística de la experiencia de eventos deportivos, enfatizando sus relaciones con los factores psicosociales que contribuyen al bienestar de los participantes. El objetivo de este estudio fue doble: (1) analizar las dimensiones de la experiencia de eventos deportivos en el contexto de un evento de maratón de vela y (2) investigar la contribución de los factores de experiencia de eventos deportivos al bienestar psicológico de los participantes. El estudio se llevó a cabo en Grecia, donde los participantes del evento completaron el Cuestionario del Perfil PERMA (Pezirkianidis, Stalikas, Lakioti y Yotsidi, 2019) y una escala multidimensional de Experiencia de Eventos Deportivos, diseñada especialmente para el propósito del estudio. Los resultados proporcionaron apoyo para la naturaleza holística y multinivel del constructo de experiencia de eventos deportivos, tal como fue teóricamente definido. El análisis de regresión mostró que el bienestar psicológico de los participantes fue significativamente predicho por la experiencia deportiva del evento, donde las dimensiones del entorno social, la marca y el entorno de servicios del evento tuvieron las contribuciones más significativas. Estos resultados muestran el valor de los eventos deportivos con una naturaleza recreativa para contribuir al desarrollo del bienestar individual. El modelo PERMA es uno aceptable para medir el bienestar percibido. Se discuten las implicaciones teóricas y prácticas de estos resultados.

**Palabras clave:** servicios deportivos, actividades de ocio, experiencia deportiva, maratón de vela, bienestar

**Abstract.** The special nature of recreational sport services, orientates the contemporary research interest to the holistic nature of sports event experience, emphasizing their relationships with psychosocial factors contributing to participants' well-being. The aim of this study was twofold: (1) to analyze the dimensions of sport event experience in the context of a sailing marathon event and (2) to investigate the contribution of the sport event experience factors to participants' psychological well-being. The study was conducted in Greece, where the participants of the event filled out the PERMA Profiler Questionnaire (Pezirkianidis, Stalikas, Lakioti & Yotsidi, 2019) and a multidimensional Sport Event Experience scale, designed especially for the study purpose. The results provided support for the holistic and multilevel nature of sport event experience construct in the case of a recreational sailing event, as it was theoretically defined. The regression analysis showed that participants' psychological well-being was significantly predicted by the event sport experience, where the dimensions of social environment, brand, and services environment of the event had the most significant contributions. These results show the value of sport events with a recreational nature in contributing to the development of individual well-being. The PERMA model is an acceptable one for measuring perceived well-being. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are discussed.

**Keywords:** sports services, leisure activities, sports experience, sailing marathon, well-being

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## Introduction

It is widely acknowledged today that sport activities are associated with multiple benefits for the participants, the community, and society in general (Eigenschenk, et al., 2019, Munoz Strale, et al., 2024). Many studies have shown that sport leisure activities enhance physical and psychological well-being (Andre, et al., 2017; Izenstark, et al., 2016). According to the World Health Organisation's guidelines (WHO, 2001), systematic sport activity subserves physical and psychological health, social relationships, and general well-being. In this sense, sport leisure activities promote a healthier lifestyle, which consequently serves as a core source of life satisfaction, self-esteem (Agyar, 2013) and subjective well-being (Theodorakis, Kaplanidou & Karabaxoglou, 2015), and quality of life in general (Hyun & Jordan, 2019). By now, only a relatively small number of studies have explored the relationship between sport event participation and happiness through sporting experience (Ruseski, et al., 2014). Sport event experience is an of increased interest

theoretical construct in sport management (Theodorakis, Howat & Avourdiadou, 2014), which is based on the -recently- introduced construct of customer experience. The customer experience concept derives from the experiential marketing field and refers to the personal experience, as a result of a series of interactions among customers, core product/service, and service providers. These interactions, known as touchpoints, affect customers' cognitive, affective, physical, and behavioral reactions, every single time of service consumption, in an individual way (Gentile, Spiller & Noci, 2007). Recent theoretical models focus on the holistic nature of customer experience, which embeds all these unique touchpoint interactions, throughout the customer journey (Ur Rehman Laghari, et al., 2010). While the study of the unique nature of sport services and participants' experience is crucial from a managerial standpoint (Sauer, Spradley & Cromartie, 2017), a few studies have focused on the measurement of customer experience in sport event settings (Funk, et al., 2016) and non robust theoretical model has been yet introduced. Klaus and Maklan

(2011) supported empirically the holistic nature of sport tourism event experience, highlighting the psycho-social factors that relate to the final sport experience, such as joy, social relationships, self-development, self-efficacy, and the feeling of experiencing something special. Respectively, Williams and Soutar (2000) studied sport experience in the leisure and tourism context, proposing a multilevel model, where the quality of services and psycho-social factors had a significant effect on the final sport experience.

Research on the influence of sport event experience on subjective well-being is still limited. Still, there is limited evidence on the role of sport events in participants' well-being (Piper, et al., 2022). Previous studies among sport participants have tested several variables in relation to perceived well-being such as socio-demographics, past event participation (Lundberg & Andersson, 2023), and event satisfaction (Armbrecht & Andersson, 2020). There have been also studies that examined subjective well-being among spectators (Ramchandani, Coleman & Milla, 2022) in relation to sport events. However, there have been no studies so far to examine the nature of sport event experience and its influence on individual well-being measured in a holistic approach with the PERMA model. The aim of this study was to explore the applicability of a multidimensional customer experience model to a sport event (Verhoef, et al., 2009) and its influence on subjective well-being, measured with the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011).

### ***Purpose of the Study***

Thus, the main research objective of this study was to test if sport event experience, as measured by a multidimensional model, has a significant positive effect on participants' psychological well-being, as measured by the PERMA model. As such, this study represents one of the few of its kind to report empirical data collected by sport event participants of a recreational nature and in relation to psychological well-being measured with a holistic approach.

### ***Literature Review***

#### ***Sport Event Experience***

The literature, on the consolidation of sport event experience, is consistent in its holistic nature focusing on the multi-facet factors that contribute to its formation, through a time continuum (Theodorakis, et al., 2014). Under this perspective, experience in sporting events takes place through all touch points between consumers and services (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In this sense, consumer experience is formed gradually through several cognitive and affective processes, such as quality evaluation, consuming satisfaction, and behavioral intentions (Alexandris, et al., 2004; Hurtado Barroso, et al., 2024; Theodorakis, et al., 2014).

The evaluation of various aspects of consumer experience lays the foundation for a unified planning of services, towards experiential strategic marketing (Theodorakis, Kaplanidou & Karabaxoglou, 2015). Most recent studies, supporting the holistic nature of customer experience, suggest that for successful management, it is essential to first understand all

these factors that contribute to its formation (Kranzbühler, et al., 2018). In this context, the study of the factors underlying the formation of sport event experience is based on the identification of these specific factors, that define its unique nature. After all, sport event experience refers to the sport services consumption, which is defined by some special features of the sport field.

In sport management literature, sport experience has been placed mainly on individual consumer factors, such as thoughts, affects, senses, and physical reactions, as well as internal incentives, service quality, and recent consumer experiences (Bertella, 2014; Minkiewicz, Evans & Bridson, 2014; Munoz Strale, et al., 2024; Prebensen & Foss, 2011; Vázquez, et al., 2023). To that point, Morgan (2006) argued that leisure event participation is based beyond hedonistic experiences, previous sport experiences, and individual characteristics of the participant, such as memories, interests, and current motivation. In corroborating this notion, De Keyser, Schepers, and Konuş (2015), argue that customer experience consists of several cognitive, affective, physical, sensual, spiritual, and social dimensions that contribute, in a unique manner, to the formation of the final experience. It is therefore proposed that, a better understanding of sport event experience relies upon the study of these touch points that attribute a uniqueness to the product as well as to the consumption experience (Schmitt, 2003).

#### ***The Measurement of Sport Event Experience***

Following the foregoing discussion, a series of multidimensional theories has made its appearance, in the effort to describe consumer experience through the basic principles of cognitive and consumer behavior sciences. In this sense, the definition of the nature of touch points during the consumer process is based on the multilevel review of consumer experience (Ur Lehman Laghari, Ben Yahya & Crespi, 2010). In line with this remark, sports services literature supports the holistic nature of the sport event experience introducing several dimensions such as the social environment, the atmosphere, the environmental factors, personal satisfaction, the sense of self-actualization, as well as the originality, and the prestige of the event (Green & Jones, 2005; Williams & Soutar, 2000).

Among these studies, Verhoef et al.'s (2009) theoretical model stands out as a pioneering work in the field, through its integrating nature. In this study, we tried to investigate the applicability of this model in the context of a small-scale leisure sport event. According to Verhoef et al. (2009), cognitive, affective, sensual, and physical individual factors, in combination with individual consumer's motivation, quality of services and prior consumer experiences interact synergistically into shaping the final consuming experience (Verhoef, et al., 2009). The following studies confirmed and extended the role of these dimensions into forming the consuming touch points, as presented below. Perceived value refers to the estimated discrepancy between expected benefits and actual cost of product consumption (Gallarza

& Saura, 2006) is determined through cognitive and affective elements, and is strongly connected with personalized experience (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). In sports services, perceived value is defined as the result of the cognitive assessment of the quality and usability of services (Byon, Zhang & Baker, 2013). Another dimension is the brand of the event, which corresponds to the participants' mental representations regarding the service provider, environment, physical activity, social environment, sense of self-actualization, and emotional involvement during participation (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2006). Co-creation refers to the creative space provided by the organizers to the consumers, to shape their own personalized experiences, according to their needs for self-actualization and self-renewal (Morgan, 2019).

Social environment refers to the social interaction between participants, staff, and spectators of the event, who all together contribute to the formation of the sense of a community (Verhoef, et al., 2009). In sporting events, social interaction among participants and spectators becomes more intense, as the emotional component is crucial in hedonistic service consumption (Kim, Han & Park, 2001). Service environment refers to the combination of these elements that constitute the ambient atmosphere, the service design as well as all the supporting services and products. Additionally, in sport events, the service environment consists of social factors, such as the presence and interaction among participants, fans, and staff (Kim, et al., 2018). Finally, Verhoef, et al. (2009) introduced the dimension of time in consuming experiences, as a core factor of the formation of the final experience, referring to previous, temporal, and future interactions between the consumer and the touch points. In this context, is based on the theoretical conception of the consumer journey, which relates to the consumers' perception and evaluation of the important touch points (Kranzbühler, et al., 2018). More specifically, consumers tend to remember mainly these touch points that emerge and generate positive emotions such as pleasure, joy, and excitement (Torres & Ronzoni, 2018), resulting in memorable positive experiences.

#### *PERMA model of wellbeing*

Wellbeing is a core construct in positive psychology research, which is correlated to experiencing fewer negative emotions, feeling good, being adaptive to life challenges, being self-aware of personal values and strengths as well as being a productive and active member of society (Pezirkianidis, et al., 2019; Seligman, 2011). Research has shown that high levels of well-being are positively correlated with high levels of positive emotions (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), optimism, positive attitude in life, mental toughness (Faircloth, 2017), meaning in life (Steger, 2012), perceived supportive social network (Chu, Saucier & Hafner, 2010) and good physical health (Diener, et al., 1999). Furthermore, well-being refers to good mental and physical health, because of systematic physical activity and a conscious adoption of a healthy lifestyle (Chen, Chang & Liu, 2015). Accordingly, in recent studies, participants in sports activities

who referred to high levels of well-being, reported also emotional stability, self-confidence, and enthusiasm in pursuit of a healthy and happy life (In-Sil, et al., 2015). Under this perspective, well-being is a subjective evaluation of one's psychological physical, and social condition of his/her life, on a consistent long-term basis (Butler & Kern, 2016; Car, et al., 2024).

According to Seligman's (2011) PERMA theoretical model, well-being constitutes five pillars of emotional, psychological, social, and physical nature. These five dimensions are positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishments. Positive emotions refer to experiencing strong positive emotions and, according to the Broaden-and-Build theory, are associated with enhancing one's cognitive, psychological, social, and physiological functions, building psychological resilience, and promoting physical and psychological well-being (Fredrickson, 2003; Fredrickson, et al., 2008).

Engagement involves several emotional, cognitive, and behavioral elements that describe individual commitment and absorption into the activity, in order to achieve a goal (Butler & Kern 2016). In these terms, engagement is related to the construct of flow, which refers to an excessive psycho-emotional experience, in which the individual is engaged in the activity to the extent that he/she experiences the maximum pleasure and sense of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). It is interesting to mention that, in sports activities, high levels of engagement and flow are positively associated with confidence, motivation, and less stress (Koehn, 2013). Positive relationships refer to the good relationships that a person has with family, friends, and important others, as well as the subjective estimation of received social support. Literature indicates that high levels of positive relationships and perceived social support are associated with high levels of well-being (Chandoevrit & Thampanishvong, 2016), as well as with experiencing positive life meaning (Kok, et al., 2013).

Meaning in life has been defined as the state of having a purpose and direction in life, larger than oneself, which generates motivation and passion and links to personal fulfillment (Pezirkianidis, et al., 2019). Meaning in life is promoted through cognitive and emotional processes regarding a person's experiences. In Seligman's theory (2011) the term accomplishment refers to the subjective evaluation of the individual's achievements. Individuals, who acknowledge and enjoy their achievements, experience higher levels of positive emotions and meaning in their lives (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). In addition, accomplishments are positively related to high levels of well-being, mental health, and psychological flourishing (Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2013).

A detailed review of the literature showed that there have been very limited attempts to test the influence of sport event participation on psychological well-being and in one of the few studies conducted among sport participants Armbricht and Andersson (2020) tested the influence of event satisfaction (hedonic and eudaimonic) on participants'

well-being. These authors reported that subjective well-being is influenced mainly by hedonic satisfaction, which acted as a fully mediating variable for eudaimonic satisfaction. However, in this study only the concept of happiness was used to conceptualize and measure well-being.

## Methodology

### Instruments

Two scales were administered in the present study. The measurement of participants' psychological well-being was made with the PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2013), which was translated and standardized in the Greek population from Pezirkianidis, et al., (2019). PERMA Profiler is a 23-item multidimensional questionnaire that measures the five dimensions of well-being based on Seligman's (2011) theory: positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishments. Three supplementary items measure physical health and also a single item that corresponds to a general well-being index. To examine the effect of sport event experience on participants' psychological well-being we created a scale based on Verhoef et al.'s (2009) customer experience theoretical model, properly adjusted to the sport event concept. The Sport Event Experience scale consisted of 18 items, measuring five factors: social interactions, co-creation feeling, service environment, perceived value, and brand of the event. All items were measured using five-point Likert scales.

### Procedure and Participants

The survey was carried out in Piraeus, Greece, in the context of the Sailing Marathon event. The target population was the event participants, who were amateur sailors of dinghy sailing boats. Data collection took place in person and on-site and, after the finish of the race. A total of 115 surveys were collected from a total of 132 participants at the Sailing Marathon event. The small size sample should be addressed as a limitation. Results cannot be generalized. However, it is adequate to run the proposed theoretical model and statistically test the relationships among the variables.

The Sailing Marathon is a sporting event, original in its nature, combining elements of leisure and sporting competition. A particularly distinctive feature of this event is that its participants are sailors from varying competence levels, such as amateurs and professionals, who sail several different types of boats. By extension, the participants covered a wide range of age, sailing experience, educational background, and geographical origin data. The special feature and core element of this event was the sailing marathon race, where all the participating sailing boats were found together in a single starting point. The Sailing Marathon event was held for three days in total, where in this period in addition to the sailing race, also took place training camps, lectures by renowned sailors, and an award ceremony. Most participants were males (61.7%), coming mostly from Attica (78.9%), followed by Macedonia

(11.3%) and other regions of Greece (7.2%). The average age of the participants was 37 years old. Additionally, most of the participants did sailing for 11- $\geq$ 15 years (36.1%), quickly followed by those of 6-10 years (33.3%) and those of only  $\leq$  5 years (29.6%). Furthermore, 52.1% of the respondents participated in the Sailing Marathon for the first time as well as 47.9% of the respondents had participated in the event before. A full sociodemographic profile of all participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.  
Profile of the Sample

		N	%	M	SD
Way of participation	e-mail	44	38.3	1.62	4.89
	paper 'n pencil	71	61.7		
Gender	Male	71	61.7	1.38	.489
	Female	44	38.3		
Education	Primary-Secondary	29	25.2	2.39	1.06
	Higher	29	25.2		
	Undergraduate	34	29.6		
	Postgraduate/Doctoral	23	20.0		
Region	Attica	91	78.9	1.33	.869
	Macedonia	13	11.3		
	Central Greece	4	2.8		
	Peloponnese	4	2.8		
	Island part of Greece	3	1.6		
How many years have you been involved in competitive sailing	$\leq$ 5 years	34	29.6	3.34	1.21
	6-10 years	38	33.3		
	11- $\geq$ 15 years	43	36.1		
If you participated in the sailing marathon event before	Yes	55	47.9	1.52	.503
	No	60	52.1		

### The Context: The Sailing Marathon event

#### Data Analysis

Analytical procedures using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were conducted to explore the dimensions that constituted the sport event experience of the participants. More specifically, the principal axis factoring method and Varimax orthogonal rotation were applied for the sport event experience factors' analysis. Subsequently, Cronbach's index was tested for the Sport Event Experience scale and PERMA Profiler questionnaire. Furthermore, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the level of prediction of participants' psychological well-being from the sport event experience factors. For the purpose of this case, event-related factors were set as the independent variables and respectively, participants' psychological wellbeing dimensions were set as dependent variables. For all survey variables, the criterion of normal distribution (Kolmogorov-Smirnov index, Q-Q plot, and histogram test) was applied.

## Results

### Exploratory Factor Analysis of Sport Event Experience Measurement scale

The exploratory factor analysis is used to investigate the latent variables behind the Sport Event Experience measurement scale, based on specific criteria. In the current

study, the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues-greater-than-1), a KMO measure of .60 (minimum proposed by Kaiser, 1974) and above, and factor loadings above .40 on a subscale were set as eligible criteria (Brown, 2015). The EFA resulted in a four-factor structure, with eigenvalues more than 1, a KMO measure of sampling adequacy of .79 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2=450.629$ ,  $df=105$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This four structure factor is conceptually clear. The sub-scales were named as follows: brand, related to the

strength of the name of the event, social environment related to the social interactions in the event, service environment, related to the intangible aspect of the event, and co-creation, and related to participants' contribution to the final service product. All the items measured by the Sport Event Experience scale and their factor loadings are listed in Table 2. These results propose that the brand of the event, the social aspect, and the opportunities for co-creation are important dimensions that influence the development of individual well-being.

Table 2. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis of Sport Event Experience Scale.

Items	Factor loadings			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Knowing the good reputation of the event organizers, I was motivated to register	.866			
The presence and participation of well-known sailors, motivated me to declare my participation in the event	.852			
The event has formed a good reputation, and that was one of the reasons I participated	.710			
The fact that my friends and co-athletes would participate in the event, motivated me to register.	.705			
My participation in the event allowed me to develop my skills in the sport		.807		
The special requirements of the sailing marathon made it a race challenge for me		.630		
The social atmosphere of the event made me feel familiar with the other participants		.600		
During my participation in the event, I felt that I was a member of a wider community.		.427		
Trophies, prizes and souvenirs			.719	
Award ceremony			.599	
Observance of activity schedule			.540	
Facilities			.473	
The ability to stream live snapshots of the event on social media has made my participation more exciting				.751
The staff was willing to serve me in whatever I needed				.647
The event organizers took the necessary precautions for my own safety				.626
Eigenvalues	5.00	2.06	1.59	1.37
% of total variance	33.38	13.77	10.59	9.17
Total variance				66.92

Note: (1): brand, (2): social environment, (3): service environment, (4): co-creation

As regards the reliability, the composite reliability estimates of Sport Event Experience factors had satisfactory ranges from .70 to .95, as well as PERMA Profiler factors, showed a satisfactory degree of internal consistency, corresponding to the Cronbach's alpha values as reported to the PERMA standardization in the Greek population (Pezirkianidis, et al., 2019). EFA item statistics and reliability estimates for all measures are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and reliability estimates for the examined latent factors.

Factor	Dimensions	Mean	SD	alpha
Sport Event Experience		.861		
	Brand	3.497	1.087	.880
	Social environment	3.707	.711	.561
	Service environment	4.134	.571	.779
	Co-creation	3.929	.735	.791
Subjective well being		.920		
	Positive emotions	4.193	.610	.852
	Engagement	4.144	.567	.484
	Positive relationships	4.164	.621	.661
	Meaning in life	4.165	.643	.710
	Accomplishments	4.016	.565	.585
	Overall well-being index	4.35	.727	
Physical health	4.321	.655	.813	

### Multiple Regression analysis

Standard multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine how much of the variance of each variable of participants' psychological well-being could be explained by the four factors of the sport event experience. The values were examined using the stepwise method and the results of the analyses are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the multiple regression analyses by Sport Event Experience factors.

PERMA factors	B	Beta	t	p
Engagement	Social Environment ( $R^2=.072$ , $F= 6.16$ , $p<.01$ )			
	.22	.27	2.5	.01
Meaning in life	Social Environment ( $R^2=.13$ , $F=11.25$ , $p<.001$ )			
	.32	.35	3.3	.001
Accomplishments	Brand ( $R^2=.097$ , $F= 8.51$ , $p<.01$ )			
	.16	.31	2.9	.01
Overall well-being index	Service Environment ( $R^2=.095$ , $F= 8.30$ , $p<.01$ )			
	.39	.31	2.9	.005

The results revealed a statistically significant model, in which the social environment, the service environment, and the brand of the event had significant positive effects on the majority of the participants' well-being. More specifically, a significant regression equation was found for engagement ( $F= 6.16$ ,  $p<.01$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .072, where social envi-

ronment had a positive effect ( $\beta=.27$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Respectively, a significant regression equation was found for meaning in life ( $F=11.25$ ,  $p=.001$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .13, where social environment had a positive effect ( $\beta=.35$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Furthermore, a significant regression equation was found for accomplishments ( $F=8.51$ ,  $p<.01$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .097. More specifically, the brand of the event had a positive effect on the factor ( $\beta=.31$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Finally, the service environment was found as a significant predictor for the overall well-being index ( $F=8.30$ ,  $p<.01$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .095, having a positive effect on the factor ( $\beta=.31$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to add a new perspective to the literature by testing the customer experience, as introduced by Verhoef et al. (2009), in the context of a sailing marathon sport event, and furtherly understanding its relationship with participants' psychological well-being. The results of this study showed that the social environment, the service environment, and the brand of the event had a significant positive effect on the participants' well-being, showcasing the value of the social identity of the sporting events, specifically in the case of a sailing event. The results proved to be consistent with recent theoretical models of experiential marketing that introduce sport experience through a multi-level interaction prism, between the important touch points of sports products and the psychological attributes of participants (Patricio, et al., 2011). Accordingly, previous empirical management studies have examined the essence, structure, and nature of customer experience, as well as its relationship with several consumers' psychological factors, in different service contexts. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to integrate sport experience and participants' psychological well-being into a small-scale sport event and to test it empirically. In this light, this study carries both theoretical and practical implications.

## Implications

### Theoretical Implications

The first theoretical contribution of this study relates to the conceptual understanding of the holistic nature of sport event experience within the context of a sailing marathon sport event. Given this consideration, this study represents one of the few of its kind, to report empirical data collected by leisure and professional sport participants, in conjunction with two academic fields of sport management and positive psychology.

The second theoretical contribution is the highlighting of two sport experience factors that had a positive effect on participants' wellbeing: social environment and brand of the event. As concerns to the effect of the brand, this finding is consistent with recent literature, as participants in sporting events report that they feel their well-being

boosted, through accomplishing specific goals, related to the brand of the event as well as to their fulfillment (Filo & Coghlan, 2016). In addition, according to Kumar and Kim (2014), consumers express their identity and the relationships that are important to them, through the brand of the product they consume. Several studies argued that group participation in a sporting event and the interaction among the participants leads to the creation of valuable experiences and enhancement of the prestige of the event (Rihova, et al., 2014). Perceived event prestige strongly connects to the individual perception of its brand (Moital, Bain & Thomas, 2018) and has a positive effect on sport involvement and participants' intent to return (Kim, Liu & Love, 2015).

Referring to the effect of social environment, this study found as a major predictive factor of participants' subjective well-being. At this point, it is worthwhile to mention that this finding highlights the value of the social identity of a sport event and the unique role of participants, as consumers and co-creators of the final product, as well as their own sport experience. This position is validated by many studies that have shed light on the social nature of sports and leisure events. Leisure sport events consist of a context, where participants come together as communities, interact in a specific place, share common interests, and form collaboratively unique experiences (Jung, 2008; Morgan, 2007). In addition to the research findings, it is noted that social relationships have long been an important element of well-being (Seligman, 2011) and human happiness (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). This is particularly the case of sailing events with a recreational nature. Such events combine competition with recreation, in social and educational environments, since they can be promoted as "festivals" in which sport and educational activities are also provided. These activities can include teaching sessions, personal skill development, and wellness activities.

This brings us to the third contribution, which is to propose that participation in sports activities contributes to the creation and strengthening of social relationships that affect positively well-being (Brajša-Zganec, Merkaš & Šverko, 2011). Several studies have shown that the social nature of outdoor activities enhances participants' social life and skills through cooperation, communication, empathy, trust, and a sense of belonging to a community (Andre, et al., 2017; Matos, et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2003; Sandford, Duncombe & Armour, 2008). Respectively, the sport of sailing promotes the socialization and fortification of the social relationships of athletes (Morgan, 2019). In the case of recreational sailing events, former athletes can participate, which promotes the recreation aspects of the event and satisfying nostalgia related motives. In this notion, Sato, Jordan, and Funk (2016), in their study of a mass running festival, showed that the main source of participants' pleasure was the time spent with people, with whom they shared common interests. The social nature of sport events serves as a reciprocal cycle that enhances a healthy lifestyle, which embraces the creation of a long-term supportive social network that supports high

goal setting, commitment to endeavor, and personal success (Lascano, 2016).

It has also to be noted that well-being has a strong hedonic element, which is expected to be developed when participating in events that provide opportunities for self-development, social interaction, and physical exercise. Sailing events with a recreational nature, as the one used in this study, create an environment that foster hedonic motives of participants and subsequently contributing towards individuals' well-being. And this can be further strengthened if such events involve local communities and provide opportunities for social inclusion.

### Practical Implications

From a managerial point of view, the results of this study may be useful to focus on these event-related factors, in the context of a sailing marathon, that could significantly contribute to participants' well-being. This aspect of sport event management could promote the development of memorable sport event experiences that could subsequently relate to positive behavioral intentions, contributing this way to participants' well-being and a healthy lifestyle in general. The goal would be to attract more participants to sailing events, promoting images related to well-being and healthy activities, as well as, attaching certain meanings to each sport event, and consequently increase the participants' loyalty.

At this point, another practical implication lays in the focus on the needs of spectators and participants of sailing events, to capture significant touch points and behaviors that support a satisfying sport experience. Especially, through a better understanding of the social meaning of the sport event experience, sailing event marketers could better predict and apply their services according to participants' needs. In this direction, it is proposed to highlight those social elements of sport experience by using innovative methods to create unique and memorable experiences through a personalized service environment. In particular, the use of technology services, on the one hand, could strengthen the social network of participants and on the other hand, could promote the sport event. For example, the use of augmented reality technologies, or live streaming of the experience through social media as well as the evaluation of the experience with online media, through the customer journey, are highly suggested.

Last but not least, a third practical implication lays in the fact that, in recent years, recreational sports activities, especially those performed in nature, have become popular, not only as recreational and tourism products but also as a means of promoting the mental and physical health of the general population. It is therefore recommended to carry out recreational sports activities, such as sailing, that will be easily accessible and attractive to the public, will meet their needs, and will be part of an ecosystem of human-nature interaction. The sport of sailing is offered as a leisure sport

activity for people of a wide range of ages and physical conditions. In this context, it is proposed to organize sailing events open to the public, in order to get to know and join the sport with an ultimate goal to include sports in their lives in general.

In addition to that, it is proposed to implement sports and recreational activities and events, into social integration programs for special groups of people, such as adolescents with delinquent behavior problems, elderly people, and people with special needs. The idea is based on the creation of memorable sport experiences by offering sport services that apply to the special needs of these target groups of people, considering that they often are excluded from regular sports activities. Key points to that effort are that the social environment of sailing events and the personalized service environment will enhance people's self-actualization and therefore will boost their engagement in sports and a healthy lifestyle.

### Limitations and Future Research

Even though the current study provides new insights concerning the nature and the effect of sport event experience on participants' psychological well-being, several limitations should be mentioned. First, the most obvious limitation of this research was the small sample size, which limits the generalization of findings beyond the context of this study. Second, the small sample size meant that we were also unable to discern any differences in responses between participants with different socio-demographic characteristics. Therefore, future research is proposed with a larger sample of participants in several types of sports events. Thus, it would be interesting for future researchers to assess our model examining sport experience among different sport activities as well as, among different sizes of sport events, considering that larger events may be evaluated on different aspects than small scale.

In addition, it is the longitudinal collection of quantitative and qualitative data from several sport events, in order to capture the sport event experience over a continuous period during the consumer journey. Finally, future research efforts should also examine the possibility of constructing a robust theoretical model of sport event experience, which will incorporate all the important touch points involved during the consumer journey and will capture their effect on participants' psychological factors. This theoretical model is considered to serve as a guide for the sport event organizers, to gain immediate feedback and improve the participants' experience, providing long-term positive results for memorable sport experiences.

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