Case Study : Sociology

Constraints and Constraint Negotiation when Participating in Domestic and International Masters Games

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[Received October 8, 2017; Accepted June 21, 2018; Published online July 3, 2018]

Japan will host the Rugby World Cup 2019, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the World Masters Games 2021 Kansai. A total of 30,000 domestic and 20,000 international athletes are expected to participate in the World Masters Games 2021 Kansai. However, little is known about constraints and constraint negotiation among such sport tourists (i.e., masters athletes). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the constraints and constraint negotiation experienced when Japanese masters athletes participate in domestic and international masters games. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Japanese masters athletes who had participated in both domestic and international (outside of Japan) masters athletic games and who belonged to the prefectural Masters Athletics Association. Thematic analysis of the transcribed data was conducted in an inductive manner. Our results indicated that: (a) time, physiological, and masters-game-specific constraints exist in both domestic and international contexts, while financial and travel constraints exist only in international contexts; (b) family, time, financial, and psychological negotiation exist in both domestic and international contexts; and (c) constraints and constraint negotiation may differ depending upon the nature of participation in the masters games (i.e., the level of involvement and social orientation).

Keywords: constraints, constraint negotiation, Japan, masters athletes, sport tourism

1. Introduction

Japan will host the Rugby World Cup 2019, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the World Masters Games (WMG) 2021 Kansai. A total of 30,000 domestic and 20,000 international athletes are expected to participate in the WMG 2021 Kansai. Statistics from past WMG indicate that the majority of participants were domestic (International Masters Games Association, n.d.). For example, in the WMG 2017 Auckland (albeit comprising a wider domestic area), 67% of the total participants came from either New Zealand (n = 11,775) or Australia (n = 7,240); only 792 came from Japan (International Masters Games Association, 2017). It is therefore reasonable to assume that Japanese participation will be key to the success of the WMG 2021 Kansai. More importantly, this can be considered an important step toward the realization of a lifelong sports society in Japan.

To this end, examining the problems experienced by Japanese masters athletes when participating in domestic and international masters games (MGs) and the strategies they employ to overcome these problems is a relevant line of inquiry. In leisure studies, such problems are called constraints and refer to “factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000). The strategies employed are called constraint negotiation, which refers to “the effort of individuals to use behavioral or cognitive strategies to facilitate leisure participation despite constraints” (Schneider and Wilhelm Stanis, 2007). Although these two themes are well researched in leisure studies, little research on them has been conducted in sport tourism contexts, especially...
MG contexts. Given that theory-driven research is necessary for sport tourism in Japan (Ito and Hinch, 2017), the use of leisure constraints theory will contribute to the advancement of the collective body of knowledge in this field. Thus, the purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate constraints and constraint negotiation when Japanese masters athletes participate in domestic and international MG. We focused on masters track and field athletes because of (a) ease of accessibility and (b) size: many track and field participants take part in WMGs (International Masters Games Association, 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Leisure Constraints and Sport Tourism

Crawford et al. (1991) reported three types of constraints: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints are psychological qualities (e.g., attitudes), whereas interpersonal constraints include the lack of companions and social interactions with friends, family, and others. Structural constraints are external conditions in the environment (e.g., lack of time, money, or facilities) (Crawford et al., 1991). Although some sport tourism researchers (e.g., Hinch and Jackson, 2000) have employed the leisure constraints approach, such empirical research is limited in Japanese contexts. Exceptions exist, however. For example, Nishio et al. (2013) investigated constraints among Japanese outbound sport tourists who participated in the Honolulu Marathon in 2010 and 2011. They identified five constraints (marathon event information, tourist information, companions, safety and culture differences, and financial issues), and found that marathon event and tourist information negatively influenced revisit intention and satisfaction, respectively. Additionally, Nishio (2014) examined the constraints of 3,773 general Japanese tourists and developed the International Sports Fan Constraints Scale, which contains six constraints (alternative leisure options, security, the lack of tourist attractiveness, different culture, companions, and distance).

2.2. Constraint Negotiation and Sport Tourism

Jackson et al. (1993) reported two major constraint negotiation strategies: behavioral (i.e., an observable change in behavior) and cognitive (i.e., devaluing unselected or constrained activity alternatives). Jackson and Rucks (1995) further clarified the two strategies by differentiating between action (behavioral) and inaction (cognitive), and also expanded the repertoire of cognitive strategies by including acceptance of or resignation to constraints. Although constraint negotiation research in sport tourism is still rare, Hinch and Jackson (2000) highlighted that sport tourists negotiate tourism seasonality (or seasonal constraints) including both natural (e.g., climatic conditions) and institutional (e.g., school and work commitments) factors, in various ways (e.g., having short vacations dispersed throughout the year). As far as we are aware, however, constraint negotiation among Japanese sport tourists has not been investigated.

In summary, although constraints and constraint negotiation are well-studied concepts in leisure studies, empirical knowledge of these concepts among Japanese sport tourists, especially MG participants, is largely limited. Therefore, this exploratory study addresses this gap in knowledge qualitatively with the following two research questions: (a) What types of constraints do Japanese masters athletes experience when participating in domestic and international MGs? and (b) How do they overcome those constraints?

3. Methods

Five Japanese masters athletes participated in semi-structured interviews. Table 1 reports their socio-demographic information. These interviews were conducted in February 2017 and the average length of the interviews was 39.8 minutes. Recruitment used a snowball sampling method. All the interviewees had participated in both domestic and international MGs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>When Starting Masters Athletics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mika</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuta</td>
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<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naoto</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shin</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keigo</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
international (outside of Japan) masters athletics games and belonged to the prefectural Masters Athletics Association. More specifically, all of them had participated in domestic MGs over 20 times and in international MGs either once or twice.

After general questions about their masters athletic experiences as an introduction to the interviews, the participants were asked the following questions: (a) What problems have you experienced when participating in domestic MGs?; (b) What strategies have you adopted to overcome these problems?; (c) What problems have you experienced when participating in international MGs?; and (d) What strategies have you adopted to overcome these problems?

For data analysis, we employed thematic analysis, which refers to “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006), in an inductive manner. Our thematic analysis consisted of the following six steps, applied separately to constraints and constraint negotiation: familiarizing the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All names in the results section are pseudonymous. Because the interviews were conducted in Japanese, the first author translated the direct quotes into English.

4. Results

4.1. Constraints

For domestic contexts, the following seven codes were identified: work responsibilities, family responsibilities, community responsibilities, age, physical conditions, lack of information, and equipment. The first three codes related to a lack of time and were therefore categorized into the theme of time constraints. For example, Yuta mentioned how his community service consumed his leisure time as follows: “I don’t have enough leisure time to travel. ... I would like to participate in MGs, but I’m very busy working for my community. No one takes over my responsibilities...” Mika and Naoto similarly associated their family and work responsibilities, respectively, with a lack of time. The two codes, age and physical conditions, were unique to masters athletes, and they were categorized into another theme, physiological constraints. Mika articulated that maintaining her physical condition for participation in MGs is very challenging: “Upon reaching this age, it is very hard to maintain physical condition without injuries.” The last two codes related to MG participation, and they were categorized into the theme of MG-specific constraints. For instance, regarding the lack of information, Naoto mentioned: “If I had known, I would have participated in most MGs. But if I don’t know [about MGs], I won’t be able to participate [in them].” Additionally, Mika pointed out how her lack of equipment made it difficult to participate in MGs: “Although I could borrow a vaulting pole for competitions, I like to use my own pole.” This equipment constraint depended on the type of track and field sports the interviewees participated in, as some sports did not require any special equipment.

For international contexts, the following 12 codes were identified: work responsibilities, family responsibilities, community responsibilities, age, physical conditions, lack of information, equipment, personal record, financial costs, language, transportation, and destination characteristics. As with the constraints in domestic contexts, the following three main themes emerged: time (work, family, and community responsibilities), physiological (age, physical conditions), and MG-specific (lack of information, equipment, personal record) constraints. Among these codes, that of personal record in MG-specific constraints was unique to international contexts, as Mika articulated: “I would hesitate to participate [in international MGs] if I didn’t have a decent record.” In addition to these constraints, the code of financial costs seemed to be the most prominent constraint in international contexts because of transportation and accommodation fees. Therefore, we transformed this code into the theme of financial constraints. Shin emphasized this type of constraint particularly in international contexts: “International MG participation was very expensive, very, very expensive.” Keigo concurred, by stating: “Money is an issue. I don’t mind traveling to Asian countries for MGs, but not to Europe or America.” The last three codes related to international travel, which was categorized into the theme of travel constraints. For instance, language was a key constraint. Yuta and Naoto both articulated how language barriers made it difficult to travel in international contexts: “It is troublesome to communicate in different lan-
languages. I wish I could speak English” (Yuta) and “It is language that is the problem. I cannot communicate outside of Japan” (Naoto). Similarly, the use of international flights seemed to be a significant hurdle. Naoto stated that “Taking international flights is really difficult.” Shin also highlighted travel distance issues, and added: “If the destination is too far away, it affects my performance.” Mika’s interview emphasized not only the issue of travel distance but also the climate at the destination: “[The destination] is very cold, ... I cannot practice well during winter.” Figure 1 shows the relationships between the codes and themes in the constraints.

Lastly, it should be noted that the interviewees provided mixed statements in terms of companionship. Some of them explained that having companions was necessary to participate in international MGs: “I wouldn’t go by myself” (Shin) and “I don’t go by myself. ... When I attend domestic games, I can find someone [I know] coming from other prefectures” (Mika). In contrast, two interviewees did not mind the lack of companions. Naoto said, “I would even go by myself if I wanted to go. I don’t think I need companions at all.” Keigo also mentioned that he would prefer traveling by himself: “I don’t prefer travelling with a group; it is just expensive to travel with a group.”

4.2. Constraint Negotiation

Constraint negotiation was employed in a similar manner in both domestic and international contexts, and the following six codes were identified for both: family support, managing work schedules, coordinating other commitments, managing economic situations, prioritizing participation, and accepting reality. The first code, family support, was renamed the theme of family negotiation. For example, Naoto asked his daughter to help him when traveling to France and Tokyo for MG participation: “I wouldn’t be able to go without help. I asked my daughter to come with me when traveling to France. I even asked her to come to Tokyo with me.” Mika’s strategy was similar to Naoto’s, in that she instructed her husband and children how to use the laundry machine before traveling to an international MG. The two codes, managing work schedules and coordinating other commitments, were categorized into the theme of time negotiation. As Mika articulated, “I get my work responsibilities done in advance [of MGs]. I can coordinate them.”
This strategy provided her with additional free time for MG participation, as she scheduled her work commitments well. The code of managing economic situations was transformed into the theme of financial negotiation. Keigo explained: “If I don’t have money, I don’t go. I try to save money [for MGs] and I don’t stay at expensive hotels.” This strategy allowed him to resolve a mismatch between his economic situation and the cost of MG participation. The last two codes, prioritizing participation and accepting reality, were categorized into the theme of psychological negotiation. However, only Naoto employed this type of strategy, as he articulated: “I just leave other responsibilities alone, and go” and “No matter what I say, I cannot fight old age.”

Figure 2 shows the relationships between the codes and themes in constraint negotiation.

5. Discussion

5.1. Constraints

The results of the thematic analysis identified time, physiological, and MG-specific constraints in both domestic and international contexts, and financial and travel constraints only in international contexts. All of these constraints could be classified as structural constraints based on Crawford et al.’s (1991) typology; however, this exploratory study revealed some meaningful sub-dimensions within the structural constraints. Although time constraints have frequently been reported in other leisure contexts, physiological constraints are prominent in our research context. Given that many previous studies have overlooked this type of constraint, particularly in measurement (Ito et al., 2018; Kono et al., 2018), understanding it is necessary to promote MG participation. This aligns with the following MG belief: “active participation is beneficial to older members of society” (Ryan and Trauer, 2005). Additionally, acknowledging MG-specific constraints appears to help the promotion of MG participation, because variability in constraints across leisure activities exists (Godbey et al., 2010). In particular, the issue of climate as an MG-specific constraint corresponds with Hinch and Jackson’s (2000) acknowledgement of seasonality as a constraint unique to sport tourism. However, it should be noted that MG-specific constraints do not exclusively apply to MG participants, as other sport participants can also experience the issues of lack of information and equipment. Rather, our intention in developing this MG-specific category aligns with Ito et al.’s (2018) proposition that adopting an activity-specific constraint category helps to diminish the heterogeneity of other constraint categories.

In addition, financial and travel constraints were identified in international contexts. These results align with Nishio et al. (2013), who reported that financial constraints and cultural differences, including language barriers were major constraints among Japanese outbound sport tourists. Financial constraints have been reported in leisure studies generally, whereas travel constraints are unique to
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Given that international travelling has its own constraints (e.g., language, transportation, information), the intersection of traveling and MG participation should be carefully examined in future research on sport tourism. Interestingly, interpersonal constraints were reported in international contexts, but the results were somewhat mixed. As Nishio et al. (2013) found, this type of constraint was not prominent among Japanese outbound sport tourists; there may be individual variability in interpersonal constraints that may reflect the different nature of MG participation. Based on the level of involvement with MGs and social sport orientation (vs. pure sport orientation), Ryan and Trauer (2005) classified MG participants into four groups: the games enthusiast (high involvement, social sport orientation), the serious competitor (high involvement, pure sport orientation), the novice/dabbler (low involvement, social sport orientation), and the spectator (low involvement, pure sport orientation). In fact, Mika and Shin recognized the existence of at least two groups, those with social sport orientation and pure sport orientation: “Out of all MG participants, one group is focused on personal records and the other group is about fun with friends” (Mika). This finding also relates to the unique code of MG-specific constraints, that of personal record, in international contexts. Our results might imply that constraints among MG participants can vary across the four participant groups, suggesting that future constraint research in MG contexts needs to take into account the nature of MG participation.

5.2. Constraint Negotiation

The results of the thematic analysis identified family, time, financial, and psychological negotiation in both domestic and international contexts. According to Jackson et al.’s (1993) typology, the first three can be classified as behavioral and the last as cognitive negotiation. Family negotiation appears to be unique to the MG and tourism contexts. Smandahl (2005) states that not only individual but collective actions should also be examined in negotiation research. This is particularly true in the context of our study, given that understanding and support from family members is necessary for the pursuit of masters athletic careers. For example, traveling by seniors involves a great amount of effort (e.g., international flights); therefore, family members may be one of the few if not the only interpersonal resources who could be asked for support with minimal hesitation. This may be because of ingroup relations (e.g., family) in collectivistic cultures such as Japanese culture. Triandis et al. (1988) stated that in contrast to individualist cultures, “In collectivist cultures the relationship of the individual to the ingroup tends to be stable, and even when the ingroup makes highly costly demands the individual stays with it”. Our interpretation aligns with Smandahl’s (2005) contention that negotiation should be understood as the interaction between an individual and internalized cultural systems of meaning.

Time, financial, and psychological negotiation strategies are not unique to sport tourism contexts, as shown by prior leisure research (e.g., Hubbard and Mannell, 2001; Jackson and Rucks, 1995). It should be noted, however, that only Naoto reported the use of psychological negotiation (i.e., prioritizing participation, accepting reality), and this may be because he was one of the oldest interviewees, close to 90 years old. Due to his age, he may have to employ psychological negotiation more than behavioral strategies, unlike the other younger interviewees. Additionally, as with constraints, constraint negotiation might differ across the four groups of MG participants (Ryan and Trauer, 2005). For example, only Naoto might be classified as a serious competitor (high involvement, pure sport orientation) among our interviewees; therefore, he employed cognitive as well as behavioral negotiation to participate in MGs. Future research should investigate this possibility.

6. Conclusion

This exploratory study attempted to clarify constraints and constraint negotiation experienced when Japanese masters athletes participate in domestic and international MGs. The results of the thematic analysis indicated that: (a) time, physiological, and MG-specific constraints exist in both domestic and international contexts, while financial and travel constraints exist only in international contexts; (b) family, time, financial, and psychological negotiation exist in both domestic and international contexts; and (c) constraints and constraint negotiation might differ depending upon the nature of MG participation (i.e., the level of involvement
and social orientation).

As with any research, this exploratory study has limitations. One of the major limitations is the small sample size. Future research with a larger sample size will allow researchers to examine similarities and differences in constraints and constraint negotiation among the four groups participating in MGs (Ryan and Trauer, 2005). Additionally, future research should re-examine our results with different populations and various research methods. Another limitation is the focus on either (a) “people who, despite experiencing a constraint, do not reduce or otherwise change their participation at all (successful proactive response)” or (b) “people who participate but in an altered manner (partly successful proactive response)” (Jackson et al., 1993). Because we purposefully recruited research participants who had participated in both domestic and international MGs, our exploratory study could not address constraints and constraint negotiation among people who did not participate in MGs (reactive response). Future research should investigate constraints and constraint negotiation in reactive response groups. Having acknowledged these limitations, however, we still believe that this exploratory study contributes to the development of sustainable sport tourism in Japan (Hinch and Ito, 2018) and provides valuable knowledge to help lead the WMG 2021 Kansai to success.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 16K21172.

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