

# Why do We Follow Sporting Events?

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of the study was to investigate the motives for following sporting events and their dependence upon gender and age of spectators. The study was based on a survey of 1727 adult Slovenes. According to the results the most important motives could be classified in the category of Dionysian values. This means that the role of sport in a spectator's life is not that influential; it is much more considered a source of relaxation and pleasure. Higher values of all motives were given by men. Women found the motive »National importance of sport« more important, while the motives »Attraction of sports« and »Competitiveness, fighting spirit, victory« were placed higher by men. Younger spectators evaluated the motives higher, with motives »Pleasure, Entertainment« and »Sport Dynamism« being most important. The data reveal those attributes of sport that have always caught and will also continue to catch the eye of the spectators.*

**Key words:** spectators of sporting events, motives, adults Slovenes

## Introduction

Sport is one of the integral segments of human culture. The sporting event spectators, either gathering at sports venues or watching and reading about sporting events in the media, are an important part of sport and to some extent impact the entire organization and purpose of sports competitions. A good knowledge of spectators' values and interests is important for the organizational culture of sport that is also geared towards commercial success, which nowadays is inevitable – primarily in terms of athletes' professionalism.

The role of spectators in sport is extremely interesting and by all means deserves further in-depth scientific analyses. The humanities in particular, placing sport in a broader social framework, may contribute substantially to broadening of knowledge of spectatorship, a phenomenon that has been a companion to sport throughout the history. A quick glance at the history of Romans and ancient Greeks and their historical remains reveals that competitive events, the circuses and various combats were always tremendously interesting for passive on-lookers – those watching from the side. The modern sports stadiums resemble the antique stadiums and arenas. The central stage where a competition or a combat takes place is surrounded by tiers of seats for spectators. In the present era of technologically highly developed media the stadiums find their way to the passive public in many ways. The leading medium is the one that most

effectively transposes the real atmosphere – of course, television has a big edge here. However, radio and printed media have also developed sophisticated ways of conveying information. This points to the fact that spectacle production is an important attribute of sport. Spectators represent an indispensable part of the current elite sports culture. The sports culture is anthropologically conditioned by participation of an individual, irrespective of the role they play in a cultural context. In each role, participation of an individual depends on their values and needs which in a specific manner trigger their motivated behaviour and activity. By all means, following of sporting events is a specific activity of an individual, which is in a causal relationship with the impact of different motivational dimensions, with some of them resting on biological and other on completely sociological bases.

In this article, we shall not reach beyond the autonomy of the sports world and we uncritically assume spectacle to be an important attribute of sport. We are well aware of the criticism that the humanities level against the spectacle society<sup>1</sup>, however, it is not reasonable to translate this criticism bluntly into the world of sport, without a methodological adaptation. The term »spectre« means »to watch, observe what is displayed«. A spectacle aims at creating a visual impression. Not everything we watch is a spectacle. Spectacle is based on an

exhibition of the object and hence presupposes spectators. It is an organic connection with synergic effects. To identify the possibilities and mechanisms for impressing of a sporting event on the spectator's mind and consequently also the reproduction and reconstruction of the sports culture, our survey tried to establish the motives that guide spectators.

According to Sloan<sup>2</sup> there are five categories of theories concerning motives of sport spectators: salubrious effects, stress and stimulation seeking, catharsis and aggression, entertainment and achievement seeking. The Sport Fan Motivation Scale (SFMS) was first developed by Wann<sup>3</sup>, and included 8 factors: eustress, self-esteem, escape from everyday life, entertainment, economic factors, aesthetics, group affiliation and family needs. First, fourth and sixth factor could be classified as intrinsic motives while the other five factors reflect extrinsic motives<sup>4</sup>. Later some other scales were developed<sup>5-7</sup> showing that motives vary between different social groups, age, gender and education. Recent literature on sport consumption and motivation shows a bewildering range of two to nine categories of motives of sport spectators<sup>8</sup>. The strongest found motives were achievement<sup>9</sup>, the drama and uncertainty of the outcome<sup>9,10</sup> or entertainment<sup>11</sup>.

The motives which are more important to women are Apollonian values<sup>12</sup>. They are consisting of Moral and Implementar values such as Leisure, Aesthetic impression, Truth, Privacy, Security, Altruism, Hope. Men are guided mostly with motives such as Pleasure, Creation, Improvement, Health, Sex, Sociability, Physical impression and Money. They are classified as Hedonistic or Potential values (both as subcategories of Dionysian values)<sup>12</sup>. Studies show that male spectators are more likely to be motivated by eustress<sup>4</sup>, self esteem<sup>4</sup>, economic<sup>11,13</sup> and aesthetics<sup>4,7</sup>, while female fans are more likely to be motivated by family needs<sup>4</sup> and salubrious effects<sup>5</sup>. However, these results appear somewhat inconsistent when comparing different studies, but there seem to be some support for the notion of differences between men and women.

Even if values are considered to be relatively permanent and stable, they change and develop during lifespan. Hedonistic values (enjoyment and pleasure), which are most significant in youth, are followed by Potential Values (success and achievement). The Moral values (duty and responsibility) and Implementer values, which represent spiritual maturity and implementation, come to the front later in life<sup>14</sup>. There are also inconsistent results concerning age of spectators and their motives. Some researchers found no relations between age and motives<sup>4,8</sup>, some found negative relationship between age and group affiliation<sup>3,13</sup> or salubrious effects<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, the purpose of this survey was to identify the factors influencing the public's motivation for following sporting events and how they depend upon gender and age of spectators. We have developed the list of 25 motives to establish the motivation of Slovene spectators for the first time.

## Methods

### Participants

The sample consisted of 1,727 randomly selected adult inhabitants of Slovenia who were divided evenly into 8 constituencies according to the electoral system scheme (Election Regulations, 2. amended edition, Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana, 1996). The age structure of the sampled respondents corresponded to the age structure of the adult Slovene population (above 18 years), while in terms of gender, the distribution was almost balanced (52.7% of males).

As regards the level of education, 15.5% had completed three-year secondary school and 31.2% four-year secondary school, 14.5% almost graduated from college or university and 11.7% had university degrees. The age structure was the following: under 25 years – 25.7%, 26–35 years – 26.9%, 36–45 years – 20.6% and 46–55 years – 17.6%. In terms of employment, 69.8% of participants were employed and 20.1% were students. Their family status revealed that 35.2% of the surveyed respondents lived with their parents and 49.1% raised their own family (including children).

### The questionnaire

The questionnaire included 25 motives for following sporting events (see first column in Table 1). Spectators were asked to indicate how important different motives were on a 5-point scale (1 standing for »completely unimportant factor« and 5 for »very important factor«). The questionnaire was of a closed type, so only suggested motives could be chosen.

### Methods

For each motive the mean value was calculated and the scale of motives by importance was drawn up (as well as on a whole sample as according to gender and age). A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and age on suggested motives.

## Results and Discussion

The most important motives for following sporting events in Slovenia were *One's liking for sport*, *Successes of Slovene athletes* and *Entertainment*, while the least important motives were *Nothing else to do*, *Successes help us overcome problems* and *Most people follow sporting events* (Table 1).

*One's liking for sport* was the most important motive for following sporting events. Perhaps the results could be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation deals with intrinsic values of sport that are common to each sports discipline. If a spectator internalises these values, either through their own experience or through emphatic re-living of sport, and the sport satisfies or fulfils them in any way so that they declare they like sport (to be precise, the factor in the survey was: one's liking for sport – I like sport), then there is high probability that

TABLE 1  
THE STRUCTURE OF ANSWERS SHOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVES THAT INDUCE THE RESPONDENTS  
TO FOLLOW SPORTING EVENTS

Motive	$\bar{X}$	SD	Very important (%)	Import. (%)	Moderately important (%)	Unimportant (%)	Completely unimportant (%)	
1	One's liking for sport	4.06	1.05	42.3	32.4	17.6	3.9	3.8
2	Successes of Slovene athletes	3.94	1.05	35.1	36.6	19.6	5.0	3.8
3	Pleasure	3.79	1.10	31.7	31.2	26.1	6.1	4.9
4	Entertainment	3.69	1.05	24.5	34.9	29.4	7.0	4.3
5	Sport dynamism	3.49	1.08	17.9	35.3	31.7	9.0	6.2
6	Competitiveness, fighting spirit, victory	3.46	1.21	23.6	27.3	29.0	12.4	7.8
7	Unpredictability of sports results	3.43	1.17	20.1	31.0	29.0	12.4	7.4
8	Interest in an achievement	3.43	1.13	19.0	31.0	31.8	10.8	7.3
9	National importance of sport	3.36	1.26	21.8	27.6	26.9	12.6	11.1
10	Attraction of sport	3.32	1.14	15.6	30.6	32.2	13.9	7.8
11	Cheering for a club or individual athlete	3.30	1.21	18.3	28.1	30.3	12.8	10.5
12	Useful spending of leisure time	3.23	1.22	16.3	28.6	28.2	15.9	10.9
13	Personally engaged in sport	3.08	1.34	19.0	21.0	25.6	18.0	16.3
14	Wide media coverage	2.96	1.12	8.5	24.1	35.0	20.3	12.1
15	Aesthetic impression	2.94	1.19	10.9	21.6	33.5	19.5	14.5
16	Element of general culture	2.90	1.09	6.8	22.4	37.8	20.9	12.2
17	Familiarity with athletes' private life	2.76	1.13	7.5	17.2	34.5	25.9	14.9
18	Ignorance of sports discipline	2.74	1.10	6.2	17.1	36.2	25.6	14.9
19	Active involvement in sport	2.60	1.22	7.1	17.3	28.0	24.6	23.1
20	Success boosts self-assurance	2.53	1.26	8.2	16.0	23.3	25.6	26.9
21	Viewing satisfies the need for activity	2.41	1.15	4.9	13.6	26.3	28.0	27.2
22	Plenty of leisure time	2.37	1.14	4.6	12.2	27.7	27.7	27.8
23	The fact that most people follow sport	1.96	1.02	2.2	6.1	18.6	31.0	42.0
24	Successes help us overcome problems	1.95	1.08	3.2	6.9	17.4	28.0	44.5
25	Nothing else to do	1.78	0.97	2.3	3.4	15.1	28.8	50.5

the reasons for following sporting events are latent. The statement that one likes sport may be fuelled from many sources, giving the respondent a chance to »express« their love for sport. This expression of love for sport is not substantiated rationally and instrumentally – it allows irrationality and is self-contained.

The other interpretation may be developed towards identity. Roughly speaking, if the identification mechanism is divided into two segments, i.e. equality and diversity, it appears that the answer *I like sport* implies identification through equality, which correlates to the second most important motive: *Successes of Slovene athletes*. When sporting events are followed internationally, a context emerges in which »the national« becomes important – it constitutes a difference on which identification and national equality are based. Slovenia is relatively young country. Before 1991 it was a part of Yugoslavia. Slovene nation is seeking its place among other nations and sport could be a very important factor for country's visibility, identification and promotion. Motives which could support these reflections are *Competitiveness, fighting spirit victory* and *National importance of sport*, which also got

higher rankings. People are obviously aware of important role of sport for nation's identity.

*Pleasure* and *Entertainment* as the next high ranking motives point to the attributes of sport. Sporting events offer a strong emotional value to consumers and therefore occupy a prominent role in their life<sup>15</sup>. Already in the introduction, spectacle was put in a broader social context. In a culture that promotes progress and is geared towards achievement, sport has a high symbolic value. Pleasure and fun in watching sporting events would not be possible, if sport failed to satisfy some desires, projections as well as natural and cultural needs etc. Many individuals become involved in sport fandom simply because it is perceived as entertaining<sup>2,16</sup>. A motive of entertainment was also the strongest motive for American and international students<sup>11</sup>. The origin for hedonistic motives such as pleasure and entertainment could be found in the heart of sport. Sport is a play and play is an activity, which was always treated as relaxing, easy, even not serious and funny. From the spectators' point of view it doesn't influence the quality of their lives (except when talking about pathologic cheering – hooligans). That is

**TABLE 2**  
THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVES THAT INDUCE THE RESPONDENTS TO FOLLOW SPORTING EVENTS ACCORDING TO GENDER

Motives	$\bar{X}$ all	SD all	$\bar{X}$ men	$\bar{X}$ women	Sig. F gender
1 One's liking for sport	4.06	1.05	4.14	3.97	0.00
2 Successes of Slovene athletes	3.94	1.05	3.95	3.93	0.77
3 Pleasure	3.79	1.10	3.95	3.62	0.00
4 Entertainment	3.69	1.05	3.74	3.63	0.03
5 Sport dynamism	3.49	1.08	3.65	3.32	0.00
6 Competitiveness, fighting spirit, victory	3.46	1.21	3.69	3.21	0.00
7 Unpredictability of sports results	3.43	1.17	3.65	3.20	0.00
8 Interest in an achievement	3.43	1.13	3.56	3.29	0.00
9 National importance of sport	3.36	1.26	3.38	3.33	0.40
10 Attraction of sport	3.32	1.14	3.53	3.08	0.00
11 Cheering for a club or individual athlete	3.30	1.21	3.41	3.19	0.00
12 Useful spending of leisure time	3.23	1.22	3.27	3.19	0.20
13 Personally engaged in sport	3.08	1.34	3.29	2.84	0.00
14 Wide media coverage	2.96	1.12	3.04	2.88	0.00
15 Aesthetic impression	2.94	1.19	2.91	2.98	0.22
16 Element of general culture	2.90	1.09	2.96	2.82	0.01
17 Familiarity with athletes' private life	2.76	1.13	2.83	2.66	0.00
18 Ignorance of sports discipline	2.74	1.10	2.77	2.69	0.13
19 Active involvement in sport	2.60	1.22	2.72	2.46	0.00
20 Success boosts self-assurance	2.53	1.26	2.67	2.36	0.00
21 Viewing satisfies the need for activity	2.41	1.15	2.52	2.27	0.00
22 Plenty of leisure time	2.37	1.14	2.48	2.25	0.00
23 The fact that most people follow sport	1.96	1.02	2.05	1.85	0.00
24 Successes help us overcome problems	1.95	1.08	2.08	1.80	0.00
25 Nothing else to do	1.78	0.97	1.83	1.71	0.01

why the sport play is taken in as entertainment, pleasure and enjoyment. Despite above mentioned rejection of active participation of TV spectators, they should not be neglected. Above all they are numerically superior and more and more sports change rules to satisfy TV spectators.

The least important factors in following of sporting events were: *Spending one's leisure time*, *The fact that most people follow sporting events*, *Athletes' successes help us overcome personal problems* and *Nothing else to do*. The motives referring to leisure time and lack of other activities perhaps point to the same findings as reported in the Special Eurobarometer 213 survey<sup>17</sup>, namely that 42% of the Slovenes do not practice sport for lack of time. With further analysis and by putting the sports culture in a broader social context, it would be interesting to correlate the level of socio-economic development of the country with the frequency of viewing or practicing sport. The motive *Most people follow sporting events* is proved insignificant and corresponds to the findings of the above mentioned survey<sup>17</sup>, reporting that the highest share of population (31%) views at least one sporting event on TV. All other ways of following sporting events (newspapers, magazines, radio and spectatorship) rank even lower.

The results of analysis of variance show that women and men differ statistically significant in most values of motives (Table 2). Higher values of all motives were given by men. The higher overall ratings on sport consumption were also proved by other researches<sup>7,18</sup>. The source of gender differences could be found in natural and biological differences between women and men. The socialization and behavioral patterns (men's role; women's role) could lead into gained results. Following sporting events is probably still treated as »masculine«, which could be a reason for men's higher values of all motives in our research.

It is interesting that there were no significant differences between men and women in motives *Success of Slovene athletes* and *National importance of sport*. Both men and women found *Success of Slovene athletes* as the second strongest motive for following sporting events. Popularity of sport and athletes' successes are also highly correlated and those sports in which the Slovenes score high are more popular<sup>19</sup>. It is of course clear that the sports in which Slovene athletes excel are covered by media more frequently and thus the correlation between high performance, popularity and spectatorship is even stronger.

TABLE 3  
THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVES THAT INDUCE THE RESPONDENTS TO FOLLOW SPORTING EVENTS ACCORDING TO AGE

Motives	$\bar{X}$ all	$\bar{X}$ to 25	$\bar{X}$ 26–35	$\bar{X}$ 36–45	$\bar{X}$ 46–55	$\bar{X}$ 56–65	$\bar{X}$ 66+	Sig. F age
1 One's liking for sport	4.06	4.31	4.16	3.98	3.84	3.56	3.68	0.00
2 Successes of Slovene athletes	3.94	3.83	3.92	3.95	4.05	3.95	4.28	0.02
3 Pleasure	3.79	4.06	3.85	3.58	3.70	3.54	3.51	0.00
4 Entertainment	3.69	3.97	3.76	3.52	3.56	3.22	3.51	0.00
5 Sport dynamism	3.49	3.63	3.58	3.46	3.37	3.21	2.94	0.00
6 Competitiveness, fighting spirit, victory	3.46	3.54	3.33	3.49	3.59	3.34	3.34	0.02
7 Unpredictability of sports results	3.43	3.62	3.50	3.33	3.30	3.17	3.23	0.00
8 Interest in an achievement	3.43	3.44	3.41	3.42	3.43	3.39	3.70	0.70
9 National importance of sport	3.36	3.19	3.17	3.43	3.69	3.58	3.55	0.00
10 Attraction of sport	3.32	3.57	3.40	3.19	3.14	3.05	2.83	0.00
11 Cheering for a club or individual athlete	3.30	3.48	3.16	3.26	3.37	3.17	3.23	0.00
12 Useful spending of leisure time	3.23	3.32	3.25	3.13	3.25	3.16	3.04	0.26
13 Personally engaged in sport	3.08	3.36	3.27	2.95	2.85	2.52	2.21	0.00
14 Wide media coverage	2.96	3.03	3.01	2.92	2.93	2.80	2.66	0.12
15 Aesthetic impression	2.94	2.76	2.95	2.99	3.04	3.09	3.19	0.01
16 Element of general culture	2.90	2.89	2.80	2.99	3.02	2.79	2.66	0.02
17 Familiarity with athletes' private life	2.76	2.78	2.76	2.78	2.77	2.61	2.55	0.57
18 Ignorance of sports discipline	2.74	2.84	2.76	2.77	2.65	2.46	2.45	0.01
19 Active involvement in sport	2.60	2.74	2.57	2.65	2.52	2.30	2.19	0.00
20 Success boosts self-assurance	2.53	2.53	2.27	2.49	2.81	2.77	2.64	0.00
21 Viewing satisfies the need for activity	2.41	2.36	2.21	2.46	2.67	2.52	2.34	0.00
22 Plenty of leisure time	2.37	2.48	2.24	2.29	2.48	2.40	2.45	0.01
23 The fact that most people follow sport	1.96	1.86	1.89	1.91	2.15	2.05	2.40	0.00
24 Successes help us overcome problems	1.95	1.92	1.79	1.96	2.17	2.02	2.15	0.00
25 Nothing else to do	1.78	1.81	1.71	1.73	1.84	1.84	2.11	0.06

Women ranked the motive *National importance of sport* higher, while the motives *Attraction of sports* and *Competitiveness, fighting spirit, victory* were placed higher by men (when considered ranking of motives). Kwon<sup>11</sup> established that major gender differences have been in motive to conquer, to beat others, which coincide with motive *Competitiveness, fighting spirit, victory* in our case. Bond<sup>20</sup> stated, that men are guided mostly with motives such as Competition, Success and Achievement what has shown also in our research. Men find motives Pleasure, Freedom and Friendship most important<sup>21</sup>. Women don't find Dionysian values (pleasure, relaxation, enjoyment, entertainment) so important<sup>8,12,22</sup> and it is possible that they did not find the suggested motives so important in general (they were motives for following sport). It could be concluded that most important motives for following sporting events are in the category of Dionysian values for men and in the category of Apollonian values for women<sup>12</sup>.

Furthermore there were found age differences in evaluation of motives for following sporting events. Younger spectators evaluated the motives higher, with motives *Pleasure, Entertainment* and *Sport Dynamism* being most important (beside first two ranked motives *One's liking for sport* and *Successes of Slovene athlete*) (Table

3). The young are led with Hedonistic and Potential values, what has been proven also by others<sup>3,14</sup>. That means that motives which involve entertainment, society, physical activity, achievement and success are the strongest. It is quite reasonable considering younger's lifestyle. These findings are in contrast to studies finding no significant relation between age and motives<sup>4</sup>. In age group over 46 years the motives *Interest in an achievement* and *National importance of sport* are gaining value. It could be concluded that Hedonistic values (enjoyment and pleasure), which are most important in youth, are followed by Potential Values (success and achievement) in later life.

## Conclusion

The motives that induced the Slovenes to follow sporting events were love for sport, high performance of Slovene athletes and emotional state during viewing of sports competitions. The highest ranked motive *One's liking for sport* shows that major Slovenes' reason for following sport events is of latent nature. They follow sporting events mostly because they like sports and not because of its aesthetic impression or attraction or dynamism... The intrinsic value of sport is obviously most

important, as proven also by others<sup>23</sup>. Comparing our results to other nations show some differences. In all common used scales for measuring motives of spectators there is no motives referring to national identity, so Slovene spectators could not be compared to others in that topic. The strongest motive among Japanese soccer game spectators was achievement<sup>9</sup>, which was as on eighth place among Slovenes. Korean spectators mostly expecting to enjoy the drama and uncertainly of the outcome<sup>9,10</sup>. This could coincide with motive *Unpredictability of sport results* which is placed on seventh position in our case. A study of sport fan motivation of American and International students found out that the strongest motive for both groups was entertainment<sup>11</sup>, which is also ranked high among Slovenes. Slovenes seem to be specific primarily in the case of national motives. It is quite understandable since Slovenia has been only recently separated from Yugoslavia. We are talking about young nation, which is seeking its confirmation among other nations.

The role of spectators could be an important part of sporting event. The communication is double sided, from spectators to the stage and back. One cannot exist without the other<sup>8</sup>. It is known from practical examples that many sports adapt and change their rules so as to increase viewer rating, seeing that the economic criterion is closely related to the component of popularity and media coverage. On the other hand, changes in rules affect sport as such and impact its intrinsic values, which is felt by athletes and spectators alike. Understanding different spectator motivations could be of significant benefit to sports marketers<sup>24</sup>. Each spectator may appreciate different aspects of an event<sup>10</sup>. If marketing managers are able to provide what spectators expect from the sporting event, spectators will come back (continue to watch). At this point it is reasonable to include spectators as an important segment of sport, which – based on the findings – will be one of the fields of research in the future.

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## ZAŠTO PRATIMO SPORTSKA DOGAĐANJA?

### SAŽETAK

Cilj ove studije bio je istražiti motive praćenja sportskih događanja i njihovu povezanost sa spolom i godinama gledatelja. Studija se temelji na anketi provedenoj na 1727 odraslih Slovenaca. Prema rezultatima, najvažniji motivi bi se mogli klasificirati u kategoriju tzv. dionizijskih vrijednosti. To bi značilo da uloga sporta u životu gledatelja nije važna ni utjecajna; smatra se više izvorom opuštanja i užitka. Više vrijednosti svim motivima davali su muškarci. Žene su kao važan motiv izdvajale »nacionalnu važnost sporta«, dok su muškarci kao važnije označavali »atraktivnost sporta« te »kompetitivnost, natjecateljski duh i pobjedu«. Općenito su mlađi gledatelji motivima davali više vrijednosti, a motivi »užitak, zabava« te »dinamika sporta« su označavani kao najvažniji. Podaci dakle otkrivaju one atribute sporta koji su oduvijek, a i dalje će nastaviti zaokupljati pažnju gledatelja.