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Event impact management plan

Guidance for creating (health) impact with running events

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1. Background

1.1 RUN for HEALTH

This document is part of the project “Promoting health-enhancing physical activity and social welfare through outdoor running events/RUN for HEALTH”.

This project aims to promote sports, exercise and social well-being through the organisation of running events. The mission of the project is fourfold:

- Study of running events - from management, marketing, organisational policy and communication perspective - for in-depth insight.
- Development of practical guidelines and policy recommendations for the organisation of running events.
- Stimulation of (international) communication between organisers of events and policy makers.
- Increasing awareness about the (im)possibilities to stimulate sports, exercise and social well - being through running events.

The following organisations are involved in this project:

- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- The European Association for Sport Management.
- University of Leuven.
- Breda University of Applied Sciences.
- Mulier Institute.
- Lithuanian Sports University.
- European Culture and Sport Organisation.

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1.2 Objective

The objective of this event impact management plan is to offer guidance and inspiration for creating impact with running events, with a specific focus on creating health impact among participants and visitors. In this sense, health is defined as a broad concept and it consists of the physical, mental and social well-being of people (WHO, 1998). In addition, impact on tourism and economy and environmental sustainability are considered as well. The event impact management plan is concise in design and aims to offer brief and practical advice for organisers of running events and their stakeholders.

1.3 Approach

This publication is based on a literature study (see Alexandris et al., 2019) and semi-structured interviews (with event organisers, sponsors and the Dutch Athletics Federation).

1.4 Reading guide

In the following chapter practical guidelines are described. Concluding remarks can be found in chapter 3.

2. Practical guidelines

Running events have the opportunity to create health impact among participants and visitors. However, to achieve this, the running concept should be thoroughly developed, which will take time and requires the involvement of the target groups and other stakeholders. To support this development process, 16 practical guidelines are provided. The guidelines start with basic guidelines for developing the concept (paragraph 2.1, guidelines 1-6), followed by guidelines to enhance the health impact among participants and visitors (paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3, guidelines 7-12). The guidelines 13-16 focus on possible impacts of a running event on the economy and the environment (paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5).

2.1 Basic guidelines

In this paragraph, fundamental guidelines are delineated. These guidelines concern the event concept, the intended type of impact and target groups. Moreover, attention is paid to related activities (side events), appointing responsible persons and promotion.

1. Develop a distinctive and appropriate event concept

The running event concept is the basis of a successful running event. Strong events have a distinctive concept, exceed expectations of stakeholders (participants, visitors) and have an optimal place on the (event) calendar. In addition, the goals of the event ideally fit well with the local or regional policy agenda. This increases the chance of important local support, cooperation, synergy and positive effects. For instance, the concept of a running event can be built around the theme ‘innovation’, but also around ‘festivity’ and ‘inclusion’.

Instead of starting from local social problems or challenges (for example loneliness, crime, inactivity) when exploring event concept options, and trying to achieve a positive impulse with an event, it is also possible to take the strengths of the local population or host region (for example: talents, strong local sports associations, solid informal sports networks) as a starting point. These strengths can be utilized and further developed.

Examples are running events which contribute to a charity, a colour run or an event with a concept that fits the desired profile of the host region. An illustration of the latter is the Marathon Eindhoven in The Netherlands, which aims to become the most innovative marathon worldwide. This ambition fits the host region as the Eindhoven region promotes itself worldwide as a smart city with the key concepts of technology, knowledge and innovation (and design) (Eindhoven municipality, 2019).

2. Concentrate on a type of impact and target group

In order to optimize the impact of running events, it is important to make choices regarding the type of impact that is aimed for and the target group. A running event may, for example, contribute to stimulating healthy behaviours, mental and social well-being, and/or economic or environmental impact. The choice for the type of impact and target group depends on the concept (see above) and wishes of stakeholders, including

the target group and local government. It is also recommended to decide on this topic when it is clear on which groups other running events in the country aim at and which impact they primarily strive for. In doing so, one can rationally position the running event in the running event market.

3. Create support for the running concept

Create support with the target group

For the target group to participate in the event, it is essential that the target group supports and embraces the concept. This can be done by actively involving the target group in the development of the concept. By tailoring the concept to the target groups' needs, wishes and (im)possibilities regarding participation, support for the concept will be enhanced. This will also help in recruiting the target group.

Create support with potential stakeholders

There are different organisations or people (in the community) that could contribute to (the organisation of) the running event or side events (see also guidelines 4 and 5). Sports clubs in the neighbourhood could, for instance, help in the organisation or provide facilities (e.g. dressing rooms) or training programmes to prepare for the event. Local organisations could, for example, sponsor the event, offer help in the promotion of the event or provide healthy food and drinks to participants and visitors. The local government should be involved to obtain the necessary licenses (e.g. for temporary road closures) and could facilitate the event in different ways (e.g. access to facilities). Involving stakeholders in the development of the concept will enhance their support.

Create support with the local community

Support of the local community for the event is important, especially if the event is large and when it takes place in public space, which is frequently the case with recreational running events. Locals can be seen as hosts, as well as potential participants. People are, for example, more likely to participate in sport events that are close to their homes (Ooms et al., 2015). Ideally, there is strong support among the local population. Local support also contributes to resilience in coping with negative local effects such as possible temporary road closures and noise disturbance.

4. Organise related activities and set goals

Organising related activities is a way of running event leveraging. Leveraging refers to the way the event and its resources are exploited in order to produce desired effects (Taks et al., 2015; Chalip, 2006; Hover & Slender, 2018).

The impact of one running event can be seen as a drop of ink falling in a bucket of water, for a moment the colour is visible and creates a beautiful surface, but a few seconds later it is not visible anymore. More targeted activities around the event - also referred to as side events - should ensure more drops eventually giving colour to the water (Hover et al., 2016).

Successful leveraging is absent in a significant number of events, partly because of inadequate knowledge, and sometimes unwillingness to invest time and money in

activities that go beyond the running event itself. Typically, the main event manifests itself as a 'greedy institution', absorbing all the time and money and leaving little energy for thinking about and acting on activities that extend well beyond the closure of the event (Hover et al., 2016).

The use of side events and other adjacent activities (such as a sports promotion campaign, a school project or a cultural festival) and goal setting is of added value in terms of leverage. Side events can be organised, for example, for people who would normally not be attracted to the running event, such as inactive people (see also guideline 7). Making links with other domains, such as the cultural sector, may therefore bear fruit. Side events and other derivative activities can take place before, during and after the event.

Box 2.1 Run to the Start

Run to The Start is a preparation programme for running events in The Netherlands, facilitated by the Dutch athletics federation. Characteristics are described below (Atletiekunie, 2020).

- National training programme of twelve weeks;
- One group training per week;
- For both beginners and experienced runners;
- Proven successful and effective;
- Participants rate the program with an 8.1 on a scale from 1-10.
- More than 40 per cent of the participants of the programme want to continue with training in a club after the event.

5. Appoint responsible persons for the organisation of the event and related activities

For the running event to be successful, it is important that one or more enthusiastic persons are appointed to organise the event. These person or persons should have enough time and resources to organise the event. The responsibility for successful (effects of) side events and related activities lies ideally with another person/persons than the running event organiser, because the organiser primarily focuses on a successful running event (e.g. within budget, safety guaranteed). So, ideally there are other parties who - in consultation with the event organiser - take up the organisation of additional activities and take responsibility for their results. Event sponsors can play a key role. This is in line with the desire of a growing number of sponsors who are looking for ways to strengthen the type of sports or to contribute to achieving health or social goals. Moreover, sponsors often have interesting networks (employees, customers, suppliers), specific knowledge and experiences (e.g. with social media, ICT, human resources management). Also schools, sports clubs and welfare organisations can play a key role in related activities.

6. Promote the running concept and related activities in a way that is appealing to the target group

People participate in running events not only for physical activity or for sport performances, but also consciously or unconsciously for mental well-being and socio-psychological effects. The experience of strong emotions, adrenaline, pleasure, relaxation and an opportunity to build social relationships are all examples of reasons for adults to participate in a running event (see also paragraph 2.3 how to stimulate this). For children and adolescents, motivations are predominantly related to fun and enjoyment (Malchrowicz-Mo'isko & Poczta, 2018; Malchrowicz-Mo'isko, Castañeda-Babarro & Guereño 2020). It is, therefore, not surprising that different types of events (read: experiences) attract different types of people. This should be considered when marketing the running concept to a specific target group.

2.2 Promoting physical health

Non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases, are a major threat to the health of people worldwide. These diseases share four common risk factors: physical inactivity, tobacco use, the harmful use of alcohol and unhealthy diets. Good health starts, therefore, with healthy behaviours (WHO, 2017). A running event and the side events could stimulate healthy behaviours of participants, visitors and the local community amongst others by making 'the healthy choice, the easy choice' (e.g. Covenant Gezonde Sportevenementen, 2020). How to contribute to this, will be described below.

Promoting health-enhancing physical activity

According to the World Health Organisation physical activity guidelines, adults should engage in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate physical activity (e.g. brisk walking) each week, or in a minimum of 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity (e.g. running) each week to prevent disease and stay healthy. Children and adolescents should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily for health benefits (WHO, 2010). Running, for example, decreases the risk for cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and premature mortality (Lee et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017; Porter et al., 2019). It should be noted that running, even 5-10 minutes per day and slow speeds (<6 mph), is already associated with markedly reduced risks of death from all causes and cardiovascular diseases (Lee et al., 2014). Furthermore, running has positive effects on body mass, body fat, cholesterol levels and resting heart rate, and it is associated with reduced disability at later life (Chakravarty et al. 2008; Hespanhol Junior et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2002).

In the pursuit of an increase in sport and physical activity participation, the idea is that watching (elite) running events encourages third parties (like visitors or TV audience) to take up (more) sports themselves. This is referred to as the demonstration effect or trickle-down effect (Van Bottenburg, 2003; Van Bottenburg et al., 2012; Breedveld & Hover, 2015). The occurrence of this effect is far from guaranteed (e.g. Frawley, 2013). However, there is some evidence that observing a running event can - under certain circumstances - have a positive impact on the willingness to engage in regular physical

activity as well as the willingness to take part in this type of sport in the future (Malchrowicz Mo'sko, Poczta & Adamczewska, 2019). In addition, research shows that participants of a running event perform additional physical activity in preparation of the event (Schoemaker, van Genderen & de Boer, 2019). Furthermore, there are some additional ways physical activity levels of both participants and visitors can be actively promoted, as will be explained below.

7. Focus on inactive people/non-sport participants

Running event organisers and other involved parties face the challenge of translating the energy and power of (elite) sport into programmes that inspire non-runners. This can be done with supplemental activities, organised by third parties, such as combining the running event with a cultural festival (see guideline 4, or Weed et al., 2012). In addition, providing training programmes to inactive people to prepare them for the running event, can enhance their physical activity levels, both before and after the event. Sports clubs in the local community could provide these trainings programmes, including suited follow-up activities at the club after the event (e.g. continuing running in a beginner's group) to stimulate continued sport participation (Ooms, Veenhof & de Bakker, 2013). Providing training programmes to novice runners could also decrease the risk for running-related injuries, as novice runners face a significantly greater risk of injury than recreational or more advanced runners (Videbæk et al., 2015).

8. Stimulate modes of active transportation to and from the event

When choosing a location for the running event and side events, the assumption should be that people do not have to use the car to reach it. It is, therefore, important that the location of the event and side events is near to a bus or train station and can be reached on foot or by bicycle. This way of transport should also be attractive to participants and visitors. This can be done by providing participants and visitors with information on safe walking and cycling routes to the event, creating sufficient bicycle parking facilities, informing public transport companies about the expected crowds, and looking for possibilities for discounts on public transport or combination tickets (European Healthy Stadia Network, 2014).

Promoting other healthy behaviours

9. Provide healthy foods and drinks

Make sure healthy food and drink options are available (for free or at low costs) to participants before, during and after the running event. Examples include fruit, vegetables, water and tea without sugar. Do not provide products that contain too much fat, sugar and/or salt and offer (healthy) non-alcoholic beverages. A 'pasta party' after having finished the run could be a healthy way to recover from and celebrate the event for participants. The same applies to visitors. Healthy food and drink options should be available (against reasonable prices) to them as well. Examples include food trucks where visitors can buy healthy sandwiches or fruit. Creating places to eat and drink, such as catering squares, adjacent to or near the event may stimulate social interaction with other people too (see also guideline 11).

10. Connect with sponsors that stimulate healthy behaviours with their products or services

Sponsorship of sport is a popular tool for commercial marketers. Choose sponsors that stimulate healthy behaviours with their products or services. For example, a store selling organic products or a company that produces sport watches. Avoid companies that sell tobacco, alcohol or unhealthy food and drinks. In addition to commercial sponsors, health sponsors (e.g. a health promotion organisation, an organisation focused on (the prevention of) a specific disease) could be approached to promote health messages through the running event or side events. This could increase the awareness for and intention to healthy behaviours among participants and visitors (Rosenberg & Ferguson, 2014).

2.3 Promoting mental and social well-being

Next to positive effects on physical health, regular participation in sport and physical activity can enhance mental and social health. Regular sport and physical activity participation, for example, decreases depressive symptoms and stress levels. In addition, participation in sport and physical activity with other people stimulates social health by improving social functioning of people and increasing their social networks (Bailey et al., 2013; Ooms, van den Dool & Elling, 2020). Running events could stimulate the mental and social well-being of people as well. A defining element of running events is the ability to drag people into one collective emotion, a special positive mental experience for both participants and visitors. Furthermore, an important motivation to participate in a running event is the desire to feel unity and integration with other people (Malchrowicz-Mo'isko & Poczta, 2018). To stimulate this, the following guidelines are presented.

11. Create meeting places

The availability of meeting places for participants, visitors and other stakeholders, promotes social interaction, which is a prerequisite for realising a sense of togetherness and knowledge exchange. A good example is the Holland Heineken House at the Olympic and Paralympic Games, which was initially developed due to a lack of meeting places for athletes and their families. But also at smaller sport events, fan zones, volunteer homes, VIP lounges and the aforementioned catering squares (and pasta party for participants; see guideline 9) offer opportunities to socially interact with other people. In this way, people will arrive earlier and stay longer, which improves the social cohesion and their positive experience with the event.

12. Create a festival effect

In essence, running events do not appeal to everyone: they often appeal solely to the wishes of runners. This offers opportunities and challenges to serve others besides the participants, in the first place: visitors, who are frequently present in higher numbers. This could be family members or friends of runners that come to support their runner alongside the track, but it could also be people who are just interested in watching an event. It is remarkable that this important target group is often neglected by event organisers. For example, ideally, organisers monitor the number of visitors, as well as

their socio-economic profiles. This is crucial information for (potential) sponsors. The involvement of visitors can be stimulated by combining the running event with a festival, creating a festival effect (Weed et al., 2012). As mentioned previously, people (non-runners, inactive people) could be attracted to a running event because of the festive atmosphere, a certain commonality and even in some cases a once in a lifetime experience. Examples of activities that can promote a festival effect are music, entertainment and possibly informing the non-runners about the relevant aspects of the event (e.g. participants, rules, history), for example in a free app. Also, an art or culture festival could be organised in the run-up to a running event to attract people who are not initially attracted to the running event.

2.4 Promoting tourism and economic impact

Economic impact refers to additional spending in a region as a direct result of the organisation of a sport event (Turco & Kelsey, 1992; Burns & Mules, 1986). When assessing the economic impact, it is important to acknowledge that public and private event sponsors could have done alternative investments, leading to a different economic return (opportunity costs occur). Furthermore, a possible crowding out effect (event visitors and participants displacing local residents and/or tourists) should be taken into account (Preuss, 2011).

13. Focus on participants and visitors from outside the region

The economic impact is increased if people (e.g. participants, visitors) who do not live in the host region travel to the running event. Especially, people from abroad, because they often visit the area for a longer time period and spend more money on local transportation, food and drinks, accommodation and tourism services. In this regard, environmental sustainability (see paragraph 2.5) should be considered as well by promoting environmental friendly ways of transportation and accommodation and by stimulating tourist activities (e.g. walking through nature/a city) that are not harmful to the environment.

14. Seduce, slow down and stay

Before this, we discussed tempting people to participate or visit the event. After seduction, two other points of interest follow: slowing down and staying. The longer people (participants, visitors of the event) stay in an certain area, the more they will spend on local products and services. On the one hand, slowing down implies that efforts will have to be made to create an attractive offer around the event of relevant products such as sporting goods and merchandising to stimulate additional spending. On the other hand, there are opportunities to offer packages that include a visit to the event combined with other activities such as visiting side events, shopping, visiting restaurants, cafes and museums and tourist tours. Furthermore, multi-day visits can be stimulated during which participants, visitors and other stakeholders spend the night in an overnight accommodation. This means that this should be actively deployed by offering suitable accommodation options. It is, therefore, important to collaborate with local hotels, bed and breakfasts or other accommodations where people can stay. In order to offer suitable packages for participants and other visitors, it is important to have knowledge about who these people are (see guidelines 3 and 15).

15. Invest in knowledge about target groups

It is important that arrangements or packages (see guideline 14) are tailored to the profiles and interests of the different stakeholders (this also applies to the running event itself and side events, see guideline 3 and 4). Knowledge about target groups can be obtained by surveys among those groups. Investing in knowledge about target groups contributes to the successful implementation of other described guidelines as well.

2.5 Maximizing environmental sustainability

Health of people is influenced by the surrounding environment. Different environmental sustainability initiatives could be taken to contribute to a healthy environment (Philpott & Seymour, 2017). The promotion of active and public transport options to and from the event is one way to contribute to this (see guideline 8). As mentioned previously, considering environmental sustainability when promoting tourism is important too (see guideline 13). Examples of how the running event itself can contribute to environmental sustainability, follow below.

16. Lower use of electricity, energy, paper and water and limit noise disturbances during the event

Use energy-efficient and durable equipment as much as possible, such as energy-saving lamps and water-saving shower heads. Connect the equipment to the electrical network instead of a separate generator. Furthermore, environmental sustainability can be enhanced by organising the event during the day (benefiting from the daylight), working with little packaging around the catering, offering vegetarian and organic products, placing sufficient waste bins and allowing visitors to separate waste. Noise disturbances can be minimised, for example by centralizing and limiting areas with noise, like music.

3. Closing remarks

The primary objective of the presented guidelines in this event impact management plan is to support organisers of running events to increase the health impact of their events on participants and visitors and possible impacts of their events on the economy and environment.

It is well known that running events can differ by size, target group and location, varying from small events for local inhabitants to mass events that attract people from worldwide (Alexandris et al., 2019). Furthermore, the possibilities for developing a successful running event are dependent on many other factors such as the availability of financial, human and material resources. Nonetheless, considering these guidelines within the local boundaries can help event organisers to develop a concept that fits with the target group and other involved stakeholders, which will ultimately increase the chances for successful implementation and consequently (health) impacts.

These guidelines do not take into account the risk of contamination with the COVID-19 virus. At the moment of writing, in The Netherlands the organisation of (recreational) running events is prohibited.

Box 3.1 Future of running and running events

“There are good opportunities for the future. Local clubs and associations can perform as the partner of the event organiser. For the promotion for the event, but also for the coaching of participants towards the event and the post event phase. Aside from the impacts of the corona virus, I expect small events will disappear slowly: smaller events do not attract as many participants or will disappear.”

“It will be a challenge for running events to remain attractive. Like the catch-up run, Wings for Life. That’s great. That is attractive. You just have to make that up, right? [...] But on the other hand, I think running events have a better future than competitive athletics. If something does not change quickly for competitive athletics to make it more attractive, it is slowly dying.”

“I think it [running] will gradually become more digitized [in the future]. That people start running with their app. That they will effectively run, but then compare with others. Something digital.”

(representative of national athletics federation)

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