

THE ANALYSIS OF ATHLETES' FINANCIAL SITUATION - ROMANIAN ATHLETES' INCOME LEVEL AND THE RETENTION IN THE FIELD OF SPORTS

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Abstract: The purpose of the research is to capture the relationships and differences that are established between performance athletes from track and field, depending on their sociodemographic variables. The emphasis was also placed on the level of their incomes from sports, the continuity in sports or the abandonment. The study was attended by 84 performance athletes, aged between 18 and 39 years old, medalists at European, Balkan championships or at the Olympic Games.

Methods. Socio-demographic data were also collected, in an extensive questionnaire, with 20 items, with an emphasis on the achievements of the performance athletes, depending on the medals obtained and the competitions they took part in, as well as on their career expectations for the future. **Results.** There are differences between athletes depending on the duration of practicing the sport, the sport event practiced and the number of medals obtained, but the income obtained exclusively from the performance athlete qualification does not ensure a decent living and the desire to continue the activity in the field of sports.

Conclusions. Our research shows that the athletes' low incomes are the main factor of abandonment in track and field, at the level of seniors in Romania, but also the lack of infrastructure and the athletes' attrition.

Keyword: track and field, athletes' incomes, medals, retention, infrastructure

Introduction

In recent years, track and field is at an impasse in terms of achieving top performances and reiterating the exceptional results achieved by Romanian athletes in the past. For example, at the Olympic Games in London (2012) and Rio de Janeiro (2016), no Romanian athlete qualified in an Olympic final. At the Tokyo Olympics (2020), Romania had two qualified athletes in the final (in throwing events). At the last edition of the World Athletics Championships, Romania did not exist in any ranking. The best place was occupied by the shot putter Andrei Gag, 11th place in the final, followed by Alina Rotaru, 12th place in the long jump final. It is important to analyze the European documents in the field of sports and highlight the need to harmonize the management of the national sports system with European realities. A study carried out in the direction of our study, investigated the economic and

political determinants that could lead to more players present at the Olympic Games.

These include the increase in per capita income required to send an additional participant and the "cost" in GDP per capita of an additional medal (Johnson & Ali, 2004). In order to develop athlete identification systems for the Olympic Games, all countries have high-performance plans for the Olympic Games, which involve facilities, coaches and sports professionals (Stotlar & Wonders, 2006). The comparative development of elite sport (Houlihan & Green, 2007) has benefited at the expense of sport for all, but the infrastructure requires very high costs for improvement, from all citizens of the country represented by the athlete present at the Olympic Games (Toohey, 2008). A key element of cost control is limited spending on Olympic venues (Wilson, 2015).

Many studies reports modeling the relationship of the weight of the countries' medals at the Olympic Games with population and per capita income, with the controls being the host state and the political regime of the respective country. For poorer countries, the existence of a small group of sports on which it would be most realistic to invest is identified (Forrest, McHale, Sanz & Tena, 2017). Even if performance athletes do not win medals at the national or international competitions in which they participate, the human capital generated only by participation can be used to promote the participation of young people in basic sports as well (Papanikos, 2020). However, few aspects of major competitions are more important than the revenues generated, and the costs incurred for hosting them Zarnowski, F. (1993). Athletes are helped by the laws of each country, which can support and encourage them, both during the years of performance, as well as in the continuation of their career after those years (Saputra & Tohari, 2023).

Method

Participants and procedure

The survey was answered by 84 athletes competing in the youth and/or senior categories, the age of the participants is between 18 and 43 years, $M = 24.26$, $AS = 5.07$. The research was carried out between April and June 2022, in the online environment, being addressed to major track and field athletes and aimed at the share of earnings exclusively as a performance athlete.

Instruments

The socio-demographic data were measured based on a questionnaire regarding age, gender, marital status, the event practiced (speed event, half-distance event, long distance, jumps, throws and combined), medals obtained at the National and Balkan Championships, participation in The Olympic Games, the monthly income, the existence of an alternative job and career counseling, the possibility of continuing the activity in the field of sports and the desired profession, the opinion regarding the abandonment of sports. Results The present study is a descriptive and comparative research. The answers were given by performance athletes ($N=84$). The study set out to analyze, at a factual level, several critical situations of the actual state of athletics in Romania, and among the aspects we proposed to investigate, the following were found:

Descriptive statistics

In order to organize the data and test the hypotheses, the statistical analysis program IBM.SPSS.25 (IBM Corp, 2016) was used. Depending on the region they come from, the sample of performance athletes is divided as follows: 23 athletes from South-Muntenia, 15 athletes from the West Region, 14 athletes from the North-East Region, 8 each from the South-East and 8 from the South-West, 6 athletes from the Central Region and 4 from the North-West.

Table 1. Distribution of participants according to gender and area of residence

		North-East Region – comprises : Iași, Botoșani, Neamț, Suceava, Bacău and Vaslui counties.		North-West Region- comprises: Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu-Mare and Sălaj counties.		Central Region - comprises: Alba, Sibiu, Mureș, Harghita, Covasna and Brașov counties.		South-East region - comprises: Tulcea, Vrancea, Galați, Brăila, Buzău and Constanța counties.		South-West region - Oltenia - comprises: Mehedinți, Gorj, Vâlcea, Olt and Dolj.		Total
Gender	M	12	8	3	1	2	7	4	6	43		
	F	2	7	1	5	6	16	2	2	41		
Total		14	15	4	6	8	23	6	8	84		

Depending on the marital status and the number of children, 49 athletes are unmarried, 29 are in a relationship, and only 6 of the 84 participants have children.

Table 2. Distribution of participants according to marital status and number of children
Marital Status * Do you have children? Crosstabulation

Count		Do you have children?		Total
		No	yes	
Marital status	unmarried	49	2	51
	In a relationship	29	4	33
Total		78	6	84

The analysis of the participants according to the practiced event and the duration of practicing the sport showed that the speed event is the one that describes the most participants, in number of 33, of which 18 with more than 10 years of experience, followed by the jumping event, practiced by 23 athletes, of which 7 with over 10 years of experience, then the half-distance race, practiced by 12 athletes, of which 8 with over 10 years of experience. Among the tests with fewer practitioners, we found the distance, throwing and combined tests.

Table 3. Distribution of participants in accordance with the practiced test and the duration of the practice How many years have you been practicing athletics? * What is the practiced test? Crosstabulation

Count			What is the evnt practiced?					
			Speed event	Middle distance event	Long distance event	Jump events	Throwing events	Combined events
How many years have you been practicing athletics??	below 5 years	3	0	1	4	0	0	8
	between 5-10 years	12	4	3	12	1	0	32
	More than 10	18	8	5	7	4	2	44
Total			33	12	9	23	5	84

Depending on the medals obtained at the championships, 77 athletes were awarded medals, of which 27 athletes won medals at the national championships, and 50 at the Balkan championships.

Table 4. Distribution of participants according to the medals obtained at CN and CB.
Did you get medals at the national championships? * Did you get medals at the Balkan championships? Crosstabulation

Count		Did you get medals at the Balkan championships?		Total
		No	yes	
Did you get medals at the national championships?	No	7	0	7
	Yes	27	50	77
Total		34	50	84

Depending on the distribution of the participants according to the medals obtained at the EC and participation in the World Championship finals, 7 athletes obtained medals at the European championships, and 8 reached the finals at the world championships.

Table 5. Distribution of participants according to the medals obtained at the EC and participation in the World Championship finals

Have you won medals at the European Championships? * Have you reached the finals at the world championships? Crosstabulation

		Have you reached the finals at the World Championships?		Total
		No	yes	
Have you won medals at the European Championships?	No	62	8	70
	yes	7	7	14
Total		69	15	84

The distribution of the participants according to the qualification for the Olympic Games and the monthly earnings, showed that 3 athletes out of the 84 qualified for the Olympic Games, of which 2 have monthly incomes between 5000-10000, and one between 1000-2500. Important to this analysis is the answers of 52 athletes, who declared that their monthly income from sports is below 1000 lei (below the minimum wage in the economy), another 17 were between 1000-2500 lei, 5 between 2500-3500, and 4 between 3500-5000 lei.

Table 6. Distribution of participants according to OG qualification and monthly earnings
Have you qualified for the Olympics? * What is your monthly income, exclusively as a performance athlete? Crosstabulation

Count

		What is your monthly income, exclusively as a performance athlete?,					Total
		under 1000 lei	1000-2500 lei	2500-3500 lei	3500-5000 lei	5000- 10000 lei	
Have you qualified for the Olympics?	No	52	17	5	4	2	80
	yes	0	1	0	2	0	3
Total		52	18	5	6	2	83

According to the distribution of the participants in line with the sufficiency of income for a decent living and for the maintenance of the family, 51 of the participating athletes declared that the income allows them a decent living to a very small extent, 13 to a small extent, 10 rated the income as suitable, 8 declared that the income allow a decent living to a large extent, and 2 to a very large extent.

Table 7. Distribution of participants according to income sufficiency for a decent living and family support

Does the money you earn solely from athletics allow you to support yourself and your family? * Does the money earned solely from athletics allow you to make a decent living? Crosstabulation

Count

		Does the money you earn solely from athletics allow you to support yourself and your family?					Total
		To a very small extent	To a small extent	sufficient	To a large extent	To a very large extent	
Does the money you earn solely from athletics allow you to support yourself and your family?	To a very small extent	49	4	0	0	0	53
	To a small extent	2	9	3	1	0	15
	sufficient	0	0	5	3	2	10
	To a large extent	0	0	1	3	0	4
	To a very large extent	0	0	1	1	0	2
Total		51	13	10	8	2	84

Depending on the distribution of the participants according to the existence of an alternative job and career counseling, 39 athletes declared that they have a second job, besides that of a performance athlete, and with regard to career counseling, this was too little present, so that 78 participants, out of the 84, never benefited from these activities.

Table 8. Distribution of participants according to the existence of an alternative job and career counseling

Do you also have an alternative job? * Have you benefited from counseling regarding the possibilities of socio-professional insertion after completing the activity as a performance athlete? Crosstabulation

Count

		* Have you benefited from counseling regarding the possibilities of socio-professional insertion after completing the activity as a performance athlete?		Total
		No	yes	
Do you also have an alternative job?	Nu	39	4	43
	Da	39	2	41
Total		78	6	84

From the distribution of participants according to the possibility of continuing the activity in the field of sports and the desired profession, it emerged that 54 participants want a career in the field of sports as coaches or teachers, 21 opted for another field, and 9 are still undecided.

Table 9. Distribution of participants according to the possibility of continuing the activity in the field of sports and the desired profession

After completing the activity as a performance athlete, do you want to continue in the field of sports? * What career do you want to pursue after completing your performance as a performance athlete? Crosstabulation

		What career do you want to pursue after completing your performance as a performance athlete?					Total
		undecided	trainer	teacher	Trainer or teacher	Other field	
After completing the activity as a performance athlete, do you want to continue in the field	To a very small extent	2	0	3	0	6	11
	To a small extent	1	0	1	0	4	6
	Sufficient	4	4	3	2	5	18
	To a large extent	0	7	4	2	0	13

of sports?	To a very large extent	2	14	6	8	6	36
Total		9	25	17	12	21	84

Among the most frequent causes of abandonment, among performance athletes, they found the following: 62.4% considered the main cause of abandonment to be the very low remuneration, 23.5% considered the *lack of infrastructure* as another cause and 12.9 % considered the athletes attrition to be the cause of abandonment.

Table 10. Distribution of participants according to the opinion regarding the causes of abandoning sports

What do you think are the causes of the abandonment of performance sports at the senior level?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low remuneration	53	62.4	63.1	63.1
	Lack of infrastructure	20	23.5	23.8	86.9
	Athletes' attrition	11	12.9	13.1	100.0
	Total	84	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.2		
Total		85	100.0		

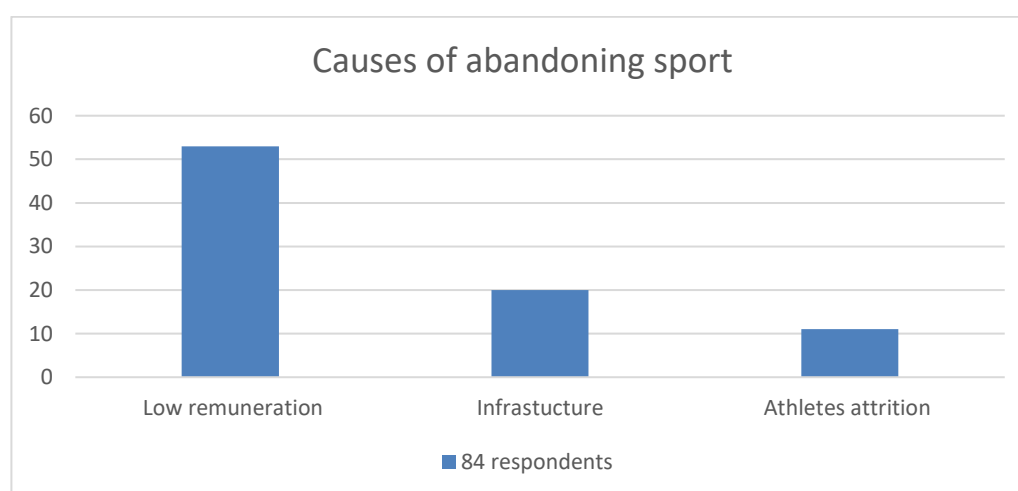


Figure 1. Distribution of participants according to the opinion regarding the causes of abandoning sports

Discussions

The analysis of the development strategies of athletics at the European level is important in order to align the results obtained by us, Romanian athletes. At the European level, many federations have long-term strategies aimed at both infrastructure, human resources, and the modernization of the training process. For example, the Athletics Strategy in England (Grix, 2009), had as objectives set in the strategic plan for the period (2017-2021),

in particular: increasing the number of members and increasing the number of authorized competitions, diversifying the way England Athletics has human resources, introducing social partner engagement programmes, providing resources for clubs, schools and community groups to engage young people in athletics, improving digital capabilities and building more collaborative relationships with our partners UK Athletics (UKA) and the other Federations athletics in

Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Green & Houlihan, 2006, Houlihan & Green, 2009, Green, 2004).

Sports policy must support equal opportunities and overcoming obstacles, so that athletes can surpass themselves (Beamish, 1990). The results from a German research study show that to be an Olympic champion, age, employment, school attendance and media exposure to the sport have a significant impact on the earnings of elite non-professional sports athletes (Wicker, Breuer & Von Hanau, 2012). Another empirical examination of the FIFA World Ranking showed that leisure competence at the aggregate level is positively associated with income and increases at a decreasing rate (Houston & Wilson, 2002). In Romania, there are legislative gaps that deeply affect the management of sports organizations caused by taxation and legislation (Brătianu, 2020). The present research highlighted a cruel reality in which Romanian athletics is found (Iacobini & Voinea, 2016, Lovin, Capatana & Cristache, 2019). Most of the athletes participating in this research stated that the salary/earnings as a registered athlete at a sports club is below 1000 lei (202 euros), an aspect that cannot constitute an extrinsic motivation to continue the road to performance, most of them being intrinsically motivated towards the performance. It becomes difficult to perform in a sport where the remuneration does not allow you to live a decent life and you have to turn to another job for this. The questionnaire was addressed to adult athletes precisely to identify whether at this age you can support yourself exclusively from the salary received from track and field in Romania.

Thus, the low incomes of athletes represent one of the main important factor of abandonment in performance track and field, at the level of seniors, and can be a starting point in the development of a strategy for revitalizing Romanian athletics. The success of a sports club can be dependent on the level of work involvement of those who manage it and those who participate in its main activities. Work commitment thus becomes an

essential variable in the evaluation of the activity of a sports club and its performances.

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Author contribution

All authors had equal contribution in writing and conducted the research.

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