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Relationship Between Perceived Importance and Flow Experience in Recreational Sports Activities: The Case of the International Arhavi Culture and Arts Festival

Rekreatif Spor Organizasyonlarında Algılanan Önem ile Rekreatif Akış Deneyimi Arasındaki İlişki: Uluslararası Arhavi Kültür ve Sanat Festivali Örneği

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Abstract

This study examined the correlation between perceived importance and the recreational flow experience within the framework of recreational sport organizations. The research is structured as a quantitative study. The data collection instrument comprised three sections: a Personal Information Form developed by the research team, the Perceived Importance Scale with three subscales developed by Buning and Gibson (2016) and adapted to Turkish culture by Aslan and Doğu (2020) and the unidimensional Recreational Flow Experience Scale developed by Ayhan et al. (2020). Data were collected from 149 athletes who participated in competitions (football, street basketball, beach volleyball, and tennis) organized as part of the 50th International Arhavi Culture and Arts Festival in 2024. The research data were gathered through a face-to-face survey administered under observation. Non-parametric tests, specifically the Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test, and Spearman correlation test, were utilized for data analysis using SPSS 26 software. The findings revealed no statistically significant differences in perceived importance levels among participants in festival sports activities based on gender, age, education level, number of festival participations, frequency of participation in recreational sports activities, city of participation, and sport discipline. Regarding recreational flow experience, no significant differences were observed between groups based on gender, age, number of participations, frequency of participation in recreational sports activities, city of involvement, and sport discipline. However, a statistically significant difference was found ($p>0.05$) for the education level variable, favoring participants with a high school education or lower. A moderate (0.445), positive, and statistically significant correlation ($p<0.001$) was identified between the perceived importance scale and the recreational flow experience scale. These findings indicate that sport event organizers may be able to provide participants with a higher recreational flow experience by increasing participants' perceived importance of the events.

Key Words: Perceived Importance, Recreational Flow Experience, Sports, Local Government, Festival

Özet

Bu çalışmada, rekreasyonel spor organizasyonlarında algılanan önem ile rekreasyonel akış deneyimi arasındaki ilişki incelenmiştir. Araştırma nicel model ile tasarlanmıştır. Veri toplama aracı toplamda üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Bunlar; araştırma ekibinin oluşturduğu Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Buning and Gibson (2016)'ın geliştirdiği, Arslan and Doğu (2020) tarafından Türk kültürüne uyarlanan üç alt boyutu bulunan Algılanan Önem Ölçeği ve Ayhan et al. (2020) tarafından geliştirilen tek boyutlu Rekreasyonel Akış Deneyimi Ölçeği'dir. Araştırma verileri, 2024 yılında 50.'si düzenlenen Uluslararası Arhavi Kültür ve Sanat Festivali kapsamında gerçekleştirilen yarışmalara (Futbol, sokak basketbolu, plaj voleybolu ve tenis) katılım gösteren sporculardan (n=149) yüz yüze gözlem altında anket tekniği ile elde edilmiştir. Toplanan verilerin analizinde, SPSS 26 istatistik programı marifetiyle, non-parametrik testlerden olan Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis ve Spearman korelasyon testleri kullanılmıştır. Analizler neticesinde; festival spor etkinliklerine katılım gösterenlerin algıladıkları önem düzeylerinin; cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim düzeyi, festivale katılım sayısı, rekreasyonel spor etkinliklerine katılım sıklığı, katılımın gerçekleştiği şehir ve branş değişkenleri açısından gruplar arasında anlamlı düzeyde farklılık göstermediği tespit edilmiştir. Rekreasyonel akış deneyimi açısından; cinsiyet, yaş, katılım sayısı, rekreasyonel spor faaliyetlerine katılım sıklığı, katılım sağlanan şehir ve branş açısından gruplar arasında anlamlı düzeyde fark bulunmazken, eğitim düzeyi değişkeni için ise lise ve altı eğitim düzeyine sahip katılımcılar lehine gruplar arasında anlamlı düzeyde ($p<0.05$) fark bulunmaktadır. Algılanan önem ölçeği ve alt boyutları ile rekreasyonel akış deneyimi ölçeği puanları arasında istatistiki açıdan anlamlı olarak ($p<0.001$) orta düzeyde (0.445) pozitif yönlü korelasyon bulunmuştur. Bu bulgular, spor etkinliği organizatörlerinin, katılımcıların etkinliklere ilişkin algıladıkları önem düzeyini artırarak, onlara daha yüksek bir rekreasyonel akış deneyimi sağlayabileceklerini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan Önem, Rekreasyonel Akış Deneyimi, Spor, Yerel Yönetim, Festival

1. INTRODUCTION

With the trade union movements that developed due to the Industrial Revolution and the increasing value given to human rights globally, leisure time has become important for individuals (Gershury, 2000, p. 8). Leisure time is the activities that people willingly engage in, either individually or in a group, outside the period they allocate to work and their compulsory needs, to protect their physical or mental health and to achieve satisfaction by experiencing a sense of pleasure in this process, and is generally described by the term “recreation” (Karaküçük, 2014, pp. 52-66). Sport has an important place in people’s leisure time, and it is one of the most preferred types of activity (Iulian-Doru et al., 2013, p. 1091). Sport has become a universal phenomenon thanks to established institutions that allow active or passive participation as an individual or a team, include elements of competition and entertainment, and take place from local to international levels. In this process, sport offers attractive recreational activities as well as being a professional field of study (Çeyiz & Özbek, 2014, p. 493).

Individuals can experience a range of emotions, including happiness, social connection, health, and competition, by engaging in sports activities during their leisure time (Berg et al., 2015; Öntürk, 2022). Additionally, participating in recreational sports allows individuals to get away the sedentary lifestyle and stress associated with technological advancements and urban living, thereby enhancing their psychological well-being and alleviating daily concerns (Kılıç & Hepsert, 2022; Mannell, 2007, p. 114). Recognizing the comfort that recreation brings to human life, local governments develop policies aimed at leisure activities and integrate these into the cultural fabric of the city by assuming social responsibility through the creation of recreational areas and services (Zengin & Öztaş, 2008). As allowed by law, municipalities can build and manage sports facilities, start sports teams, and assist regional athletes or sports organizations. Furthermore, they can provide public services by organizing sports-related events at various levels.

In contemporary society, festivals have emerged as a significant area of activity for municipalities (Alptürker & Alptürker, 2021). Traditionally, festivals encompass cultural and artistic activities, as well as sporting competitions (www.festivall.com, 2024). The sporting competitions organized within these festivals attract public attention and elicit both active and passive participation (Arhavi Municipality, 2023a; Hürhaber Gazetesi, 2018). In conclusion, participants attribute significance to the festival and sports events and generally exhibit behaviors consistent with the importance they perceive (Çelik-Oğuz & Özbek, 2019, p. 98). Perceived importance refers to the emotions, interests, or values that individuals associate with objects or abstract concepts (Chen & Petrick, 2014). For instance, in the context of health behavior, perceived importance may indicate how much an individual values the benefits of specific health-related actions, such as exercising or maintaining a healthy diet (Leung, 2013). Factors influencing the perceived importance of sporting organizations may include individual preferences for the event, the event’s location, and travel styles (Arslan & Doğu, 2020). The level of importance attributed to recreational activities may be related to the scope, quality, and image of the event, as well as the emotional states experienced by individuals during the event. The flow theory, which was put forth by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1975, is one of the theories and models used in the literature to explain these relationships (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). In this model, it is especially stressed that flow can be experienced during leisure activities. Flow theory is described as a complex state of experience that promotes intrinsic motivation and is known to facilitate varying degrees of flow experiences in daily life (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989).

In a state of flow, individuals feel pleasure and happiness from the activities they engage in, making their experiences enjoyable and prompting them to repeat these activities frequently (Şahin & Karahan, 2021, p. 1319). Consequently, flow theory plays a crucial role in recreational activities that help individuals alleviate their daily troubles, highlighting the significance of both the quantity and quality of services offered in this domain. The importance attributed to recreational sports activities can enhance the organization, making it more satisfying and enjoyable for participants. As the perceived significance of sports organizations increases, the likelihood of individuals’ continued participation and re-engagement may also rise (Backman, 1987). In this context, it can be said that the level of importance that recreational activity participants give to the organization may be related to the flow experience they experience (Kim & Thapa, 2018). As a matter of fact, there is no study in the literature examining the relationship between the perceived importance of sport organizations and recreational flow experience. However, it is seen that these two variables are the subject of separate studies (Bozkır, 2021; Demirel et al., 2022; Wagner et al., 2003). In this case, examining the possible relationship between the importance perceived by the participants of multi-branch sports competitions and their recreational flow experience can provide important information for both event organizers and scientific studies in the field of sport and recreation management. In this context, some characteristics of the participants of the event, which includes competitions in different branches, may be

important in terms of perceived importance and recreational flow experience. Therefore, individual differences such as gender, age, education level (Q1, Q2, and Q3), number of participations in the festival sport activity (Q4), frequency of participation in recreational sport activities (Q5), province of participation (Q6), and branch (Q7) of the sport activity participants may be related to perceived importance and flow experience. In addition, participants who attribute a high level of importance to the festival sport activity may tend to focus more on the activity and find themselves in the flow. Therefore, the perceived importance level of the sport organization may be a factor affecting the recreational flow experience of festival sport event participants (Q8).

Based on these circumstances, the primary hypothesis of this study examines the relationship between the perceived importance of festival sport organizations and the recreational flow experience. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the connection between these two concepts.

1.1. Literature Review

The issue of perceived importance is a topic analyzed across various fields within the social sciences and is also the subject of research in the field of sports. In studies conducted outside of Turkey, Wójcicki et al. (2013) investigated the level of importance attributed to physical activity by older women. Ko et al. (2011) explored the perceived significance of sports management competencies among academics and practitioners. Kuczka and Treasure (2005) examined the relationship between motivational climate, self-efficacy, and perceived importance in competitive sports. Additionally, Cuskelly and Auld (1991) analyzed the selected job responsibilities and perceived importance levels of sport and recreation managers. In Turkey, Bozkır (2021) studied the perceived importance of cycling athletes' participation in organizations concerning various variables. Numerous studies have also been conducted on recreational flow experiences in Turkey and other countries. Wagner et al. (2003) investigated flow experiences in surfing, while Cheng and Lu (2015) examined the relationship between recreational participation in surfing activities, flow experiences, and well-being. Jones et al. assessed the validity of flow experiences in whitewater kayaking. In Turkey, Demirel et al. (2022) explored flow experiences and leisure interests among individuals playing tennis for recreational purposes. Yazıcı et al. (2023) investigated the recreational flow experiences of skiing participants, and Kül-Avan et al. (2022) studied the recreational flow experiences of curling participants. When reviewing the current literature, it is observed that recreational flow experience and perceived importance have been studied independently, yet no research has been conducted to examine the relationship between these two concepts.

1.2. Relationship Between Sports Organizations and Perceived Importance

Sport tournaments are events organized at various levels, ranging from local to international, and can include single or multiple sports competitions with a competitive element (Erdal, 2012). Perceived importance reflects the value that individuals assign to themselves, their work, or an organization (Kent, 2007). Participants who perceive high levels of importance tend to be highly motivated (Tsai & Tai, 2002) and report greater satisfaction with their participation (Bozman et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2022). Conversely, low perceived importance may lead to decreased effort, an increased intention to quit, and weakened team dynamics. Furthermore, as perceived importance rises, the quality of service that participants expect from the organization also increases (Aslan & Doğu, 2020). The relationship between sport organizations and perceived importance is critical for the participation and performance of athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders in sports activities. Therefore, sports organizers should develop strategies to enhance participants' perceived importance.

1.3. The Relationship Between Flow Theory and Recreation

Flow theory describes a state in which an individual becomes fully focused in an activity, losing track of time while experiencing enjoyment and satisfaction (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). Recreation, conversely, encompasses activities in which individuals engage during their leisure time to develop personally, socialize, and have fun (Leitner & Leitner, 2012). The interplay between flow theory and recreation suggests that individuals can experience flow during recreational activities, which in turn enhances their quality of life, happiness, and performance (Cheng & Lu, 2015). Factors influencing the relationship between flow experiences and recreation may include variables such as gender, age, education level, frequency of participation, location of participation, and sports history (Yazıcı et al., 2023). In this context, considering that sports activities represent a significant domain of recreational leisure, it can be

said that a relationship may exist between participants' perceived importance of sports organizations and their flow experiences, warranting further investigation.

1.4. International Arhavi Culture and Art Festival

The 50th International Arhavi Culture and Art Festival, which was first organized in 1973, took place in 2024. The festival features a variety of socio-cultural activities, with one of the key categories being sports competitions (festival.arhavi.bel.tr, 2024). These competitions include events in football, tennis, beach volleyball, athletics, and street basketball. The festival activities are coordinated by the Arhavi District Municipality of Artvin, located in one of the Eastern Black Sea provinces, in collaboration with other local institutions (Arhavi Municipality, 2019). Participants from local, regional, national, and international backgrounds are welcome to join the event. Participation in the sports competitions is voluntary, and the local administration plans the events, with awards presented to the winning teams and athletes (Arhavi Municipality, 2023b).

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Model

This study employed a relational survey model to examine the relationship between perceived importance and recreational flow experience within the context of recreational sport organizations. The primary purpose of the relational survey model is to reveal the variations among two or more variables (Büyüköztürk, 2014). Additionally, this model evaluates situations that have been experienced in the past or are currently ongoing in their present state (Karasar, 2019).

2.2. Research Group

The study group for this research was composed of participants selected using the purposive sampling technique. Only individuals aged 18 and older who participated in the sporting competitions at the 50th International Arhavi Culture and Art Festival were included in the study. Data were collected from a total of 172 participants; however, 23 survey forms that were incomplete or incorrectly filled out were excluded from the analysis. Consequently, the research group consisted of 149 individuals over the age of 18 who engaged in sports activities at the International Arhavi Culture and Art Festival, which was organized for the 50th time by the Arhavi District Municipality of Artvin Province in 2024. Among the research group, 87.9% were male, 38.3% were aged 26 or older, 71.1% were university graduates, 52.3% participated in two or more sports activities during the festival, 63.8% engaged in recreational activities two or more times a year, 83.9% attended the festival from Artvin Province, and 38.3% participated in the football event.

Table 1. The distribution of personal information among the participants in the research group.

Variables	Groups	n	(%)
Gender	Female	18	12.1
	Male	131	87.9
	Total	149	100
Age	18-21	42	28.2
	22-25	50	33.6
	26 and up	57	38.3
	Total	149	100
Education Level	High school and lower	43	28.9
	Associate's degree and higher	106	71.1
	Total	149	100
Festival Sports Event Participation Frequency	First time	71	47.7
	Two or more	78	52.3
	Total	149	100
Recreational Event Participation Frequency	Once a year	54	36.2
	Twice a year or more	95	63.8
	Total	149	100
Province Participating in Sports Event	Artvin	125	83.9
	Other Provinces	24	16.1
	Total	149	100

Branch	Street Basketball	33	22.1
	Tennis	24	16.1
	Beach Volleyball	35	23.5
	Football	57	38.3
	Total	149	100

2.3. Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using a comprehensive data collection tool consisting of three parts. The first part includes a personal information form. The second part measures the Perceived Importance Scale (PIS), developed by Buning and Gibson (2016), which underwent a Turkish validity and reliability study conducted by conducted a Turkish validity and reliability study by Arslan and Doğu (2020) and has a three-factor structure, was used in order to determine the importance of sport-related individuals in participating in sportive activities. The answers given to the five-point Likert-type measurement tool are calculated as “Strongly Disagree” 1 point, “Disagree” 2 points, “Undecided” 3 points, “Agree” 4 points and “Strongly Agree” 5 points. The Event Preference (EP) dimension of the PIS consists of 17 items, the Destination Preference (DP) dimension consists of 9 items, and the Travel Style Preference (TSP) dimension consists of 11 items, totaling 37 items in total. In the last part of the data collection tool, there is a single-factor and 9 items, Likert-type Recreational Flow Experience Scale (RFES) developed by Ayhan et al. (2020), ranging from 1 for “Strongly disagree” to 7 for “Strongly agree”. There are no reverse items in both measurement tools. Information on the reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) of the scales in the data collection tool is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach Alpha Confidence Coefficients of Measurement Instruments

Measurements	Original Score (Current Score (
Perceived Importance Scale (PIS)	0.89	0.95
Event Preference (EP)	0.78	0.89
Destination Preference (DP)	0.84	0.88
Travel Style Preference (TSP)	0.78	0.90
Recreational Flow Experience Scale (RFES)	0.89	0.87

As shown in Table 2, the reliability coefficients for the PIS and its sub-dimensions—EP, DP, and TSP—are 0.95, 0.89, 0.88, and 0.90, respectively. The reliability coefficient for the single-factor structure of the RFES is 0.87. Comparing these values with those reported in the original measurement tools, it is evident that the PIS, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES demonstrate adequate reliability (Nunnally, 1978)

2.4. Data Collection Process

The data collection tool utilized in this research was administered exclusively to participants involved in sports competitions, specifically in football, tennis, beach volleyball, and street basketball, organized as part of the 50th International Arhavi Culture and Arts Festival held in 2024. Data were gathered using a survey technique through direct observation in the event areas.

2.5. Data Analysis

The research data were transferred to the SPSS v.26 statistical program. Initially, frequency, arithmetic mean, standard deviation values, and reliability coefficients were examined. Subsequently, Shapiro-Wilk values were assessed to determine the normality of the data. It was found that the p-values for both measurement tools (including sub-dimensions) were significant at least at the 0.05 level, leading to the decision to apply non-parametric tests (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2018). Accordingly, the Mann-Whitney U test was utilized for independent variables with two groups, the Kruskal-Wallis test for independent variables with three or more groups, and the Spearman correlation test was employed to measure the relationship between dependent variables. The results of the correlation test were interpreted at a significance level of at least 0.05; values between 0.70 and 1.00 were considered high, 0.30 to 0.69 as medium, and 0.00 to 0.29 as low (Büyüköztürk, 2020).

2.6. Ethical Aspect of the Research

Approval for the ethical compliance of the research and the data collection tools utilized in the study was obtained from the Karabük University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Board (2023/06, Decision No: 15). Written permissions were obtained from the researchers who developed the data collection tools used in the study. Participants were informed about the research topic during the data collection process, and their consent for voluntary participation was obtained in writing. The purpose of the study was communicated to the participants through the data collection tool, and they were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue completing the questionnaire at any time. Additionally, written permission was secured from Arhavi Municipality to collect data from participants in the festival event areas.

3. FINDINGS

In this section of the paper, we present the results of the analyses related to the Perceived Importance Scale (PIS) and its sub-dimensions: Event Preference (EP), Destination Preference (DP), Travel Style Preference (TSP), and Recreational Flow Experience Scale (RFES) scores.

When the scores obtained by the participants from the PIS were analyzed, it was found that the mean of the total scale was (\bar{x} =3.63) in the EP sub-dimension (\bar{x} =3.63), in the DP sub-dimension (\bar{x} =3.75), and in the TSP sub-dimension (\bar{x} =3.53). On the other hand, it was determined that the mean score obtained by the participants from the single-factor structure RFES was (\bar{x} =6.17). The participants' lowest score (\bar{x} =1.51) and highest score (\bar{x} =5.00) on the PIS was 5.00, while their lowest score (\bar{x} =2.67) and highest score (\bar{x} =7.00) on the RFES was 7. Table 2 presents the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values for the PIS, its sub-dimensions, and the RF.

Table 2. Distribution of Scale Scores (PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES)

Measurements	Item Count	N	Min.	Max.	(\bar{x})	sd
PIS	37	149	1.51	5.00	3.63	0.82
EP	17	149	1.59	5.00	3.63	0.83
DP	11	149	1.22	5.00	3.75	0.89
TSP	9	149	1.00	5.00	3.53	1.02
RFES	9	149	2.67	7.00	6.17	0.93

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test for the gender variable indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores obtained by female and male participants on the total scale, as well as the sub-dimensions of the PIS and the RFES scale (Q1).

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores by gender.

Measurements	Gender	N	Rank Mean	Rank Total	U	p
PIS	Female	18	64.5	1161.0	990.000	0.271
	Male	131	76.4	10014.0		
EP	Female	14	71.8	1292.5	1121.500	0.738
	Male	125	75.4	9882.5		
DP	Female	14	63.9	1149.5	978.500	0.242
	Male	125	76.5	10025.5		
TSP	Female	14	61.9	1113.5	942.500	0.168
	Male	125	76.8	10061.5		
RFES	Female	14	72.7	1309.0	1138.000	0.808
	Male	125	75.3	9866.0		

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for the age variable indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the scores obtained from the total PIS scale, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES scale (Q2).

Table 4. Kruskal-Wallis test results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores in terms of age variable

Measurements	Age	N	Rank Mean	Sd	X ²	p
PIS	18-21	42	80.00	2	0.972	0.615
	22-25	50	74.96			
	26 and up	57	71.35			
EP	18-21	42	80.65	2	1.178	0.555
	22-25	50	74.63			
	26 and up	57	71.16			
DP	18-21	42	73.75	2	0.851	0.653
	22-25	50	79.47			
	26 and up	57	72.00			
TSP	18-21	42	83.42	2	2.238	0.327
	22-25	50	72.03			
	26 and up	57	71.40			
RFES	18-21	42	78.07	2	1.998	0.368
	22-25	50	79.50			
	26 and up	57	68.79			

According to the Mann-Whitney U test results presented in Table 5, the scores obtained from the PIS total scale and its sub-dimensions by the participants with a high school education or lower do not differ significantly from those of participants with an associate degree or higher. However, the scores obtained from the RFES scale show a statistically significant difference in favor of participants with a high school education or lower (Q3).

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores according to educational level.

Measurements	Education Level	N	Rank Mean	Rank Total	U	p
PIS	High school and lower	43	81.12	3488.00	2016	0.270
	Associate's degree and higher	106	72.52	7687.00		
EP	High school and lower	43	80.36	3455.50	2048.5	0.334
	Associate's degree and higher	106	72.83	7719.50		
DP	High school and lower	43	80.99	3482.50	2021.5	0.280
	Associate's degree and higher	106	72.57	7692.50		
TSP	High school and lower	43	81.27	3494.50	2009.5	0.258
	Associate's degree and higher	106	72.46	7680.50		
RFES	High school and lower	43	85.73	3686.50	1817.5	0.050*
	Associate's degree and higher	106	70.65	7488.50		

p<0.05*

Table 6 presents the results of the Mann-Whitney U test conducted on the frequency of participants' involvement in the festival sports event. The findings indicate that the total scores of the PIS scale, as well as its sub-dimensions, and the RFES scale scores for individuals who participated in the event for the first time do not differ statistically from those who participated two or more times (Q4).

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U test results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores in terms of frequency of participation in festival sport activity

Measurements	Frequency of Participation	N	Rank Mean	Rank Total	U	p
PIS	First time	71	77.46	5499.50	2594.50	0.507
	Two or more	78	72.76	5675.50		
EP	First time	71	77.61	5510.50	2583.50	0.481
	Two or more	78	72.62	5664.50		
DP	First time	71	75.20	5339.00	2755.00	0.957
	Two or more	78	74.82	5836.00		
TSP	First time	71	77.83	5526.00	2568.00	0.444
	Two or more	78	72.42	5649.00		
RFES	First time	71	77.06	5471.50	2622.50	0.572
	Two or more	78	73.12	5703.50		

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test, conducted to compare the frequency of participants' engagement in recreational sports activities, indicated that the total scores of the PIS scale, along with its sub-dimensions, and the RFES scale scores for individuals who participated once a year and those who participated two or more times a year did not differ statistically significantly (Q5).

Table 7. Mann-Whitney U test results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores in terms of frequency of participation in recreational sport activities

Measurements	Frequency of Participation	N	Rank Mean	Rank Total	U	p
PIS	Once a year	54	71.24	3847	2362.000	0.423
	Twice a year or more	95	77.14	7328		
EP	Once a year	54	70.85	3826	2341.000	0.376
	Twice a year or more	95	77.36	7349		
DP	Once a year	54	72.48	3914	2429.000	0.590
	Twice a year or more	95	76.43	7261		
TSP	Once a year	54	70.93	3830	2345.000	0.384
	Twice a year or more	95	77.32	7345		
RFES	Once a year	54	78.84	4257,5	2357.500	0.405
	Twice a year or more	95	72.82	6917,5		

When analyzing the Mann-Whitney U test results for the city variable regarding participants in the festival activity presented in Table 8, it is evident that the means obtained from the PIS total scale, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES scale for participants from Artvin and those from other cities do not differ statistically significantly (Q6).

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores in terms of city variable

Measurements	Province	N	Rank Mean	Rank Total	U	p
PIS	Artvin	125	76.60	9575.5	1299.500	0.300
	Other	24	66.65	1599.5		
EP	Artvin	125	75.25	9406.0	1469.000	0.873
	Other	24	73.71	1769.0		
DP	Artvin	125	77.87	9733.5	1141.500	0.064
	Other	24	60.06	1441.5		
TSP	Artvin	125	76.74	9593.0	1282.000	0.259
	Other	24	65.92	1582.0		
RFES	Artvin	125	75.86	9482.5	1392.500	0.573
	Other	24	70.52	1692.5		

According to the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test regarding the sport branch of participation, the averages obtained from the total PIS scale, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES scale for the branch variable did not differ statistically significantly (Q7).

Table 9. Kruskal-Wallis test results of PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores in terms of sport branch of participation

Measurements	Branch	N	Rank Mean	Sd	X ²	p
PIS	Street Basketball	33	76.98	3	2.300	0.513
	Tennis	24	62.79			
	Beach Volleyball	35	77.93			
	Football	57	77.19			
EP	Street Basketball	33	72.86	3	0.993	0.803
	Tennis	24	68.94			
	Beach Volleyball	35	75.01			
	Football	57	78.78			
DP	Street Basketball	33	73.32	3	4.078	0.253
	Tennis	24	60.90			
	Beach Volleyball	35	83.50			
	Football	57	76.69			
TSP	Street Basketball	33	81.35	3	3.759	0.289
	Tennis	24	61.21			
	Beach Volleyball	35	80.36			
	Football	57	73.84			
RFES	Street Basketball	33	82.59	3	5.741	0.125
	Tennis	24	61.52			
	Beach Volleyball	35	84.26			
	Football	57	70.60			

The results of the Spearman correlation analysis conducted to determine the relationship between perceived importance and recreational flow experience indicate a statistically significant moderate positive correlation between the total scale scores of the Recreational Flow Experience Scale (RFES) and the Perceived Importance Scale (PIS) ($r=0.445$; $p<0.001$). This correlation is also evident in its sub-dimensions. (EP) ($r=0.373$; $p<0.001$), (DP) ($r=0.447$; $p<0.001$), (TSP) ($r=0.423$; $p<0.001$) (Q8).

Table 10. Spearman correlation analysis results for PIS and its sub-dimensions and RFES scores of the participants

Variables	PIS	EP	DP	TSP
RFES	,445*	,373*	,447*	,423*
p	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000

$p<0.001^*$

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The data for this research, which examines the relationship between the perceived importance of sports organizations and the recreational flow experience, were obtained from participants in the sporting events organized as part of the 50th International Arhavi Culture and Art Festival held in 2024. A total of 149 athletes participated in the study, yielding a mean score of 3.63 for the Perceived Importance Scale (PIS) (Sub-dimensions: 3.63 for EP; 3.75 for DP and 3.53 for TSP). These results are comparable to the average values reported by Bozkır (2021) for EP (3.88), DP (3.64), and TSP (3.50) in a study on organizational commitment among cyclists. In his study on the organizational participation of cycling athletes. The average score obtained by participants on the Recreational Flow Experience Scale (RFES) was 6.17, which is notably high considering that the maximum possible score on the scale is 7. When the studies in the literature are examined; Yazıcı et al. (2023, p. 38) obtained a mean score above 6 in a study on skiers, Kül-Avan et al. (2022, p. 5) obtained a mean score close to 6 in a study on curling participants, Yapılı (2022) obtained a mean score of 6.30 in a study on individuals using bicycles for recreational purposes, Ekinci (2023) obtained

a mean score of 5.84 for outdoor nature sports participants. It can be said that the studies in the literature are similar to the average scores of athletes participating in the festival sports activities.

In terms of gender variable (Q1), no significant difference was found between the mean scores of the PIS total scale and sub-dimensions and RFES scores of the participants. There may be several reasons why no significant differences were found between the groups in terms of perceived importance. For instance, the multi-disciplinary nature of the event and the extended duration of the sports competitions might have led both male and female participants to attribute greater importance to the event. Furthermore, the event's long-standing and traditional history may have contributed to the lack of differences between the groups. However, Bozkır (2021), in his study on a cycling event, found that female participants exhibited a higher level of perceived importance compared to their male participants. The discrepancy between this study and Bozkır (2021) findings may stem from the distinction between multi-disciplinary and single-disciplinary events. The lack of intergroup differences regarding the gender variable in the context of RFES may be due to the competitive nature of the festival's sports competitions, which might generate a similar flow experience for both men and women. Looking at the literature, in the study conducted by Yapılı (2022) on cycling athletes, no difference was found between the groups. Yazıcı et al. (2023) on ski athletes and Ekinci (2023) on participants of outdoor sports activities found that male participants experienced higher flow experience in their studies, while Kül-Avan et al. (2022) on curling athletes and Chang (2017) on retirees participating in leisure activities found that female participants experienced higher flow experience in their studies. It can be said that the types of activities participated in may be determinative in the emergence of these differences.

When examining the scores obtained from the scales in relation to the age variable (Q2), no significant differences were found between the mean scores of the PIS total scale, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES. The relationship between perceived importance and age has been the subject of research in various fields. For instance, Kekolahti et al. (2015) identified a significant level of linearity between the perceived importance of communication services and the age variable. Similarly, another study found that age is an important factor in project team management (Chipulu et al., 2014). On the other hand, in the field of sports, Bozkır (2021) study reported no differences among various age groups in terms of the total PIS scale scores of participants in cycling events. The lack of variation in the age variable across groups regarding the PIS total scale and its sub-dimensions may be attributed to the fact that participants voluntarily engaged in the sports events; the majority of whom reside in the immediate vicinity, and they return to participate because the festival is a traditional event. The absence of differences in the age variable concerning the RFES may be due to the nature of the other sports activities, which, apart from tennis, fall under the category of team sports, with most participants being part of a team (Boyd et al., 2018). In the literature, Yazıcı et al. (2023) and Ekinci (2023) found that RFES scores were higher among younger participants. The inconsistency between the findings of this study and those reported in the literature may stem from the research groups participating in different types of activities.

Although the overall scale and sub-dimensions of the PIS show no statistically significant differences across education levels (Q3), the RFES scale indicates a significant difference ($p < 0.05$), with participants possessing a high school education or lower scoring higher. The lack of difference in scores between individuals with high school or lower education levels and those with at least a university-level education regarding the PIS and its sub-dimensions may be attributed to the long-standing nature of the activity. Furthermore, the participants' extensive knowledge about this activity, irrespective of their education level, could also be a contributing factor. Conversely, the significant difference favoring those with a high school education or lower in the RFES may stem from variations in time commitment, responsibilities, or lower stress levels. A review of the literature reveals that in studies conducted by Yapılı (2022) and Yazıcı et al. (2023), no differences were found between education levels and recreational flow experience. However, studies by Ekinci (2023) and Kül-Avan et al. (2022) observed differences among groups based on education level. The variability in results across different studies may be attributed to differences in branches and disciplines.

The mean scores of the PIS total scale, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES did not differ significantly based on the frequency of participation (Q4). The absence of significant differences among the groups regarding all measurement tools may be attributed to the fact that the activity was held for the 50th time, leading participants to possess a certain level of knowledge and attitude about the event. In contrast, Ekinci (2023) found that individuals who frequently participated in outdoor sports activities experienced a higher state of flow. Since outdoor sports activities are not conducted only once a year, unlike festival activities, this may

have contributed to differences among the groups concerning participation in recreational sports activities variable (Q5). The fact that there is no difference between the groups for PIS may be because the festival is traditionalized and the sports events have a certain recognition, and the fact that the RFES scores do not differ may be because the participants experience a high flow experience regardless of the frequency of participation since the festival sports competitions are a recreational activity. In contrast to this finding, Yapılı (2022) was found that users who participated in cycling festivals obtained more flow experience scores. The difference between these two studies may be since the festival in Arhavi is multi-disciplinary, or in other words, the cycling festival is single-disciplinary, and cycling participants have more passion for their discipline.

Upon evaluating the results for the participation province variable (Q6), no statistically significant differences were observed in the averages obtained from the total PIS scale, its sub-dimensions, and the RFES scale. This absence of differences across all scales may be attributed to several factors: participants traveling from other cities may originally be from Artvin, despite currently residing elsewhere; or, despite the festival context of the sporting events, participants may perceive the competitions as independent from the festival itself. This perception could influence the importance they attribute to the event and their flow experiences.

The results indicate that, for the variable related to the sport branch (Q7), the scores obtained by participants concerning the PIS and its sub-dimensions, as well as the RFES scale, do not differ significantly. The lack of variation among the groups in the overall PIS scale and its sub-dimensions may be attributed to the fact that the participants' sporting activities are organized under a single entity. Furthermore, the absence of a significant difference between the branches regarding the RFES may stem from the participants competing in a general context and concentrating on the competition itself, irrespective of the specific branch in which they are participating during the festival activity.

Analysis of the correlation between PIS and RFES (Q8) revealed a moderate, positive, and significant ($p < 0.001$) relationship between the total PIS scale and all its sub-dimensions and RFES. This finding suggests that as participants' perceived importance of festival sports events increases, their focus on competition increases, which may lead to a more intense flow experience. When the relationship between these two variables is considered within the framework of flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2014), when an individual is completely absorbed in an activity, he/she loses awareness of time and the environment and experiences an intense sense of concentration and happiness. Therefore, the importance attributed to an activity can be associated with the individual finding the activity meaningful and believing in the value of participation. In this case, the individual focuses on the activity, intensifies their efforts, and thus achieves a balance between challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 83). This can be said to be valid for the research findings. It is seen that as the importance the participants attach to sports organizations increases, their recreational flow levels increase moderately. In addition, the fact that the location of the event is more accessible and reasonable for the participants may increase their flow experience (Collins & Potoglou, 2019). Besides this, it can be said that so it is easier to participate in the event in terms of location and travel preferences may cause participants to focus more on sporting competitions and thus increase their flow experiences (Liang et al., 2008; McCormack et al., 2006).

As a result, this study found that the perceived importance levels of participants in festival sports competitions did not differ based on gender, age, education level, number of festival participations, frequency of participation in recreational sports activities, or the city and branch of participation. Regarding the recreational flow experience, there were no differences among the groups concerning gender, age, number of participations, frequency of participation in recreational sports activities, or the city and branch of participation. However, a difference was observed in the education level variable, favoring participants with a high school education or lower. Additionally, a moderate and positive correlation was identified between the total scale scores of perceived importance levels, sub-dimension scores, and recreational flow experience scores.

According to these results, it can be concluded that if the organizers of sports competition events enhance the perceived importance of the event among participants by hosting higher-quality organizations, it may provide participants with a more immersive flow experience. This approach could encourage participants to attend future events and recommend them to others within their social circles. The festival event from which the research data was collected is organized at the district municipality level. Since sports activities can be offered as a public service, the municipalities' fulfillment of their duties and responsibilities, as

specified in relevant laws, in a more effective manner increases the satisfaction and happiness levels of local residents and those in surrounding areas. In this regard, the high average scores obtained by participants from the measurement tools indicate that they value festival sports activities and experience significant recreational flow. Consequently, local municipalities can enhance recreational sports organizations by prioritizing sports services, improving the quality of existing activities, and thereby elevating their overall service quality. Additionally, they can strengthen their organizational capacities in the field of sports. By organizing festivals, tournaments, or competitions that incorporate sports activities, municipalities can facilitate participants' experiences of recreational flow and contribute to the creation of a happier society.

5. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research are based on the opinions of 149 voluntary participants from the sports events organized as part of the 50th International Arhavi Culture and Art Festival. The limited number of participants represents a significant limitation of this study. The voluntary nature of participation and the data collection process during the festival posed additional challenges. Therefore, future research should explore the relationship between perceived importance and recreational flow in multi-sport events with a larger participant pool. Furthermore, it is advisable for researchers to assess the perceived importance and recreational flow experiences of participants in recreational sports events by examining other dependent and independent variables that may be relevant. A notable finding of this study is the moderately positive correlation between perceived importance and recreational flow experience. This insight suggests that event organizers should consider implementing strategies to enhance the perceived significance of festival sporting events for participants.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Conflict of interest: *There isn't conflict of interest among the authors.*

Financial support: *There isn't financial support was reported by the authors.*

Ethics Approval: *The authors declare that the article complies with national and international research and publication ethics. In case of a contrary situation, the **Journal of Sport and Recreation Research** has no responsibility, and all responsibility belongs to the authors of the article.*

Ethics Committee Approval: *This study was prepared with the approval of Karabük University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Decision number: 15 Session no: 2023/06).*

Informed Consent: *Informed consent was obtained for the voluntary participation of the participants.*

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