

Is running accessible for everyone?

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Abstract

Running road is pointed as a “democratic”, “accessible for all”, and “low-cost” practice; however, this issue must be questioned, especially due to costs related to the involvement in race events, which has led to changes in the “runners profile”.

Unlike other mammals, the human being is not an “innate” sprinter; on the other hand, when taking into account the ability of running for long distances, few animals are as efficient as humans ^[1]. Despite this ability be seen as a key behavior for the human evolution process, given it allowed the survival of the humanity ^[2], nowadays the running endurance is not necessarily performed for this aim (survival), leading to a change of its use, which involves competitive perspective, as well as well-being. Because of that, it has been observed, since the 1970s, an increase in the number of practitioners, and also in the number of race events, which allow the participation of both professional and non-professional runners, comprising races from the 5km to ultra-endurance ones ^{[3][4]}. For example, data from 32,335 race events across the globe, indicated that between 2008-2018, the amount of runners participating in marathons increased by more than 49.43%, where the USA, the UK, and Germany showed the highest amount of participants ^[4].

Since running is usually considered a “democratic” practice, “accessible for all”, and “low-cost”, it is possible to observe, at race events, runners involved in the practice with different goals, such as those who run with the purpose to improve “health and quality of life” ^{[5][6]}, and those who take part in these events focusing to improve the performance. In addition, evidence point out the large benefits of road running to its practitioners, involving improvements in complex mood disorders ^[7], in health components in physically inactive adults^[8], and reduction of risk of death from all causes and cardiovascular disease ^[9]. However, the idea that running is an accessible practice, that can be performed by everyone, is a point that must be questioned, especially due to the marketing that involves it, with costs to take part in events, the peers “pressure” for the acquisition of certain gadgets and tennis training, and the need for a coach to prescribe and monitor the training sections.

These factors have led to changes in the profile of runners, where is not more observed a predominance of low-income practitioners, aiming the performance, with the purpose of social rise ^[10]. In this context, previous studies have shown that most of runners tend to be classified as high-income ^[11], with a high educational level^{[12][13]}, and these factors showed to be significant predictors associated with the practice ^{[10][14]}. In fact, nowadays most of the race events are planned under a “theme” (e.g. “color running”, “obstacles running”, “night running”, “woman’s race”, “seasons race”), with a strong touristic appeal ^[3]. In the Brazilian context, for example, the average costs associated with the participation in a national race rounds about R\$520.00 (about €79.00 or US\$93.00, in October 2020) [15], while for taking place in one of the marathon majors, the costs associated reach about US\$2,800 ^[16], and these costs are not accessible for a large portion of the population, or even the runners.

The main point is that while a phylogenetic ability, “running” is accessible for everyone, but running as a sport practice, with the marketing that involves it, moving billions of dollars around the world (specialized services, events participation, acquisition of fancy equipment and accessories) ^[17], is too far to be considered as an accessible practice. The “conventional” events have been replaced by “fashion” races ^[18], and nowadays “to be a runner” is a feeling that not everyone can experience. So, it is desirable that the “simple” and “natural” way as running is defined and “introduced”, can be really observed and experienced by runners during their training sessions, with their relationship with peers, and at running races, throughout the development of a really democratic and accessible for all “running environment”.

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Keywords

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