

# The Impact of Marathon on Urban Development from the Perspective of Experience Economy

## Taking Leshan International Marathon as an Example

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**Abstract**—With the rapid development of the experience economy, people are becoming more and more interested in the leisure activities with high participation. Sports tourism has gradually won people's favor. The popularity of marathon in China has not only promoted the cause of national fitness, but also contributed to the development of cities. From the perspective of experience economy, this paper takes Leshan city marathon as an example. Through literature, field investigation, expert interview, logical analysis and other research methods, this paper aims to analyze the positive impact of marathon on the national fitness, economy, culture and brand development of the city.

**Keywords**—*experience economy; marathon; urban development*

### I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, marathon entered people's life from competitive competition, and in the 1990s, it became a popular leisure sport and swept around the world. In recent years, China has witnessed a "marathon fever", and the number and scale of urban marathons are growing rapidly. According to the 2017 China marathon big data analysis report released by the track and field management center of the general administration of sport of China, about 10 marathons were held in China every year before 2008, and then there was a blowout development. In 2015, China held 134 marathons with 1.5 million participants. In 2016, 328 marathons were held and more than 2.8 million people participated. In 2017, more than 1,100 marathons of various types were held nationwide, with nearly 5 million participants. As of November 2, 2018, the number of road running with more than 800 runners and cross-country races with more than 300 runners has reached 1,072 with 5.3 million participants. Such "marathon fever" on the one hand promotes national fitness, from which participants get excellent sports experience, and urban marathon becomes a grand festival [1]. On the other hand, it invigorates the industrial chain with hundreds of millions of yuan in six industrial links, including event organization, marketing, runner service, brand communication, broadcasting technology and Internet channels, playing a huge role in driving the sports industry, tourism and urban GDP.

### II. REASONS FOR THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN MARATHON IN CHINA

#### A. A Series of Policies Issued by the Government to Support the Development of Marathon

In 2014, the state promulgated several opinions on promoting the reform of sports event approval system, which stimulated the vitality of the domestic sports event operation market and unleashed great value potential. In 2016, the state council promulgated the national fitness program and the national fitness plan (2016-2020), making fitness activities a strategic goal of national policies. In 2018, the state council promulgated the marathon industry development plan, which puts forward guiding opinions on the scale and number of marathon events. A series of national policies have promoted the rapid and healthy development of marathon.

#### B. Great Increase in Sports Consumption with the Improvement of People's Living Standards

The improvement of living standard and the change of lifestyle have transformed people's consumption concept. The life concept of Chinese residents has gone through three stages, namely "fill the stomach", "eat well" and "live well", from a single material need to the pursuit of spiritual culture. Experience economy is the fourth development stage of human economic activities after agricultural economy, industrial economy and service economy. It refers to that consumers are willing to pay relevant fees while gaining beautiful and unique experience in the process of participation [2]. Under the background of the experience economy era, sports and leisure are becoming the new fashion of modern lifestyle, and people are more and more willing to participate in sports and invest in sports consumption, so as to obtain sports experience and inner abundance.

#### C. Professional Operations of Sports Companies to Improve the Level of Marathon

A large marathon with a scale of more than 10,000 people reflects a city's comprehensive quality in many aspects, including resource mobilization, department

coordination, emergency support and reception level. It is a good opportunity to establish a city image and build a city brand. By 2017, the number of companies that operate national sports events has exceeded 100. In addition, a large number of private enterprises and other social capital are involved in marathon events. For example, various apps, media, network, clothing, drinks, advertising and so on have become sponsors and cooperative media of the event. With professional companies doing professional things and the government collaborate with enterprises, the level of the marathon has been greatly improved.

#### *D. The Rise of Social Platforms Making Running Marathons a Platform for Interpersonal Communication*

For runners, running marathons is a way of life to know through a city. Marathon has a strong social attribute, which can greatly meet people's social needs. Participants are willing to communicate with their peers during the running process, and also like to share running scene pictures, racing experiences and inner feelings through the moments. At ordinary times, marathon enthusiasts can also gather together through group chat and meet to compete in order to encourage each other to finish the race successfully. They can also use running APPs for running process monitoring and scientific stretching at any time. In this way they can develop a good lifestyle of exercise, scientific diet, reasonable work and rest and make like-minded running friends to enrich their spiritual life.

### III. OVERVIEW OF LESHAN INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

#### *A. Organizations of Leshan International Marathon*

Leshan international marathon is sponsored by China Athletics Association, Leshan People's Government and Xinhuanet.com. It is undertaken by the Leshan Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China Publicity Department, Leshan Municipal Central District People's Government, Leshan Shawan District People's Government, Leshan Tourism and Sports Development Committee, and Xinhuanet.com, operated exclusively by Xinhuanet Sichuan co. LTD. It is the national event IP "China in Motion" marathon series jointly launched by Xinhuanet and Chinese Athletics Association. As the largest international competition held in Leshan up to now, Leshan international marathon is a perfect interpretation of Leshan city spirit, a comprehensive demonstration of the vitality of Leshan city and a concentrated demonstration of Leshan city brand.

#### *B. Scale and Characteristics of the First International Marathon in Leshan in 2017*

The first Leshan international marathon in 2017 was divided into three events: full marathon, half marathon and joy run. More than 10,000 runners from over 10 countries and 24 provinces and cities participated in the race. With the theme of "Leshan, leshui, lepao" (namely enjoy the mountain, enjoy the water and enjoy the running) the competition fully integrates the landscape culture of Leshan and marathon culture. In addition, a "food track" featuring the food culture of Leshan was built. Different delicacies such as sweet skin

duck, pottery pot chicken and bean curd jelly were arranged at each supply station for players to taste, which was also a good publicity of the tourism, food and other cultures of Leshan city.

#### *C. Route and Awards of the First International Marathon in Leshan in 2017*

The famous Ecological Avenue of Leshan was used as the main track of the 2017 Leshan international marathon. Both of the starting and finishing points of the full marathon and the joy run were set at the No. 1 Bridge of the Ecological Avenue, and the finishing point of the half marathon was set at Shawan district of Leshan city. Along the course various sceneries such as green hills and water and big Buddhas are all in sight. As a well-known tourist destination in the world, Leshan boasts the world cultural and natural heritage of Mount Emei — Leshan giant Buddha. Here, the Landscape and buddhist culture add radiance and beauty to each other. Marathon runners ran along the Dadu River, facing the Mount Da'e, Mount Er'e and Mount Emei. They could feel the gentle wind from the river and appreciate the beauty of the mountains at the same time.

Leshan international marathon 2017 had rich rewards for the top 10 male and female runners in the full and half marathon events. Runners who finished first in the men's race in 2h 09m 30s and the women's race in 2h26m in full marathon received a bonus of 20,000 yuan, and those who finished first in the half marathon received a bonus of 5,000 yuan.

#### *D. Social Evaluation of the First International Marathon in Leshan in 2017*

The successful holding of Leshan marathon shows the integration of the ecology, culture, tourism and sports of Leshan, and highlights the concept of marketing a city through one event. The competition, which contains the urban characteristics and sportsmanship of Leshan, reflects the vitality of the city and the confidence of the citizens. It is more meaningful than the competition itself and exerts a great influence on the development of the city. The first international marathon in Leshan in 2017 won the prize of race with natural ecological characteristics issued by Chinese Athletics Association.

#### *E. New Changes to the 2018 Leshan International Half Marathon*

According to relevant experts, in order to further form the atmosphere for national fitness and let more people who like running participate in the event, the full marathon program is cancelled in the Leshan international half marathon in 2018, but innovations has been made in the half marathon and joy run programs. Only the half marathon and joy run remain, but new groups featuring "group participation and joy sharing" are added, including "sweet run", "happy family run", "industry elite run" as well as "happy pairing run " etc. In addition to the continuation of the food supply station, landscape elements are also added. Flowers are planted along the track to create a "flower track".

In terms of awards, the scope of awards has also been expanded. The prize money goes to the runners from the eleventh to ninety-ninth place. And the top three will receive special rewards from sponsors in addition to the prize money. The top three runners in the "sweet run" group in the half marathon also get a bonus of up to 3,000 yuan.

#### IV. IMPACT OF MARATHON ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT

##### A. *Impact of Marathon on National Fitness in Leshan City*

Running is the most basic way of human fitness and the easiest physical activity to carry out. It is the only city-based event in which amateur and professional athletes compete together with a strong participation of the mass. At the same time, in order to participate in the competition, people need to carry out some pre-competition training, which helps them develop the good habit of exercising. The city marathon in Leshan reduces the cost for people to travel to other places for competition. As the carrier of cohesion, it drives the enthusiasm of citizens to participate in physical exercise actively and promotes the development of the cause of national fitness. The staff of the municipal bureau of sports said that after the first marathon, the enthusiasm of citizens to participate in sports has been greatly improved, and their demands for participating in physical exercise have become increasingly strong. On the official website of Leshan international marathon, in addition to the explanation of the process of the race, there are also the silhouette of the race field, interviews with people, official training camps for marathon, and the promotion of scientific running knowledge. People can take the initiative to learn the knowledge of running, or seek professional coaches' guidance, which is conducive to the scientific and sustainable development of national fitness.

Leshan municipal party committee and government successively issued the "Opinions of Leshan People's Government on the Implementation Accelerating the Development of Sports Industry and Promoting Sports Consumption", "Leshan National Fitness Implementation Plan (2016-2020)", "Leshan 13th Five-year" Sports Development Plan", "Leshan National Fitness Project Construction Management Measures" and other systems. By the end of 2017, there were 3,059 sports venues in the city and 30.8 kilometers of urban fitness trails as well as over 900 sports fitness projects had been built, with an annual reception of more than 1.2 million people in the sports venues in the city. In terms of competitive sports, the 2015 and 2016 Tour of China Road Cycling Race (Leshan section), Heizhugou National Outdoor Obstacle Race, "Beautiful China" 2017 Leshan Gandwei Cross-country Challenge, Mount Emei International Mountaineering Festival, and 2017 World Traditional Martial Arts Championship have been held successively. In terms of mass sports, events including "holiday sports", national fitness day, New Year's day mass fitness run, "serving the country people in three aspects of sports" (namely to bring national fitness equipment, fitness activities, scientific fitness guidance to the countryside), Double Ninth Festival Sports Fitness Carnival Activities for Ten Thousand Elderly People and national

physique monitoring, etc. are held every year. As a part of the construction process of "healthy Leshan", Leshan international marathon has played a positive role in promoting national fitness and enhancing people's enthusiasm to participate in physical exercise.

##### B. *The Impact of Marathon on the Urban Economy of Leshan City*

Leisure sports industry refers to the sports service industry people are provided for the purpose of improving physical and mental health, enriching life and improving them in their leisure time. It is an important part of the tertiary industry. As leisure and health are playing an increasingly important role in people's life, the leisure sports consumption is increasing rapidly. The city marathon held in Leshan has improved the infrastructure construction, the living environment of residents, the city's tourism image and the construction level of a modern city. The event has attracted a large number of marathon enthusiasts at home and abroad, whose consumption behaviors of food, accommodation, transportation, travel, entertainment and shopping have promoted the development of catering, hotel, tourism, retail and other industries in Leshan, which has a significant stimulating effect on its economic development. In addition, the Xinhuanet of Sport is the official representative and operating organization of Leshan marathon, and sponsors will also gain direct economic benefits through registration, event operation.

On the basis of the operation in 2017, the 2018 Leshan international half marathon has increased its strategic cooperative media to 7 with an exclusive elevator media partnership — XinChao, and up to 22 event partner media including website, APPs, newspaper, broadcast and self-media. This fully shows that the economic benefits brought by holding marathon events for the city are huge.

##### C. *Impact of Marathon on the Culture of Leshan City*

Sports events are also a kind of culture, which is a concentrated form of urban culture [3]. Marathon plays an active role in the construction and publicity of urban culture. It displays the city's features from multiple perspectives and from all aspects. Since each city's culture has its own characteristics, and different people have their own unique aesthetic perspective, discovering the different temperament of each city through the city marathon is a spiritual experience, emotional experience and a sports experience that one has never been experienced.

Leshan is an outstanding tourist city, a famous historical and cultural city in China with three world-class heritages of Mount Emei, Leshan Giant Buddha and Dongfeng Weir. When sports and culture are integrated, the city will be full of new vigor and vitality. The "food track" created in Leshan marathon reflects the urban culture of "food in Sichuan, taste in Leshan"; the marathon course is set along the Dadu river, facing the Mount Da'e, Mount Er'e and Mount Emei, which is also a full display of the "landscape culture" of Leshan, highlighting the connotation of urban culture.

#### *D. Influence of Marathon on City Brand of Leshan*

City brand is formed under the joint promotion of urbanization development and market economy competition [4]. A good city brand can stimulate the sense of ownership and pride of citizens, and is a concentrated display of regional characteristics of the city. For example, Xiamen Marathon is one of the most mature and successful city marathons in China. It serves as the visiting card of Xiamen and Shows its charm to the outside world. Since the launch of "several opinions of the State Council on accelerating the development of sports industry and promoting sports consumption" on October 20, 2014, the development of China's marathon industry has set a benchmark for the development of China's sports, and provided a perfect opportunity for sports to show the achievements of urban development and establish city brands.

Leshan, as a second- or third-tier city in China, is not as rich in elite runner resources as first-tier cities, and thus focuses more on the combination of competition and entertainment in the holding the marathons [5]. The tourism resources of "one lake and five wetlands" in Leshan are promoted relying on the event, in which the leisure sports event plays a role in marketing the city brand.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Marathon, with its simple, open and inclusive characteristics, undertakes the social responsibility and mission of leading the national fitness. It wakes up the health awareness of more people and unlocks a healthy lifestyle. At the same time, it actively spreads mainstream health values and gathers strength for realizing the Chinese dream. Urban marathon has a great function of integrating social resources, which can improve the enthusiasm of the masses to participate in exercise and promote the development of national fitness undertakings. Supported by domestic policies, it promotes urban economic and cultural construction mainly by means of market operation. At the same time, urban marathon has become a new visiting card for building a city brand and promoting the urban development.

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