



Using constant comparison method and qualitative data to understand participants' experiences at the nexus of tourism, sport and charity events

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H I G H L I G H T S

- ▶ Autoethnographic studies can provide useful qualitative secondary data.
- ▶ Constant Comparative Method provides a good analytic tool for qualitative data.
- ▶ Charity sport event & philanthropic adventure travel experiences have strong links.
- ▶ A sense of connectedness & wellbeing underscore the links between these experiences.

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A B S T R A C T

This study focuses on understanding the experiential meaning for participants engaged in events at the nexus of tourism, sport and charity. Using the Constant Comparison Method (CCM), we analyze the published findings of an autoethnographic study on philanthropic adventure tourism with focus group ($n = 31$) and interview ($n = 32$) studies of charity sport event participants. Several themes related to the tourism, sport and charitable aspects of the experience are highlighted. Notably, the central role of connectedness is revealed, and the multiple levels for participant connectedness, including with the *self*, with others and with a greater social cause, and the processes facilitating these connections are discussed. The results extend research on charity sport events to multi-day touring events, while uncovering initial evidence of how these events may facilitate pathways to wellbeing. In addition, implications for autoethnographic research in tourism, and managing experiential meanings within this growing event sector, are highlighted.

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1. Introduction

Recent tourism scholarship has witnessed a far greater diversity of methods employed to understand meaning associated with travel experiences. In some ways, the growth of qualitative studies in tourism research is a response to calls for more personal narratives in tourism research articulated by authors such as Ren, Pritchard, and Morgan (2010) and Ryan (2010). In particular, one type of qualitative study, autoethnography research, represents a compelling means by which tourism scholars may include personal narratives within peer reviewed publications. However, whilst insightful and rich in personal meaning, the autoethnographic study may often remain isolated within the broader field of

research, as to date, few tourism scholars draw upon sources of autoethnographic data within their own work.

In this study we examine how qualitative research, including an autoethnographic study, can inform our understanding of meaning within a growing tourism niche sector, that is charity sport events and philanthropic adventure travel. Meanwhile, an interdisciplinary framework to understand the management and marketing implications associated with making meaning in philanthropic travel is applied. The overlapping research interests of the two authors and their published qualitative data sets presented a unique opportunity to accomplish the following research aims: first, to extend the co-author's original research agendas and second, and more broadly, to investigate some methodological and epistemological implications of qualitative tourism research, focusing on autoethnography.

To achieve these aims, we provide an overview of philanthropic adventure tourism and charity sport events, highlighting the challenges of understanding meaning in these sectors (and tourism

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more broadly), before considering the benefits of autoethnographic research, and presenting the research method and findings. We discuss the co-created knowledge of the meaning that participants attribute to their tourism experiences and highlight the central role of connectedness, and the multiple levels for participant connectedness, including with the *self*, with others and with a greater social cause. We illustrate the processes that facilitate these connections, for example the creation of emotional meaning shared between participants, the interpersonal relationships established during the event, and the sense of self-expression and enduring involvement that facilitate a connection with *self*. Finally, we discuss the management implications of the findings and the use of autoethnography within tourism research.

2. Meaning-making in adventure philanthropy and charity sport events

2.1. Charity sport events and philanthropic adventure tourism: a form of meaningful tourism

This research examines tourism experiences which characteristically provide meaning to participants through their philanthropic nature. Broadly, philanthropic endeavors are linked to a sense of personal involvement and interconnectedness (Schuyt, Bekkers, & Smit, 2010), personal benefits such as *empathetic joy* at giving, enhanced self-image and the expression of personal pro-social values (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007). Where tourism and sport events are linked to charity/philanthropy, these experiences provide an ideal context to explore new methods of understanding meaning in tourism experiences. Lacey, Peel, and Weiler (2012) explore this notion within the context of project based volunteer tourism, highlighting Stebbins' (2005) link between project-based leisure and a sense of altruism. This is an area which Getz (2008) argues has been given little research attention and requires the event and the travel experience to be "understood in concert" (p. 413). These events also correspond to Trauer's (2006) idea of special interest tourism, at the boundaries of recreation, leisure and travel. This section describes charity sport events and philanthropic adventure tourism as growing niche sectors providing participants with a meaningful experience.

Charitable organizations are increasingly turning to alternative fundraising events to engage communities, attract donations, and publicize the charity's activities (Ruperto & Kerr, 2009). Accordingly, this sector of events is experiencing considerable growth. Due to the broad range of events that can be included within the charity sport event sector, overall figures on participation and revenue for these events are not available. However, the American Institute of Philanthropy (2011) reveals that the 30 largest events in 2010 attracted over 11.3 million participants generating \$1.64 billion for charity. One example of this growth is the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF), a Texas-based non-profit organization founded in 1997. The LAF's first Ride for the Roses, a cycling fundraiser held to inspire and empower individuals living with cancer, generated \$130.00 (M. Stoller, personal communication, May 5, 2004). In the years since that inaugural event, the Ride for the Roses has grown to become a multi-million dollar fundraiser for the organization and has evolved into a series of events – The LIVESTRONG Challenge – held annually in multiple cities across the United States.

Meanwhile, philanthropic adventure tourism, described as adventure tourism which raises money for charitable initiatives, may be considered a touring extension of charity sport events, for example, long-distance, multi-day cycling or hiking events. Lyons and Wearing (2008) suggest that adventure philanthropy participants "blend the voluntary act of fund-raising with the more hedonic pleasures of a packaged adventure tour" (p. 151). It is an

emerging niche sector within slow/sustainable tourism (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011).

As noted above, both charity sport events and philanthropic adventure tourism align with the idea of project based leisure (Stebbins, 2005). These events and tourism activities reflect one-time or occasional leisurely undertakings completed in an individual's free time. Furthermore, Stebbins (2005) suggests that project-based tourism allows individuals to experience community through the altruistic activity inherent to these undertakings. Meanwhile, the niche component of each sector suggests these contexts may also qualify as a long tail phenomenon (Anderson, 2006). Long tail events occur in relatively low or rare frequency, however the total number of aggregate occurrences contributes to the success of the sector (Lew, 2008). This aligns with philanthropic adventure tourism and charity sport events based upon the sheer diversity of events on offer in terms of location, benefitting charity or cause, activity, and design offset by the wide array of events from which consumers may choose. Tourism scholars have suggested that the long tail has led to growth in special interest tourism experiences (Lew, 2008). The current research advances both sectors as examples of this growth through the specialization afforded by philanthropic adventure tourism and charity sport events.

In this research, both the terms *philanthropic adventure tourism* and *charity sport events* are used. Philanthropic adventure tourism represents an extension of charity sport events when a tourism/touring component is present. Both refer to an event requiring a registered participant to raise funds and complete physical activity, with proceeds benefiting a designated charity.

Both types of events appeal to a variety of individuals based upon a participant's connection with both the charitable organization and the sport activity (Ritchie, Tkaczynski, & Faulks, 2010; Scott & Solomon, 2003). Whilst little research is available on philanthropic adventure tourism, we know that a variety of motives, including those that are recreation-based (e.g., *intellectual, social, and physical*) and charity-based (e.g., *reciprocity, self-esteem, need to help others*), drive charity sport event participation (Bennett, Mousley, Kitchin, & Ali-Choudhury, 2007; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2008; Taylor & Shanka, 2008). In addition, both types of events are believed to provide participants with a meaningful experience. In a qualitative exploration of charity sport event participation, Filo et al. (2008) uncovered an interaction between the recreation motives and the charitable component of the event. This interaction between motives and the event's charitable component resulted in attachment to the event. Attachment to the event is revealed through the event taking on emotional, symbolic, and functional meaning (Funk & James, 2006). Emotional, symbolic, and functional meaning relate to the feelings, self-expression, achievement, and accomplishment evoked by the event (Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009), as motives become internalized and take on greater meaning for participants.

In evaluating the meaning that charity sport events elicit from participants, a framework is useful to explore the connection between the person (that is, event participant) and object (that is, charity sport event). The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM), a vertical continuum modeling consumer relationships with sport products, is one such framework, integrating literature from consumer behavior, marketing, sociology, and psychology, and applied to various sporting and charity sport event studies (Beaton, Funk, & Alexandris, 2009; Beaton, Funk, Ridinger, & Jordan, 2011; Filo et al., 2008, 2009; Funk & James, 2001, 2006). It shares similarities with prior models such as Hierarchy of Effects Theory (Barry, 1987), the Transtheoretical Model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) and Enduring Involvement (McIntyre, 1989). The PCM advances processes operating within and among awareness,

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