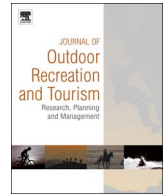




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Willingness to travel as an extension of leisure activity seriousness – A study about Finnish hunters

Jarno Suni

Business School, University of Eastern Finland, P.O.Box 111, 80101 Joensuu, Finland

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationships between leisure activity seriousness and travel intention. The concept of seriousness, introduced by Lee and Scott (2013), combines constructs from serious leisure and recreation specialization, such as behavioral commitment, personal commitment, perseverance, career progress, effort and identity. The study uses this framework to investigate relationships of these seriousness constructs with travel intention for hunting tourism, focusing on Finnish hunters. Data collected via a web survey consists of 1662 respondents. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were used as analysis methods. The results indicate three seriousness related constructs personal commitment, career progress, and effort have a positive effect on willingness to travel. Finnish hunters who consider hunting as an important leisure activity, want to increase their hunting knowledge and develop their hunting skills, are more likely to travel abroad to participate in hunting.

Managerial implications: For the service provider, it is of utmost importance to have an in-depth understanding about each customer group and their expectations, to be able to provide them with the best possible prerequisites for a hunting experience. Not all hunting tourists are similar. Managerial implications based on this study indicate that Finnish hunters interested in travelling abroad for hunting, consider themselves personally committed to hunting and are looking to improve their skills and progress in their hunting career. To create a satisfying hunting tourism offering for such hunting tourists, the service provider should offer a possibility for hunters to challenge their skills and to experience something new, which can progress their hunting career.

1. Introduction

Hunting, a complex activity, requires dedication, time and other resources from the hunter. Therefore, hunting is as a *serious leisure* activity, where serious leisure is: “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer activity sufficiently substantial and interesting for the participant to find a career there in the acquisition and expression of a combination of its special skills and knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3). Hunting tourism, a form of special interest tourism, is motivated by an opportunity to experience hunting in a new environment (Komppula & Gartner, 2013). In this study, the aim is to increase understanding of hunting tourism as an expression of serious leisure and special interest tourism.

After Stebbins coined the term serious leisure, it was also necessary to define what is *not* serious leisure. Stebbins and other researchers posited that *casual leisure* as the counterpart of serious leisure. According to Stebbins (1997), casual leisure activities are less significant within the context of a leisure career. Examples given by Stebbins (1997) as casual leisure activities are eating, sightseeing,

relaxing and watching television. However, Scott (2012) argues that even though activities vary by the level of complexity, it is possible that complex activities, such as hunting, golf or music, can be done *casually*.

According to Stebbins (2012), even though he had not used terms *continuum* or *causal leisure* in his early works, terms such as *unserious*, *nonserious*, and a *dabbler* were used to conceptualize the feel of seriousness in a leisure activity. Stebbins (2012) comments that the recent works of Shen and Yarnal (2010) and Scott (2012) have set out the idea of a CL-SL Continuum in the “greatest detail”. Scott (2012) argued that first, participants involved in the same leisure activity are diverse. Second, the number of specialized (or serious) participants can be quantified. Third, seriousness can be gradated, and finally, practical applications of understanding that participants vary along a specialization continuum.

When discussing serious leisure and CL-SL Continuum, rather than Stebbins’ idea of serious leisure, some researchers have followed Bryan (1977) and his idea of *recreation specialization*. Bryan (1979, p. 175) defines recreation specialization as “a continuum of behavior from the general to the particular, reflected by equipment and skills used in the

E-mail address: jarno.suni@uef.fi.

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sport, and activity setting preferences". With this continuum, Bryan suggests that recreation participants could be arranged from "casual" to "committed" participants. Both, Stebbins and Bryan, started investigating leisure activities in the 1970s, but at that time were unaware of each other.

Nowadays, based on Scott's (2012) investigation, Stebbins's serious leisure has gained more ground than Bryan's recreation specialization despite their conceptual similarities. Furthermore, Scott (2012) connects Stebbins' (1992) serious leisure with Bryan's (1977) recreation specialization with the CL-SL Continuum (Shen & Yarnal, 2010), commenting "both perspectives provide valuable insight into complex forms of leisure activity". Scott (2012) calls for future research that applies the insights of recreation specialization framework studies to the serious leisure framework research.

The objective of this study is two-fold. The study aims to help fill the research gap mentioned by Scott (2012) and to provide new insight by using the combined frameworks of serious leisure and recreational specialization developed by Lee and Scott (2013). The first goal is to examine and develop Lee and Scott's (2013) model within a hunting context. The second goal is to examine the relationship of the seriousness construct and hunters' willingness to travel. Does the seriousness of a leisure activity indicate travel intention? The latter objective is motivated by the suggestion by Komppula and Suni (2013), who called for more in-depth research on hunting tourists' characteristics, motivations, values and expectations. Studies (Komppula & Gartner, 2013; Komppula & Suni, 2013) have shown that in hunting tourism trips, hunters have an interest for developing hunting skills, shooting new species, increasing their knowledge about new hunting methods and cultures, and furthermore, experience new terrains and landscapes. These interests refer to intellectual and/or competency mastery motivations for leisure (e.g. Ryan, 1997). The search for novelty value connects hunting tourism to Stebbins' (1992) serious leisure career and Bryan' (1979) recreation specialization continuum, creating a premise that travelling for leisure activity with an intrinsic purpose indicates a higher level of seriousness regarding the chosen leisure activity. Stebbins (2001) has noted that "At first blush, tourism and serious leisure would appear to go together about as well as pickles and ice cream, a seemingly incongruous, if not unappetizing, match on which most reasonable people would prefer to waste little of their precious thinking time" (p. 71). This study considers seriousness as an antecedent motivation for travelling as proposed by Lee and Scott (2013), and examines the relationship between six qualities of seriousness and travel intention.

2. Literature review

2.1. Empirical studies investigating the connection with serious leisure and recreational specialization

Tsaur and Liang (2008) used data collected from Taiwanese birders (birder is a person who does birdwatching as a recreational activity) to test two hypotheses: 1) A higher level of serious leisure traits leads to a higher level of recreation specialization for recreationists, and 2) There is a significant relationship between serious leisure and recreation specialization dimensions. In the study, the dimensions for serious leisure were *perseverance*, *have careers in their endeavors*, *significant personal effort*, *durable individual benefits*, *unique ethos* and *identifying strongly with the activity*. For recreational specialization, the used dimensions were *past experience*, *centrality-to-lifestyle* and *economic commitment*.

According to Tsaur and Liang (2008), their study results showed that three serious leisure qualities, *making significant personal efforts*, *identifying strongly with the activity*, and *having careers in their endeavors* were strong participation indicators in serious leisure. This indicated that birdwatchers were willing to devote great amount of effort and time to birding regardless of the financial gain or loss. In case of recreational specialization, the dimensions of past-experience and

centrality-to-lifestyle were powerful indicators of birdwatching specialization. In discussion about the set two hypotheses, Tsaur and Liang (2008) noted that a higher level of serious leisure traits led to a higher level of recreation specialization, meaning that the birders possessing the distinctive qualities of serious leisure seemed to identify strongly with the activity. Excluding *unique ethos*, the other serious leisure qualities were positively related to *past-experience* and *centrality-to-lifestyle*.

Surfing has been a subject of study as a serious leisure activity. Continuing their investigation between serious leisure and recreational specialization, Cheng and Tsaur (2012) examined how the six qualities of serious leisure relate to three dimensions of recreation involvement: attraction, self-expression and centrality among surfers. As a result, they suggested that serious leisure and the indicators of specialization are moderately related. Barbieri's and Sotomayor's (2013) study about surf travel behavior utilized Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM), developed by Gould, Moore, McGuire, and Stebbins (2008), to examine surfing as serious leisure, and furthermore investigate if six serious leisure qualities, perseverance, effort, career, ethos, identity and benefits, could be predictors of surf travel behavior and destination preferences. The results of their study indicated that these serious leisure qualities had no effect on surf travel behavior, but the qualities are significant associated with preferences on the surfing appeal of the destination.

Lee and Scott (2013) continued the empirical investigation between serious leisure and recreational specialization in the context of birdwatching. They utilized four qualities of serious leisure (identity, perseverance, career, significant effort) and two facets of recreational specialization (personal commitment and behavioral commitment). They assume that the selected dimensions should be treated as the outcomes of seriousness. In their words, "the level of seriousness is likely to be an antecedent of choice of partners, immersion into social world activity, and the benefits accrued from participation". Lee and Scott (2013) argue that degree of seriousness is likely to shape the participation frequency, travel behavior, and the skills participants acquire over time. Their results showed that personal commitment and behavioral commitment relate closely to the four qualities of serious leisure, meaning that some dimensions of the recreational specialization and serious leisure frameworks can be combined. The combined framework could provide more complete assessment of people's participation in complex leisure activities.

2.2. Hunting in Finland

There were approximately 300,000 people in Finland who had a Finnish hunting license in 2016 (Luke, 2017). This is about six percentage of the total population of Finland. However, the amount of active hunters from this group was 202,000. Typically, Finnish hunters are interested to hunt alone with or without a dog, or in small groups with two to three other hunters (Nygård & Uthardt, 2009; Toivonen, 2009). According to the Toivonen's (2009) report, hunting as a leisure activity also includes game management related activities, such as feeding the game, building bird boxes and making environmental improvements. The main interests for ordinary hunting for Finnish hunters are nature experiences, hunting as the main leisure activity and hunting being a way of life (Nygård & Uthardt, 2009). One of the reasons why Finnish hunters seem to emphasize other features than the bag in hunting can be the scarcity of game stock (Nygård & Uthardt, 2009). Abundance of game is a major pull factor for hunting trips abroad (Komppula & Suni, 2013). Nevertheless, Finnish hunters strongly connect themselves and their identities with hunting, which shows that hunting is considered as a serious leisure activity. According to Stebbins (1992), serious leisure participants are often identified strongly with the activity related subculture.

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