



Research article

The relationship between serious leisure and recreation specialization in sportspeople with and without physical disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes whether the relationship between serious leisure and recreation specialization differs for federated sportspeople with and without physical disabilities. Sportspeople with and without physical disabilities in the Basque Country (Spain) ($n = 370$) completed a questionnaire assessing the component dimensions of two constructs, “serious leisure” and “recreation specialization”. The Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM) and the Recreation Specialization Index (RSI) were used in the analysis. Results showed an association between these concepts in competitive sports in both samples. However, the magnitudes of association between the total of both concepts were higher in the group with physical disabilities. Regarding perceptions about their sports practice, the group without physical disabilities showed higher levels of specialization but there were no substantial differences between their levels of serious leisure participation. In conclusion, seriousness and specialization were found to be key issues for sportspeople's practice of leisure, regardless of their physical condition.

1. Introduction

The theoretical concepts “serious leisure” and “recreation specialization” have emerged in contemporary research in social sciences in recent decades. They have focused on complex leisure activities which significantly influence different aspects of people's lives (Liu, 2012). These activities require a combination of abilities, knowledge, and experience (Lee and Scott, 2013) to explore their various, highly inter-related facets in a fulfilling way (Stebbins, 2005). “Serious leisure is the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 1992, p. 3).

A greater involvement with and commitment to the discipline often leads toward a greater level of specialization, together with improvement and a better understanding (Stebbins, 1992) of the perceived benefits derived from the practice (Cheng and Tsaur, 2012). The adjective ‘serious’ relates to qualities such as ‘sincerity, importance, or care’ (Elkington and Stebbins, 2014). In this type of leisure activity, a specific relationship is established between the person and the activity which shows how important and central leisure practices can become for

people. Serious leisure is defined by six characteristics or qualities (Elkington and Stebbins, 2014; Stebbins 2001, 2007): (a) perseverance, (b) personal effort, (c) unique ethos, (d) leisure career, (e) durable benefits, and (f) identification with the pursuit (see Table 2 for a description of each quality). These qualities distinguish serious leisure practices from other activities. As Stebbins (2008) suggested, all these qualities must be examined when studying any leisure activity, as it is not always apparent whether an activity is a serious leisure activity.

Recreation specialization (Bryan, 1977) is a construct that describes the variation in experiences, aspiration, commitment, relationships, and/or economic investment related to a leisure practice, segmenting participants into differentiated groups (Salz et al., 2001) within the same leisure practice (Jett et al., 2009). Recreation specialization is a continuum of behavior ranging from the general to the particular which is reflected in the equipment used and skills developed through a particular leisure practice. Participants are located on a continuum that ranges from the minimum interest in participation to the maximum specialization and high involvement in recreational practice (Bryan, 1977). Each level of specialization involves particular behaviors and equipment (Bryan, 2000). People progress through different stages of development, engaging in increasingly specialized behaviors and changing their types

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